

National Histories of the Book in a Transnational Age

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Résumé de l'article

Les années 1990 et 2000 auront constitué des moments charnières pour les histoires du livre nationales : en premier lieu, ces deux décennies ont vu l'arrivée à maturité de la sous-discipline que constitue l'histoire du livre elle-même, surtout dans les pays anglophones; en second lieu, les histoires du livre nationales ont posé durant cette période des jalons de l'histoire culturelle de leurs pays respectifs. Dans le présent article, j'aborde le cheminement et les répercussions des histoires du livre nationales à partir de l'exemple de *History of the Book in Australia*, ouvrage que j'ai codirigé et dont j'ai écrit plusieurs des chapitres.

Deux phénomènes historiographiques sont venus mettre en cause la posture adoptée par les histoires du livre nationales. Le « virage transnational », d'abord, a remis en question le cadre fondamental qui régissait leur conception et leur réalisation. Dans une moindre mesure, l'essor des humanités numériques a quant à lui changé radicalement les méthodes de recherche « traditionnelles » des années 1990. Je retrace les retombées qu'a eues *History of the Book in Australia*, pour ensuite poser la question du rôle éventuel d'une histoire nationale du livre à l'ère des approches transnationales. Je soutiens en fait qu'il y a toujours de la place tant pour les histoires nationales et transnationales que pour ce qu'on pourrait appeler les micro-histoires du livre.

NATIONAL HISTORIES OF THE BOOK IN A TRANSNATIONAL AGE

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* Editor's note: The following text is taken from remarks contributed to the roundtable, "Inheriting the National Histories of the Book / L'héritage des grands projets nationaux d'histoire du livre," held on the occasion of the 23rd Annual Conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, "The Generation and Regeneration of Books / Générations et régénérations du livre." The traces of oral presentation have therefore been retained. Moreover, the audio file includes exchanges with the audience that followed the roundtable. The audio file is accessible here: http://www.usherbrooke.ca/grelq/fileadmin/sites/grelq/documents/Colloques/S_HARP_2015/Table_ronde_projets_nationaux_2015-07-07_1.mp3.

ABSTRACT

In the 1990s and 2000s, national histories of the book achieved a double milestone: firstly, they marked the coming to maturity of the subdiscipline of the history of the book itself, especially in English-speaking countries; at the same time they established landmarks in the cultural history of their own countries. My presentation will discuss the fate and the impact of national book histories from the point of view of the *History of the Book in Australia*, which I coedited and to which I contributed several chapters.

Two historiographical events have challenged the agenda of national book histories. The 'transnational turn' has thrown into question the fundamental framework which governed their conception and production. To a lesser extent, the growth of the digital humanities also makes a radical departure from the 'traditional' research methods of the 1990s. My presentation will assess the legacy of the *History of the Book in Australia* so far, and ask whether national book history has any role to play in the age of transnational approaches. I will suggest in answer to my own question that there remains a place at the table for all three levels—transnational, national and also micro-histories of the book.

Les années 1990 et 2000 auront constitué des moments charnières pour les histoires du livre nationales : en premier lieu, ces deux décennies ont vu l'arrivée à maturité de la sous-discipline que constitue l'histoire du livre elle-même, surtout dans les pays anglophones; en second lieu, les histoires du livre nationales ont posé durant cette période des jalons de l'histoire culturelle de leurs pays respectifs. Dans le présent article, j'aborde le cheminement et les répercussions des histoires du livre nationales à partir de l'exemple de *History of the Book in Australia*, ouvrage que j'ai codirigé et dont j'ai écrit plusieurs des chapitres.

Deux phénomènes historiographiques sont venus mettre en cause la posture adoptée par les histoires du livre nationales. Le « virage transnational », d'abord, a remis en question le cadre fondamental qui régissait leur conception et leur réalisation. Dans une moindre mesure, l'essor des humanités numériques a quant à lui changé radicalement les méthodes de recherche « traditionnelles » des années 1990. Je retrace les retombées qu'a eues *History of the Book in Australia*, pour ensuite poser la question du rôle éventuel d'une histoire nationale du livre à l'ère des approches transnationales. Je soutiens en fait qu'il y a toujours de la place tant pour les histoires nationales et transnationales que pour ce qu'on pourrait appeler les micro-histoires du livre.

What is the legacy of national histories of the book? In this age of transnational history, this seems to be the wrong question. The 'transnational turn' has called into question the value of national perspectives, stressing the permeability of the nation-state and the limitations of studies centred on it. In the field of book history, it has led us to examine a wide range of cultural transfers and international exchanges which national frameworks encompassed inadequately, if at all. From the standpoint of 2015, national book histories now bear the mark of their time—essentially the decade of the 1990s when most national book histories were conceived or in preparation, even if they did not always appear until the next decade. This was a specific historiographical moment which has now been overtaken.

The History of the Book in Australia

My reflections on these developments emerge from my experience as editor and contributor to the (unfinished) three-volume *History of the Book in Australia*, known henceforth as *HOB.A.*¹ I represent only myself here, because I cannot speak for the large team of contributors from various disciplines who eventually made this project a reality. A group of thirty-

seven authors contributed to *HOB A* Volume Two, including literary specialists, bibliographers, librarians, book trade practitioners and even the occasional historian. The *HOB A* project involved making a series of choices about content and format. We followed a standard Australian chronology; our three-part periodisation divided our national book history into firstly, a colonial period from first European settlement up to 1890, traditionally seen as a cultural watershed; secondly, from 1891 up to the end of the Second World War; and thirdly, from 1945 to the present. We gave up the idea of including a systematic treatment of the newspaper press, which seemed too massive a burden to assume, at least for the twentieth-century volumes.

On the other hand, we did decide to include the history of libraries and bookshops, although it should be noted that the flourishing network of public lending libraries which developed in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States took much longer to appear in Australia. An effective system of public lending libraries dates only from the end of the Second World War. So our library history between the wars necessarily leaned towards three other kinds of library: private lending institutions like the suburban circulating libraries, the Mechanics' Institute libraries and workplace libraries. In including libraries and bookshops, we diverged significantly from our French avatar (*Histoire de l'Édition française*).² The separate histories of libraries and then of bookshops in France were to follow in procession later.³ The inclusion, however, of substantial treatment of such institutions in *HOB A* represented a distinctive emphasis on the history of reading, to which I shall return later.

It is hard to underestimate the importance of our inspirational French precedent. Two members of the *HOB A* editorial team (myself and Wallace Kirsop of Monash University) had already been contributors to the *Histoire de l'Édition française*. We settled on a Roger Chartier-style structure in Volume Two, with a rough division of treatment into the worlds of production, distribution and reception. We adapted this scheme to incorporate a focus on specialist publishing areas like art and music, and some popular genres such as children's literature. Like our French precedent, we wanted an illustrated book history, even if we could never aspire to the sumptuous large-format edition produced in Paris by Promodis and the Cercle de la Librairie. Budgetary constraints ruled out entertaining such glorious

fantasies. Instead we aimed at a work which would be priced and produced to appeal to a wide audience, and not just a readership of specialists.

The publication of Volume Two in 2001 achieved a double milestone: along with other national histories, it signified the maturity of the subdiscipline of the history of the book itself, especially in the English-speaking countries where national book histories were either appearing or were in preparation. At the same time, *HOB*A Volume Two established a landmark in the cultural history of Australia itself, and in this sense it has acquired a pioneering status.

National or Nationalist Book Histories?

A transnational approach does not limit its aims to contextualizing national histories. If this was the extent of its ambitions, its added value would not be very impressive. Transnational history must do more than this, to demonstrate how the various contexts—regional, national, international—interact with each other. It does not simply embrace levels of analysis other than the national level, but also cuts through them in order to examine their reciprocal relationships. In the *History of the Book in Australia*, the aim was not simply to contextualize domestic developments in literary culture, but to show that they could not be understood without indispensable references to the wider world. The result was a history which showed that a national framework alone was inadequate to understand the development of Australian publishing, bookselling and reading. A national perspective which ignored the dimension of global interaction would easily fall into the trap of becoming not just a national but also a nationalist history. In other words, the transnational approach offers not a context, but a challenge to national histories, questioning the notion that they constitute discrete entities.

Whenever national book histories are produced in a post-colonial context, there is a danger that traditional national or patriotic reflexes will surface. This was most evident in our choice of publisher. This was always going to be a risky decision. As our late colleague John Curtain would say, asking any publisher to publish a history of the book is like asking the mafia to fund the filming of *The Godfather*. Cambridge University Press expressed an interest in publishing us, but the idea was rejected explicitly on nationalist lines; we preferred the independent Australian house of the University of

Queensland Press (and in the prevailing economic climate we supported the survival and prosperity of any independent Australian publisher). We declined to join the Cambridge stable of national book histories in order to safeguard the unique identity of *HOB A*, consciously trying to avoid any trend towards the standardisation of national book histories in the English-speaking world.

National imperatives were problematic in more profound ways. In the 1970s, many historians subscribed to a nationalist historiographical discourse in which the domination of the Australian market by British publishers had a stifling effect on Australian cultural development. Indeed, in the period 1890 to 1945, the Australian book market was effectively colonised by the British publishing industry. Australia was the jewel in the crown of the British book empire. More than 25 percent of all British book exports ended up in Australia between 1900 and 1939.⁴ Australian literary historians traced the long uphill struggle for the recognition of Australian literature in the face of colonialist ignorance and condescension. In a period of colonial dependence, they went in search of the growth of a national literary identity, and they found it in Australian poetry, children's literature and a few novels. The discourse identified certain stock characters: there were the pioneers of Australian literature, the precursors, and naturally the villains, usually to be found in the offices of London publishing houses. This simplistic scenario tended to obscure those who collaborated with imperialist cultural supremacy and profited from it (notably booksellers and certainly readers). Australian publishers, meanwhile, were never attributed the same predatory capitalist tendencies as their London rivals.

HOB A needed to loosen the grip of these conventional clichés but it did so only partially. It is true that the Australian book trade suffered from its subordination to British producers. British publishers formed a virtual cartel, claiming exclusive rights. Australian publishing suffered and the printing industry stagnated. Australian authors received an inferior royalty, the so-called 'colonial' rate of about 5 percent. On the other hand, the 'collaborators' have to be recognised: Australian readers were flooded with cheap books and Australian booksellers, far from being servile victims, profited enormously from selling them.

Literary history had canonised the few works of poetry and fiction which were judged to have expressed a uniquely Australian literary identity. Other works which were not concerned with questions of national identity were cast into the shade, even if they were well-read by their contemporary reading publics. *HOB A* Volume Two was determined to give some space to popular literature or pulp fiction whether imported or written by Australian authors. Clive Gordon Bleek was one of the most prolific and successful Australian authors of all time, but he was almost completely unknown to the Australian reading public and to Australian literary history. On a typical evening in the 1950s, Bleek left work in the railway workshops and went home to Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, had dinner, retired to his back room, put paper and carbon into his typewriter, and began work on his latest literary creation, entitled *The Invasion of the Insectoids*. Bleek wrote 250 novels or novellas, westerns, romances, thrillers and what he called 'space operas.' He wrote for American publishers who provided him with suitable pseudonyms (13 of them in all) and, in his personal notebooks, he carefully recorded everything he wrote, the time it took him to write it, and the payments he received. Not surprisingly, *The Invasion of the Insectoids* has not yet won recognition in the Australian literary canon. One might hazard a guess that it never will. Bleek was nevertheless the most productive novelist who had yet worked in Australia, and his story introduces *HOB A* Volume Two. He wrote in unfashionable genres, and he did not seek to contribute to a national literary identity, and thus he has been ignored by literary history.

HOB A Volume Two did not merely aim to outline the domination of the Australian market by British publishers. It also presented the narrative of a continuing effort to encourage and re-evaluate Australian literature. This twin perspective tried to put the history of national development into an international context. It achieved, I suggest, only partial success, so constraining was the national framework in which the project operated. We underplayed Australia's international connections: North American influences on the book trade and on Australian reading were almost certainly greater than *HOB A* Volume Two indicated and this was a neglected area; connections with New Zealand hardly surfaced at all. If we made some first steps towards international perspectives, they were limited and tentative and soon to be overtaken by more liberated transnational approaches.

Recent Histories of the Australian Book Trade

Today's scholars have gone much further in this direction. New works by Katherine Bode and James Ensor have extended our understanding of these international connections. Bode's *Reading by Numbers* marks a return to quantitative research methods in the framework now proposed by experts in digital humanities.⁵ Using the AustLit database, Bode constructs a model of Australian publishing from the nineteenth century to the present. Based on a solid empirical and statistical foundation, her conclusions are critical of some conventional views. Firstly, in place of a traditional image of Australian dependence on and subservience to London publishers in the nineteenth century, Bode argues for a thriving Australian publishing industry, in which many novels were serialised in the press. Secondly, her data for the post-war period also leads to some criticism of accepted wisdom. Bode rejects a familiar narrative in which a local book trade, flowering in the 1960s, was soon decimated by ruthless multinationals. She attacks nationalists for idealising a past golden age before the wave of corporate takeovers occurred, bringing with it a subsequent narrowing of the publishing spectrum—a golden age which, according to Bode, never really existed. Her new interpretation, based on serial data, defines long-term trends and in doing so, plays down sudden ruptures. Her emphasis is on continuity. Australian publishing did not emerge from nowhere after the Second World War, nor did it suddenly disappear in the 1980s. Neither London-centred imperialism, nor the invasion of media corporations should give rise to a catastrophic interpretation.

Jason Ensor's study of the leading Australian publisher and bookseller, Angus & Robertson, makes a further contribution to the interconnected world of international book-dealing.⁶ Ensor studied the London office of Angus & Robertson, established in 1913, and its attempts to sell Australian literature to British readers. Angus & Robertson used its London branch to compete with international publishers and to raise the global profile of Australian literature. Ensor here reverses the conventional angle of vision to examine how the colonial periphery exploited the centre as a market for its own literature. Both Bode and Ensor show that transnational approaches continue to thrive in the English-speaking world; neither of them adopts the outdated diffusion model of books issuing forth from the metropolitan centre to be distributed worldwide throughout the Empire, as special

colonial editions or as cheap remainders. Instead the focus is on the active role of the periphery. The Empire writes back, and what is more the Empire *publishes* back.

Can we say that these valuable studies have built on the legacy of *HOBAN*? I think this is far from the case. In their freely transnational approach, they have rather bypassed it and, in the case of Bode, directly criticised some of the assumptions embedded in *HOBAN* Volume Two. Furthermore, the application of digital humanities analysis to large masses of data marks a new stage in the industrialisation of book history, which throws my own artisan manipulation of statistics into the shade. Once again, the national *HOBAN* appears as a child of its time.

Some Limits to Transnational Book Histories

In 2010, together with Jean-Yves Mollier, I outlined four broad avenues offering possibilities for a transnational approach to book history.⁷ These were: translation studies, focusing on translators as cultural brokers or *passseurs*; the study of cultural transfers, and of the adaptation and reception of an author or an entire genre in a different language area; international law and transnational organisations, including the development of international copyright law which is an aspect of book history with a genuinely transnational significance. So too, are violations of copyright law, and the history of the widespread publishing ‘piracy’ before the Bern Convention on international copyright in 1886 made possible the development of a truly global economy of the book. Lastly, I proposed a history of international corporations. The research agenda invites us to break with old habits, to analyse the ways in which a global approach transforms the way we do national histories. In other words, a transnational perspective changes the way we write our national histories, and it demands that we interpret them differently and reconfigure them anew.

Since 2010, book historians worldwide have made significant progress, especially in developing the first two points above, namely the study of translation and the study of cultural exchanges. But just as national histories have their constraints, so too there are limits to a transnational history of the book. The nation-state still exerts a powerful grip on book history research. After all, it dictates the legislative frameworks within which the book trade

has historically operated. It structures the archives and libraries in which much of our research is done. National governments provide much of the research funding which enables our projects to thrive. National histories, national historiographies, nation-states and national languages still hold us tightly in their grasp. It requires a great effort to transcend their well-entrenched boundaries.

There are limits to what is possible. I also argued in 2010 that transnational history implied a kind of ‘historiographical transnationalism’—in other words, doing transnational history also invites us to engage with the historiographical traditions of other countries and other languages. Transnational history demands that we consider and analyse a plurality of viewpoints. It calls for what Peter Burke has called a ‘polyphonic history,’ sensitive to multiple voices from multiple perspectives.⁸ This imposes new demands on historians’ linguistic abilities. A transnational approach to book history is thriving within the field of New British Empire studies, and this is no coincidence. Transnational book history works well within single-language areas, such as the British Empire, the countries of *francophonie*, or within most of Latin America. Elsewhere, perhaps it has stumbled. One reason for this may be the question of language. Outside these zones, transnational historians need competence in at least two languages, not just to examine their primary material but to engage with different national historiographies. This can be a demanding requirement.

It was perhaps an awareness of such limitations that persuaded SHARP to commission a series of translations into English of important articles on books history from other languages. The first group of these was published last year on SHARP’s website, and more are planned. We are currently pursuing a project to translate work in several Indian languages into English, as much for the benefit of Indian as of other scholars. Eventually it is hoped that we will also translate some work out of English into other languages as well.

The History of Reading

A distinctive feature of *HOB A* Volume Two was the attention it devoted to the history of reading. Five chapters or about 20 percent of the text discussed a range of topics central to the history of the Australian reader.

Three or four other chapters dealt with libraries and their readers, adding up to a substantial effort to bring actual readers, their preferences and their practices, into the heart of book history. The normative sources for the history of reading were treated (by which I mean the advice and instruction provided on what to read and also on how to read). Other chapters discussed reading models, reading communities, reading practices and finally the importance of literary anniversaries and commemorations in the first half of the twentieth century. Behind it all lurked the question: who was the Australian reader? Were Australian reading practices in any way unique, or was the Australian reader, rather, a variant of the English provincial reader or perhaps of the colonial reader, very similar to his or her counterpart in Cape Town, Auckland or Birmingham?

On balance I concluded that in spite of some distinctive characteristics the Australian reader was not a distinct species. The Australian book trade was, after all, part of a larger imperial cultural space. What I would like to stress here is that national book histories rarely offered such coverage of reading practices, restricting themselves principally to traditional histories of printing and publishing. *HOB A* was different in going in search of the Australian audience.

In order to do so, I drew on autobiographical sources, both in the form of published diaries and autobiographies from the period, and also in the form of oral testimonies. In the 1980s, I had devised, directed and been involved in an oral history of reading in Sydney. In the 1980s, we interviewed 61 informants over the age of 70 on their reading histories. We also asked them about their families' past reading practices, so that we effectively drew on memories of two generations of readers, in a period when print media were still supreme, but when the radio and the cinema were just beginning to compete with books for leisure time. The result was a study entitled *Australian Readers Remember*, and I drew on some of it in *HOB A* Volume Two.⁹

What was the legacy of this foray into the history of Australian reading practices? And what was the legacy of this promotion of the value of oral history for historians of the book? In Australia, I regret to report that the legacy has been zero. If, as reviewers suggested, the work had the merit of opening up new paths of research, unfortunately no one has so far ventured

down them. The oral histories of reading in workplaces, country towns, book clubs which I hoped would develop did not appear. Oral history, I believe, has much to offer reading history, but its potential has hardly been unlocked, except by a few isolated scholars.¹⁰

There has been a response to this legacy, but it has been belated and it has come not from Australia but from the United Kingdom. The SAPHIRE project *Scottish Readers Remember*, funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council, had objectives which were quite different from the Australian precedent, but I regard its title as an acknowledgement of *Australian Readers Remember* and even as a kind of homage to it.¹¹ The *Memories of Fiction* project based at Roehampton University and Royal Holloway University, London, uses the Australian precedent to explore different directions in the oral history of reading.¹² *Reading Sheffield* represents another community oral history project.¹³ Decades after the original event, then, the baton has been picked up, and I believe the legacy is now being developed in interesting ways, sometimes embedded in local communities, sometimes exploiting the resources offered by local book clubs, always aware of new on-line methods of disseminating research results.

The history of reading is often neglected in transnational book histories. In Latin America, for example, it was clear from the presentations at the SHARP conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 2013 that work is proceeding fast on book-trade relationships not only between Latin American countries and Europe, but also on the many reciprocal exchanges developed between those countries themselves. This parallels developments in the New British Empire studies, whose agenda includes not simply relationships between centre and periphery, but also the independent connections between the different peripheries.

Close studies of the nineteenth-century Brazilian periodical press, the book reviews they carried, and advertisements placed by local publishers allow scholars to trace the rapid and widespread circulation of French novels in South America. We find that in the nineteenth century bestselling French fiction appeared in Portuguese, in the form of *feuilletons* in the Rio press, almost as quickly as it was published in Paris. In 1987 in *Le Triomphe du Livre*, I offered some approximate calculations of bestselling titles in France

in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Marcia Abreu argued, the bestselling novels identified in *Le Triomphe du Livre* should now be revisited, but this time from a global perspective.¹⁴ French cultural models were paramount: Walter Scott was translated into Brazilian Portuguese from French editions, which had already edited and truncated the originals. Thus the Portuguese read Scott in a translation of a translation. But the French model was the medium through which Scott achieved a large readership in South America.

What we miss from these studies to date is an answer to the question of readers' responses. Studies of translated editions may help us to see how originals were modified in their travels, especially in the case just cited of the global circulation of Walter Scott, creating a situation where South American readers consumed edited retranslations of his original novels. Mapping patterns of circulation may also help us to assess the reception of other forms of European literature in Latin America. South American readers bought European novels—but what did readers make of them, how did they interpret them? The history of publishing alone is not enough: it needs to take a further step into reading history.

The Microhistory of Reading

To illustrate the microhistory of reading, I will now take a short detour via New Zealand, with New Zealand book historian Lydia Wevers as my expert guide. Very soon after British settlement of New Zealand, colonists met in Wellington in 1840 to establish the Pickwick Club, an offshoot of many Dickensian societies formed all over the English-speaking world. New Zealanders imitated the original fictional Pickwick Club by meeting in a tavern. Australia, too, had its Dickensophiles. In colonial Sydney, the central area of the Rocks was associated with crime and poverty, and reminded Sydneysiders of *Oliver Twist*. The new township of Liverpool to the west was compared with the fictional settlement of Eden in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The *Pickwick Papers* and their character Sam Weller were at the centre of an imagined reading community of comedy, which was classless and which spanned the globe. Why was Charles Dickens so important to New Zealand and Australia? Through Dickens the far-flung outposts of Empire demonstrated their membership of a common community, with Dickens as one of the authors they shared. Dickens had a broad and comprehensive

public, supported in New Zealand by the highest density of libraries anywhere. New Zealand settlers made a big investment in print culture, regarding it as an essential framework of colonisation from the outset. Dickens also had Maori readers (in translation) and apparently did not suffer from any unpopular association with the colonial regime. *Pickwick Papers* remained the most popular Dickens novel in his lifetime, but later the humour dated, and *David Copperfield* superseded *Pickwick* as his most popular title. In the 1890s, enthusiasm for reading Dickens waned as readers turned to more contemporary fiction.

Many of these insights derive from Lydia Wevers' study of Dickens in the Antipodes, still in progress. The same historian is also responsible for a quite different study which, on the face of it, appears the exact opposite of the transnational approach inherent in her Dickens study. In *Reading on the Farm*, Wevers studies life and reading on one mid-nineteenth-century farm—Brancepeth—on the North Island of New Zealand.¹⁵ It seems a very far stretch from global reading communities to the study of a one farm, but even here there is a transnational dimension. On this large estate the Beetham family, who emigrated in 1856, recreated the life of the English gentry. Brancepeth's station library housed about 2000 volumes, whose contents are still identifiable because they were bequeathed to the Victoria University in Wellington. Fiction absorbed 88 percent of the library's titles. The library catered for the substantial station workforce of maids, cooks, shearers and thousands of itinerant labourers, whose presence was especially felt in the depression of the 1890s. The library had instruction manuals, classics by Horace, Virgil, Homer and Herodotus, and it held books in Maori. It housed fiction by canonical authors including Dickens, Scott, Rider Haggard, Dumas, Trollope and Thackeray. Later on more popular fiction was acquired by, for example, Marie Corelli, Mayne Reid and Mrs. Henry Wood. The family had its own library, which it kept separately from that of the station, so that the books just mentioned were not contained in the baggage of migration, but were all acquired from Britain subsequently.

This was the achievement of the station clerk, John Vaughan Miller, who was a dominant scribal presence, writing thousands of letters annually as well as dozens of articles for local newspapers. He also read and annotated many of the books in the library whose organization he supervised. Wevers examines the surviving books for marginal scribbling and other material

evidence of usage. They carry grass stains, remains of dead insects, desiccated spiders and greasy fingerprints. There are doodles, sketches, pages removed, and scorch marks where the book was perhaps held too close to the fire. Damaged books are signs of intensive and repeated use; dirt too constitutes historical evidence.

It is clear from this unusual microhistorical study of reading and writing on a single farm that Brancepeth was no isolated outstation. In Wevers' presentation, it was clearly part of an Empire-wide book market, buying colonial editions, and favouring themes which had some colonial resonance, nostalgia for home, stories of getting rich and finding romance. Brancepeth was 'plugged in' to a British world that circled the globe, and which produced fiction that assumed that emigration was a part of family life. This is transnational history, but viewed through a microhistorical lens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *History of the Book in Australia* was a landmark in national cultural history, but I cannot be entirely positive about its inconsistent legacy. It was a product of its time. Just as transnational history tries to transcend artificial political boundaries to reveal new connections and interchanges, so I believe we have to transcend the framework of national book histories.

As I have pointed out, however, there are limits to thinking globally. I suggest that there is a place for all three levels of study—for local studies such as Wevers' micro-history of reading on a single New Zealand farm, for national studies like *HOB A*, as well as for studies of global or imperial interactions. They all have their distinct purposes, but they should never be considered in isolation from each other. Even microstudies can reveal the importance of international connections. All historical problems have to be studied within their appropriate geographical spaces. The history of the book, like the history of the Reformation or the history of industrialization, inhabits multiple geographies. The global and the national should not be seen as antagonistic, but rather as complementary levels on which to consider the multiple layers of social and cultural interaction.¹⁶

Martyn Lyons is Emeritus Professor of History in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. His research interests are in the history of reading and writing in Europe and Australia, and his most recent book was *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c. 1860–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). He has contributed to collective national book histories including *L’Histoire de l’Édition française*, and with John Arnold, he edited and contributed seven chapters to *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market* (University of Queensland Press, 2001). From 1995 to 2002, he was Executive Editor of the *HOB A* Project.

Notes

¹ Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, eds., *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001); Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright, eds., *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006). Volume One has not been published.

² Roger Chartier, Henri-Jean Martin and Jean-Pierre Vivet, eds., *Histoire de l’Édition française*, 4 vols. (Paris: Promodis/Cercle de la Librairie, 1982–86); and 2nd ed. (Paris: Fayard/Cercle de la Librairie, 1989–91).

³ Dominique Varry, ed., *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, 4 vols. (Paris: Promodis/Cercle de la Librairie, 1988–92; Patricia Sorel, Frédérique Leblanc and Jean-François Loisy, eds., *Histoire de la Librairie en France* (Paris: Cercle de la librairie, 2008).

⁴ Martyn Lyons, “Britain’s Largest Export Market,” in *A History of the Book in Australia*, eds. Lyons and Arnold, 19.

⁵ Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers: Recalibrating the Literary Field* (London: Anthem, 2012).

⁶ Jason D. Ensor, *Angus & Robertson and the British Trade in Australian Books, 1930–1970: The Getting of Bookselling Wisdom* (London: Anthem, 2013).

⁷ Martyn Lyons and Jean-Yves Mollier, “L’histoire du livre dans une perspective transculturelle,” *Histoire et Civilisation du Livre. Revue internationale*, no. 8 (2012): 9–20.

⁸ Peter Burke, “Cultural History as Polyphonic History,” *ARBOR, Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura*, CLXXXVI: 743 (2010): 479–86.

⁹ Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading, 1890–1930*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ I include among them Natalie Ponsard, “Quand l’histoire socio-culturelle est aussi histoire orale: L’exemple des pratiques de lectures dans une communauté d’ouvriers des années trente à nos jours,” *Genèses* no. 48 (2002): 100–14; and see Martyn Lyons, “Why We Need an Oral History of Reading,” in my *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) : 151-164.

¹¹ “Scottish Readers Remember (AHRC-funded): Project Overview.” [http://www.sapphire.ac.uk/scottish-readers-remember-\(ahrc-funded\)/](http://www.sapphire.ac.uk/scottish-readers-remember-(ahrc-funded)/).

¹² *Memories of Fiction*, *Memories of Fiction* Project Team, last modified January 22, 2016, <http://memoriesoffiction.org/>.

¹³ *Reading Sheffield*, *Reading Sheffield* team, last modified 1 March 2016, <http://www.readingsheffield.co.uk/>.

¹⁴ Márcia Abreu, ‘Antigos e modernos: o impacto da publicação de folhetins nas preferências dos leitores’, presentation to a panel on the circulation of French novels in nineteenth-century Brazil (SHARP Conference *A Cidade de Letras*, Rio de Janeiro, 7 November 2013).

¹⁵ Lydia Wevers, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington NZ: Victoria University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Michael G. Müller and Cornelius Torp, “Conceptualising Transnational Spaces in History,” *European Review of History* 16, no. 5 (2009): 609–17.

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