There is a detailed index of personal and institutional names, along with some broad subject entries.

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David Pearson. *Books as History: The Importance of Books Beyond Their Texts*. London, England: The British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2011. 208 pp.; US \$29.95 ISBN 9781584562900

In the foreword to this second edition of *Books as History: The Importance of Books Beyond Their Texts*, author David Pearson clearly states the work's two aims: "Primarily, [this book] is about the various ways in which books can be interesting as artefacts, as objects with individual histories and design characteristics, beyond whatever value they have in the texts they convey. The ways in which books are made, owned, written in, mutilated and bound all add something to the documentary heritage which is central to the record of human civilisation. The second theme is around the importance of seeing this, at a time when the world of books is in flux, and the need for them is questioned as their traditional functions are increasingly undertaken by electronic media" (5). While the reference to "human civilisation" is a bit misleading considering Pearson focuses mostly on British book history, this work does generally accomplish both aims. Pearson is clearly passionate about his topic, and he succeeds in providing an engaging and informative introduction to books as meaningful cultural objects – as not only texts, but also "containers of texts." Significantly, he does so through extensive use of photos of books: he *shows* the reader how these books matter in ways beyond the words they contain, by letting images of covers, bindings, illustrations, and marginalia prove it. While one is, of course, taught never to judge a book by its cover, Pearson suggests that covers, and all other paratextual elements, in fact have much to tell about a book's history.

Pearson begins his work, which would be of interest to scholars of book culture, manuscript studies, and European cultural history, with a chapter on books in history, in which he also refers to the history of bibliography itself. This section offers a basic introduction to the topic; while Pearson's mention of bibliographer Don McKenzie, who studied the sociology of texts and "how the material form in

which texts are transmitted influences their meaning” (22) is helpful, there are a number of other important scholars who might have been mentioned here, such as Harold Love, Roger Chartier, Mirjam Foot, and others. In chapter 2, Pearson focuses on book design, including type and letter forms, illustration and decoration, and books as art; in later chapters he also discusses covers, bindings, and, in a limited way, paper (though not ink). Some of this material is, of course, as relevant to digital media as books: type, illustration, and decoration are just as important in web design, for example, as book design, a point Pearson seemingly overlooks. The positive aspect of this oversight, however, is that, despite the second aim outlined above, Pearson does not dwell on the move away from print books in a digital age in a defensive or paranoid way. Instead, to his credit, Pearson points out that the world is always changing, and he compares the current digital revolution to the early modern revolution of the printing press over manuscript production (which Margaret Ezell, Patricia Fumerton, and other scholars remind us was anything but smooth and complete). Rather than dwelling on the change, Pearson instead expresses his sincere love of books and his belief in their continued relevance as a unique form.

Anyone who appreciates old books and has experienced the thrill of discovering centuries-old handwritten marginalia in a copy she was holding would likely agree with Pearson that books’ importance extends beyond their content. However, there is something slightly unsettling about placing *too* much emphasis on the book as artefact, at least when, as in *Books as History*, the textual element is entirely ignored. While the textual meaning of books is not the focus of this work, the particular relationship between the book as a material object and the text contained within deserves some consideration. For if, as Pearson notes, the design of a book influences our reading of the text, then surely the medium of the book does the same; I was somewhat surprised, for example, that Pearson does not directly discuss the differences between manuscripts and print books. And in terms of the relationship between a book and its text, he might have considered a work such as *Don Quixote*. As Quixote actually becomes aware that he has been written (so that before, he imitated books, whereas now the world – in the book – imitates him), and as Cervantes directly responds, in the second part of his book, to the imposter sequel published after the first part, here is a case in which the book and the text are absolutely dependent upon the other for their very existence.

Pearson is decidedly more thorough in his discussion of the relationship between books and their readers. In emphasizing that marginalia and other paratextual additions have only recently been valued as illuminating the thoughts and values of the reader, he reminds us that just as telling as additions are the ways in which books have suffered deletions and other mutilations during periods of censorship relating to religious or political events. It is for this reason that books should always be passed on rather than discarded; as Pearson writes, “[a] degree of recycling of ownership is arguably a good thing for books, especially if we are interested in the historical veneers which different custodians create” (178). Thankfully, even when books were discarded in the past, the “waste” paper was often used to create new bindings; Pearson writes that many works of William Caxton, England’s first printer, are only known today because they have been discovered recycled in later bindings. Of course, many more books are lost forever, and Pearson’s reference to pages being used to wrap butter or line pie cases made me recall chestnuts I once bought in Spain, which came wrapped in a child’s math notes; a few centuries before and these could have been pages from the aforementioned *Don Quixote*.

In his chapter on libraries, Pearson points out that books contain value not only individually, but also collectively – and this is a clear deficiency of electronic texts, which can never provide an equivalent experience to walking into a library. Just as a book accumulates history over time, it also accumulates meaning spatially, in relation to other works in a collection. Owners collect and organize books in unique ways, and thus both personal and institutional libraries capture tastes and interests at a certain point in time. This chapter is followed by another on values for the future, in which Pearson returns to a full discussion of electronic texts, and then a case study of four books of the same text and very different histories. Read in light of all that has gone before, these final chapters – which can be seen as a final contrast of forms – are particularly thought provoking and encourage the reader to contemplate the double meaning of the title *Books as History*.

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