career of George Woodcock is one vector which will be easier to trace, thanks to Miller and Price's exhaustive description of the poetry magazines of twentieth-century Britain.

DAVID MCKNIGHT

University of Pennsylvania Libraries

David Pearson. *Books as History: The Importance of Books Beyond Their Texts*. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press; London: The British Library, 2008. 208 pp.; US \$49.95 ISBN 9781584562337

This book offers a fascinating, illustrated narrative on how the material form in which texts are transmitted conveys different kinds of historical meaning worthy of preserving. It is intended to raise awareness within a general audience about the various kinds of material evidence that are at play, to stimulate ideas about their value to scholarship, and to broaden the horizons for the future of books and collections. The author, currently the director of the University of London Research Library Services and a reputable scholar in the field of book history, skilfully achieves these goals.

Pearson opens the discussion with the theme "Books in History," using a rather startling mix of examples, in which he situates the book as the key medium of communication throughout the ages. He goes on to place the book within the current context of the rapid transformations of the digital age, pointing to the enhanced circulation and accessibility of texts and to the "interactive frameworks within which subjects can be explored, and knowledge shared, in new ways" (13). Getting down to the impact of books on readers, Pearson notes that unlike parallel communication platforms in which new media usually supplement the text, "the threat, or promise, of the e-book is that it will replace the physical format of the book by becoming a completely accessible, or improved, surrogate, without changing the communicative experience in any significant way" (15). With all of the massive initiatives to reconvert the contents of books and manuscripts to digital format, Pearson predicts that the time will come when an electronic option and the device to read it on will be available for most texts people want to read.

Books as text are part of the history of communication and open to all kinds of surrogacy, but as objects they can be studied in a different

way. How do we study the “Book as History”? We do so by looking beyond the text and taking into account the copy-specific evidence held in the material object, which has already opened vast new territories of study. For Pearson, we are at the right moment in time to “recognize that books may be history in an entirely positive sense” (25). Pearson provides a convincing construction of that argument as he takes the reader through the various angles from which to examine the physical characteristics of the book.

In the section describing the printing process of the hand-press period, Pearson discusses the range of possible errors that could be made during the manufacture of books, resulting in a slew of unique copies, with which we can better understand print-house operations. First and last impressions of a title could be different if the printer subtracted or added material, such as errata slips or cancel leaves, the latter of which can be significant evidence in revealing authorial intention or contemporary political sensitivities. Paper quality can be another distinguishing factor in copies of the same title and Pearson gives a fine example of the great multivolume polyglot Bible printed by Christopher Plantin in the sixteenth century which was offered for sale on four different types of paper, or on vellum, variously priced according to quality (89); this variety opens up investigations into readership.

Pearson is careful throughout to explain why these differences matter. The chapter entitled “Variety Through Ownership” explores “the traces of individual history each copy retains” (93). Pearson’s vast knowledge of provenance, published in his earlier work, *Provenance Research in Book History*, does compel him to expand on this topic more than on any other. Even though his purpose restricts him to only a brief exposition of the kinds of evidence accumulated from the manufacture, handling, binding, retailing, and ownership of a particular book, it is an exciting succession of examples and makes for the most convincing chapter on why materiality matters.

The concluding chapter deals with “Values for the Future.” In short, it is all about choices: what are the criteria that should be applied to the acquisition or preservation of a new or rare book? This is a difficult question for those held accountable for expenditure and relevance in libraries. Pearson answers that question by insisting that a vital consideration is “the extent to which it possesses interesting characteristics of its own which are not replicated in whatever surrogate or alternative that is proposed” (182).

Pearson's approach is visual. All of the illustrations are in colour and many are wonderful examples of the milestones in printing history. A few shortcomings exist in the production of the volume, such as an inscription which is illegible on the image, yet not provided in the caption (138–39), or as in the case of two Shakespeare First Folio bindings, in which the images are of different sizes, making the comparison difficult to fully grasp (150–51). There is also the question of the chapter "Variety Between Copies" which should have been placed before the "Future," since it still proves the point about the value of evidence.

The selection of examples is based on Pearson's long experience in handling remarkable copies. This expertise is immensely beneficial to the outcome of the book, inspirational to readers, and should be convincing to decision-makers in archives and libraries that books are essential artifacts for scholarship and intricately part of the "fabric of our cultural heritage" (183).

ANN MARIE HOLLAND

McGill University