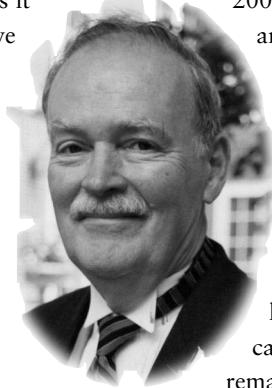


THE BOOK

JULY AND NOVEMBER 2001, NUMBER 54-55

Hugh Amory, July 1, 1930-November 23, 2001

Any scholar who worked alongside Hugh Amory, as it was my privilege to do for half a dozen years as we labored over *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, Volume 1 of *A History of the Book in America*, came to realize that he possessed—he commanded—an immense practical knowledge of how books came into being and were used. He was restless with "history-of-the-book" scholarship that betrayed little awareness of the particulars of the book trades or of the materialities of books, and especially restless in the presence of Americanists who failed to acknowledge either the tremendous flow of books back and forth across the Atlantic or to consult trade catalogues or publishers' records or take account of multiple editions. Hence the tenor of his remarks that follow, and hence his astringent review of Paul Gutjahr's *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, c. 1999), in the *William and Mary Quarterly* (3d ser., 57 [April



2000]: 450-53). Of more importance, his capacities—his angle of vision—informed chapter 1 of *The Colonial Book*, where he differentiated the "colonial" from the "provincial" book (a distinction that, alas, the rest of us did not fully sustain in the chapters that followed), and in the paragraphs he wrote for the "Afterword" on how the book trades differed after independence. As a cataloguer he knew too well the inaccuracies that plague library records and even the most scrupulous of bibliographies; and he put his own skills as a cataloguer to work in what is, in some respects, the most remarkable feat of research included in *The Colonial Book*, the table of Boston book production by sheets for 1765 (chapter 9). Hugh was a gentle, modest, shy person. I learned far more from him than he from me; but I like to think, indeed I am confident, that he found great and unexpected pleasure in the multiple collaborations that resulted in *The Colonial Book*.

David D. Hall, Harvard Divinity School

Remarks delivered at the Roundtable on *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, American Literature Association, Cambridge, Mass., May 25, 2001

I am honored to have this opportunity to discuss the relationship between our history of the book and American literary history today. It may be useful to begin by confessing our volume's faults. I have prepared a list of micro-errata that I hope you will be able to expand, and I shall supplement it with a brief note of larger failings, which are incorrigible. Ours is a collaborative history, a device for gaining impartiality without losing authority, but as all who have headed such projects know, circumstances get out of your control. One of our major contributors succumbed to a fit of writer's block, and the Cambridge University Press required us to cut some 30,000 words from the original manuscript, forcing some excruciating choices. In particular, I regret that we have nothing to say about music, prints, maps, and jobbing—little enough, indeed, on the technology of print itself. I do not regard the concession implicit in the title of 'A History of the Book' as much of an excuse for these shortcomings. If anything our focus is too literary for the subject.

As a result, too, David Hall and I wrote or revised a larger proportion of the text than we ever expected to, and our narrative may well exhibit a certain unconscious regional bias toward New England. I trust that David rightly summarizes the cultural context of our period as "a culture of the Word," organized around an essentially theological understanding of print, authorship, and reading." I can well imagine a historian of the South or middle colonies taking a more legalistic, secular view.

Our volume of *A History of the Book in America*, then, is a history of the production, distribution, and exchange of books as physical objects, primarily in commerce, but also privately as gifts, and intellectually by reading and writing. The 'Atlantic world' of our title is the great ring of commerce connecting the British coastal Atlantic settlements from Newfoundland to the Caribbean, with the Wine Islands, Glasgow, Bristol, and London. To be sure, books were already arriving in the Continental United States during our period from outside this circuit: French books in Detroit, St. Louis,

and New Orleans; Russian books in the Aleutians, Baranof, and Pribilof Islands; and commercial quantities of Spanish books in the Southwest; but to account for these would have rendered our narrative totally incoherent. Wallace Kirsop, in a review for *English Studies in Canada*, protests that we ignore printing in New Orleans; production that we had left as rightfully belonging to our Canadian colleagues. Just to show how national stereotypes continue to shape our imagination, however, Patricia Fleming, one of the co-editors for the Canadian series, tells me that no right-thinking Québécois would ever have considered New Orleans part of Canada. The commercial ties that bound the British Atlantic colonies in a quasi-national unit did not exist for French America.

Our approach entails a break with traditional American national bibliography, which counts only books printed in the Continental United States—a retrospective application of American copyright law. Yet it seems doubtful that any colonial so privileged his local production—any more than a printer in Birmingham would have considered his production alien from London. Hence we have counted any book, wherever printed, in whatever language, if it was owned by an American, as an “American book.” We have tried to sketch the relative importance of native production and British imports, but the data are still fragmentary and hard to interpret. When Robert Winans completes his study of newspaper listings, we will be better advised on the relation between these two book stocks.

These, then, are the main features of our history, and perhaps they argue that our two kinds of history have little in common. Certainly, the recent first volume of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1994) is not so much critical of as oblivious to the traditions of American bibliography. It takes its canon of authors for granted, though it is a nineteenth-century creation. Startlingly, no colonial author was ever honored with a collected edition of his works. Indeed, as David Shields has shown, the production of colonial *belles-lettres* was a coterie affair, often carried out in manuscript. Even post-Revolutionary canonical authors, like Joel Barlow, might reject their pre-Revolutionary writings from their canon—unless they revised them, producing British and American versions. What, exactly, constitutes the subject of the Cambridge volume? Can it be justified by sizes or numbers of editions, or expressions of critical opinion? Was there such a thing as American literature before 1776?

A bibliographical list of some 299 monographs deemed “especially influential or significant” for the subject of the Cambridge History includes only 20 titles with some connection to the history of the book; eight of these are of some bibliographical reference value, though the selection heavily favors the discursive treatises over the enumerative list, and a staggering number of basic references like Evans, BAL, and Brigham are simply ignored. Of those who have contributed most to the history of the American book in our century, one looks in vain for the names of Rollo G. Silver or Edwin Wolf, 2nd.

Despite this standoff between our two histories, I like to think they share areas of mutual interest, though I have time for only one example. Perhaps the most popular novel in eighteenth-

century America, Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, was written by a British subject and first published in England; it is a novel of seduction, in which the susceptible heroine, by ignoring the advice of her parents, comes to a sticky end. Literary historians are of radically opposed opinions concerning its success. Cathy Davidson argues that it liberated a female readership that was already primed by the American Revolution, Rousseau, and the *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Michael T. Gilmore, on the other hand, sees it as a cautionary tale that owed some of its success to the conservative reaction against the French Terror. The forces that Davidson and Gilmore urge to explain the novel’s success in America failed to sustain it in England, though either revolution or reaction, one would have thought, ought to have sufficed. There are more pedestrian reasons for its unequal success than revolution, moreover. To be reprinted by Mathew Carey, a leading Philadelphia publisher, was a stroke of luck for Rowson—rather as though Helen Wolff had selected some lurid Harlequin novel from Mills and Boone for republication by Harcourt, Brace. The prestige of a London author played better in Philadelphia, of course, than in London, and in Philadelphia, Rowson had the field of the seduction novel pretty much to herself.

R.W.G. Vail’s bibliography of Rowson (1933)—not cited by either historian—provides the materials for still more nuanced explanations. Briefly, the earliest and for twenty-eight years the only London edition (1791) and its initial Philadelphia reprints (1794-1802) appeared in fairly generous formats, suitable for circulating and social libraries. Cheaper editions began to challenge Carey’s market in 1802, beginning with a so-called “sixth American edition,” printed by Cottom and Stewart in Alexandria, Virginia, in 137 pp. Carey’s pace of publication slowed, and then resumed in 1808 with three more editions in the same cheap format. With his 9th edition, in 1812, having printed a total of some 30,000 copies, Carey abandoned the market to his competitors; the dominant edition from 1825 to 1855 was stereotyped in 138 pages with an inexpensive woodcut frontispiece, printed out of Hartford.

Gilmore and Davidson both assume that the text is (as it were) fictively inscribed with the date of its first publication—Gilmore inclining to the date of the first American edition, Davidson to the first English. The residual thud of the guillotine, and the fading thrust of *Sturm und Drang* were as ineluctably present to readers who first encountered a copy during the liberal administration of Thomas Jefferson as, presumably, they ought to be to a properly trained literary historian today. Davidson further bolsters her thesis from inscriptions in copies of female ownership, but fails to observe that most of these were printed after 1800, when the novel became available at prices suitable for a private library. One does not inscribe one’s deepest fears and desires in circulating or society library copies, and the cheapening of the novel thus encouraged the spread and expression of Rowson’s vogue. If I may say so, I think both these would have benefited if Gilmore and Davidson had abandoned their literary prejudices in favor of the first editions and an ideal, utopian text, and instead pursued the more complex possibilities of *Charlotte Temple*’s

after-market, as documented in surviving, physical copies

To conclude, though literary history and book history seem at present to pass like ships in the night, I believe there is room for dialogue. But it will not be easy.

Hugh Amory

Book Note

James A. Secord, *The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000). xvii, 624 pp., ill. \$35.00 ISBN 0-226-74410-8

The *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* was first published anonymously in 1844; the author, Scottish journalist and publisher Robert Chambers, successfully concealed his authorship until his death, to be finally revealed in the posthumous 12th edition of 1884. Advertisements gave a one-sentence summary of his sensational argument: “This work, after connecting the Nebular Hypothesis with the Discoveries of Geology, suggests a Physiological Explanation of the Development of the Vegetable and Animal Kingdoms; leading to the conclusion that the Designs of Creative Wisdom were entirely effected by the Intervention of Natural Law.” As such, it has generally been read by modern historians as a precursor of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), which in turn has been treated as the source of a Victorian crisis of belief; on the contrary, Secord argues, “The *Origin* was important in resolving a crisis, not in creating one” (p. 514).

Though Secord’s sources for the reception of the *Vestiges* are almost entirely restricted to Great Britain, his study—“the most comprehensive analysis of the reading of any book other than the Bible ever undertaken” (p. 2)—should also appeal to Americanists, for two reasons. First, there were some twenty American editions of the *Vestiges*, most of them supplemented with a reprinting of a hostile review by David Brewster in the *North British Review* (1845); it sold many more copies than in Great Britain, and (despite Brewster) convinced Abraham Lincoln. It was even annotated aboard an Alabama River steamboat. Second, and more importantly, Secord develops a model for the history of reading that, in my opinion, is the first to deserve the name of “history”—as distinct from Robert Darnton’s “biography” of the *Encyclopédie* and other studies of exceptional cases and rare survivals. Secord’s documentation is astoundingly “thick,” ranging from reports of inner-city missions, and the archives of the author and his publisher, John Churchill, to letters, diaries, newspapers, periodicals, and some 156 illustrations, including portraits, cartoons, and views of panoramas, assemblies, exhibitions, and scientific expeditions. As he points out, most studies of reading have focussed on the novel, but the impact of a scientific work is much more easily identified.

The history of reading has been bedevilled by problems of generalization. On the one hand, there are more or less plausible

assumptions of a “common reader” and “popular science.” On the other, experience, as I. A. Richards showed eighty years ago, indicates that reading varies from person to person; all readings are “different and heterogeneous” (p. 334) and they are invariably depicted as solitary, silent, and private. Secord partly avoids this dilemma by defining reading as social, carried on “in a context of struggles over interpretation” (p. 518). As such, he rejects Darnton’s well-known “circuit of communication,” because readers may interrupt the circuit with assumptions, prejudices, experience, or knowledge from beyond the work, or even overlay it with the reading of a later book. More is being “communicated” than the text. In this manner, the *Origin of Species* overlay the *Vestiges of Creation*, relegating it to the position of a precursor of a “Darwinian Revolution.”

Because it is social, like politics in Tip O’Neill’s famous one-liner, all reading is local. The “sensation” of the *Vestiges* began in the salons of London high society, where it engrossed conversation for only a year. Here, the principal topic was authorship, the two leading candidates being the bluestocking daughter of Byron, Ada, Countess Lovelace, and the Cornish savant and Tory, Sir Richard Vyvyan. Secord proceeds to examine readers and reviewers in the learned culture of Oxford and Cambridge, the middle classes of Liverpool, and the fissiparous sects of Edinburgh. In every locale, he is able to show distinctive commonalities, even between Oxford and Cambridge—generalizations that elude the Charybdis of heterogeneity. Among the broader, widely influential causes or conditions of these commonalities, he singles out phrenology (powerful in Chambers’s circle) and evangelicalism. Phrenologists held that reading was a form of mental exercise, the harder the better: scientific works—even (or perhaps especially) if the reader disagreed with them—were thus more valuable than novels and poetry. Evangelicals too disparaged “light reading,” but urged readers to begin with the Bible, proceeding to read other works for conviction and vocation. Their reading of the *Vestiges* thus provoked a crisis of belief—whereas the dons of Oxford and Cambridge were more concerned with the superficiality and unsoundness of its science.

Since all agreed that reading should be governed by the intentions of the author, the anonymity of the *Vestiges* meant that it “could scarcely be ‘read’ in the usual sense of the term” (p. 24), and “almost no one read it as expected” (p. 383). Attributions roamed widely and unconvincingly from the real author to (even more unconvincingly) Prince Albert. Secord’s allegiance to “communication” can also lead him in unexpected directions: he includes the author’s revisions of successive editions as a form of “reading,” for example, whether carried out by himself or by other more knowledgeable experts hired for the purpose. These “readings” responded to specific criticisms of factual inaccuracy or scientific authority in reviews, or to fresh discoveries like the resolution of the “fiery mist” of nebulae into individual stars. While they considerably enlarged and corrected the text of the first edition, such revisions tended to focus on isolated passages and questions—a rather different sort of “reading” from our ordinary continuous perusal of a book. Still, one may applaud Secord’s provocative

comparison of the opportunities afforded author and reader in the mutual reshaping of successive editions of a scientific work with the better known collaboration of author and audience in the production of successive numbers of serially published novels.

Ironically, Chambers owed much of his success to a rhetorical mixture of fact and fiction modeled on the art of another anonymous author, the “Great Unknown,” Sir Walter Scott. Many reviewers observed that the *Vestiges* read “like a novel,” and Secord speaks of a “cosmic Waverley” (p. 87). As such, its “lightness” not only offended evangelicals but also scientific authorities like Adam Sedgwick, the Woodwardian Professor of Geology at the University of Cambridge, who thought the author was a woman or at least effeminate. With the transference of the conduct of science from the hands of gentleman amateurs in the first half of the nineteenth century to an emerging professional caste, the way lay open for Darwin’s tightly focussed, much more dryly “factual” *Origin of Species*—even though the first conclusive demonstration of his thesis awaited the 1930s, when the contribution of the *Vestiges* was long forgotten.

This is a superbly researched, impressively original and imaginative book, which ought to become indispensable reading for historians of the book and of reading everywhere alike. The design and printing also does great credit to the University of Chicago Press, and, at only \$35 (hard cover), it is a Best Buy.

— Hugh Amory

Board of Advisors Named for AAS Book History Program

A new Board of Advisors will provide on-going counsel for the AAS Program in the History of the Book in American Culture. David Shields (English, The Citadel) chairs the group, which also includes Michael Benjamin (attorney and collector, Philadelphia, PA), Daniel Cohen (history, Florida International University), Ann Fabian (history, Rutgers University), Alice Fahs (history, University of California at Davis), James N. Green (Library Company of Philadelphia), and Sandra Gustafson (English, University of Notre Dame).

The group will act as a sounding board for Program ideas and initiatives and will provide a set of eyes and ears in the larger world of scholarship and book history to help determine what the Program is, or is not, doing well and will advise on opportunities the Program might embark upon. It replaces two previous entities, the Committee of Overseers and the Advisory Board.

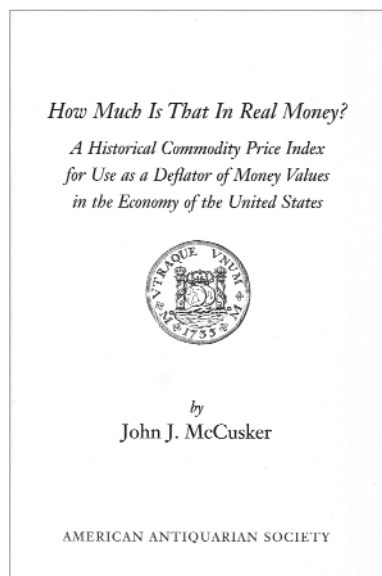
The Board begins its work with an important task. The Collections and Programs Committee of the Society has charged the group with examining, in concert with AAS staff, the question of what changes might the Program undergo when preparation of the five-volume collaborative work *A History of the Book in America* no longer dominates the energies and finances of the Program. This long-range planning commenced at a meeting of the Board, held in Worcester on October 26. The Board is to submit its recommendations to the Collections and Programs Committee in April 2002.

AAS Publishes New Edition of *How Much Is That In Real Money?*

How Much Is That In Real Money? *A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States*, by John J. McCusker is back in print. The second edition, revised and enlarged, may be purchased from the Society’s distributor, Oak Knoll Books, in New Castle, Delaware. Books may be ordered on-line through its web site, <http://www.oakknoll.com>. The price is \$15.00 plus \$4.50 postage for the first copy.

John J. McCusker, Ewing Halsell Distinguished Professor of History and professor of economics at Trinity University in San Antonio, is a member of AAS. A noted economic historian, he is also the author of *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (2d ed., Chapel Hill, 1992). The new edition of his noted vade mecum enables researchers, teachers, and students to convert prices from any time in the American past as far back as 1665 to their comparable value in today’s dollars.

This monograph presents a consistent commodity price index that extends across as much of the history of the United States as possible. McCusker’s clear introduction discusses the theory and practice behind the construction of historical price indexes, spells out their uses and limitations, and supplies step-by-step instructions (and some examples) to making the conversions from past prices—even those expressed in colonial currency—to today’s values. In addition to providing consumer price index tables for the United States since 1665, *How Much Is That In Real Money* includes similar tables for Great Britain going back to 1600, making a valuable reference work even more helpful. He also explains how users may keep this reference tool current by obtaining the monthly and annual consumer price index figures compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the like agency in the United Kingdom. The work is rounded out by a comprehensive bibliography of sources for historical prices and related subjects, allowing interested readers to pursue this subject further.





Front row, l-r: Katzman, Barnhill, Elliott, Cherbosque, McCartin, Tremblay, Masten. Second row: Wajda, Martin, Pomeroy, Sally. Third row: Sloat, Reps, Petrik, Johnston, Schiavo, Newton, Stankiewicz, Allewaert, Norwood, Hawley, Hench. Top row: Martinek, Conroy, Masur, Rice.

Review of the 2001 Summer Seminar, “Using Graphic Arts as Primary Sources”

The 2001 Summer Seminar focused on how visual images both enhance and challenge the methodologies now associated with the growing field of “the history of the book.” The three-day seminar was filled with sessions demonstrating innovative research, providing “how-to” knowledge from printmaking processes to twenty-first century technological resources, and asking how using prints affects our research, writing, and teaching. Participants included curators, faculty members, graduate students, teachers, and researchers with different specialties and levels of experience. Members of the seminar faculty were Louis Masur (City College of New York), James Newton (Lincoln-Sudbury [Mass.] Regional High School), John Reps (Cornell University), and Georgia Barnhill (American Antiquarian Society).

The first day introduced theoretical concerns about using visual images not only as illustrations of arguments but also as the potential framework for arguments. Lou Masur led the opening session and gave a brief overview of ways in which graphic arts have been used in the field of history in the past and ways those roles are being reconsidered, especially in light of influence from the field of art history. On display in the reading room was an exhibition of recent books that have focused on images from AAS, shown alongside the original prints they used. This exhibition gave us a chance to see the range of subject matter and methodology in recent scholarship. In the afternoon, Georgia Barnhill gave a concise and highly informative demonstration on printmaking processes, including showing the materials used for woodcuts and lithographs, comparing different coloring techniques, and providing tips on identifying intaglio prints. Everyone agreed that such information was essential for the kind

of work we had discussed in the opening session.

While the first day established the theoretical and technological framework for the seminar, the second day featured sessions that demonstrated how graphic arts had been incorporated into particular projects. Slide presentations and lectures were linked with exhibitions from AAS collections. The morning featured prints of the Jacksonian era. First, we saw a video made at AAS in the early 1970s on commercial lithography. Then James Newton led a session on visual arts and politics, focusing on over two dozen political prints and cartoons of Andrew Jackson from 1824 to 1837. Discussion ranged from representations of Jackson’s masculinity to the impact of the images on political culture. Issues of pedagogy remained alive as well. Newton opened his presentation by passing out secondary school history textbooks for participants to assess how they might use the images in these texts in the classroom. We were directed to note everything from quality of reproduction, caption wording, information provided in the prose of the textbook, and the role the image played in the exercises these texts asked of the students. After lunch, John Reps brought our discussion of visual expression from politics into urban planning. His slide presentation on city views not only provided a history of visual images about American cities but also included information about the artistic culture in which such images were drawn, reproduced as prints, advertised, and distributed. He also talked about the work of other scholars in determining how city views can be used to learn more about the urban past, including ways that their accuracy has been tested. Each of these sessions was paired with an exhibition of primary materials from the AAS collections.

The final day was devoted to collaborative projects, which we shared in the afternoon. Both the variety of materials used, including early samples of currency and stereographs, and the presentation formats suggested the numerous ways visual images can be used as the focus of narratives about American history and culture.

This summary of the sessions, of necessity, omits many of the most memorable events of the seminar experience. The busy days were balanced with ample opportunity after hours to share personal experiences in research and teaching. The AAS staff kept us well fed with meals at the Goddard-Daniels House, a dinner at the home of John and Lea Hench, and a picnic lunch in Worcester's Rural Cemetery, where we were honored by the presence of Isaiah Thomas himself (as portrayed by actor Neil Gustafson). Georgia Barnhill, Caroline Sloat, Terri Tremblay and Caroline Stoffel supported the seminar not only with their daily exhibitions, but also with ample handouts and demonstrations of new on-line features, relevant web sites, tips for using the AAS catalogue, and bibliographies. The AAS staff members were phenomenal in responding to our group projects in addition to their usual workload. The overall amount of primary material we saw was incredible and a testament not only to the strength of the AAS print collections but also to the efforts of the staff to have them available on such short notice.

Overall, the seminar was a mix of theoretical discussion and practical information that simultaneously challenged us to rethink the use of graphic arts in our own work and gave us tools with which to begin to address that challenge.

—Lisa West Norwood
Stanford University

Monique Allewaert, Ph. D. candidate, English, Duke University; Cathy Cherbosque, curator of historical prints and ephemera, Huntington Library; Thomas E. Conroy, Ph. D. candidate, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Sandra Elliott, Ph. D. candidate, cultural studies, Claremont Graduate School; E. Haven Hawley, Ph. D. candidate, history, technology, and society, Georgia Institute of Technology; Patricia Johnston, professor of art and history, Salem State College; David Katzman, professor of American studies and courtesy professor of history and African American studies, University of Kansas; Sally Lynn, Ph. D. candidate, performance studies, New York University; Nancy M. Martin, manuscripts librarian and archivist, University of Rochester; Jason D. Martinek, Ph. D. candidate, English, Carnegie Mellon University; April F. Masten, assistant professor of history, State University of New York at Stony Brook; James P. McCartin, Ph. D. candidate, history, University of Notre Dame; Lisa West Norwood, Ph. D. candidate, English and American literature, Stanford University; Paula Petrik, professor of history and chair, department of mathematics, University of Maine; Jane R. Pomeroy, independent scholar, Limington, Me; Stephen P. Rice, assistant professor of American studies, Ramapo College of New Jersey; Laura Schiavo, Ph. D. candidate, and instructor, American studies, George Washington University; Mary Ann Stankiewicz, associate professor of art education, The Pennsylvania State University; Therasa Tremblay, curatorial assistant, AAS; Shirley Teresa Wajda, assistant professor of history and American studies, Kent State University.

Stevenson To Lead Summer Seminar, June 9-13, 2002

"Books in American Lives, 1830-1890," is the topic of the 2002 Summer Seminar in the History of the Book to be led by Louise Stevenson, professor of history and American studies at Franklin and Marshall College, where she has taught since 1982. The seminar dates, Sunday, June 9, to Thursday, June 13, 2002, have been chosen to follow the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians to be held at the University of Connecticut. The AAS seminar will investigate how books made themselves felt at home and in public life through readings, workshops, and discussion based in part on extensive collections of manuscripts, periodicals, and visual sources.

Stevenson has written extensively on higher education and nineteenth-century cultural and intellectual life. Her books include *Scholarly Means to Evangelical Ends: The New Haven Scholars and the Transformation of Higher Learning in America, 1830-1890* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and *The Victorian Homefront: American Cultural and Intellectual Life, 1860-1880* (1991; rev. ed. Cornell University Press, 2001). Her recent work includes articles on books and reading in everyday Victorian life, including an essay for volume 3 of *A History of the Book in America*, to be published by AAS and Cambridge University Press.

To receive the seminar announcement, contact Caroline Sloat at the Society (csloat@mwa.org).

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The editors welcome all news relevant to the interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

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Book Note



Alastair Johnston. *Alphabets to Order: The Literature of Nineteenth-Century Typefounders' Specimens.* (New Castle, Delaware, and London: Oak Knoll/British Library, 2000) 222 pp. ill. \$39.95 ISBN 1-58456-009-6

The title of this smart, witty, and useful book captures its argument and methodology: Alastair Johnston considers Anglo-American type specimen books—the trade catalogues of the type foundry business—as literature rather than simply as sources for typographic or printing history. Like other cultural and literary historians who examine non-canonical print genres— as David Henkin reads paper money, for example, in *City Reading*— Johnston shifts the terms with which we regard these texts, in this case by placing them centrally within literary history. *Alphabets to Order* provides a genealogy of the kinds of texts used in specimen books, an argument for a poetics of the genre, and a riveting cultural/social history of the tramp-typesetter of nineteenth-century America. Like other lovers of typography and alphabets (Johanna Drucker comes to mind), Johnston “came to typography through poetry” (3), and he brings to his subject a poet’s feel for language and for literary and cultural history along with a printer’s sense of the materiality of type.

To begin, Johnston attends to what happens when you read a type book as literature; after all, its “literary content...appears to be nonsense” (1). For Johnston specimen books reflect the “groundswell of nonsense” that produces such writers as Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, but which also prefigures the dadaist and surrealist poetics of the twentieth century. The typefounder’s “specimen” book paradoxically draws attention to that which works best when most invisible. To look at type fractures the absorption of reading. This is, also, part of the modernist project, and Johnston claims that the specimen book anticipates “trends in concrete poetry, cut-up writing, and even performance art” (1-2). Though he quickly offers a disclaimer (“there was no vital connection” between composers and “language-oriented” poets (4)), he argues by allusion and accretion for a modernist poetics of the type-specimen book, ending his book with this proleptic specimen from 1893:

THE POET OF THE FUTURE

Hiding His Light Under the Bushel of a Specimen-Book (184) Throughout he makes a convincing case that the changing materialities of print engender shifts in habits of reading and writing that produce the techniques of twentieth-century poetry. Noting that “radical changes in reading were wrought by the introduction of display types” and that “the founders demonstrated a new approach to language”(8), Johnston reads some of the type books as “prototypical concrete poetry works” (9) in fascinating chapters on a Caslon 1865 specimen book and on an 1883 *Specimen of candy stamps*—the ultimate in edible art.

Johnston charts the transition from Latin specimens (William Caslon introduced the often repeated opening to Cicero’s “Oration against Cataline” in 1734), that showcase the pretty letter Q and create a visually smooth text, with fewer distracting descenders and

ascenders than in English, to the commonly used Lord’s Prayer. He traces specimens’ development from self-reflexive paeans to the art of the printing itself in the early nineteenth century, to excerpts from popular dramas, to the brilliantly playful found poetry of the mid- to late century, especially in display types, in which “mesmerization through scale and contrast is a new way of holding our gaze” (52). The aesthetic and literary-historical heart of the book is in these examples; finally and fetchingly, this is a picture book—whose pictures are words—somewhat along the lines of Massin’s *Letter and Image*. Here are funnily profound juxtapositions:

YAM
man (55)

Ambiguous commands:

MORE
margin (67)

And *Onion*-like sendups of contemporary headlines:

ATMOSPHERIC RAILWAY DIRECT FROM LONDON TO EDINBURGH.
CONCERT EXTRAORDINAIRE, 1,234,567,890 PERFORMERS! (66)

In two closing chapters, Johnston finds social as well as literary history in the type books, before the 1893 Linotype transformed the industry, in the vivid figure of the itinerant printer whose ranks included Charles F. Browne (Artemus Ward), Horace Greeley, Bret Harte, Lafcadio Hearn, and William Dean Howells. “While socially he sees himself amongst the educated classes, his way of life makes the tramp printer an intimate of ...outlaws” (152) and specimens begin to speak from, of, and to the low-life: “PROFESSOR LIGHTFINGERS RECOMMENDS/CARELESSNESS IN BOLTING FRONT DOORS AND GATES” (152). This “Rabelaisian tramp printer” (161) haunts the pages of these unauthored books. In the persons of Twain and Whitman he “purged American literature of the genteel tradition” (161) and in the social life of the nation was an anarchic voice in the public sphere of the gilded age: “PATENT AUTOMATIC ELECTORAL COUNTERS/HONEST OFFICIALS CONSTRUCTED ACCORDING TO CIRCUMSTANCES” (168) warns one specimen book.

The genre of the specimen book is a wonderful example of print culture speaking of and to itself. The genre’s self-conscious self-reflexivity makes it a “playground of the compositors” (3). In type books, the institution of print, modernity’s great sense-maker, exposes its raucous backroom, a descendant of the ritual world of the eighteenth-century printshop of Darnton’s “Great Cat Massacre.” A bookman’s book and a poet’s book, this is an important resource as well for students of the cultural and social history of the book.

Patricia Crain
University of Minnesota

Congratulations to Patricia Crain, the winner of the eighth annual Prize for a First Book, awarded by the Modern Language Association of America on December 28, 2001. *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*, published by Stanford University Press was researched in part on an American Antiquarian Society fellowship.

Construction and Moving Collections Necessitates Closing to Public From January 18-April 1, 2002

Work is progressing on the construction of the state-of-the-art vault, and the construction managers have given us a good idea of the schedule for the remaining months of work. Accordingly, the dates when the library will be closed to the public have been set. The library will close at 5 p.m. on Friday, January 18, 2002, and re-open to the public on or about Monday, April 1, 2002.

During that period, materials will be moved into the new stack area, and a fire suppression system will be installed throughout Antiquarian Hall. The new vault, fitted with compact shelving, will house the collections and workrooms for the newspaper and graphic arts departments as well as the Society's archives and manuscripts collections, first editions, reserve, dated books, and pamphlets, almanacs,



AAS President Ellen Dunlap fills the cornerstone of the new vault with information about the Society in 2001.

directories, Bibles, hymnals, songsters, secular music, city and state documents, materials relating to colleges and fraternities, and state and national institutions.

We regret that only fellows currently in residence or who have made already plans to be in Worcester during the winter can be accommodated during the period of this construction and moving of the collections.

The deadline for applications for fellowships during the 2002-3 academic year remains January 15, 2002, and the full complement of academic fellowships will be available.

If you haven't followed the progress of the construction, do check out the Society's website: www.americanantiquarian.org/construction.htm. Information about the Society's reopening to readers will be posted as soon as it becomes available.

www.americanantiquarian.org

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