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.

Past into Print is an exploration of the publishing history of history in Britain. Located at the intersection of historiography, cultural history, bibliography, and the history of the book, it explores four interconnected themes: the life cycle of the reader, the agency of the publisher, the tension between academic and popular accounts of the past, and the materiality of the history book. These themes are constructed over a one-hundred-year span, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, against the backdrop of a historiographical shift from narrative to empirically-based history and the cultural, political, and economic shift from an imperial Britain to an inward-looking welfare state. The book’s five chapters are based on the five Lyell Lectures in Bibliography that Howsam delivered at the University of Oxford in 2006, to which she added an epilogue, extensive endnotes, a bibliography, and a chronology of events, appointments, and publications. Her chief source was correspondence between historian authors and their publishers, located in publishers’ archives and historians’ private collections.

Howsam offers the framework of the life cycle of the reader as a contrast to Robert Darnton’s communication circuit model, which, in her view, simplifies relationships among publisher, printer, binder, bookseller, and reader, at the cost of reducing complex social structures to token individuals. She suggests that taking the reader’s perspective offers a rationale for beginning with books for children and moving forward in time with the reader’s life to those for adolescents and for adults, for common readers and for apprentice historians, and eventually for scholarly peers. This approach places children’s popular history books and textbooks more centrally than is usually the case in book history. She contends that schoolbooks and schoolbook publishing deserve greater scholarly attention due to their impact on publisher profits, their status throughout the period under examination as the locus for the creation of national pride and a sense of ethnic and racial superiority, and the fact that textbooks and popular histories were the only forms of history which most people ever encountered. She also claims that readers took them seriously and remembered what they had read. With regard to the economic value of textbooks for publishers, Howsam includes an apt quote from Cambridge University Press Secretary S.C. Roberts, who in a chance meeting with medievalist Eileen Powers, encouraged her to write a children’s history book. When Powers remarked that the Press only published “tombstones,” Roberts responded, “How do you think we can provide the money for your tombstones if we don’t
have the chance of making it on something more popular.” Writer Edith Thompson’s school history of England remained in print for 50 years and sold about 250,000 copies. Boys at City of London School habitually referred to the book as “my Edith.” Anecdotes such as these, gleaned from the sources, are sprinkled throughout the book, greatly enlivening the narrative.

The second theme is an exploration of the claim that publishers exercise significant agency when it comes to the representation of history in books. Howsam contends that studies in book and publishing history fail to sufficiently acknowledge the role of the publisher and editors, leaving the impression that historians are self-published. She uses periodization as an example of publisher agency with regard to content, pointing to books in a series, where publisher requirements of length and format “constrain the historical imagination” by imposing external limitations on periodization. Her examination of publisher agency reveals the sometimes difficult nature of relations between publisher and author. The most pointed example comes from the self-conscious historian Arthur Bryant, who commented in a querulous postscript to a 1935 letter to Cambridge University Press about terms, format, and promotion of his Samuel Pepys biography: “I suppose you all hate me. And I’m afraid this is a very Pepysian document. Perhaps some poor devil doing a thesis on the relations of publisher and author will stumble on it 200 years hence.” Howsam comments editorially that it took her only about 70 years to fulfill Bryant’s gloomy prophecy.

The third theme pertains to the tensions between academic and popular historical accounts, or between esteem and profit, as Howsam puts it. Between the 1870s and 1920s academic history became increasingly “scientific,” meaning that it became based in the idea that objective analysis of documentary evidence could lead to accurate and “truthful” accounts of the past which could be replicated. This shift served to widen the gap between academic and popular history. Academics increasingly wrote for a limited audience of other academics, scorning attempts to reach a broader readership. As historian Sir Robert Seeley put it, “All that is necessary [for popularization] is systematic exaggeration and occasional falsification.” At the same time, there was broad public interest in narrative popular histories and they were often very lucrative for their authors. Howsam points to the series format and book size as the two most striking aspects of the fourth theme, the materiality of books. She sees materiality as most evident in the series format, which chopped
history up into manageable chunks bound together in arbitrary and uniform packages. As for size, historians spent years working on so-called big books, while expeditiously dashing off little books for profit. Ironically, the little books, or “stories for the nursery,” considered insignificant by historians, often had far larger print-runs, a much larger audience, and were much more profitable than their weightier tomes. The theme of materiality is inextricably tied to the themes of publisher agency and the tensions between academic and popular historical accounts.

In the epilogue Howsam identifies four cross-cutting themes that became apparent in revising her lectures for the book format – attitudes towards women historians, projects of collaboration including the editing of series, the importance of periodical publication, and the use of history books to make transatlantic and indeed transnational communities. She mentions that she will explore these themes in future work. However, the first is already present. Although she does not address gender as a particular theme, it is a subtext which emerges unbidden into the main text time and time again. For example, she describes instances of male historians who acted as mentors and patrons of women authors, finding “highly teachable” women who produced “baby histories” for the popular market or for schoolchildren. It is evident from her examples that the attitudes of eminent male historians toward women’s historical endeavours ranged from patronizing to dismissive.

Past into Print examines the history book as a material artifact situated within a complex set of evolving relationships. These include the economically and academically based relationships of author and publisher; the gendered cultural relationships involving male academics and female “popular” or schoolbook writers who worked under their tutelage; and scholarly rivalries fuelled by competing perspectives on the pursuit of history. This book will be welcomed with great interest by cultural and book historians, historians of education, bibliographers, and scholars of literary history.

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