describes Tschichold’s career in Europe, followed by a brief history of the Penguin firm, up to his arrival in England in 1946. The rest of the book describes and illustrates his work at Penguin, along with a summary of his legacy at the firm and for British publishing. Appendices reprinting Tschichold’s letters and documents relating to Penguin, as well as a “select list of publications by Jan Tschichold,” a resource bibliography, and an index, follow.

Compared with Baines’s paperback book, Doubleday’s book is certainly a more elegant production, based on the principles laid out by Tschichold. But both books have their charms: potential readers will have to base their decision on the very different claims of each. Baines’s book is a survey of 70 years, and what he relates in a few paragraphs, Doubleday details in an entire book. If you want a comprehensive history of the company, then Baines’s Penguin by Design is an excellent survey. If your focus is on Tschichold and European design, then Doubleday’s Jan Tschichold, Designer would be better. Neither duplicates the other, and libraries, collectors, and book historians would profit from having both on their shelves.

RANDALL SPELLER
Art Gallery of Ontario


This little book (only 77 pages in length, excluding notes and bibliography) had its genesis in a paper written for a SHARP conference in 2000. Howsam tells us that she was part of an interdisciplinary panel discussing the academic positioning of book history; a comparative volume projected by the panel never got off the ground, and Howsam decided to set forth her own position here. As a historian, she acknowledges that the main question she asks of “the book” – how it might illuminate past cultures – is fundamentally different to those a literary scholar or a bibliographer would ask, but she stresses the adaptability of the discipline itself and its comfortable position in the middle of a triangle formed by the three traditional disciplines. The first two chapters of Old Books and New Histories, then, offer an overview of the various disciplinary approaches to the subject, including the thorny problem of what to call what it is we do,
and the academic power struggles evident in such debates. Examples from the published work of practitioners such as Janice Radway on readership history and James Raven on bibliographic surveys are given as examples of the variety of approaches possible.

Chapter 3 begins with Darnton's well-known and frequently reproduced "communications circuit." It is 25 years old now, and has been modified and criticised by others, but remains the starting point from which new students of the discipline enter the field. Summarising the objections of G. Thomas Tanselle to the Darnton model, and the inverted model offered as an alternative by Adams and Barker, Howsam points out again the occasional difficulties that book history has had in finding a secure home, much in the same way that Women's Studies departments are uneasily positioned in traditional Arts faculties. The Women's Studies example is relevant too in terms of Howsam's questioning of the language Adams and Barker utilize in their description of bibliography as the "handmaiden" to history; she points out that neither History nor English departments have done much to address the place of class, gender, or ethnicity in the study of the book. The resistance of book historians to theory is also noted; Peter McDonald's use of books as case studies to which cultural theory is applied is presented as an example of the successful adaptation of the Darnton approach. The chapter ends with a potentially explosive question: "Might it be that scholarship like this [the work of McDonald, Adrian Johns, James Secord], using the book as an intellectual approach and a way to open up interpretive possibilities, is even more fruitful than the sort of studies that focus inward upon the complexities of books for their own sake?" The answer is, of course, yes. In my own university, the history of the book as a material object is taught at the MA level in the English Department, but the History Department also contains a historian of scientific publishing, as well as a cultural historian whose research includes nineteenth-century Irish-language publishing. The result is a fruitful exchange of ideas and teaching methods, rather than a struggle for dominance or disciplinary protectionism.

Chapter 4 tries to tease out the problems inherent in placing book history within traditional history departments, and concludes that "no consequential history of books and the cultures they inhabit will be possible until historians take mutability, not fixity, as their starting point." In other words, periodization and the tyranny of place are both seen as hindrances to a fuller understanding of the way the book works across cultures; Howsam reminds us that some of the
most interesting questions arising from national histories of the book
(and there are many already published and in train) concern ways in
which “book-trade similarities from one nation to another perhaps
outweigh their national differences.”

The familiar Eisenstein-Johns debate about the cultural transmission
of print forms the basis for a larger discussion in Chapter 5 about
where new students of book history will take the discipline in the
future. This new generation embraces the interdisciplinary nature of
their study; these are students who, rather than hankering after the
textual fixity traditional bibliography seemed to offer, understand
instability as part of the inherent “malleability of all discursive forms”
(as Howsam quotes Leah Marcus). At the end of the book, Howsam
returns to her central three questions: Is book history possible? Is book
history actually history at all? What is the history of the book for?
She finds the answers in a re-declaration of the primacy of all three
strands of book history: history, bibliography, literary scholarship,
and the informing, illuminating influence they have on each other,
while maintaining the importance of their independence. After all,
the questions they ask of the book are fundamentally different, and
what they mean by both “history” and “book” differ. Ultimately,
Howsam sees new scholars of book history continuing to approach
the subject from whatever discipline they find themselves in, and
continuing to welcome, through cordial interaction at conferences and
in shared teaching environments, the possibilities of “an undisciplined
discipline.”

The advantages of this text for the neophyte are many: it’s readable;
it’s short; its bibliography is extensive and current; its notes do exactly
what notes should: offer further analysis, asides, comparisons, and
form a parallel, intimate narrative that the reader may peruse, or not,
just as she likes. Though it is intended as a general introduction to the
subject, Old Books and New Histories is equally useful as a review of
book history over the last 20 years, and a hopeful outline of possible
ways forward.

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