macro-économique et la diffusion européenne à l’époque moderne, est à déplorer.

Les études présentées tant pendant le colloque que dans les actes ont un caractère fortement scientifique et sont d’une qualité et d’une profondeur qu’on retrouve rarement dans des études portant sur un personnage et, plus spécifiquement, sur un imprimeur. Beaucoup de questions ont été posées, certaines ont trouvé réponses, d’autres non, de nouvelles questions se sont également ajoutées. La conclusion de Richard Cooper, d’ailleurs excellente, aborde quelques-unes de ces questions et des nouvelles pistes de recherches ont été mises de l’avant. Un second colloque Quid novi? sera certainement nécessaire, puisque ce ne sont pas les idées, les chercheurs, ni l’intérêt qui manquent.

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The seasoned reader who arrives at the endpapers of a Penguin Classic or Oxford World’s Classics paperback knows that another treat remains in store: beyond the final chapter lie the lists itemizing additional works Penguin and O.U.P. will sell you. “Read more in Penguin,” that publisher urges you, and then, in a sub-heading, indicates why compliance with that directive might be in your interest: the sub-heading identifies the titles that follow as “a choice of classics.” These rosters of titles also provide bookish consumers a way to chart their personal intellectual progress though the canon – as the now somewhat embarrassing check marks and calculations that I deposited in the endpapers of my paperbacks in my youth disclose. In this way, these lists supply something that Thomas F. Bonnell identifies very well while describing the advertising apparatus that the English bookseller Charles Cooke incorporated into his wares in the 1790s. Cooke, “a full-service purveyor of the English classics,” publisher of series entitled Cooke’s Select British Novels, Cooke’s Pocket Edition of Select British Poets, Cooke’s Sacred Classics, etc., was as aware as his descendants at Penguin and Oxford of how an “Enumeration of the Works Published” – printed on the wrappers
of Cooke volumes – would provide the reader, in Bonnell’s terms, with “the satisfactions of keeping track, accounting for books owned and books yet to be purchased” (239).

In this lively and valuable study, Bonnell demonstrates that this tight linkage of aspirational reading and the passions of the collector, of the drive to be well read and the drive to possess and display a complete set, was the work of a particular historical moment. *The Most Disreputable Trade* is about the intertwined innovations in bookselling and in configurations of canonicity that lay behind the publication, from 1765 on, of uniformly printed, multi-author series with titles such as *Works of the British Poets* or *The Poetical Magazine: or, Parnassian Library* – books that their compilers marketed as sets, sometimes alongside matching bookcases and travelling-cases. Shaped by efforts to advocate for the “native classics” and provide them the “tribute” of (in John Bell’s words in 1777) a “general and uniform publication,” this eighteenth-century publishing phenomenon not only anticipates Penguin’s and Oxford’s respective series (cited 7). Thanks to the nationalist rhetoric of the entrepreneurs, it resembles even more nearly such projects as the Library of America or, closer to home, McClelland and Stewart’s canon-forming New Canadian Library.

As he recounts the history of these new methods of packaging, promoting, and selling literary texts, Bonnell’s central claim is that the first step in the processes of canon-formation that underlie the discipline of English studies was the establishment of a material infrastructure for canonicity. The “multi-volume collections reified the idea of the English classics” (13): the visual uniformity linking the individual volumes also connected the poets housed within them, itself made an argument for very different poets’ common membership in a national tradition. Urging this insight, Bonnell frames his study as a corrective to such books as Trevor Ross’s *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (1998) or Richard Terry’s *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past, 1660–1781* (2001). His proposal is that the story of canonicity, of the invention of Literature with a capital L, is less a development in the history of aesthetic theory or historiography, as these two and others have suggested, than it is a chapter in the history of books and their marketing. In the mid-seventeenth century the poems and plays of Ben Jonson had been promoted, in a novel formula, as deserving to be “read as Classick Authors” were read – and promoted, likewise, as worthy of institutional preservation alongside Greek and Latin texts.
But it was the enterprising eighteenth-century booksellers Bonnell studies, who through their series found new ways of turning books into other books, who really convinced the British public that texts by their countrymen deserved that epithet, “classic.” In another development with far-reaching implications for how Literature would henceforth be understood and consumed, these booksellers also make it hard to think poetry apart from lives of the poets. Biographical prefaces were standard features of their series.

The central drama of this book, to which Bonnell devotes three of its ten chapters, involves the tug-of-war between, on the one hand, the bookseller John Bell in Edinburgh and, on the other hand, the London booksellers who responded to the “invasion of [what they called their] literary property” that Bell’s reprints of English classics represented by launching their own competing collection and convincing Samuel Johnson to write prefaces for it (cited 132). This battle for market share gave rise to the phrase that Bonnell borrows for his book’s title. In a gloomy letter sent to a brother bookseller in 1778, William Strahan expressed his alarm over the Law Lords’ decision in the case of Donaldson v. Becket four years earlier, which had, in upholding a limited term of copyright, terminated by this means the London proprietors’ monopoly ownership of the English classics. The decision, Strahan felt, spelled the end of their profession’s gentility and made publishing “the most pitiful, beggarly, precarious, unprofitable, and disreputable Trade in Britain” (cited 169). John Bell, by contrast, celebrated the dissemination of the literary heritage that the decision enabled, cheerfully cultivated the lower end of the market, and described his vending of reprints in small-format editions as an enterprise centred on “reducing the best Works of Literature from their cumbersome and inconvenient magnitude” (cited 107; 345). In Bell’s estimation, cheapening English poetry, initiating an expanded audience into the rites of literary consumerism by doing so, was an emancipatory act.

Bonnell’s inspired research into the handbills, prospectuses, advertisements, and puffing reviews that these entrepreneurial booksellers issued makes for an often ebullient account of their schemes and marketing ploys. Then again, his determination to do justice to the richness of this archive sometimes crowds out a more thoughtful elaboration of his core concepts – canon most saliently. Furthermore, less interested in poems than books containing them, The Most Disreputable Trade does not really equip us to investigate how the reading of poetry might have changed when poets came
to be conceptualized more emphatically than before as members of that large corporate body, “The English Poets.” Bonnell remarks interestingly on the engraved frontispieces and illustrations adorning the poetry collections, but otherwise his gaze does not often extend beyond the outside of books to their insides. He does not often engage how in these various editions the poems ended up looking on the page, nor does he engage the kinds of questions about the impact of the anthologizing impulse that Anne Ferry posed in *Tradition and the Individual Poem: An Inquiry into Anthologies* (2001).

These limitations might well be considered, however, advantages – since thanks to his determination to do justice not to poets, nor poet-lovers but instead to those innovative eighteenth-century gentlemen who called themselves “the best judges of vendible poetry” (169), Thomas Bonnell has managed to write a book that will be read with profit by a wide audience. Students of marketing as well as of literary history will learn from it. It is a fascinating demonstration of how much bibliography can contribute to cultural history.

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In his 1997 keynote address to the founding conference of the History of the Book in Canada project, Robert A. Gross remarked that book history is uncharted territory: “with hazy boundaries and fluid forms, it awaits our clear-sighted forays in what promises to be a rich, collaborative, transnational community of scholars.”¹ *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850–1950*, jointly published in Canada and Great Britain, offers one such clear-sighted foray into that still largely uncharted territory. Leslie Howsam, history professor at the University of Windsor and current President of the international Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), occupies a central position in that transnational community of scholars.