

EVANGHELIA STEAD (ED.). *READING BOOKS AND PRINTS AS CULTURAL OBJECTS*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, NEW DIRECTIONS IN BOOK HISTORY, 2018 [ISBN 978-3-319-53831-0]

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Reading Books and Prints as Cultural Objects, edited by Evangelhia Stead, is a sample selection of papers from the Freiburg FRIAS conference. A major contribution to image, media and book studies research, it offers a stimulating interdisciplinary perspective on the function of books and prints, spanning a broad period from medieval manuscript to digital work. The comparative method adopted in this book leads to an insightful cross-exchange of views that connects books, first regarded as objects, with uses and fashions. This approach associates literary analysis and the study of the importance of design and marketing, but also of cultural trends and their impact on reading itself. It shows that books and prints are not simply objects but also media and metaphors, endowed with material and spiritual qualities that evolve and change with the passage of time.

Following a cycle that goes from production to reception, the authors concentrate on the circulation of material things that are also to be regarded as aesthetic and cultural models. Despite its being grounded in Europe, the approach chosen here perfectly reflects not only the differences but also the overlapping of cultures. This work spans threshold periods in the history of the production and reception of prints and books: the late Middle Ages, early humanism, precursors of art publications, illustrated books in the industrial age, book consumerism in the twentieth century, then e-reading. However, instead of being built on a strict chronological order, it is divided into four parts corresponding to different media: manuscripts, prints, mechanically printed books, and e-readers.

Part I, on manuscripts, examines reading practices, monastic and antiquarian, devotional or early humanist. Henrike Lähnemann focuses on the production and dissemination of the Prayer Books of Medingen, precious items composed, copied and illuminated by Cistercian nuns in the late fifteenth century. They functioned both as devotional aids (annotated and corrected by their readers due to the Lutheran reformation, transformed by the addition of signs of ownership, new bindings) and as antiquarian objects taking part in the circulation of knowledge in Europe (sold to collectors, auction houses, and libraries in the 18th century). Yet reading processes evolve and overlap and, in

the 20th century, specialized disciplines for the study of medieval manuscripts emerged, while in the twenty-first these manuscripts became objects of exhibition and digitization. Devotional manuscripts were built on a dialogue between text and image and the analysis of the cultural techniques related to a German picture book dating from the first half of the fourteenth century and kept in Montpellier (Bibliothèque Universitaire de Médecine) gives a twofold meaning to the word « technique »: Henrike Manuwald both envisages it as the creation of a cultural artefact with the help of technology and as the accomplishment represented by reading, itself a culturally determined procedure. By referring to the actor-network theory making of objects key-elements of action chains that they not only influence but even generate, the author pays close attention to multilayered reading practices and the function of illustrations, the complementary relations between text and image. Testifying to the transformation of reading processes, Michael Stolz's article on early Italian and German humanism insists on the division between *otium* (rest, leisure) and *negotium* (activity, practice, negotiation, circulation). Starting from St Augustine's reading and conversion, exemplary cases of reading are mentioned (Petrarch reading St Augustine and Boccaccio) and St Augustine's act is presented as embedded in other reading acts. Reading involves social interactions and « negotiations » that entail spiritual and physical movement, a process that culminates in Gossembrot's practice of annotating texts.

In Part II, the subject of the dissemination of images in Europe is first treated through the fluidity of images evoked by Christina Posselt-Kuhli: the painting collections rendered on copper (*Galeriewerke*) and numismatic collections or *histories métalliques* were reproductions arranged in gallery sequence. Though their most obvious role was to glorify rulers, they also introduced a reflection on artistic worth, prefiguring the art book. They were also instances of intermediality and experimentations in pictorial and textual hybridity. With the intensified circulation of printed images through Europe, new uses, new techniques, a new public and new meanings emerged, and Alberto Milano examines how the dissemination of decorative prints, copied and sold, took place in Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. This circulation led to the creation of a common market and above all to interactions between « high » and « low » culture as compositions adapted from famous artists were transposed into grotesque and comical interpretations.

Part III introduces printed books in the nineteenth century with Barbara Korte's work on the representation of the figure of the heroic woman in Victorian and Edwardian gift books (1846-1909). The cultural visibility of the heroic in that period becomes obvious in the reward book or prize book, mixing a didactic purpose and the attempt to convey an ambivalent praise of female agency, as the interaction and tension of peritext (notably covers) and text bring forth both gender borders and their transgression. The migration and transformation of images as they travel from one work to another and

from one country to another is the topic broached by Giorgio Bacci who explores, chronologically and thematically, the evolution of illustrations of *Pinocchio* from 1883 to 2005. Going from representations rooted in Tuscany to more archetypal images set in other regions and times, this evolution has eventually resulted in a form of globalization and depersonalization in the contemporary art sphere. In his study of the reinterpretations of Arthur Schnitzler's works in German and English editions, from Vienna (1900) to New York (1965), Norbert Bachleitner shows that illustrations are not simply depictions of texts, but extensions, supplements or excursions. Comparing M. Coschell's and Donia Nachshen's interpretations of the characters' inner life and treatments of eroticism, the author also focuses on illustrations, format, paper, cover and typography, on the numerous metamorphoses and adaptations to new audiences through a wide spectrum of artistic movements (Romanticism, realism, Art Nouveau, Cubism and pop art). Clearly, illustrations and format, but also size and binding have an impact on the reception of the text. A concluding chapter on book sales Clubs and book ownership in the twentieth century written by Corinna Norrick-Rühl turns to a further demonstration of one of the cultural roles of the book as object in personal book collections, as self-fashioning device and manifestation of social prestige, even becoming an item with which to furnish one's home from the 1920s.

However, the status of the book as object and the interpersonal relations it creates have been redefined by the digital age and social media have replaced book sales club discussions. The unique chapter in Part IV (the « Epilogue ») reflects on e-readers and digital media, now turning the book into an object absent from the scene of reading, according to Stephan Packard. Yet the kindle reintroduces an imagined community, as readers seem to be viewed by other readers, thanks to the traces left in marginalia and preferences. With his reading activity thus visible, it is now the reader who has become an object to be read, a kind of on-line commodity.

Reading Books and Prints as Cultural Objects is a very rich and insightful interdisciplinary approach. Detailing the « anatomy » of the object implies a study of its reception and examining print culture both literally and figuratively is indeed very fruitful. The interrelation between the analysis of formats, techniques and materials on the one hand and of visual and literary experimentation on the other hand illustrates the metaphor of the book as flesh (formerly explored by Evangelhia Stead in *La Chair du Livre. Matérialité, Imaginaire et Poétique du Livre Fin-de-siècle*). A cultural object, the book involves not only the readers' minds but also their bodies, connecting senses and imagination. In a similar vein, the presence of images in illustrated print implies an examination of the process of reading with images and of the intersemiotic relations that the nexus of text and image creates. This emphasis on the book as cross-breed runs through most of the articles and gives unity and coherence to this publication, in spite of the multiple topics that are broached and the wide temporal span that these articles cover.