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The history of book history is currently being written in two rather different ways. According to one narrative, book history is 'an important new discipline' (Robert Darnton) that has quickly established itself as a conspicuous presence in the humanities. According to another narrative, book history is not so new after all, but has been in existence, in various guises, bibliography, social history, etc., for quite a long time. While the former narrative has the advantage of describing a dynamic ascendancy, the latter approach can conveniently adopt seminal work of the past even though its authors may never have known that what they were engaged in was book history.

In *The Book History Reader*, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery have decided to have it both ways. In the introduction, they stress the discipline's recent rise and make the thought-provoking argument that its emergence 'partly derives from . . . a realization that the role [of print] has now been usurped by other media' (2–3). Yet this does not keep them from including material published as long ago as 1957, in Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader*. Nor do all the excerpts included in the *Reader* conform to the relatively narrow definition of 'book history' the editors presuppose in the introduction. Is Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' book history? Or, to put it differently, what understanding of book history would warrant the inclusion of a scholar like Wolfgang Iser ('Interaction between Text and Reader'), who emphatically does not deal with actual books or actual readers but with reception aesthetics? One of Finkelstein and McCleery's tasks in their all-too-short introduction (1–4) might have been to engage this question, thereby allowing readers to clarify what exactly they think book history is.

The two editors have divided their *Reader* into four parts, each preceded by a two-page introduction. Part One, 'What is Book History?', contains ex-
cerpts from the writings of six ground-breaking scholars with an undeniable impact on the history of the book: Robert Darnton (‘What Is the History of Books?’), D. F. McKenzie (‘The Book as an Expressive Form,’ from his seminal Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts), Jerome McGann (‘The Socialization of Texts,’ from the equally seminal Textual Condition), Roger Chartier (‘Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader’), Adrian Johns (‘The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book’) and Pierre Bourdieu (‘The Field of Cultural Production’). Part Two, with excerpts from the work of Walter Ong (from Orality and Literacy), Chartier, Jan-Dirk Müller, Elizabeth Eisenstein (from her monumental Printing Press as an Agent of Change), C. A. Bayly, and McKenzie, explores from a variety of perspectives the passage ‘From Orality to Literacy’. Part Three, ‘Commodifying Print: Books and Authors’, centres on examinations of the notion of the author, ranging from the now classic essays by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, to more recent work by Mark Rose, John Brewer, Jane Tompkins, John Sutherland, James L. W. West III, and N. N. Feltes. The final part on ‘Books and Readers’, drawing on the work of Wolfgang Iser, E. Jennifer Monaghan, Kate Flint, Jonathan Rose, Richard Altick, Stanley Fish, and Janice Radway, ranges from reception aesthetics to historical reading practices, from the nature of the act of reading itself to empirical studies of actual readers.

While it is hardly true that much of what The Book History Reader includes ‘is now out of print or impossible to access’ (i) – most well stocked libraries surely house most if not all of the volumes from which its texts have been excerpted – Finkelstein and McCleery have the merit of having made available an affordable volume that includes a good many seminal texts for the history of the book. Some will quarrel with the inclusion of an author like Iser, and many will regret the almost total absence of bibliography, whose key importance as the direct ancestor of book history is acknowledged in the introduction (2), but which is nowhere given adequate representation. Nevertheless, given the rapidly growing number of academic institutes, programmes and seminars devoted to book history, Finkelstein’s and McCleery’s Reader is likely to find a grateful readership.

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