



Editorial

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The Politics of Book History: Then and Now marks the rising scholarly scrutiny of the political structures that shape the fields of bibliography and the history of material texts. To talk about politics is to talk about ‘actions concerned with the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority’ (OED, *politics* *n.* 3a). When Milton turns ‘now again to Politics’ in *Eikonoklastes*, the word signals a shift in the discussion towards the authority held by the monarch. But the politics of early modern texts, both in their own moment and in how we use them today, are not limited to what they say about government. This special issue of *JEMS* takes on a broad range of politics: enslavement, patronage, race-making, disability, queer identities, and much else. Our investment in book history means that we also attend to the politics of the production of the texts that disseminated these ideas. How do indexing, prefacing and cataloguing, targeted publishing and retailing, reprinting, digitising and transcribing contribute to the structures of ‘power, status, or authority’ built and dismantled in early modern texts?

Noticing the increasing politicisation of literary scholarship, John Guillory attributes this phenomenon to the increasing politicisation of the *profession*, in which precarious humanities scholars ham up the ‘topicality’ of their research in the chase after ever-elusive jobs (2022, 74-79). For Guillory this results in a two-fold contraction of the field: both temporally, to modern or contemporary literature, and generically, ‘to the form of representation – prose narrative – most amenable to interpretation within a political thematic’ (76). Neither such contraction is on display here, as the readings of ‘early modern’ literature stretch from the mid-sixteenth-century scientific manuals of Jacques Besson to the late-eighteenth-century reprints of Sarah Trimmer’s natural history manual for children, with George Herbert’s poetry, the plays of Shakespeare and Milton’s epic in between. More importantly, what these essays make clear is not the adventitious imposition of contemporary ‘topicality’ on unyieldingly early modern texts, but rather structures of power (between printers and patrons, librarians and collectors, digital keyers and editors) that emerge from diachronic and material objects of study.

The 'then and now' part of our title asserts the long lives of books, the fact that these objects index shifting ideas about knowledge, power and authoritative or non-conformist reading, a history in which our readings and encounters continue to play a part. The production processes foregrounded in this special issue of *JEMS* span from the initial printing of early modern texts to their reprinting, circulation and archiving in nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century institutions; the articles that follow account not only for texts' first editions but for their *longue durée* both analogue and digital. The politics of book history are continuously being remade just as our objects of study are reshaped by the catalogues and critical essays that frame them. The aim of *The Politics of Book History: Then and Now* is to account for the longer timelines of books' politics, broadly conceived: to acknowledge both the structures (of patronage, of paid labour, of enslavement) in which books were written, printed, edited, and sold *and* the intellectual and material frameworks in which these books are read and written about today.

One such framework is the injection of energy into the term Critical Bibliography, no longer defined as 'the science of the material transmission of literary texts' (Greg 1912, 48) but as the movement to '(re)shape our histories of the book and bookish objects' with critical theory (Maruca and Ozment 2022, 232). Once signalling the search for answers (a 'science'), Critical Bibliography now prioritises questioning our questions. Those we might ask of books today – whose labour contributed to this book? what kinds of oppression created the money to make and buy it? what kinds of identity are being constructed and excluded in the dissemination of this text? – reflect the priorities of our own moment, but their answers are to be found in the material qualities of texts that long precede us. Evidently, modern understandings and experiences of sexuality, race, ableism, nationalism, patronage, and non-conformism are different to those that circulated in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. But the texts under discussion here are caught up in these longer histories, and asking where these texts came from as physical objects means asking the same of the political structures they reflect and contain.

Despite the temporal ambition of the essays that follow, their geographic reach is more restricted. These essays cover books primarily made in England, Scotland, North America, and Europe; the exception is to be found in Margaret Maurer's contribution which foregrounds the labour of the digital keyers of Proquest's database Early English Books Online (EEBO), who were located in the Philippines and India (although even in this case the books being digitised and transcribed are primarily English-language and printed in the British isles). Maurer's article dwells on the erasure of this labour from EEBO's self-description, and this erasure of geographically 'distant' work can also index the failure of this special issue of *JEMS* to attract the notice of scholars working from and on the global south. The narrow geographic reach of the present volume speaks to the politics of its own moment in which, despite the possibility of collaborating with remote colleagues digitally, and despite increased emphasis in the discipline on 'global' forms of research, our field still tends geographically to delineate both scholars and objects of study, with some encouraging recent exceptions (see Gillespie 2020; Barnes and Goodman 2024). That the circulation of this special issue's call for papers largely stopped short of reaching scholars working in non-Anglophone countries suggests there is much more work to be done. Nonetheless, various articles in the present volume are attuned to what happens when books cross borders. Sarah Sprouse and Sarah Valles foreground the Scottish readership for a manuscript miscellany previously mined for its Donnean contents, while Jessica Linker shows how books that are reprinted, or more accurately rewritten, for American audiences following their English success imagine and construct national identities.

In asking us to read a miscellany as a whole rather than for its individual poems, and in questioning the limits of a text that multiplies through its reprinting, both of these articles about place

also raise the question of scale. Book historians tend to be sedulous in distinguishing between the copy, the issue, the edition, and the work. The scale at which we read assumes something about the significance of the thing in hand: this particular copy is worth your attention above all the others, or, this is an intellectually significant text regardless of its particular material form. The chosen scale of analysis also lets in and excludes the different power structures available in the transmission of texts. Tom Clayton and Consuelo Gomez show how the addition of paratextual material changes consecutive editions of the 'same' texts; they each work at this scale to show what new kinds of authority are asserted in the shift from one edition to the next.

What happens if we read not at the scale of editions but entire collections? Alice Wickenden discusses the provenance of the Hans Sloane collection in the British Library, exposing the difficulty of learning and teaching about the roots of this collection in the slave trade. Such a discussion involves less close reading of the lines of poems, and more reading of the curatorial and cataloguing material that surrounds them. Collections demand different kinds of reading – where did it come from? how do we know? – that reflect not only the named and famed individuals who so often steal the limelight of provenance history, but the often invisible and underpaid labour of cataloguers and librarians tasked with the huge responsibility of finding and recording answers to these questions.

In that shift from Hans Sloane to the community of cataloguers and librarians who take care of his collections today, we register another tension in the present volume between the Davids and Goliaths – the literary giants and the ants – whose stories are told in the articles that follow. Kate Ozment foregrounds the labour of Rebecca Field, a once-invisible eighteenth-century printer, to show more broadly how women's labour is erased from catalogues today. The little-known Henry Hills might have been more well known had the 'biography' promised in *The Life* come down to us as something other than 'a (failed) reprint of a reprint of which no original copy has survived', as Michael Durrant writes. Durrant puts under a microscope the granular detail of these texts' lives while making a broader point about the representation of sexuality both in the methods of book history and in its objects of study. Justin Kuhn's article uses the relatively well-known (among early modern book historians) publisher Humphrey Moseley to argue for publishers' political dexterity across their lifetime. Moseley is thus, like the less-studied Henry Hills and Rebecca Field, indexical of a wider trend.

But some of the work here attaches itself to outliers. Taylor Hare's article is at first glance about Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but it is less about Milton or the literary quality of his work than it is about his amanuenses and the slave labour that underwrote the funds for the first braille edition of the poem. The existence of such an edition, and thus the kind of reparative scholarship on display here, is only made possible by the canonical status of Milton that put his work to the front of the queue in making 'literature' more accessible to a wider readership. Canonicity and the economics of slavery intersect in Emma Smith's contribution, too, which tracks the changing prices of Shakespeare's First Folio over time to show how the value of rare books – and to some extent the English antiquarian book trade with Shakespeare at its pinnacle – was invented by the wealth generated in England by the slave trade. As Smith notes, her kind of analysis is only possible for an intensely canonical book whose travels between hands and across borders has been so well documented, and Shakespeare's cultural status (for better or for worse) increases the strength of the argument. Would we be as convinced by an argument based on the prices of a book by a now-forgotten author even if we had the evidence to make it? In another article that raises the stakes of Shakespeare's canonicity, Breanne Weber close-reads the Shakespearean quotations found in the fundraising cookbook put out by the Seton Guild of Hyattsville, Maryland. The effect is to demonstrate how 'the Bard' both bestowed cultural status and was deployed in the demeaning 'exoticisation' of people and foodways.

Tracking the changing status of Shakespeare and Milton in print – as tools to chisel away at the relative value of labour and social status, of authors and their commodified works – means noticing the oscillating politics of these objects of study over time. Shakespeare and Milton are staples of an undergraduate literary education but their status is deployed by the authors here to question our ways of reading rather than to affirm them. That is to say, their durability as texts that ‘should’ be read arises from their pliability to absorb new directions in the field. Our thinking changes, and these texts come with us. The articles that follow are arranged to foreground the journey of books through time and how and why they have landed on our shelves, in our institutions, and on our bedside tables in the formats and editions that they have.

The present volume opens with two articles that reflect broadly on the fundamental question of how we access the early modern texts we study. The tools that enable us, at the most basic level, to read early modern texts – facsimiles and transcriptions, hard-copy and digital catalogues – delineate and restrict as much as they enable that access. Many early modernists rely heavily on EEBO, whose democratic effect is to make legible tens of thousands of rare books to scholars who would otherwise be precluded from reading them by travel costs, institutional affiliation, time constraints, and so forth. Yet Maurer’s article foregrounds the political infrastructures, and other forms of exclusion, that make EEBO possible: the way it foregrounds in its ‘about’ pages the work of ‘editors’ based at elite western institutions while pushing into the background the digital keyers based in India and the Philippines. While we are often reminded that EEBO is not a neutral database because of the way it excludes or glosses over certain textual features, our opening article makes clear the politics of the institutional organisation itself, and thus of the research tool that undergirds most current book history scholarship on early modern English books. Turning to another crucial access tool in early modern scholarship, Kate Ozment shows how a mistake in the English Short Title Catalog (ESTC), the primary digital reference for the study of pre-1800 English printed books, mis-records how one book came into being by naming the printer Rebecca Field as ‘Richard’ Field. Tracing how this error multiplies across the numerous other catalogues that use the ESTC as their source, Ozment mines the archive for the biography of Rebecca Field. Ozment’s work attends not only to this one mistake but to the underlying presuppositions about the authority of the ESTC that propagate this error, presuppositions that urgently need to be undone by the kind of feminist bibliography on display here. Together, these two articles show the kinds of power structures, subjective histories, assumptions and inequalities which shape our ability to encounter early modern objects of study in the first place, while offering reparative and activist ways to critique and redress those politics.

Having established the political structures of the very tools which enable access to early modern texts, the second part of the present volume moves into close-readings of such texts. The first category of articles, ‘Origins’, asks us to notice where texts have come from and how their current location – within archives, libraries, digital infrastructures, or miscellanies – can (if we pay attention) reveal important narratives about the past. Taking seriously the notion of looking to *then* to comprehend the *now*, this section moves backwards in time from the digital tools of our opening section to the contemporary analogue archive. Alice Wickenden’s article explores how the British Library documents the origins of two collections that originally belonged to Sloane and John Bellingham Inglis. What we might think of as the factual work of ‘provenance studies’ is shown to be thoroughly imbued with politics. The British Library and British Museum cannot curate and describe these collections and their one-time owners neutrally, and the ‘griefwork’ of recognising the oppressive past of our objects of study becomes part of the archival encounter. This essay on entire collections is followed by one that reads a single copy assembled in the seventeenth century, namely the Dalhousie manuscripts.

Previously read only as containers of Donne's poetry and therefore predominantly 'English' in origin, Sprouse and Valles suggest that these manuscripts were compiled in Scotland for a Scottish readership. Compilation is one origin point among many in the making of manuscripts. Shifting this co-ordinate from England to Scotland invites new ways of reading that resist the canonical gravity of Donne's verses and the rigidity of national borders as constructed in the ways we imagine textual production.

The next section considers the politics of 'Textual Labour': the diachronic process of making that brings books into being. Highlighting the disjuncture in the value afforded to different kinds of labour, Taylor Hare describes the enslavement that funded the 1855 braille edition of *Milton's Poetical Works* versus the broadly celebrated making of that edition as a project of democratisation and increased accessibility. Milton's own dependence on his amanuenses is increasingly noted to ask what it meant to 'author' *Paradise Lost*. This nineteenth-century edition raises the stakes of noticing what kinds of work make textual production possible. The presence of slavery in the rare books trade also threads through Emma Smith's article, which asks 'what did a First Folio cost and how much was that?' The answer is that the First Folio – and the numerous other rare books whose prices rocketed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – cost the lives of many enslaved people whose labour lined the pockets of wealthy families able to establish and assert their cultural status through the purchase of rare books.

Our third category thinks about a particular kind of textual labour – 'Publishing' – whose affordances are both aesthetically broad and historically particular. Tom Clayton shows how the indexes added to George Herbert's *The Temple* completely transform its intended and actual use, transformations that ultimately map onto the growing status of the book as a literary text. Initial indexes to *The Temple* assumed a clerical readership who mined the book for 'answers' to theological quandaries, and so these indexes resist that literary sense of open-endedness for which we now read and teach this collection. Indexes reflect and dictate reading; publishers shape our objects of study and in doing so shape the methods of close reading deployed by scholars of theology, literature, and the history of the book. Conseulo Gomez is interested in another kind of unstable paratext, dedications, that also allow a book to signify differently over time. Gomez shows how the rewriting of paratexts for Jacques Besson's *Theatrum instrumentorum et machinarum* (first printed in 1572) changed who it was for: this time reflecting not a shift from 'clerical' to 'literary' readers, but from Protestant to Catholic. Publishing becomes an inherently political act: a form of labour that is also an act of service or patronage. These dedications assert the cultural status of both the works they precede, and the owners to whom they are being given; these manuals show the political value of books as sources of cutting-edge knowledge that helped their publishers, writers, and patrons assert themselves in early modern Europe. Returning to London, Justin Kuhn shows us how the publisher Humphrey Moseley also used books to keep abreast of the tides of power in the mid-seventeenth-century civil wars. Moseley's business acumen and professional loyalties oscillated between republican and royalist networks as the moment required. Kuhn encourages us to read across the full careers of publishers, whose political loyalties emerged from different doors at different moments. In so doing, he shifts the argument that many of these articles make about books onto the people who made them, insisting that the *longue durée* of a publisher's life reflects a changing political environment.

While Humphrey Moseley was a political publisher in flux, then, the final section of the present volume focuses on the fluctuating identities of the 'readers' made and imagined by early modern books. 'Readerly Identities' consists of articles that resonate overtly with some of the most divisive political contests of our own moment, but the articles that follow do not anachronistically tape current ways of thinking onto early modern print and paper. Post-indus-

trial globalisation has resulted in both the building and the dismantling of borders, and Jessica Linker's article, which examines the 'reprints' of George Fisher's *Instructor: or Young Man's Best Companion* and Sarah Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* for an American audience, shows how such reprints constructed and reflected differences between American and British readerships. Even as these books travelled across borders, their reprinting – which comes to be a mode of rewriting – asserts divisions between American and British identities that rely on gender, wealth, and the colonial and post-colonial relation between provinces and metropole. Breanne Weber's work on Shakespearean cookbooks maps the cultural status of the predominately white women whose recipes are included in these nonprofessional printings. While purportedly a work of charity that seeks to make money for other disadvantaged women, the Seton Guild Cookery Book shields its constructs of race behind the 'poetry' of Shakespeare. Like the braille Milton discussed by Taylor Hare, this book both provides agency and community to a partially disenfranchised group, but it does so at the cost of further marginalising those already more harshly disadvantaged than they. This section finishes with an essay about sexuality, a category that has more recently come to the fore of book history in the form of Queer Bibliography (see Noble and Pyke 2024). Michael Durrant traces the four surviving copies of Henry Hills' *The Life*, which have come down to us in a non-linear mode that resists the kind of stemmatic 'lineage' often deployed in textual bibliography and genetic criticism. The material forms of these books reflect the representations of Hills's own sexuality to be found within them, in which his Ranter politics were bound up with his queer identity.

Just as this special issue of *JEMS* foregrounds how new material forms can transform old texts, and how new scholarly interests can interrupt old narratives and make different aspects of these texts newly visible, so too our own organisation of these essays might easily have been different. Other threads weave their way through the present volume, which highlight both newer and long-standing conversations in book history. Paratexts, for example, have been established as significant sites of meaning-making since Gerard Genette's foundational 1987 book, followed more recently by Helen Smith and Louise Wilson's 2011 edited collection, Deborah Shuger's 2022 monograph on Biblical paratexts, and many others. The articles here about the indexes of George Herbert's *The Temple*, the paratextual material of sixteenth-century European manuals and even the catalogue entries for Hans Sloane's donations enter this established conversation, but provide a timely intervention that intersects with the concerns of our moment around power and its slippage. Conversations around labour could be said to begin with the early twentieth-century establishment of bibliography as a discipline, with scholarly investigations into printshop practices and work habits, the structural organisation of and conflicts within the printing guilds, and the history of industry and manufacturing in the book trade. Here this work is made new by an emphasis on forms of power and exploitation that were largely invisible then, and by the incorporation of new forms of digital textuality and the labour that accompanies its production and dissemination. One pay-off of integrating the study of textual materiality into literary studies, art history, and the histories of science or theology is to foreground the work of contemporary archivists, cataloguers, and collectors as well as the early modern printers, binders, and typographers whose decisions and skills intervened in the making of a text and its semiotic force. Such scrutiny re-assesses whose work is and has historically been valued, and broadens the cast of figures brought into the spotlight by textual production.

While joining established yet fast-shifting scholarly debates around paratexts and labour, this special issue of *JEMS* also contributes to more recent theorising of the roles that access tools play in shaping our encounter with material texts. What does it mean to have a searchable digital database; how do such technologies enable and disable readings in contrast with those available to

early moderns? *The Politics of Book History: Then and Now* contributes as much to these nascent but urgent questions as it does to those of longer standing. The two-fold temporality that drives the present volume – a concern with the ‘then’ and the ‘now’ – extends to its participation in scholarly dialogue. Our arguments and claims are over thirty years in the making and yet the depth of these veins are such as to make it possible to continually strike new material.

This special issue of *JEMS* drives the cutting edge of our discipline while acknowledging the prior scholars and book-makers whose work has made new ways of thinking possible. The articles that follow also take this Janus-faced approach to their objects of study. *The Politics of Book History: Then and Now* is committed to the *longue durée* of early modern books, and yet it casts that *durée* as a circle rather than a line, drawing attention to the simultaneously backwards and forwards vision of texts, editions, reprints, catalogue entries, and digitisations, resisting any teleological narrative. Such are the politics of book history today. The articles contained in the present volume strive towards reparative and democratic forms of scholarship that nevertheless anticipate their interruption by new ways of thinking, of reading, of doing book history, that await us when ‘now’ becomes ‘then’.

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