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1 Introduction

*Print Cultures: A Reader in Theory and Practice* is the first anthology of critical writings to concentrate on book, publishing and digital cultures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These selected texts provide a comprehensive introduction to this rapidly developing and dynamic subject, and represent the main theoretical approaches and models as well as key historical and thematic analyses. This is a collection of essential reading for students and researchers wanting to know how the subject has developed, where it is now and its future directions.

Print culture studies can be defined as the study of the production, circulation and consumption of books and other communications media, in both printed and digital form. The focus of this field of study is three-fold. Firstly, it concerns print as an agent in cultural, social and political life; how the circulation of printed and digital texts affects society. Secondly, it involves the analysis of the material form of a publication, or in other words the significance of the physical form of the text. And thirdly, it uncovers the stories behind books and other publications, which lead to their creation, recognition and longevity. This field of study draws attention to people involved in the process of literary and cultural creation who are frequently assigned to the footnotes of history; not only the author, but also the publisher, literary agent, typographic designer, marketer and publicist, bookseller, and reader.

The terms ‘print culture studies’ and ‘book history’ have tended to be used interchangeably to describe this new and fast-developing academic field of study, but the term ‘print culture’, particularly in its plural form ‘print cultures’, encapsulates more accurately the multiple and competing cultures of contemporary and historical print and publishing discussed in this volume: the assortment of geographical and social contexts in which texts have been produced and circulated and the variety of different cultural institutions behind their production. These range from established publishing industries that are closely affiliated to, or controlled by, the state, to the alternative, often dissenting or subversive work of authors and publishers operating outside the mainstream. The studies in this anthology demonstrate the range of countries from which the study and theorisation of Anglophone print culture has emerged: the United Kingdom, the United States, the Caribbean, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania and India. These studies also locate connections and mutually influential exchanges in international print culture, while acknowledging that these exchanges are frequently asymmetrical and uneven.

The study of print and publishing has conventionally taken place within the discipline of analytical bibliography, and has involved the technical analysis and historical investigations of individual books and editions. In the 1950s, however, new methods and approaches were introduced by historians Lucien Febvre and
Henri-Jean Martin in *L’Apparition de Livre* (1958), published in English as *The Coming of the Book* (1976), and later by Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979), to investigate the socio-materiality of texts: how literature and society have been influenced by the processes of textual production, distribution and consumption. These areas of scholarship have variously been termed the ‘sociology of texts’, ‘book history’, ‘publishing studies’ and ‘print culture studies’ (see Robert Darnton (1982), John Sutherland (1998), Finkelstein and Mc Cleery (2006b) and Simone Murray (2007)).

From the 1970s onwards, attention turned to contemporary institutions of literary and cultural production and has resulted in a number of sociological studies of late twentieth-century print culture (Coser et al. 1982; Lane and Booth 1980). The most influential of these is Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture (1971, 1993, 1996; see also Chapter 3 in this volume) which provides a framework for disclosing the systems of power and privilege in literary relations and for giving prominence to the role of the different agents, including authors, literary agents, editors and publishers, in the process of literary creation.

Scholarship in print culture has subsequently developed within a number of academic disciplines, including publishing studies, literature, social history, politics, law, sociology, library studies, information studies, geography, anthropology and art history, and this volume incorporates a number of methodological and theoretical approaches. The risk of such complexity is, as Robert Darnton famously stated, ‘interdisciplinarity run riot’ (1982, p. 67). In order to navigate a path through this potentially unwieldy subject, this volume maps out the main directions in which this field of research has developed and is continuing to develop, and identifies the main shifts in print and publishing history during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

One of the most significant shifts in print culture relates to changing patterns of ownership in the publishing industry, as it developed from family-owned and independent ‘gentlemanly’ firms in the early twentieth century to predominantly large multinational media conglomerates, with business interests spanning the globe, and with new players currently entering from the wings in the form of digital publishing start-ups. These changes precipitated debates and discussions that date back to the 1930s, when anxieties were expressed within the book trade and in the academy about the commercialisation of book publishing and reading, the rise of an undiscerning mass reading public, the tendency of the book trade to produce corrupting books for herd-like readers and the need for publishers to act as guardians of literature (see the extracts in this volume by Q. D. Leavis, Chapter 13 [1932]; Geoffrey Faber, Chapter 14 [1934]; and Mary Ann Gillies, Chapter 8 [2007]). As the publishing industry responded to new media and the developing marketplace for books in the mid-twentieth century, debates continued to centre on the publisher’s role and responsibilities in negotiating the balance between culture and commerce (see extracts by Stanley Unwin, Chapter 2 [1960]; Janice Radway, Chapter 15 [1997]; and Clive Bloom, Chapter 16 [2002]). From the 1980s onwards, in the wake of the deregulation of markets in the United Kingdom and the United States, the publishing industry underwent fundamental changes in its patterns of ownership, when long-established family-owned imprints were taken over and absorbed within major multinational and multimedia corporations with
headquarters in Europe and America (see extracts by Lewis A. Coser, Chapter 18 [1975]; Sue Curry Jansen, Chapter 17 [1991]; and André Schiffrin, Chapter 39 [2010]). Several scholars have examined how authorship and reading have been affected by structural changes in the publishing industry, in particular by the rise of literary celebrity culture, the ways in which authors have to promote themselves and the implications of literary prizes (see extracts by Richard Todd, Chapter 35 [1996]; Juliet Gardiner, Chapter 10 [2000]; Joe Moran, Chapter 9 [2000]; Tom Maschler, Chapter 36 [2003]; and James English, Chapter 38 [2010]).

The changing power structures in print culture have also come under scrutiny throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, specifically the frameworks operating for the privileging and excluding of specific texts, authors, publishers and readers, and how these controls have been opposed or subverted. During wartime, the strong links between the political establishment and the publishing industry were particularly pronounced, and several of the chapters in this volume assess the ways in which British and American authors and publishers were co-opted by the state in the production of both censorship and propaganda during the first and second world wars, and the extent to which they and their readers were complicit in these arrangements (see extracts by Peter Buitenhuis, Chapter 21 [1987]; Joe Pearson, Chapter 24 [1996]; Jane Potter, Chapter 22 [2007]; Valerie Holman, Chapter 23 [2008]; and John B. Hench, Chapter 25 [2011]). Sue Curry Jansen argues that market censorship is more significant than state censorship in contemporary American publishing (Chapter 17). Other scholarship has drawn attention to the multiple ways in which writers, publishers and readers have contested and subverted state censorship, for example in Alistair McCleery’s discussion of the ways in which *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* avoided and circumnavigated obscenity scholarship in the early twentieth century (Chapter 19 [2013] in this volume) and Archie L. Dick’s discussion of the means by which censorship in the apartheid period was resisted by black readers in South Africa (Chapter 20 [2012] in this volume).

Feminist publishers and scholars have sought, as Claire Squires notes, ‘to remove the gendered construction of the “gentleman publisher”’ (2007: 46), in exposés of systems of patriarchy in authorship, print culture and publishing, for example in the chapters in this book by Virginia Woolf (Chapter 31 [1929]) and Lynne Spender (Chapter 5 [1983]). The work of feminist publishers in establishing their own publishing firms, publishing feminist texts and recovering forgotten women’s literature is reviewed in the extracts in this volume by Simone Murray (Chapter 33 [2004]) and by Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar and Rumsha Shahzad (Chapter 34 [2015]) while Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon (Chapter 32 [1995]) examine the particular challenges facing feminist publishers in the global south.

Postcolonial scholars have turned their attention to the implications of inequalities in knowledge production on a global scale, analysing the cultural, political and economic impact of the transnational and local book trade, and the emergence and constitution of reading publics in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The publisher’s role, not just as an intermediary, but as an agent and gatekeeper in the production of print culture, is explored in this research, and there is particular
attention to how such control over the production and circulation of printed books has adversely shaped literary and cultural development in these countries. One line of scholarship is concerned with the historical legacies of imperialism on the book trade, and the European publishing industry’s involvement in the exercise of colonial and neo-colonial expansion (see extracts by Henry Chakava, Chapter 28 [1992]; Graham Huggan, Chapter 29 [2001]; and Robert Fraser, Chapter 27 [2008]), while other scholars have examined how print culture and publishing have been employed as a tool of independence, resistance and subversion in colonial and postcolonial contexts (see extracts by James Currey, Chapter 30 [2008]; and Archie L. Dick, Chapter 20 [2012]). Further recent scholarship has focused on the implications of a globalised, conglomerated publishing industry for authors, literature and publishers in the global south (see extracts by Walter Bgoya, Chapter 40 [2001]; Pascale Casanova, Chapter 26 [2004]; Sarah Brouillette, Chapter 43 [2007]; and Suman Gupta, Chapter 42 [2009]).

The most significant transformation in book and print culture during the last century has resulted from the digital revolution. A number of scholars embrace what Jay David Bolter (2001) termed ‘the late age of print’, arguing that the internet and digital publishing tools have liberated mass communication from control by a small elite: George Landow (Chapter 12 [2006]) celebrates the transformative potential of digital text, while Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar and Rumsha Shahzad (Chapter 34 [2015]) maintain that digital text offers new possibilities for women writers to tackle gender inequalities in the publishing industry. Other critics draw attention to the threats of digital disruption: for example, Laura Dietz (Chapter 11 [2015]) draws attention to the risk that new digital publishing poses to authors’ careers, and John B. Thompson (Chapter 6 [2010]) points to the dangers associated with the possible disintermediation of the publisher from the publishing value chain. Michael Bhaskar (Chapter 7 [2013]) argues that digital technology is ambivalent, simultaneously offering the potential for individualism as well as centralisation, for freedom and for surveillance. Furthermore, several chapters grapple with the way that geographical boundaries are challenged by digital communications technology and publishing, and the extent to which new networks, connections and exchanges are being established that either challenge or reinforce traditional binaries between West and East, North and South (Walter Bgoya, Chapter 40 [2001]; Sarah Brouillette, Chapter 43 [2007]; Pascale Casanova, Chapter 26 [2004]; Angus Phillips, Chapter 41 [2014]; and Suman Gupta, Chapter 42 [2009]). These texts explore the dichotomy in twenty-first-century print and publishing culture, which on the one hand offers unique opportunities for individual expression and control, and for dissent and political opposition, as a result of digital technology and the internet, but on the other hand has become more centralised than ever before.

The book is organised into nine parts, each dealing with a specific concept or theme, and each consisting of an introduction and a selection of texts from leading theorists, historians and critics. The volume begins with an examination of publishing, authorship and readers in the literary marketplace, and then turns to censorship, propaganda and war, colonial and postcolonial print cultures, women and print culture, literary prize culture and globalisation and the book.
These readings in print culture shed light on the circuits of power operating in twentieth- and twenty-first-century print culture; they examine how the role of the author, the publisher and the reader have changed in response to socio-economic, political and ideological challenges, and explore the networks of textual exchanges underlying the publications of books and other texts. They offer important interventions in central, often paradoxical, issues in print culture studies: the ways in which the publishing industry, while corporate owned, also provides opportunities for individual and collective creativity; how print is employed as a means of enforcement of dominant ideologies, but conversely as a means of resistance; and how print and digital text has been used as a vehicle both for societal and political control and for radical social change.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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