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Introduction

Wondering about ‘the Causes of Causes’: The Publisher’s Series, Its Cultural Work and Meanings

Part Two: The Series, the Academy, and the World

John Spiers

[For Part One: The Methodologies of Series and the Limits of Knowledge, please see The Culture of the Publisher’s Series, Volume 1]

The series is a major factor in aiding the book historian to pose and to answer many questions, including ‘why does book history matter?’ Here we confront wider dilemmas about ideas and assumptions about culture, art, education, politics, economics, democracy, morality, the intellect and individual development, and the relations with ourselves, with others, and with the State. And so we find that in considering the culture of the publisher’s series we have to examine social roles and consciousness, perceptions of self and of others, and the complex interactions of private and public thought and practice on how we are to live and how others have done so. These issues concern – in the words of Raymond Williams – ‘changes in consciousness which are themselves forms of consciousness of change’ (Williams 1986: 142).

In the first half of this two-part Introduction (in Volume 1 of this two-volume set) I considered some essential terms relating to publishers’ series as cultural phenomena, the cultural and economic work that they do, their nature as cultural artefacts and the modes of understanding appropriate to their appreciation. As I said in Volume 1, our contributors are especially concerned with the social processes by which competing publishers have sought to occupy niche-spaces, in response to changing opportunities and by extrapolating from the experience of the recent past. Here, we need to work with a definition of a niche which is helpfully ever-present in discussions of the series and which is actively explanatory. Paul Colinvaux, in his The Fates of Nations, offered ‘A niche is a specific set of capabilities for extracting resources, for surviving hazard, and for competing; coupled with a corresponding set of needs’ (Colinvaux 1980: 232).
For a series publisher to recognise, learn and master a niche, to occupy it as a fresh environment in a culture, to respond successfully to contextual change, is to seek fitness for purpose and survival.

In Volume 1 I looked at the series over time, and the role that series have played in cultural formation and in the constitution and positioning of readerships. I stressed, too, the limits of all such knowledge as well as the elements that can be comfortably assimilated into scholarly discourse, together with the more elusive factors which escape such classification – and, indeed, which may always do so. In this second part here I broaden the discussion to consider the place of publishers’ series in our understanding of publishing and its changes. I do so in relation to society, to economics, and to national and international identities – as, indeed, do our contributors.

Critically, we are examining the cultural work of the series, its purposes, strategies and contexts. In these two collaborative volumes we offer twenty-two entirely new papers focused on this polarity. Introductions to such volumes commonly tell you what the authors of the following papers then tell you. I do not envisage my role as editor as to try to steal the thunder (or the lightning) of contributors by summarising their best points in a few cursory sentences. Instead, I have offered an Introduction in two halves, each of which precedes a volume of the two-part set and which instead attempts some wider contextual work. The two volumes can stand alone, but the reader will gain much from studying the two as a whole. In the first volume I provide some basic definitions and observations – of what we mean by a ‘niche’, a ‘series’, a ‘library’ etc., as well as a ‘culture’, a ‘classic’ or a ‘canon’. In this second volume I particularly emphasise the importance of taking entrepreneurship and business and the individual consumer seriously, if we are to understand the actual dynamics of risk-taking, the calculations of odds and probabilities made by publishers and the wider context and agencies of book publishing and book-buying.

Paul Colinvaux’s The Fates of Nations (1980) showed how and why nations competed for resources, and how they sought to occupy specific and changing niche-spaces in the world’s polity and economy. These were learned niches in national struggles to secure extra resources. They are fundamental to our understanding of the dynamics of such national strategies as colonialism, trade and the onset of aggressive wars – analysed by Colinvaux as deliberate efforts to change a nation’s niches to increase its resources. By implication this study suggests many insights into the social mechanism which was and is the publisher’s series.

As I outlined in Volume 1, the phenomenon of the publisher’s series has generally been neglected by all but a few scholars working on individual
publishing houses. Few book-trade studies index ‘series’, although most index ‘serial’. The series has never before been considered holistically as part of the changes in culture and the production, pricing and distribution of books in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and as something with precedents in earlier periods and ramifications in later ones, and in many nations and cultures. As my friend and colleague Dr. Mary Hammond said, in encouraging the project, in this two-volume set the different contributors’ voices emerge as complementary methodological systems: engaging with archival research, cultural theory, literary, para-textual and bibliometric analysis, and often with each other. They demonstrate a wide range of approaches which scholars of book history have come to recognise as essential in the task of excavating texts and readers of the past, and in assessing which trends reflected general patterns of change. The papers in these two volumes were first presented to the conference ‘The Culture of the Publisher’s Series’, held at the Institute of English Studies at Senate House in central London on 18–19 October 2007. They celebrate the series in its complex diversity.

The essays in this second volume all concern the broader frameworks provided by nation, empire and the international community insofar as they help us to appreciate the purpose and function of series, and the rapport that each seeks to establish with various kinds or categories of reader. John Hench examines the role of American publishers’ series during the Second World War, 1939–45; Álvaro Caballos Viro considers international Catholic literature; Alison Rukavina considers the canon-making aspects of Richard Bentley and the Melbourne bookseller and publisher George Robertson’s Australian Library; while Lisa Kuitert looks at series for women in the nineteenth-century Netherlands. Robert Fraser surveys a number of series in nineteenth-century Scotland and England, and the ways in which each moulded their readers’ sense of nation; he ends with some personal remarks concerning his maternal grandfather’s intellectual debt to Cassell’s National Library. Two essays concern the international dealings of the firm of Macmillan. Shafquat Towheed examines the author contracts supplied by the firm for their Colonial Library, and Ruth Panofsky looks at some series launched locally by the Macmillan Company of Canada. Abhijit Gupta discusses the Bengal Family Library, and Terry Seymour examines J. M. Dent’s Everyman’s Library. Elizabeth Tilley looks at the publisher’s series in nineteenth-century Ireland, where much original and highly influential publishing work influenced a sense of ‘the nation’.

The essays here help us to see how some inhabitants of some countries actually saw themselves, and how ideas and people were differentiated
within historical and temporal frontiers. They thus illuminate the flux of culture, custom, outlook and identity held in common and the different senses of nationhood over time. They also emphasise cultural disparities as well as homogeneities, alignments and re-alignments, and the variety of identities prevailing and persuasive among different groups at different times. Self-image was always a crucial factor, itself reflected in many series. Here specifics matter, as Loughran (2007) shows.

A key context here is Benedict Anderson’s controversial work *Imagined Communities* (1991). In an important essay about the development of the modern American nation Robert A. Gross offered this summary:

As formulated by Anderson, modern nationalism took shape under the aegis of ‘print capitalism’ seeking out markets for readers with a common language and with inchoate sentiments and identities waiting for public expression. Out of the experience of reading the ascendant genres of the newspaper and the novel. ‘rapidly growing numbers of people’ came ‘to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways. Although they followed the news and absorbed the plots of novels in ‘silent privacy, in the lair of their skull’, they did so in an ‘extraordinary mass ceremony’, aware that thousands of others were doing the same thing more or less at the same time. Their outlooks were enlarged, their sympathies broadened, and by this means an impersonal aggregation of strangers, scattered across far-flung settlements, developed into a ‘remarkable community in anonymity’, joined in mutual awareness, collective sentiments, and emotional bonds. (Gross 2010: 12)

Loughran queries this account, but Linda Colley, draws attention to the words of the French historian Georges Duby, who noted that ‘The attitudes of groups of individuals to their own situation in society and the conduct these attitudes dictate are determined not so much by actual economic conditions as by the image in the minds of the individuals and groups’ (Colley 1996: 45; Duby, in Briggs 1985: v).

The differing cultures of the series, too, show us that there are few consistent monolithic national identities. There are complex divergencies due to different geographies, including the powerful influence of island status and also the fact that a nation is not made by ruling a line on a map. In the formation of nations, ambiguities abound. And smaller nations regularly seek to re-emerge from larger formations, too. In addition, as we have seen in our own time in Eastern Europe and Africa, when centrally imposed controls relax old enmities and aspirations can re-emerge. There is then
an open conflict of cultures and controls. Since the eighteenth century at least, invention and investment has constantly shifted in the formation of national and regional identities, as these studies of series show. With respect to national series whose innovations A. Gupta, L. Kuitert, E. Tilley, A. C. Viro, and N. Yakovaki examine. They explore the question of what a specific nationality or sense of nationhood is about, how people established who they were, what they felt, why they thought the way they did, the frame through which they looked at the past and the present, the psychic and political questions concerning what made them special, what forged their national consciousness, what offered them rallying cries, what legitimated their national structures and bound people together. As Jennifer Alison has shown in her study of George Robertson (of Angus & Robertson), an individual publisher can have an enormous and conscious impact in establishing a purely national literature of prose and poetry, and a new sense of a ‘nation’ (Alison 2009).

The publisher’s series has thus reflected differing (and not always durable) senses of identities, and the extent to which they have been serviceable and useable resources in national expression, as Linda Colley has investigated for Britain. She points, too, to ‘the unsoundness of any single platonic notion of what constitutes nationalism and nationhood’ (Colley 1996: 408). Certainly, the drivers for specific recent cultures have been many and diverse: the pressures of revolutions in industry and transport, the geographical mobility of a nation’s or a region’s inhabitants, elite attitudes and the privileging of minorities, the rise of the bourgeoisie, the patriotic influence of organised religion, networks of self-interest and credit, the urbanisation of a population, the growing volume and complexity of internal and external trade (including exporting, importing and re-exporting), the operations of free trade and the realities of entrepreneurship and profits, the impact of imperial tides, and for Australia (and New Zealand) the consequences of what historian Geoffrey Blainey has called ‘the tyranny of distance’ (Blainey 1968). As John Hench shows in his paper, war has been a key factor in enhancing literacy and book distribution. Colley (echoing the Orwell of Nineteen Eightyfour) says, too, that ‘Time and again, war with an obviously hostile and alien foreign power has forged a semblance of unity and distracted attention from the considerable divisions and tensions within. In a very real sense, war – recurrent, protracted and increasingly demanding war – had been the making of Great Britain’ (Colley 1996: 339). John Stevenson, too, has pointed out that ‘Modern mass communications, railways, delivery vans, the telegraph, wireless and the newspapers also fostered a greater sense of nationhood. People of widely different
backgrounds and outlook were increasingly moulded by common, collective concerns of which the sense of national identity was one of the most powerful. This sense of nationhood played a large role in the war fever of Europe and further afield in 1914’ (Stevenson 1990: 48).

Then there is the range of networks of communications and the proliferation of print (tracts, religious works, almanacs, newspapers and periodicals, pamphlets, books) which have been fundamental in any culture, and in the evolution of its ‘political personality’. So, too, shifts in religious belief and influence, political upheavals, the threats of wars and invasions and the national bonding they have encouraged. The yields of peace and prosperity, educational change and other modernising agents form a major part of the picture, too, as John Hench and others show. Here, one of the great interests of the culture of the publisher’s series that we see is to examine what were common frameworks among series publishers and what was peculiar to time, to the inventive entrepreneur in invented nations, to those identifying with a nation, as well as to place, and why.

Each of our authors is tussling with intractable questions raised by the series as material artefact and social fact. They address priorities which seem to be mandatory for book historians at the point at which they are driven to assess such questions of cultural, social, political and economic relevance. Here it is a challenge for the academy to come to terms (often reluctantly) with business as a generator of social and economic change, in an adaptive liberal market economy. We need a new-revisionist assessment of the preponderance of anti-capitalist rhetoric in the academic discourse of the recent past, its pervasiveness and apparent appeal, and the constraints which it can place on our appreciation of something as subtle and as substantial as the production and distribution of books. We need to be sympathetic to that frequently misunderstood figure the creative capitalist entrepreneur, always a major actor on many diverse scenes. In the process I suggest that we are driven to consider nothing less than the politics and purposes of book history itself.

In my Introduction to the first volume of this two-volume set I sought to open out some fundamental problems of method and of address. The reader with this second volume in their hands may wish to see the Introduction to the first volume. There I stressed the importance of studying publishing and its culture as a practical business with ever-shifting everyday challenges, to which the series has been one significant response. Here, a publisher’s books are valuable as an archive in themselves – especially in the absence of surviving commercial archives.
In the absence of direct evidence we are forced back upon the indirect and the otherwise overlooked. I raise some key problems of cultural and social analysis, including the vital role of the creative entrepreneur, the management of every kind of capital, and the energy and the capability to dare to be different – to march to a different drum, to break step, to show a touch of imagination and wit, to take a risk and to learn from failure, and to garner success. Series show that this work is a mix or synthesis of art, science, knowledge and intuition – of conception, inception and experience. Leaps of imagination have been essential – such as the first introduction of the ‘railway’ novel by the Belfast firm of Simms & M’Intyre in 1847 as the railway emerged as the predominant metaphor of the Industrial Revolution as Elizabeth Tilley shows.

This fundamentally important series had many effects, the consequences of which are felt to this day. A major large niche of proven opportunity, quality and apparent permanence was revealed – ultimately leading to mass market cheap books for all. In its novelty and trade-effects it particularised key factors of change, including the benefits of cheaper materials and production techniques alongside growing readerships and new methods of distribution. In the 1840s and 1850s there chimed motive, opportunity and means. These were enormous cultural changes, consequential as entrepreneurs trapped and widely applied the energies captured in fossil fuels.

As our studies of individual publishers’ series demonstrate, post-industrial processes of manufacture and management rapidly changed and every other culture had to contend with the consequences. Every localised culture across the globe shifted in response to newly reorganised world markets. As the environmental historian James Winter puts this: ‘Inexorably, material goods and information flowed from less to more highly organized systems … Increase in the scale and complexity of technological systems encouraged further increases; these increases and the diffusion of technology to new areas encouraged centralisation of management; this centralized management encouraged the development of implements and techniques whose performances were predictable and therefore responsive to central management’ (Winter 1999: 205). As he shows, local, social, business, physical and cultural landscapes were much changed by the far-reaching influence of London. These cultures were vulnerable to such a powerful remote interest, and to policies and events. And, in the short term at least, the diversity of local enterprises was reduced or blocked. The influences were complex: Extranatural power, iron machinery, artifice, railway speed, innovation, precision, synchronization, professionalism, rationalization, calculation,
utility, abstractness, efficiency – these phenomena, values, and processes were what Victorians had in mind when they described their age, as they frequently did, as the age of steam (Winter 1999: 83).

Key new techniques were introduced, as production reached ever-expanding global markets, carried part way at least by steam, directed by telegraph from mid-century onwards, and expedited by new professional accounting procedures, by innovative financial and exchange services, and by new marketing systems. As Winter argues, ‘each of these technologies shaping and stimulating the other’ (Winter 1999: 11). From the 1860s onwards ‘investors, shippers, import and export companies, international railway engineers, politicians, and military strategists were forming a world trade, insurance, banking, information, and communications network centered in London’ (Winter 1999: 20–1). And so Britain was able initially to co-opt much world production into its Imperial system.

In many prismatic senses, the ‘railway novel’ is a whistle that signals these changes. We see each of these interlocked aspects of cultural change in the mirror of the publishers’ series. Steam became a metaphor for artifice and innovation of every kind. Space and time shrank as opportunities expanded. The gulf between the conceptual world of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries widened rapidly. Local markets and culture – as Alison Rukavina shows – were co-opted and often overwhelmed by the newly industrial Britain, as they struggled for local self-definition. How these cultures and values responded and developed is a key focus of our essays.

The ‘railway novel’ proved to be an entirely new niche. It was at the railway station bookstalls that the first Simms & M’Intyre novel – and the imitators led by George Routledge and his ‘Railway Library’ – were to be found. These changed access to a huge number of texts, both new and old. They changed price and design. The new and cheaper novels in pocket-format were specifically located in these opportunities generated by new technology – the railway and its new bookstalls. That niche then permitted other recruitments in the market and broadened niches for both individuals and populations. The origin of the ‘railway novel’ itself depended on the application to movement of new and cheap fossil-fuelled industrial energy, and to the entrepreneurship of booksellers at railway stations. Cheaper, faster, wider distribution by railway (and steamship) led, among other changes, to cheaper food, to more personal disposable income and to much changed cultural horizons. The ‘railway novel’ showed – reflecting Paul Colinvaux’s terms in his The Fates of Nations (1980) – that well directed energy multiplied the benefits from a good idea, and that such change was the friend of the
shrewd, the quick-witted and the innovative. But it also demonstrated that it was difficult to retain a competitive edge in an adaptive market. Technical superiority was brief. Monopoly was temporary. Competitors learned and imitated any new approaches, and they improved on innovations too. Few if any publishers could behave like the management of Arnold Bennett’s *Grand Hotel Babylon* and defy competition by ignoring it. The knowledge of new techniques and technologies was rapidly held in common. Compromises did not endure. Once a favourable new niche was demonstrated, others rapidly occupied it. Every series was vulnerable to imitation. Careers could be built on emulation. As Colinvaux (1980: 192) says, ‘Anyone can make a warship, just as anyone can make a musket, a cannon or a tank.’ Or a series. New ideas were easily adopted by others, and counter-techniques thought of too. The benefits of a new kind of series were immediate, but they had to be exploited rapidly in a culture where people were learning to live better and where new standards rapidly spread. Here marketing had to be sustained if a firm was to hold onto a sufficient share of a newly established market.

The historical data shows that rivals, indeed, learned new techniques very quickly, as the emulative career of George Routledge in England and that of the many nineteenth-century American cheap reprint firms highlighted. The contemporary struggles over copyright were necessary technical attempts to attract and protect new material, to hold it alone for long enough to recover and benefit from the necessary investment in a jostling and a piratical market, to retain business in the face of the challenge of new technologies and determined competitors. Nevertheless, ‘wealth, numbers and ambition grew together’ (Colinvaux 1980: 155). How and why the Belfast firm withdrew from fiction publishing, returning to its old base of educational books, is a separate problem – as is the influence for good and ill of conservative habits.

John Simms and James M’Intyre were genuinely creative, where their imitator George Routledge was an alert and vigorous copyist and marketer who seized and amplified the opportunities they had first recognised. The Belfast duo showed that publishers are not metronomes, and that the acceptance and management of risk is an essential element in a creative business. The series publisher had to judge what works, what might work, what had not worked and what his or her firm might do with ideas tried by others, or never tried at all. Probabilities, and combinations of probabilities, always needed to be sensibly assessed, where they could be predicted. Self-criticism was always an essential. Markets showed up strengths and weaknesses in the knowledge of the publisher, and encouraged adaptive improvement. No publisher ever wanted to
take undue risks, even when accepting the impossibility of a risk-free society. These factors have been basic in the culture and engineering of the publisher’s series. Here the technology scholar Henry Petroski has drawn attention to several key points, in assessing the science of physical engineering projects. What he says is apposite to the culture of the publisher’s series, and its constantly changing new environments.

First, there is ‘the idea of design – of making something that had not existed before’, which is essential to any new beginning in economic, social and creative development and evolution. Second, ‘defects are unplanned experiments that can teach one how to make the next design better’ (Petroski 1985: 84). Successes may be repeatable, but the essential necessity is to learn from failures, as human beings seek to design what has not existed before and to ‘go beyond the past’ (Petroski 1985: vii, 9). Third, ‘No one wants to learn by mistakes, but we cannot learn enough from successes to go beyond the state of the art.’ Therefore the acceptance of risk and uncertainty in a trial-and-error system – including failure analysis and corrective action – is essential as we seek to increase creativity as well as the ability to predict the future. And innovation does not necessarily lead to failure, although the test is in the doing (Petroski 1985: 62). Fourth, the individual personality, craft and judgements of the engineer – and the publisher – matter, too. Petroski notes that, ‘As with all recipes ... the cook is always the invisible ingredient’ (Petroski 1985: 42). Fifth, ‘While the curse of human nature appears to be to make mistakes, its determination appears to be to succeed ... there is little indication that innovation will ever be abandoned completely for the sake of absolute predictability’ (Petroski 1985: 105).

In these terms we can try to track the decisions taken and the realities of the publishers’ contemporary world and culture, for the structure and publication of series reflect the publisher’s observations, experiences, inspiration, hopes, guesses, calculations and conclusions, investments and results in ever-changing markets which are a daily economic referendum of taste and choice. Digital technology enables contemporary publishers to analyse and ask many questions of this data in detail and to respond rapidly, but archives do not survive sufficiently for us to track what earlier publishers did, save in very general terms. Key signals, however, are price, design and format, length, marketing and advertising, the development or closure of a project and patience or impatience with the market. Who copies whom is telling, too, as is the response of book-trade organisations that have sought to curtail competition when challenging new niches (created by experiment and learning) have emerged – for example, with the organised subversion by the British
booksellers of the innovative Smith, Elder ‘Library of Romance’ between 1833 and 1835. This challenged the public to buy instead of borrowing new fiction in single volumes. The series offered was comprised entirely of original fiction, and was thus the forerunner of the one-volume novel of modern times. ‘It broke down (1) because the trade in its own immediate interest wished to maintain the status quo, (2) because the public in Britain were not book-buyers but book borrowers’ (Sadleir 1951: 170–5). Our contributors have highlighted much new material which reflects bright light on these issues with regard to an uncommonly met range of national identities, cultures, publishers, series, histories and traditions – and on such perennial economic issues for every publisher as how to increase sales, improve margins, cut costs, increase productivity, maintain reputation and achieve a sustained yield.

In examining the culture of the publisher’s series within these different national imaginations and identities our essayists have focused on specific situations and eventualities. These detailed monographic studies are the essential building blocks of a new theoretical understanding of key aspects of book publishing in many countries and regions, and of international competition between them. Contributors have, too, tested the adequacy or otherwise of different kinds of social analysis – including nation, race, class, gender and time-bound place. Notably, the essays show that the culture of the publisher's series raises key methodological issues about what we mean by ‘history’, and about the role of historical memory, of methods of historiographical research and of historical consciousness, the roles and origins of social processes and the difficulty of the concept of ‘purpose’ in history. The analysis of specific series confronts this cluster of perennial problems, including ‘the past’ as differentiated from the intellectual and political processes of historians. Here we see that the series has been concerned with particular and different identifications, norms and prescriptions – as an agent of socialisation, of national identity and of common (if often very different) values. It has reflected every aspect of the evolution of modernity, of liberal urban and industrial capitalism, the development of democracy and of ‘popular’ culture, the decline of religious faith, the rise of science and now the electronic global situation.

In these constant and often unnerving cultural and commercial shifts a fundamental role of the series has been to seek to make sense of life, offering a model of order in differing fields. The series has thus selected and reflected on issues and events, and offered readers a resonant means of identifying their relationships. It has been one institutional means which has linked the everyday life of the individual, observed realities and prospects, historical and cultural memory. Series editors have sought
to make sense of social processes, while themselves functioning as such a process. As we have seen, the series is itself a technological, a cultural and thus a historical system. It closely relates to inevitable – and creative – uncertainty. It has done much to structure public and private fields of meaning, and the ways in which people have understood their historical situation. The series has played its part in reaffirming and disrupting perspectives and experiences. It has combined ideas, cultural practices and industrial processes. As we seek disciplined historical understandings the series is one major means by which to study how a publisher has sought to imply ideas of permanence, authority, validation and judgement, while balancing art and economics.

Our contributors show that the series has been a major contribution to the nature of book culture itself. It has been a significant factor in the evolution of ideas and in public conversation about literature, culture and competing political ideas. As we can see in these two volumes, the ‘canon’ is one problem posed by the series. The ‘canon’ (a time-capsule) has usually flowed backwards, summarising a national essence, as a touchstone and an approved inheritance. In ‘arranging’ (or ‘re-arranging’) the past the series has been the site for new claims made for the significance, too, of previously excluded cultures and interests, just as it has often offered works which imply necessary qualitative change. Reprint, or ‘classic’, series have commonly presented themselves as retrieving those texts which are said to define us (whoever ‘we’ are) in a social process of reaffirmed community and continuity.

The series and ‘the canon’ is thus a key but very complicated element in what the cultural commentator Patrick Wright has spoken of (in another context) as

a historically produced sense of the past which acts as ground for a proliferation of other definitions of what is normal, appropriate or possible. ... Far from being somehow ‘behind’ the present, the past exists as an accomplished presence in public understanding. In this sense it is written into present social reality, not just implicitly as residue, precedent or custom and practice, but explicitly as itself. ... Any attempt to develop and assert a critical historical consciousness will find itself in negotiation if not open conflict with this established public understanding of the ‘past’. It is therefore important to understand what it is that functions as the ‘past’ and to distinguish it from history. (Wright 1985: 128)

In these terms, we have sought to evade reductionist explanations of cultural phenomena, and to be alert to the risks of raising particularities
to principles, as Sir J. H. Plumb warned us in his *The Death of the Past* (1969). Here I have drawn attention to the benefits of considering the technologies of book publishing and the actual documented work of every agent involved in editorial, marketing and distribution decisions. Our contributors have considered the physical book as well as the text, together with the social and personal processes of interacting with books – including how people read as well as what they read. Here we seek both public and private meanings. This remains the most difficult territory. For we confront what are for millions of past people entirely insuperable problems of discovering the meaningful individual responses and ideas of readers, the interiority amidst many unrecorded specifics and confused social contingencies of past lives. We struggle to capture the point of view, private intimacies and values which animated an individual, save for the necessarily unusual self-recorder and autobiographer. Robert Fraser illustrates this issue.

Economics is a vital focus. Series reflect both individual and aggregate demand, and its changes. And so our contributors consider such economic categories as capital, costs, rents, income, profits and such as these are indicated in the profile of the publisher, culture and series. Here, in emphasising the importance of studying publishing as a business, our essayists have studied the series both as an editorial and a marketing device and as an important part of that set of cultural and economic processes which create the object which is ‘the book’. The culture of the publisher’s series evidences how publishers have projected ideas about the book (and about ‘book culture’) – by design, by price etc. Experience, however, often knocks a publisher on the head. It provides new information, and changes adaptive expectations, confronting predictions with actualities. And so change in a series indicates slopes and plateaus, experience and equilibrium, evolution and stability in cultures and choices. Here price is one key indicator. Price, of course, is only one factor which determines demand; others include the consumer’s tastes, customs and preferences; the consumer’s income, and the price of rival goods; and such intangibles as comparative consumer status and aspiration, envy and peer pressure and what the Norwegian economist Thorstein Veblen in 1899 called ‘the emulatory instinct’. It is major ideas – social, cultural, technical, political – as well as responses to market movements – which drive the specific series, as Ruth Panofsky illustrates.

To circulate, ideas need both sponsors and buyers. And so we are concerned with both supply curves, which slope upwards, and demand curves, which slope downwards. In any particular publisher’s business
model the series has been one means to seek to eliminate some of the inevitable gambles and the uncertainty of guesswork in judging how many copies to print of a particular title. This is a non-trivial decision, and publishing is always concerned with living forces and movements. Time is also a constant problem. The clock is always ticking. Change always has to be handled. And there are few publishing houses which have progressed in a straight line.

The business model necessarily concerns, too, what economists call ‘marginalism’, or the necessity of incremental decisions in response to market changes – a publisher making step by step changes to improve their situation. There is no wriggling room for the scholar here. This issue must be addressed. For it focuses us on the key economic and psychological problem of ‘value’ to the consumer, on who discovers or determines this and how, and what records we can discover about willing consumer choices. It necessarily enmeshes us in the theory and functioning both of distribution and of the explanation of prices by marginal analysis. It is not enough to say that prices always matter, and then walk on by. We need to see why and how they were arrived at, and how people responded. These factors are the key to the behaviour of consumers and thus of producers. The economist William Stanley Jevons (1835–82) showed that the essential economic problem was that of allocating given resources to obtain maximum satisfactions for the consumer, achieved through competitive, dynamic market processes. Jevons highlighted the effect of a small increment or decrement of a good or service on consumption or production, and thence on price determination. As R. D. Collison Black, the modern editor of Jevons's The Theory of Political Economy, has said, Jevons ‘shifted the focal point of value theory from long-run “normal” values determined by the cost of production to short-run exchange-ratios determined by the psychology of the parties making the exchange’ (Jevons 1970 edn: 11).

Critically, the consumer is always concerned with marginal cost and with marginal utility, or the additional comparative satisfaction that additional expenditure may secure. Increments of a commodity are not equally valuable, Jevons argued, and the consumer’s degree of satiety would or should determine willingness to consume more and to pay the price, this itself influencing the producer’s willingness to provide more.

The producing publisher is interested in the last increments of a commodity that might be consumed, and publishing in series has given much guidance. This idea was outlined by Jevons in his ‘final’ (marginal) utility of theory of value, drawing on previous work by the political economist Richard Jennings and the physiologist Alexander Bain (Jevons 1871;
Gallagher 2006: 120–1). This is the ‘law of the relativity of sensation’, to adopt Catherine Gallagher’s words, from her invaluable discussion of marginal utility theory (Gallagher 2006: 121–30).

The margin of utility is the moment when the desire for a book purchase and the wish to spend the money on something else become equal, or almost so. Jevons highlighted an inverse proportion between value and quantity – ‘the degree of utility varies with the quantity of the commodity, and ultimately decreases as that quantity increases’ (Jevons 1970: 11). As Collison Black summarises:

In other words, consumption of successive units yields an increasing total utility, but each additional unit consumed adds a smaller amount to that total: we can say that marginal utility, the utility of an increment to the consumer’s stock, is diminishing. It can then be shown how this marginal utility will serve to determine the quantity of the good which the consumer will demand at a given price. ... Hence marginal analysis can be used to produce a consistent explanation of the determination of all prices in a market system, and this can perhaps be regarded as the crowning achievement of neo-classical economics. (Jevons 1970 edn: 16–17)

Here, degrees of satisfaction featured as a curve, with no abrupt transition. Novelists keep human ‘motivation’ and ‘character’ before us as vital issues, and, as Gallagher says, ‘political economists like Jevons ... claimed to be taking emotions seriously as the bedrock of exchange’ (Gallagher 2006: 144). But, alas, we do not have the information about the individual psychological, physiological and economic motivations and wished-for satisfactions of those who made up the mass of individual readers. And so we cannot, alas, commonly measure to what extent any specific buyer consciously sought to maximise their pleasure and resources, or was consciously aware of the equal and unequal utility which was relevant to him or her.

Such choices and preferences are inevitably highly idiosyncratic decisions and unpredictable, but the publisher still seeks to influence these by many devices. The publisher, too, is concerned with the marginal cost of producing one more unit at the marginal benefit, the price. Just as the consumer in theory compares the marginal utility of spending a dollar, a pound, a euro etc. on a book (or on another product entirely) the producer constantly compares the marginal utility of spending a dollar on capital (machinery) with the marginal utility of spending that dollar on labour to produce an alternative book or series. The producer,
too, is aware of what Alexander Bain called the ‘rule of Novelty’, and the constant necessity to counteract decay in demand by refreshing attractions in the market place (Bain 1873: 51).

Elusive as the specific individual reader is, price, as ever, is still a key parameter and indicator. The market price is, too, a quantitative effect. Indeed, as an indicator of likely readerships it is the most useful and objective of quantitative effects, and a measure of decisions made by producers and consumers. Combined with our understanding of marginal utility it is a record of psycho-social phenomena such as individual preferences and an indicator of the value negotiated in the market and thus accorded to individual books and series by consumers. Price reflects costs, of course, as well as a publisher’s conception of the market (which tends towards equilibrium), and their experience of it. It mirrors consumer responses too, for it expresses aggregated individual choices. Both the producer and the consumer determine price, in the intersection of supply and demand. Sales of series may or may not sum up the quantitative effects of individual feelings and emotions, but they do show us cash on the counter.

Here there is constant mutual counterpoise and interaction, which the history of an individual series reflects. A classic statement here is Alfred Marshall’s Principles of Economics (1890). The publisher’s series, too, is an example of a comment that Bertrand Russell once made to his friend Beatrice Webb, that the second law of thermodynamics says ‘that everything tends to uniformity and a dead level, diminishing (not increasing) heterogeneity. Energy is only useful when unevenly concentrated, and the law says that it tends to become evenly diffused’ (Webb 1938: 112). An adaptive, creative economy constantly seeks to press back the walls of these constraints, enlivened by new series.

We have seen that the series can serve to identify or confirm a niche in markets, as evidence of evolution in markets, and as a record of individual decisions taken where publishers judge that the benefits exceed the costs. Series thus function as a reference point for potential readers and historians, just as they perform as a hook in the market and a reflection of adjustments book buyers have made to their purchases – in response to price and other factors in markets. As one means of helping the publisher predict and function the series serves, too, a classificatory function – in Foucault’s terms – which we know, too, as ‘branding’. Our contributors address price, which reflects both the publisher’s costs and their estimate of what markets will bear, as well as what markets prove to bear or reject. They comment, too, on the range of social and economic factors which constantly come into play.
Culture, literacy and democracy

We have to discharge two tasks: to find an adequate theoretical account of cultural practices, in which specific empirical studies of the conditions of book history and reading fit, and which they help make fit; and to analyse particular individual publishers and series and the associated general history of cultural forms and the social processes of cultural production. This is the location of key problems concerning materiality, the historically specific publisher, agent and reader, and the meanings, influences and consequences for individuals, for firms and for the wider culture.

The historian, too, has to work with evidence. And, while understanding theory, we must avoid a priori assumptions controlling some possible discoveries and suppressing others. Here, book historians carry a heavy burden of theory concerning concepts of cultural continuity and change, the literary canon and politicised literary studies, in the radical convergence of the history of the book and of cultural theory. Many theorists are concerned with pleas about mentalities, discursive practices, reader response, ideological criticism, cultural materialism, deconstruction, new historicism, postmodernism and the end of an author-centred perspective concerned with authorial intentionality.1 There is a heavy preponderance of anti-capitalist writings. Yet paradoxically, perhaps, this criticism is itself multiplied and distributed easily by the free market in new ‘wired’ and wireless technologies. These enable the instant and cheap circulation of oppositional materials, both digitally and in hard copy by on-line retailers. Thus, there is full access to the competing ideas of structuralism, deconstruction, Marxism, feminism and gender studies, reader-response theory, the revision of canons, postcolonial studies and cultural studies.2

So, too, the youth culture is now intertwined and defined by instant and global electronic access. Here Michael Schudson has written that ‘Accompanying consolidation there has been an increase in book titles published, improved distribution, wider access, more choice, and new constituencies reached (notably teenagers and children and, through large print books, the growing population of the elderly). Efficiencies in distribution that online bookselling makes possible have even encouraged publication for “niche markets” now that profitability on the basis of modest sales is more and more likely.’ Reproducibility and economic growth have gone hand in hand, too, just as investment and technology have increased competitiveness, risk-taking and the discovery of new talent. The industry itself has thus moved to new performance means, and higher absolute levels of performance. In our time, the innovations
of the internet have dramatically lowered the costs of holding diverse or non-mainstream ideas, reflected different ideas of merit and changed what we mean by publication and access. Despite consolidations, indeed.

Schudson suggests that new technologies have reconfigured what we even mean by author, publisher and audience (Schudson 2009: 7, 17). He argues, too, that much publishing remains subsidised, favouring academic and minority projects. The economic system which many radical critics decry actively enables minority voices. The American Book Industry Study Group estimated in 2004 that there were 62,815 firms, organisations and self-publishers (Schudson 2009: 26). By 2006 more than 200,000 new titles were published annually in the USA, most of them by small publishers, organisations and individuals (Bowker 2007). Yet these wired and paradigm shifts are, however, regarded as catastrophic by Sven Birkerts, in their impact on social and cultural practices and relationships. Birkerts discusses the nature and discipline of ‘the durational reverie of reading’ in a text-centred imaginative engagement, in the animating worlds of writing and literature, artistic narrative and reflection. He is concerned with ‘our entire collective subjective history – the soul of our societal body’, previously encoded in print. He calls the ‘electronic deluge’ a fault line or a ledge dividing cultural possibilities, which has slammed many doors (Birkerts 2006: 20).

The problem for the historian is to work with evidence about such developments, using theory but not being misled by it. We need to study how things were, not how they ought to have been, or, indeed, might be made to be tomorrow with the past viewed as a weapon in the battle for the future. These problems are illustrated as we consider culture, literature, democracy – and the series and its culture. The issues are silver fish slippery.

An important area of cultural analysis which reflects on these issues in book history concerns the ‘Industrial Revolution’. Here, recent amendments in perspectives have seen historians revisiting ‘catastrophist’ ideas about the nature of the ‘industrial revolution’ – which the economic historian D. C. Coleman has called ‘one of the mythic phenomena of British history’ – and its consequences and benefits. The view that commentators take of this historical event powerfully colours their assumptions, ideas and theories of past and present, as well as what they think counts as suitable subjects for study and of what counts as evidence (Toynbee 1884; Ashton 1948; Hartwell 1971; Raven 1989; Coleman 1992; Taylor and Wolff 2004).

One major part of the cultural background has left a romantic inheritance of doctrinal history about the Industrial Revolution – and about
life, political economy, economic and social institutions, public policies and private morality. There are competing attempts to theorise such a complex development as the Industrial Revolution (with its inevitable Capital Letters). Revisionist historians have noted that these developments encompassed many of the crucial changes in the scale and pace of life – including longer living itself, changes in communications, wider literacy, education and reading, and choices of how to live, not least the new freedoms gained by women and by non-white peoples. John Stuart Mill (while fearful of the consequences of population growth) pointed out that the standard of living in Britain was higher than ‘the condition of the corresponding classes in other countries’, even during this period of great vicissitudes. Macaulay made the same point in 1830 (Mill 1843; Macaulay 1886: 120).

The ‘industrial revolution’ debate was most sharply characterised by Arnold Toynbee as the ‘bitter argument between economists and human beings’ in his pessimistic and posthumously published Lectures on the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century in England (1884). The issue was famously characterised, too, in Unto This Last (1862) by John Ruskin as that between wealth and life. It was much influenced by J. S. Mill, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Southey, Engels and Alfred Marshall. And it has been used and followed more recently by F. R. Leavis, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson – the keepers of the legacy of ‘the Gradgrind caricature.’ However, the cultural historian Donald Winch – who recommends agnosticism and non-doctrinal history as a means to facilitate ‘an understanding of what happened and how it did so’ – has recently noted that ‘Fortunately, there are signs in the early years of the twenty-first century that the engagement of literary historians with the serious economic literature of the past is moving beyond the old stereotypes, making rapprochement with intellectual histories of economic debate possible’ (Winch 2009: 21–2, 6). As Winch has written, ‘The argument was part of a broader assault on the allegedly self-interested, mechanical, and materialistic thinking of a despoiling industrial age – an assault that was to be hailed in the twentieth century as the “romantic” or “cultural” alternative to utilitarianism and political economy’ (Winch 2009: 1, 367–98).

Recent historians have introduced a more subtle and a more realistic picture (Taylor and Wolff, 2004). But these former and predominant criticisms accepted uncritically and sympathetically by some book historians unfamiliar with later historical work – were set by the earliest generation of romantic critics, notably by Carlyle, Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth. The ‘hungry forties’ was seen subsequently as a key
decade. But Winch writes that Walter Bagehot commented that those who had forecast impending ruin during the debate on the condition of England in the 1840s had been proved wrong. For reasons that Adam Smith had foreseen, Bagehot noted that ‘we were [then] on the eve of the greatest prosperity which we have ever seen’ (Bagehot, ‘Centenary of the Wealth of Nations’, in Collected Works, III: 117). Winch says that the problem of the influences of judgements made about the Industrial Revolution ‘invites the attention of the intellectual historian as well as the literary scholar. It concerns the power of symbolic representation to define allegiances and form part of a canon that remains, if only by tireless repetition, a significant part of Our Island Story’ (Winch 2009: 368).

Stefan Collini has written of ‘a familiar dichotomy … between, on the one hand, the temper of rational science, leaning to positivism, receptive to Utilitarianism and political economy, and most commonly issuing in some kind of Liberal or reforming politics; and, on the other hand, the temper of essentially Romantic cultural critique, uneasy with modernity, suspicious of the reductive tendencies of science, hostile to the soulless reasonings of political economy, a temper whose political expression, where not straightforwardly Tory, veered, by an intelligible affinity, from a Carlylean authoritarianism to a Ruskinian or Morrissian Socialism’ (Collini 1991: 185–6).

We might, however, justly query how many book historians and literary critics – much concerned with ‘commodification’ – would agree with Cowen that

The market economy and capitalism are among the greatest enablers of civilization. Our lives are comfortable instead of wracked with hard physical labour, chronic malnutrition, and massive losses of women and babies during childbirth, to cite just a few features of earlier times. Whether our political views are right-wing, left-wing, or elsewhere on the spectrum, we can agree on these facts. … Markets are not just about the steam engine, iron foundries, or today’s silicon-chip factories. Markets also supported Shakespeare, Haydn, and the modern book superstore. The rise of oil painting, classical music, and print culture were all part of the same broad social and economic developments, namely the rise of capitalism, modern technology, rule of law, and consumer society. The Renaissance occurred when growing cities and reopened trade routes created enough wealth to stimulate demand for beautiful arts. Beethoven gave music lessons and concerts to a rising middle class and later sold them sheet music;
his rise required the printing press, the affordable piano, and ready travel around Europe. Markets, of course, have their uglier side. ... But the balance favours markets, which themselves more easily correct bad effects; government failure is much more difficult to erase. (Cowen 2007: 219–20)

J. H. Plumb wrote, too, that

Any historian who is not blindly prejudiced cannot but admit that the ordinary man and woman, unless they should be caught up in a murderous field of war, are capable of securing a richer life than their ancestors. There is more food in the world, more opportunity for achievement, greater areas of liberty in ideas and in living than the world has ever known: art, music, literature can be enjoyed by tens of millions, not tens of thousands. This has been achieved not by clinging to conservative tradition or by relying on instinct or emotion, but by the application of human ingenuity, no matter what the underlying motive may be. (Plumb 1969: 140)

Plumb wrote elsewhere, of ‘trade, the life-blood of civilisation’ (Plumb 1966: 80).

As Rowland noted in Literature in the Marketplace: Romantic Writers and Their Audiences in Great Britain and the United States, ‘Orestes Brownson claimed that the often criticized materialism of the country was already creating a “nation of readers”. In response to Emerson’s “literary ethics”, Brownson wrote: “Now this very business world, against which we war, is the most active in teaching all to read, in providing the means of universal education. And how, without this general and absorbing devotion to money-getting, is the general wealth of the country to be sufficiently augmented to allow the leisure we have determined to be necessary?”’ (Rowland 1996: 11). Brownson said that the first duty of the scholar was to cultivate the audience being formed by capitalist expansion: ‘Now in this country the whole people must constitute the audience, the public. The scholar here must speak not to a clique, a coterie, but to the entire nation. The first thing to be done, then, is to make the whole nation “a fit audience” To talk of a “fit audience though few”, betrays an entire ignorance of the age and the country’ (Brownson 1996: 13).

As the work of England’s first printer William Caxton (c.1421–91) made clear, art has always been material. And so it has been perennially commodified – with its value determined by the patron, or the market, or both (Kuskin 2008). Overall, our attitude to markets per se (and our
economic literacy, too) are central to analysing the culture of the publisher's series. What we believe is what we often see. This is the rock and the hard place: whether markets are seen as creative, adaptive, positive and necessary to freedoms or as the focus of oppositional politics and cultural pessimism. *A priori* perspectives here seriously influence what the viewer actually sees. The series is thus implicated by differing critics – by Postrel, Cowen and Delany in adaptive, creative, trial-and-error innovations, and by Eagleton, Ohmann and Williams in hegemonic commodification and in revolutionary politics.

These stark polarities offer competing ideas about the value and purposes of book history. They remind us, too, that, as the Marxist Ohmann puts this, ‘The teleology present in such ideas makes it clear that they will satisfy only those who want to believe them for other than historical reasons’ (Ohmann 1996: 37). And that empirical verification or falsification is essential, as well as the need to spell out ‘the implications of a theory, reflecting on its perspicuity in analysis of events and processes, and considering its capacity for fruitfulness, for generating new knowledge’. And, of course, ‘no historical account begins without theoretical presuppositions that influence what the investigator will look for and find, what will seem to be evidence, what story will shape it’ (Ohmann 1996: 46).

In the reconstitution of corporate capital and of its institutions in North America and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, a key device was the series itself. This helped to shape taste, audiences, consumers and cultural industries as individual publishers pursued specific purposes and coped with the circumstances with which they were confronted. The series thus used and produced capital.

For the ‘romantic period’ and since, St Clair has sought to ‘model the links between texts, books, reading, changing mentalities, and wider historical effects’ (St Clair 2004: 1). This sets the agenda and the context of key questions – of behaviour, culture, systems, political economy, literacy, access – which the culture of the publisher's series helps to illustrate and to which it can seek to offer some further material towards answers. It can net more archival material, more statistics, more evidence with which to check and recheck St Clair’s persuasive conclusions, and enhance his fine-grained mesh. St Clair asked: ‘Could histories of reading help us to understand how knowledge was constituted and diffused, how opinions were formed and consolidated, how group identities were constructed, and, more generally, why ideas that at one time seemed mainstream and unassailable could suddenly lose credibility, while others persisted for centuries largely unchallenged? Can we find explanations
which apply to the print era as a whole? Can we begin to model the links between texts, books, reading, changing mentalities, and wider historical effects?’ (St Clair 2004: 1). These quandaries include asking how series help us to see how changes related to and interacted with the governing structures of society and with the questions of how to live, including democratic and cultural evolution.

Here we directly confront the differing contributions of theory. These themes and problems open out ideas, attitudes and choices about ideas of culture and systems of values, publishing and politics. They offer differing ways to analyse what was happening with publishing cultures and series. One approach is to suggest that the study of the culture of the publisher’s series – itself, generally oriented towards development, persuasion, recognition and identity – can do much to help us to recover and interpret the relationships of all of the diverse but interlinked agents involved in books, and all of whom depended for their living on the market reception of books (and series), and who existed in mutual relationships.³ Thus, we seek to find their motivations; their ways of working; the books that resulted; and some reflections, too, on audiences and readers.

Richard Ohmann, in his influential Marxist study Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century, posed basic questions about the transforming capitalist social relations of marketing and advertising: ‘When did mass culture arise? Why? What has it done for and to its various participants?’ (Ohmann 1996: 340, 10). In Ohmann’s answers we hear Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Gramsci and Althusser speak in the accents of the Frankfurt school and in later Marxist tones. This body of work was notably taken up in Britain by Raymond Williams and by some of his successors.⁴ These ‘Theorists’ saw an alien apparatus of hegemonic mental production, commodity consumption, a new ‘literacy of goods’ and ‘self-transformation through purchase’ which changed class relations, reshaped people as consumers and reconstructed society.⁵ As Ohmann wrote, on American magazines, ‘Publishers mass-produced a physical product, which they sold at a loss, and used it to mass-produce an immaterial product, the attention of readers, which they sold at a profit’ (Ohmann 1996: 346).

These issues of how to live, including how to ‘do’ book history, are raised by many book historians and literary critics themselves, either very directly or by the implications carried with their theories. There are broadly two general views. First, the non-Marxist view that cultural bias – most notably against business and also suspicions about ‘mass’ culture – are a problem and a barrier to a fuller understanding of the
cultural work of publishing, and the active roles of the reader. Second, the Marxist perspective that history needs to be viewed from the revolutionary potentials of the future.

These choices significantly affect the writing of book history. And they are among the socio-political elements which themselves command study if we are to achieve a fully systematic and coherent evolutionary account of economic, aesthetic, literary and social influences concerning the book and its cultures, and the factors which have thus far shaped our understandings. The revolutionary Marxist view, to my mind, presents the hazards of ways of seeing, or mis-seeing, the past through a future-focused lense. Consider a very prominent case, par example. The enormously productive Oxford (and now Lancaster) Marxist literary critic Professor Terry Eagleton has emphasised a guiding preference for the final collapse of late (or, surely, latest?) capitalism and for socialist revolution: ‘If Marxists manage to bring down the bourgeois state, socialise the means of production, and institute full socialist democracy, then we really do not mind being told by people like Richard Rorty that all we are doing is carrying on the conversation. If that is what one prefers to call what we are doing, for some philosophical reason of one’s own, then this is perfectly alright with us as long as we are still allowed to do it’ (Eagleton, 1989, in Desan et al., 93).6

This kind of analysis and proposition concerns particular acts of faith. As Eagleton himself says, ‘all statements of political interest are always implicitly theories of reality’ (Eagleton, 1989: 92). The Marxist offers a theory of causation which is focussed on a generalized future rather than on a particular past. This theory relies upon an interpretation of history and of society which seems unpersuasive after a century of actual practical experience of Communism. I suggest that it makes impossible connections between disparate phenomena. One major danger is the temptation to patronise both the future and the past. Another is to overlook the evidence of recorded historical realities in the capitalist economy – in book history, as in much else, including human nature. Marxist accounts embedded in much otherwise necessary revisionist feminist, gay, black, and colonial book history – for example, in Great Britain – frequently discount the records of the late-Victorian economy which showed significant increases in real earnings for those in work, which released an enormous new consumer demand, and which prompted socially and educationally valuable developments in consumerism, whilst also creating many new freedoms for women in particular. This was the context of huge changes in the world of books, magazines, education and reading. The introduction of a wide range of
cheap branded goods, alongside new welfare provision, radically altered life, notably for the poor and for the growing lower middle-class.

There was still, of course, a sharp contrast between rapidly improving living standards for a majority – most clearly shown in higher per capita food consumption – alongside the survival of poverty and a harsh and precarious existence for a significant minority. But this problem proved to be capable of being addressed in the medium term in mass markets and by government action: evolution without revolution, as historians such as D. H. Aldcroft (1970), W. Hamish Fraser (1981), John Stevenson (1990) and José Harris (1993) have shown. Such evolutionary changes were international in scope, too.

There have been enormous qualitative gains, notably in the lives of the poor – not least in access to cheap reading matter. In addition, as the economic historian Sidney Pollard remarked, ‘Statistics fail to take full account of the difference made by electricity instead of candles, and gas cookers instead of coal or coke ranges, as standard equipment in working-class homes; of improved housing, including indoor water and sanitation; or of radio, the cinema and newspapers within almost everybody’s reach’ (Stevenson 1990: 129). These shifts may be dismissed as ‘commodification’, but they changed millions of lives for the better. In Britain, too, class divisions and class loyalties have been much more complex than many Marxist literary critics have suggested, as historians Hamish Fraser (1981), Stevenson (1990), Harris (1993) and McKibbin (1998, 2010) have shown. Book history needs to reflect these works.

However, the focus of many Marxist literary critics – and that of some influential book historians – has been on politics and social formations, on inclusion and marginalisation, on struggles over the production of cultural power and with advancing ‘resistance’ to ‘the logic of dominance’ – rather than on the autonomous and unpredictable reader and ‘the book itself’ in an adaptive, creative, renewing global culture where many lives have much improved. Often in the writing of book history, as in literary criticism, ideology has been a fundamental reference point. For example, Alexis Weedon noted that a much quoted study by Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin (1989) was ‘ideologically motivated’, and that these authors ‘used methods widely accepted in the social sciences, but care must be taken when applied to historical data’ (Weedon, in Eliot and Rose 2007: 41).

Much apocalyptic thinking and historical interpretation still seems to resist rational contemporary and historical observation. And so a bias against business, entrepreneurship and investment – as well as against the results of consumer choices in mass markets – remains a powerful
transmitter of unhelpful ideas. This gravely damages book history by limiting its range and perspectives. In terms of understanding publishing cultures and the series it needs radical revision and replacement. To make progress we need to recognise what really happened in the past, whether we approve of it or not. And then to use a non-deterministic and non-holistic theory of history that is itself testable, that makes verified predictions and that is self-correcting in the light of what we learn of the unforeseen novelty that only experience reveals. This can then be fruitful of new knowledge about what publishers and readers do and have done. As to the fundamental choice and competition between holistic perspectives, the economist and cultural historian Professor Donald Winch has recently cited Henry Sidgwick’s view that ‘Henry Maine was right in saying that there were only two ways of getting the world’s business done, slavery and coercion on the one side, and competitive industry on the other’ (Winch 2009: 230; Maine 1885; Sidgwick 1906).

Professor Winch has quietly stated, too, that many of the practitioners of alternative ways of writing intellectual history clearly feel that they are engaged in resolving the weightier moral and political dilemmas of today, deploying sophisticated ‘theory’ and suitably technical apparatuses for the purpose. However, ‘There are other, equally important things to do, and they rarely require the use of theories borrowed from other pursuits for the purpose of achieving historical understanding ... we should not regard our subjects as helpless victims of their circumstances and our theoretical and ideological categories.’ Further, ‘We are never merely eavesdroppers, anxious only to recapture as faithfully as possible what our interlocutors were saying and how they were doing so. We are engaged in conversations of our own, and we select, edit, and translate according to priorities dictated by our own curiosity and the possible interest and knowledge of those to whom we are speaking. We also possess hindsight and ways of looking and listening that enable us to discern features of the landscape that were not perceived by past interlocutors’ (Winch 1996: 29–30).

Here there are competing ways in which theoretical insights are deployed about markets, by which, in Coleridge’s words, we can ‘possess ourselves as one with the whole’. Indeed, the economist Tyler Cowen says that ‘cultural assessments contain an irreducibly subjective component’ (Cowen 1998: 6). These issues are clearly very directly relevant to considering reading and readers, markets and marketing and thus the culture and context of the publisher’s series and all the active agents involved. As Cowen puts this, ‘When translated into the terminology of
economics or rational choice theory, the internal forces correspond to preferences and external forces represent opportunities and constraints. These internal and external forces interact to shape artistic production’ (Cowen 1998: 16).

There is much more to say, too, of the relationships between theory and practice. For example, John Vernon, in his *Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, says that:

Theory should free us to investigate reality rather than provide us with a set of immutable conclusions. But theory and metaphor have this in common: both clamp forces on the truth and may damage it in the process. In this respect, even so noted a theoretician as Marx was a metaphoric thinker. I tend to agree with Kurt Heinzelman’s suggestion that *Capital* is one of the great three-decker nineteenth-century novels, complete with plot and characters (Mr Moneybags, the simple laborer, Free-Trader Vulgaris), at least in part 2. And to call it a novel is not to show it any disrespect or to lessen its truth value – only to assert that its truth, like a novel’s, is provisional, elusive, and contingent: an investigation of reality. (Vernon 1993: 23)7

The culture of the publisher’s series, as can be seen, thus embraces large-scale personal and social dilemmas of ‘democracy’: of how to live, of how to act for oneself and of the acceptable reach of the State. The culture of the series, too, engages us in asking how change happens, how we make decisions, with which cultural assumptions, with which material and cultural results, and how we study change.

The principal historical challenge is to keep one’s eyes open, to pose explicit and useful questions and not to privilege prior allegiances which can exclude from review necessary evidence. As Talia Schaffer has emphasised, we need to ‘find the findings first’ rather than to prejudge these. We do not only want ‘facts’ which fit the chosen model. Nor do we wish to be trapped by the limitations of theories. We do need to know what it is we think we are observing, analysing and describing, but the balance between evidence we can discover, preconceived notions of the objects of study and the historically distorting power of *a priori* assumptions and of shibboleths is one problem to recognise and address.

Critically, in book history, we should consider the willing consumer and the entrepreneur, and profit and the returns to those varying agents engaged in productive processes. Are entrepreneurial gains as rents of ability appropriate, and positive, or illicit and alien? Are profits morally reprehensible and socially damaging, or the best available measure
of business efficiency? One positive and influential economic view is that recorded by the sociological historians Rosemary O’Day and David Englander. Discussing the economist F. A. Walker’s views (contemporary with the late nineteenth-century inquiry work into industry in London of Charles Booth), they have said that ‘Walker tried to demonstrate that wages were partly determined by the productivity of the undertaking and that profit was not the outcome of exploitation but the special remuneration due to the entrepreneur. High profits and high wages were, he argued, mutually supportive’ (O’Day and Englander 1993: 140).8

Walker urged that the entrepreneur was functionally distinct from the capitalist and the central figure in the production process. In an economy with a high degree of specialisation and with a large amount of fixed capital the entrepreneur must manage risks and anticipate changing consumer demand. The increased responsibility of managements has become an essential characteristic of modern industry, in much altered markets where the premium has been placed not on the ownership of fixed capital but on the skills and capacities of the entrepreneur in handling capital.

As our contributors show, in the late nineteenth-century firms everywhere reorganised, industrialised, changed their methods of production and output, adopted new marketing techniques, and altered market relationships both with authors and readers. The traditional ‘high culture’ Enlightenment focus was amended. Technological, economic, educational and cultural shifts were the basis of a new reading revolution for a mass market. One where women’s and children’s reading, too, became increasingly important. We thus need to take the creative role of the entrepreneur very seriously if we are to understand the dramatic changes in publishing characterised by the careers of George Newnes, Alfred Harmsworth (who launched the Daily Mail in 1896, and became Lord Northcliffe in 1905) and C. Arthur Pearson in the late nineteenth-century in Britain, and by similar figures elsewhere. These men came, by their own efforts, to be in charge of new and very large capitalist enterprises. Although the ‘Americanisation’ of the press had been in progress for several decades, the newspaper and magazine public – and then, book buyers – became widely familiar in the 1890s with dramatic new approaches. Newnes, Harmsworth etc. did much to forward a sense of national cohesion and identity, too, with common sources of information and awareness available to all. Harmsworth was criticised by the Saturday Review in 1905 as having done ‘more than any man of his generation to pervert and enfeeble the mind of the multitude’ (cited in Searle 1987: 94). But the shift to a large popular audience was reinforced
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by mass education, by radio and then by cinema and television, and by mass interest in sports. Harmsworth and his competitors applied the latest methods of business organisation in a thoroughgoing way, including the quest for advertising revenues which enabled prices to be very low, with magazines even sold at prices below the direct cost of production. The changes also shifted power from editors and journalists to proprietors. It was an international change. In North America in the publishing trade there were Frank Munsey, S. S. Mclure and John Lovel; the successors in business of Louis Hachette in France; such firms as Reclam, Insel-Verlag and Tauchnitz in Germany; the two George Robertsons (of Melbourne and of Sydney) and the Melbourne and Adelaide bookseller and publisher E. W. Cole in Australia. Each of these dynamist firms was led by an innovative ‘captain’ who perceived new wants among a growing middle class and also among those rising from poverty. These newly recognised wants were the basis of large-scale investment to meet financially empowered individual consumer demand. These publishers exploited new niches which arose as new standards spread to the poorer sections of several different societies, and as the middle classes expanded. They were part of new paths in life, new ways of living better, which people could choose and which they recognised as a form of personal freedom. This was because a time had come ‘when wealth, hopes, ambitions and numbers all rise together’ (Colinvaux 1980: 220).

Newnes et al. recognised that ‘Wealth is to be made by attending to mass needs. The corollary should also be true, that needs of the individuals of the mass are best met by attending to the needs of wealth. Shifts of mass population in ways that serve entrepreneurs are a result. This is the phenomenon known to history as the drift to the towns. The social process of drift to the towns is actually a number of individual movements that can be understood without a theory of group behaviour’ (Colinvaux 1980: 247). In our own time, too, in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America there ‘are countries of rising literacy, rising ambitions, rising civilization and rising numbers’ (Colinvaux 1980: 222).

Such careful observation of day-to-day practical action and changing contexts in publishing is important. Here Harvey Teres is one recent critic of over-theorised approaches which lead away both from aesthetic and practical realities: ‘Instead of learning alertness to the subtle forms and devices that distinguish a work of art from a social document, a generation of students and citizens has dispensed with aesthetic experience in favor of the hunt for a text’s ideological propositions, conflicts, contradictions, and deficiencies. The goal has become “interrogating” the text rather than being challenged by it, mastering it through superior
political awareness rather than surrendering temporarily to the author’s world [and] submitting to the pleasures and insights that arise when literal reality is suspended in favor of an imaginative virtual reality that paradoxically illuminates it’ (Teres: 236). Sven Birkerts, in The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age, spoke too of the cultural losses if we lose the value of ‘that slow, painful, delicious excavation of the self by way of another’s sentences’ (Birkerts 1994: 146). As the nineteenth-century environmentalist George Perkins Marsh said, in his Man and Nature (1864), sight is a faculty; seeing is an art (cited in Winter 1999: 26).

The entrepreneur

In his magisterial study, Judging New Wealth, James Raven has pointed out that ‘the modern study of business elites remains comparatively youthful’. His is an important analysis of how and why hostile attitudes to business were cultivated in popular literature (Raven 1992: 1). The prospects for new and successful research based on some respect for what the creative entrepreneur has done have, indeed, in our own time been hindered by a continuing academic ‘moral’ suspicion of profits – without which all publishing companies rapidly vanish, unless subsidised. This view is rooted in Romanticism, in criticism of the English Industrial Revolution and then in Marxism. The eighteenth-century radical Sir James Mackintosh mused about ‘such fanciful chimeras as a golden mountain or a perfect man’. William Hazlitt (in The Spirit of The Age) wrote, too, of the risks of the state ‘being hurried down the tremendous precipice of human perfectibility’. The economic historian D. C. Coleman is but one who has pointed out that profits matter: ‘The very facilities which permit our historical studies are among those fruits’ (Coleman 1992: 177). So, too, are the freedoms to criticise these.⁹

Whether publishers sought profits for further investment, personal prestige, social status, political power, other personal satisfactions or merely as a measure of these several factors, we need to track these not least as a measure of enterprise and as the transmitters of economic growth, publishing development and changing print culture. The creation of wealth is not an accident, and if we regard it as a crime we will not, I suggest, ‘enquire within’ appropriately. We need to carefully consider the detailed use of resources, all of which record the decisions of individual consumers, businessmen or publishers, in the totality of print culture. Similarly, an emphasis on what Alan Sinfield has called ‘left-culturalism’ – on postcolonialism, on poststructuralism, on cultural materialism, on New Historicist theory and on gender studies – is one corrective by which
to study the excluded in previous cultural narratives (Sinfield 1989: 241–5). But we need to achieve a pluralist approach to historical analysis. A ‘corrective’ which foregrounds ‘class struggle’, the fragmentation of ‘the bourgeois public sphere’ and the hegemonic state itself needs significant correction – if, that is, we want to understand the quandaries that real human beings faced as publishers (and readers) in the past, and what they did. And thus we are serious about series as a prismatic lens through which we might see what has been obscured concerning reading and readers – if, indeed, it can be recovered. Adrian Johns has urged us to reconstruct how texts were used in their own times and in their own terms ‘by these people, here, in these circumstances, with these results’ (Johns 2000: 47). A crucial figure here is the entrepreneur, very often a figure of disruptive, innovating energy.

The economist Jean-Baptiste Say distinguished the entrepreneur from the other agents of production, formalising the term ‘entrepreneur’ in his Catechism of Political Economy in 1815. Say said that the entrepreneur is the economic agent who ‘unites all means of production – the labour of the one, the capital or the land of others – and who finds in the value of the products which result from their employment the reconstitution of the entire capital that he utilizes, and the value of wages, the interest, and the rent which he pays, as well as the profits belonging to himself’ (Say 1816: 218–29).

Joseph A. Schumpeter famously urged the need for empirical research on entrepreneurs and their shaping influences in what he called ‘a sociology of the enterprise’ (Schumpeter 1949: 63–84). As both Raven and St Clair have emphasised, book history needs augmented understandings of the business management, leadership and direction of such agents, the actual practice of business and the entrepreneur’s combination of a number of factors into productive relationships. The entrepreneur – who was not necessarily or essentially the capitalist or inventor – is at the centre of productive distributive theory and practice. Enquiries here should include analysis of the institutional and economic framework of wholesaling and retail distribution; comparative prices, and their messages; bankruptcies and stock transfers; sales outside the book trade; who became a publisher, and why. And who the other personnel who did the work were, cooperating inside the buildings where the publisher’s shingle hung. As our papers make evident, we can greatly benefit from a further series of studies of the publisher as an entrepreneur, and as a figure of distinct and special abilities. We can then fulfil our historical interest in particulars and our theoretical interest in achieving informative generalisations. Thus, studying the designing, directing, leading and coordinating
functions of the dynamic entrepreneur in book publishing is part of the social process, as it is of viewing leaders and their motives and mental processes, interests and attitudes, styles and strategies in adapting to ever-changing situations. It is no surprise that the series matters here.

These characteristics are ‘social facts’. John Stuart Mill recognised their importance, saying that the entrepreneurial role often required ‘no ordinary skill’. Schumpeter rightly notes that the ‘successful survival of difficult situations and success in taking advantage of favourable situations is not merely a matter of luck’ (Schumpeter 1949: 65–6). We need to look again at book-history generalisations from these viewpoints, and to verify what we think we know by case studies, by statistics and by other empirical work. We then need to synthesise this work in book history and in economic and social history and the history of social thought; that is, if we are to achieve a usefully provisional set of broad generalisations about publishers and publishing, readers and buyers, business and consumer behaviour, leadership and creativity. Then we can offer a coherent answer to the question of why book history matters.

A key task is to consider individual publishers as innovative leaders and agents of change with a spirit of adventure, always operating in conditions of uncertainty and risk. The entrepreneur’s prices are uncertain at the time the commitment is made as to costs. The entrepreneur is, too, not merely a shadow of technological and other social changes, significant as these often were. The challenges which publisher’s series represent and reflect can very usefully be considered in terms of the work done by entrepreneurs. This is the result of business decisions which dealt with finance, editorial, design and production, and marketing. The publisher assessed markets, costs and risks, and necessarily sought to minimise uncertainties. The publisher targeted and tried to reach specific audiences, notified by the series. If, too, series books could be shelved side-by-side by the retailer – when did booksellers begin to do this? – they would help to sell each other by attracting readers for that type of book or category. The publisher thus tried not only to sell more units, but to limit the congenital distribution infirmity of publishing, the problem of over-supply and of returns. Famously, Alfred A. Knopf described this anecdotally as ‘Gone today; here tomorrow!’

The entrepreneur offers us a way of analysing a business and its economic evolution in terms of the expressions of directing energies and judgements, as empirical, cognitive and rational actions. We need to know more of these many careers, and in detail: when and how people entered the business and why; their transactions and decisions; their attitudes to and their management of uncertainties; the sources of their
business information; their deployment of resources; their attitudes towards the social and economic environment, including towards business itself; the external situations; their motivations; the decisions they took; and their colleagues.11

Alas, the materials available with which to ask and answer these questions are very variable and patchy, but we need to draw together what can be known in constructing a historical sociology of entrepreneurship in publishing – as well of longitudinal studies of specific functions or relations, such as those offered by St Clair and Raven. There may be a case for saying that entrepreneurs are driven not by profit alone but by a quest for efficiency, the growth of an enterprise with which they have identified themselves, and by ideas of social service too – as well as the sheer fun of it all. But we make these assumptions with little real knowledge of the motivations of entrepreneurs, changes of motivations over time or accounts of individual publishers themselves.

The recent fine study by Kate Jackson of George Newnes shows something of what can be seen in how the destiny of an enterprise was carried in individual hands through effective innovation, competent management, and successful or unsuccessful adjustments to changing external conditions. Such restless new British businessmen as Newnes, Harmsworth and Pearson (and others overseas) challenged customary forms. They embarked on risky and innovative ventures, and with little to lose they had a high propensity to take such risks, as economic theory shows that they would and did (Jackson 2001; Ohmann 1996).12

These people were not your ordinary Clapham bus-riders. As Say said, the entrepreneur must be someone of special qualities, needing:

judgement, perseverance, and a knowledge of the world as well as of business. He is called upon to estimate, with tolerable accuracy, the importance of the specific product, the probable amount of the demand, and the means of its production: at one time, he must employ a great number of hands; at another, buy or order the raw material, collect labourers, find consumers, and give at all times a rigid attention to order and economy; in a word, he must possess the art of superintendence and administration. ... In the course of such complex operations, there are abundance of obstacles to be surmounted, of anxieties to be repressed, of misfortunes to be repaired, and of expedients to be devised. (Say 1821: 104)

As we have seen, these creative originals embarked on risky and innovative ventures, and, valuably, had a high propensity to take risks.
Economies, which require innovation and risky and new projects, rely on such people. Publishing did not merely proceed independently of such creative and often daring leadership. Much of the modern increase in physical capital which has underpinned the book industry comes from entrepreneurial actions, which have been able to give the fullest effect to the possibilities inherent in the social system. For example, the dramatic increase in British book exports (which Shafquat Towheed’s paper illustrates) resulted from the increase in factors of production but also from leadership in making different uses of those new factors which Winter described so well (Winter 1999). This was part of the creative process of construction and destruction, innovation and revision, which has characterised human societies, and which Postrel illustrates (1998, 2003). Certainly, business decisions and necessary revisions were a constant problem, concerning the objectives of the business, changing conditions, the development and maintenance of the organisation, the need to secure sufficient finance, nurturing good relations with investors and with the trade, using modern machinery, developing markets and meeting or anticipating consumer demands.

Once a success, a series often proved to be a key contributor to a solid operational base for a great enterprise, as George Routledge’s ‘Railway Library’ proved to be from the 1850s onwards in the UK (James 1997). Such series help us to ask why and how changes happened in publishing, through which institutions and instrumentalities, and how these were influenced by the social and political environment. For example, why did the huge-selling British ‘yellowback’ and the US ‘dime novel’ of the nineteenth century give way to new products? Such series had been an important aspect of the wish and need to enhance profits, to increase business income, and the efficiency and survival of the enterprise.

As the economist Arthur H. Cole wrote, entrepreneurial decisions (including those of banking entrepreneurs) constitute the chief element in business cycles. These decisions are a potent force for change. The entrepreneur is often considered the central figure in modern economic history, and, indeed, in economics. As Cole said,

The economic significance of such business phenomena is patent, although infrequently adumbrated. Economic advance, at least insofar as it springs from business and not from governmental or other forces, is largely a consequence of innovations by individual enterprises copied by competing business units ... Advantageous innovations, made effective by efficient management, are copied
by other enterprises; the differential advantages of the innovating institutions are repeatedly lost; marginal expenses are reduced; and the phenomenon of economic progress – greater productivity at lower human cost – is attained. Such surely is an adequate social reason for studying entrepreneurship. (Cole 1946: 186–7)

James Raven has emphasised that ‘Historical analysis of literature as both evidence of and as a causal agent in the development of social thought, must adopt a more plebeian approach than that of the literary critic. It must develop a methodology which treats of literature as it was produced, distributed, popularised, and discussed’ (Raven 1992: 22). Many factors necessarily influence business management and the successes or failures of individual enterprises in using practical know-how. The economic historian D. C. Coleman has said that ‘Enterprise, like patriotism, is not enough. Its quality and nature are all-important’ (Coleman 1992: 212). We need to be able to put a set of consistent questions concerning the analysis of behaviour and economic issues relevant at the specific time to particular managements, publishers and entrepreneurs – especially the publisher as an entrepreneur: the psychologies of individuals, their behaviours, their decisions and – indeed – their monopoly practices as studied by St Clair. Insofar as the evidence allows us to isolate and to assess entrepreneurship within a particular firm or sector we would like information on many factors, such as their origins (often as ‘practical men’ – like the bookbinder J. M. Dent, by contrast with the ‘educated amateur’), their career tracks, methods, personalities and productions.

Entrepreneurship requires an individual (or a cooperating group) to offer leadership and influence to transform or combine factors into products in new ways for the market, often in ways which are not inherited from the past. This is not ‘management’; nor is it ‘administration’. It is something different entirely. It invokes the study of the economic and political environment, the structures of public authority, individual and corporate initiatives, readers and responses. Entrepreneurship is usually judged by economists to be a creative response to given conditions, acting ‘outside the pale of routine’ and distinct from adaptive responses. One of the pressing tasks is to ask: how did this conceptualisation take effect in actual historical practice in the book business? The response of a publisher such as Robert Cadell, or Henry Colburn, or Colburn’s erstwhile partner Richard Bentley in England from 1829 onwards – and the emergence of a host of such entrepreneurs – is itself a study in the actualité of these ideas.
and of distinctive states of mind. Their success as entrepreneurs, their launch of successful publisher’s series – and the response of competitors closely or at a distance – may be seen as one of the gains of entrepreneurship. This was, too, marked by asset returns and in further consequent experimentation. Entrepreneurship thus proved to be a positive frame of mind, with results welcomed by those who wanted books. It affected, and was influenced by, the entire culture. Series were a part of this significant and enquiring cultural achievement.

To study the economics of past publishing we need thus to take seriously invention, creativity and adaptive, pragmatic and improvising trial-and-error change. We then have the greater chance of appreciating the complexities of the social and institutional contexts of cultural production and consumption. We then increase our chances of successfully examining the contemporary readership and influence of particular texts, as well as the day to day challenges faced in past times as we probe literary output, the mechanics of commercial development, the growth of the fiction industry and of other literary endeavours, and as we assess consumer responses and their assumptions, prejudices and actions. And so urgent research topics should include: what was the social background of new print entrepreneurs; who of these were average and who exceptional, who the more typical; who was successful, who unsuccessful – who durable and who transient; who were the inspirational and creative figures; who were the initiators and who the imitators; who were the ‘new men’ and ‘new women’ (including those who began with limited means), and who from elite backgrounds; who were the educated amateurs, the ‘Gentlemen’, and who the practical and problem-solving ‘Players’; why and how? What motivated the entrepreneur, and what were their measures of success? What were the barriers and thresholds of entry, and what the consequences for social mobility? How far forward did the entrepreneur look? And did they sustain long-term interests? What did they do when the tides turned against them? To what extent, too, did the work of entrepreneurs in publishing contribute to the democratisation, changing social basis and leadership of industry, and changes in traditional power structures? We need to apprehend the culture of the series in these terms.

The entrepreneur, classically, is seen as someone who has exploited innovations to increase profits, generate new products, sell in different ways, achieve higher productivity and achieve growth – either within an existing business or by setting up a new business. And as someone who has adapted technical and organisational structures to changes in
the market place, both for the factors of production and for the final products. The functionings of the entrepreneur were one distinguishing factor between businesses. The body of modern economic theory, arising initially from Alfred Marshall’s late Victorian neo-classical synthesis and built upon by Keynes and post-Keynesian macroeconomics, provides a general framework. But detailed studies of individual publishers must deal with the strategy and structure of specific firms, and how they relate to decision-making processes in markets and over time. Who took individual decisions, how and why are crucial. These decisions are reflected in the publisher’s series. Simon Eliot, too, has regularly stressed the necessity of capturing and analysing statistical data for the examination of the behaviour of publishing businesses. Quantitative values especially help us to make comparisons – between sectors and countries. Professor Eliot’s quantified material has contributed much to filling notable gaps, including being able to put a consistent set of questions to the past, and to varied source material. This new bibliographical control has enabled us to make valuable comparisons, within changing and differing national cultures and trajectories.

James Raven’s *The Business of Books* is a commanding exemplar of how to analyse entrepreneurship and demand, its complexities and contradictions, its fruitfulness and fault-lines, its cultural context and yields. Raven says that ‘Without the diversity of individual entrepreneurship, the shape of this industry would have been very different. In the first century of print, the production of many types of literature owed much to the personalities of the publishing booksellers and promoters of books. In succeeding centuries ... the rivalries and enthusiasms of those involved in the manufacture and sale of books continued to enlarge the business and create new specialisms and services’ (Raven 2007: 356). As he has said, too, of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain, ‘The business agility of the new, often first-generation entrepreneur proved critical. On him (and sometimes her) depended the moves towards greater market specialisation and the particular identification and targeting of new and existing groups of consumers’ (Raven 2007: 226).

We want, too, to study what worked well and what did not work at all in a business marked by a high degree of liquidations and take-overs as we seek more detailed comparative studies of how entrepreneurs responded to the difficulties they confronted, and as we identify who was ‘typical’ and who atypical, and why. As P. L. Payne has said, ‘It is not enough to say what had been done; it is necessary to assess what might have been done and was not’ (Payne 1974: 40).
Finally, the broadest of contexts again. William St Clair has persuasively shown that book history can make a larger contribution to ‘the political economy of knowledge’. Thus,

If a piece of printed matter is conceived of not only as a manufactured material object, a ‘book’, but as a carrier of a potentially readable text, then the field of study is potentially widened to the history of reading, the construction of knowledge, the diffusion of ideas, and the competition for allegiance of minds. What book history could do is make a huge, and otherwise unobtainable, contribution to the history of mentalities – that is, people’s beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in certain ways at particular times in particular places – including not only states of mind that are explicitly acknowledged but others that are unarticulated or regarded as fixed or natural, including nationalism. (St Clair 2009: 7–8)

We are concerned with new and specific understandings of the particulars of materialist history, and with their cultural (and ideological) representations. This analysis engages us in assigning values and drawing up accounts between competing choices. Here, St Clair has sought to ‘model the links between texts, books, reading, changing mentalities, and wider historical effects’ (St Clair 2004: 1). This sets the agenda and the context of key questions – of behaviour, culture, systems, political economy, literacy, access, democracy, relations with the state and with one another. These quandaries include asking how series help us to see how changes related to and interacted with the governing structures of society, including democratic and cultural evolution. As the present two volumes show, there are indeed differing answers in different cultures. But ‘knowing best’, a priori, is a poor guide to discovery. As to culture itself, we might recall Lord Burghley’s comment in 1593: ‘I find the matter as in a labyrinth: easier to enter into it than to go out.’

Notes

1. A large body of theoretical work by Marxist and neo-Marxist thinkers has related literature to society. These theorists are widely used by English-speaking and European academics although most of this writing arises from the very specific cultural contexts of France and Germany. See Delany (2002: Introduction) for commentary on this point. Theoretical analysis has offered ideas about inter-textuality, production and consumption. Much of this has been ‘oppositional’ and culturally pessimistic, concerned with exposing and


3. These points are stressed by Delany (2002) in his Introduction, ‘The Peculiarities of the English’.


5. The phrase ‘self-transformation through purchase’ is from Lears (1994: 42).

6. Eagleton (1989). Such critics may be thought to fit the stance noted by Pierre Bourdieu, that of ‘seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise’ (Bourdieu 1993: 40). Two other recent feminist writers – Margaret Beetham and, separately, Laurie Langbauer – might stand as other examples of a separate specific, unhelpful, way of seeing. Beetham has carefully and historically studied the sixpenny reading public in the 1890s in Britain, but with the explicit declared purpose of seeking ‘to destabilise through making visible’ how what she viewed as inequalities of power worked (Beetham 1996: 268). Langbauer has written similarly on serial publications: ‘I’m interested not so much in delivering a history as in exploring that history’s ongoing process of revision’ (Langbauer 1999: 7). On the politicised framework which Eagleton suggests, cultural critic Patrick Wright (a man of the left) has reflected that ‘The idea of the necessarily victorious proletariat has passed with its own inevitable progress into the museum of inadequate philosophical constructs’ (Wright 2009: 175). Orwell was early and prescient here, notably on what the total transformations of ‘revolution’ entailed. Orwell, ‘The Prevention of Literature’, Polemic, 2, January 1946; reprinted in Orwell (2008: 21–41). See also detailed modern analysis in Furet (1999) and Conquest (2002). Plumb, reflecting Gibbon, noted that
‘History contained causes and events, not laws or systems’ (Plumb 1969: 130).

7. See also the still valuable François Simiand, ‘Causal Interpretation and Historical Research’, 478, in Lane and Riemersma (eds), 1953.


9. The economist Tyler Cowen noted that ‘Trade is an emotionally charged issue for several reasons, but most of all because it shapes our sense of cultural self’ (Cowen 2002: 2).

10. Wholesalers have been an important agent in the book world, but their contribution has been much neglected. We need new work here as we seek information on print runs, prices, sales, margins and distribution deals with major London, Edinburgh and the many more localised publishers and distributing agents in the UK. We need to consider these wholesalers, too, in broader economic terms including the history of markets, credit arrangements, risk-taking, and the nineteenth-century changes in company structures which facilitated major change in the book world. On eighteenth-century credit see Hoppit (1987). There are many wholesalers in addition to those large firms of W. H. Smith, John Menzies, Simpkin, Marshall (including Hamilton, Adams & Co. and Kent & Co., both taken over by Simpkin’s), William Dawson & Sons, John Joseph Griffin, Hodgsons, Longman, Henry Vickers, Eason & Son in Dublin and Mullan in Belfast. Wholesalers whose imprints we find on nineteenth-century books include The Grand Colosseum Warehouse, operating from Glasgow, and Faudel Phillips in London. Each, for example, evidently issued much reprinted fiction under its own or joint title pages, as we see from surviving books, for example, many issued by the London firm of Richard Edward King, 1886–1922. The Grand Colosseum and Faudel Phillips combined publishing and bookselling. The evidence of surviving copies of books indicates that they seem to have purchased large quantities, although I can find no archival evidence. They seem to have supplied the country trade as well as institutional buyers at discounts. For a summary of current knowledge see Stephen Colclough (2009), who also discusses other firms including James Askew, Bell & Bradfute, Dean & Munday, Robert Evans, Gale & Fenner, Abel Heywood, George Gaillie, Houlston & Son, Law & Whittaker, James Nisbet, Oliver & Boyd and Lewis Smith & Son. Colclough says that ‘all of this evidence suggests that fundamental changes took place in the distribution and retailing of texts during this period 1880–1914’ (Colclough 2009: 278). Some of the major religious publishers in Britain also had their own distribution networks. See Michael Ledger-Thomas (2009). I explore these questions further in my By Book or By Crook. The Secret History of a Victorian Publisher, in preparation.

11. For example, we need, for the UK, modern studies of such pivotal figures as Henry Colburn, Richard Bentley, Simms & M’Intyre, George Routledge, Alfred Harmsworth and C. Arthur Pearson (following Jackson’s recent important work on George Newnes); in America, Frank Munsey, S. S. McClure, John Lovel; in France, Hachette; in Australia, E. W. Cole, and E. A Petherick. Where any accounts exist of these they are often embedded in the jellied-eel preservative
of patronymic house histories. A key figure like Henry Colburn – an influential series publisher, among other roles – has, too, been ill served by history. He played important creative parts in the formation of literary cultures and in series development. Sadleir's bias against him has been too powerful for too long. See Sutherland (1986: 59–84), Sadleir (1951) and Gettmann (1960). Colburn did not only publish fashionable and meretricious fiction, either. He published Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* in 1839, and took many other important bookselling and publishing initiatives.


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Individual contributors have provided guidance to reading in their specific fields, including non English-language sources with which I am unfamiliar. Individual studies in English include:


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