‘This varied collection of richly-detailed case studies has something to offer scholars in a wide range of fields.’
Leah Price, Distinguished Professor and Director of Rutgers Book Initiative

Reveals the experience of reading in many cultures and across the ages

Bringing together the latest scholarship from all over the world on topics ranging from reading practices in ancient China to the workings of the twenty-first-century reading brain, the four volumes of the Edinburgh History of Reading demonstrate that reading is a deeply imbricated, socio-political practice, at once personal and public, defiant and obedient. It is often materially ephemeral, but it can also be emotionally and intellectually enduring.

Modern Readers explores the myriad places and spaces in which reading has typically taken place since the eighteenth century, from the bedrooms of the English upper classes, through large parts of nineteenth-century Africa and on-board ships and trains travelling the world, to twenty-first-century reading groups. It encompasses a range of genres from science fiction, music and self-help to Government propaganda.

Mary Hammond is Professor of English and Book History at the University of Southampton.
The Edinburgh History of Reading: Modern Readers
Bringing together the latest scholarship from all over the world on topics ranging from reading practices in ancient China to the workings of the twenty-first-century reading brain, the four volumes of *The Edinburgh History of Reading* demonstrate that reading is a deeply imbricated, socio-political practice, at once personal and public, defiant and obedient. It is often materially ephemeral, but it can also be emotionally and intellectually enduring.

*Early Readers*, edited by Mary Hammond  
*Modern Readers*, edited by Mary Hammond  
*Common Readers*, edited by Jonathan Rose  
*Subversive Readers*, edited by Jonathan Rose
The Edinburgh History of Reading: Modern Readers

Edited by Mary Hammond
Contents

List of Figures, Plates and Tables vii
List of Contributors ix

Introduction
Mary Hammond 1

1 The Rise of Night Reading in Nineteenth-Century Britain
Christopher Ferguson 9

2 The Book as Prop in the Missionary Imagination: Picturing Africans as Readers
Natalie Fossey and Lize Kriel 30

3 Augustus De Morgan (1806–71), His Reading and His Library
Karen Attar 62

4 William Gladstone Reads His Contemporaries
Michael Wheeler 83

5 Reading While Travelling in the Long Nineteenth Century
Mary Hammond 104

6 The Empire Reads Back: Travel, Exploration and the British World in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries
John McAleer 124

7 ‘Knowledge of books’ and ‘Appreciation of literature’: Reading Choices of Aspiring American Librarians in the Progressive Era
Christine Pawley 145

8 Papers, Posters and Pamphlets: UK Readers in the Second World War
Simon Eliot 165

9 Peace of Mind in the Age of Anxiety: Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman and America’s Post-war Therapeutic Faith
Cheryl Oestreicher 185
Contents

10 Reading and Classical Music in Mid-Twentieth-Century America
   Joan Shelley Rubin 206

11 Remaking the World Through Reading: Books, Readers and the Global Project of Modernity, 1945–70
   Amanda Laugesen 226

12 Amazing Stories, 1950–3: The Readers Behind the Covers
   Angelle Whavers 250

13 The Other Digital Divide: Gendering Science Fiction Fan Reading in Print and Online, 1930 to the Present
   Cait Coker 264

14 ‘A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast’ (Matthew Arnold, ‘The Buried Life’): A Methodology for Literary Reading in the Twenty-First Century
   Philip Davis and Josie Billington 283

Select Bibliography 306
Index of Methods and Sources 334
General Index 335
Figures, Plates and Tables

Figures

1.1 Thomas Gray’s illustration accompanying W.T.’s poem ‘In the Firelight’  21
2.1 ‘Rev. Moffat’s Preaching Journey’ 38
2.2 ‘Sermon’ 39
2.3 ‘Eromonga Youth Preaching on the Ship’ 40
2.4 Engraving after Missionary Carl Hoffmann’s drawing (Plate 5) 40
2.5 Missionary teacher surrounded by pupils 42
2.6 A woman school teacher with a book in her left hand makes sure the children’s hands are clean 43
2.7 A little white girl reading to a black family 43
2.8 According to the Caliver Bilderbuch, an image of Jakob Okofi, a young Christian from Niger who showed great interest in English books, c. 1863 45
2.9 Grandfather and grandson instructing [one another] 46
2.10 A frequently reproduced photograph of two evangelists of the Berlin Mission in conversation over two books 48
2.11 Advantages of mission education: Carl Hoffmann’s illustration of an enthusiastic African reader 49
2.12 Abegu and Durugu, the two youths who assisted with the translation of the Bible into Hausa, depicted in England in the 1850s 51
2.13 A photograph of Joel Modiba with an open Bible in the veld 52
4.1 Upper part of page 60 of Gladstone’s copy of John Henry Newman, Apologia Pro Vita Sua 87
4.2 Page 11 of Gladstone’s copy of H. R. F. Bourne et al., John Stuart Mill 92
5.1 John Tenniel’s illustration for page 53 of Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There 109
12.1 Gender breakdown of Amazing Stories’ letter-writers between 1950 and 1953 259
14.1 ‘Hands’. Photograph by Joe Magee 283
14.2 Using physiological data to examine the effects of literature 297

Plates

1 Robert Braithwaite Martineau, *The Last Chapter* (1863)
2 A. Courcell, *I am Tird of Reading!* (c. 1810)
3 A. Courcell, *So am I of Working!* (c. 1810)
4 Self-portrait of missionary Carl Hoffmann, from his private diary: ‘In the garden of the Mission House on Arkona Mission Station, Transvaal, South Africa’
5 Preaching scene in Mashonaland by Missionary Carl Hoffmann, from his private diary
6 The History Room, Gladstone’s Library, containing the Gladstone Foundation Collection
7 Vittore Carpaccio, *The Dream of St Ursula* (1497–8)
8 Pierre Auguste Cot, *Pause for Thought/Ophelia* (1870)
9 Abraham Solomon, *First Class – The Meeting and at First Meeting Loved* (1855)
10 Abraham Solomon, *Second Class – The Parting: ‘Thus part we rich in sorrow, parting poor’* (1854)
11 Abraham Solomon, *First Class: The Meeting . . . and at First Meeting Loved* (1854) (original version)
12 Augustus Leopold Egg, *The Travelling Companions* (1862)
13 Agnes Cleve-Jonand, *Train Compartment* (c. 1920)
14 *Amazing Stories*, October 1950. A typical ‘sexy’ cover
15 *Amazing Stories*, August 1952. A more conservative cover after readers demanded more attention to science and less to the female body
16 *Amazing Stories*, September 1952

Tables

12.1 Gender breakdown of the readership of *Amazing Stories*, 1950–3 260
Contributors

Karen Attar is the Curator of Rare Books at Senate House Library and a research fellow at the Institute of English Studies, both University of London. Her major publication is the third edition of the Directory of Rare Book and Special Collections in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (2016). She has published widely on library history, especially pertaining to the University of London.

Josie Billington is Professor in English at the University of Liverpool. Her publications include Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Shakespeare (2012) and scholarly editions of George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She has published extensively on the power of literary reading to influence mental health, including as the author of Is Literature Healthy? (2016) and as the editor of Reading and Mental Health (2019).

Cait Coker is Associate Professor and Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and completed her doctoral degree in literature from Texas A&M University in 2019. She is co-editor of the Women in Book History Bibliography (http://www.womensbookhistory.org) and Senior Bibliographer of the Science Fiction Research Index. She frequently publishes on genre history and women in book history.

Philip Davis is Professor of English and sometime Director of CRILS (Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society) at the University of Liverpool. He is general editor of the ‘Literary Agenda’ series at Oxford University Press in which his book Reading and the Reader: The Literary Agenda appeared in 2013, and of a new Oxford University Press series, ‘My Reading’.

Simon Eliot is Professor Emeritus of the History of the Book at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. He was involved in founding the Reading Experience
Database; the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP); and London Rare Books School. He has published on quantitative book history, publishing history, history of lighting, library history and the history of reading. He was general editor of the four-volume *History of Oxford University Press* (2013–17) and recently directed a large-scale project on the communication history of the Ministry of Information, 1939–46, the first publication of which is *Allied Communication to the Public During the Second World War* (2019).

**Christopher Ferguson** is Associate Professor of History at Auburn University. He is the author of *An Artisan Intellectual: James Carter and the Rise of Modern Britain, 1792–1853* (2016). He is currently writing a book on the history of Christmas in nineteenth-century Britain.

**Natalie Fossey** is a printmaker and fine arts lecturer in the School of the Arts University of Pretoria, working in printmaking, drawing and print culture. She developed her interests at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, receiving a Master of Arts in Fine Art (MAFA) (Cum Laude). She has exhibited in a number of group shows, most recently ‘Drawing Conclusions’, at Pretoria Art Association, curated by Diane Victor. Her most recent publication was a chapter co-authored with Lize Kriel, ‘The “Reading African” in the Hierarchy of Others as Visualised in the Periodical Der Missionsfreund, Early 20th Century’ (in the book *Menschen – Bilder – Eine Welt*, 2018).


**Lize Kriel** is Professor of Visual Culture Studies in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. She is interested in the production of historical knowledge, with a specific focus on the intersections

**Amanda Laugesen** is a historian and lexicographer, and is currently Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre and Associate Professor at the Australian National University. She has published widely on Australian as well as US history, including on the history of the book. Her most recent monographs are *Taking Books to the World: American Publishers and the Cultural Cold War* (2017) and *Globalizing the Library: Librarians and Development Work 1945–1970* (2019).

**John McAleer** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Southampton. He was previously Curator of Imperial and Maritime History at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. His work explores the British encounter and engagement with the wider world, situating the history of empire in its global and maritime contexts. His monographs include *Representing Africa: Landscape, Exploration and Empire in Southern Africa, 1780–1870* (2010), *Britain’s Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763–1820* (2016) and *Picturing India: People, Places and the World of the East India Company* (2017).

**Cheryl Oestreicher** is Head of Special Collections and Archives and an associate professor at Boise State University. She authored an article for *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* and has authored, edited and contributed to books, articles and conference proceedings about archival topics for the Society of American Archivists and Washington State University Press, *Archivaria, Provenance* and the Council on Library and Information Resources.

**Christine Pawley** is Professor Emerita at the Information School, University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was previously Director of the School and of the Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture. Her publications include *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (2001) and *Reading Places: Literacy, Democracy, and the Public Library in Cold War America* (2010).

Angelle Whavers is a recent graduate of Drew University with a bachelor’s degree in history. She is member of the Phi Alpha Theta and has worked as a dramaturg conducting research for the shows ‘Reaching Back to Move Forward’ (2016) and ‘Surely Goodness and Mercy’ (2017).

Michael Wheeler is a visiting professor of English at the University of Southampton. He founded the Ruskin Centre and the Ruskin Library at Lancaster University, and was then Professor of English at Southampton and Co-Director of Chawton House Library in its early days. His books include *Ruskin’s God* (2006), *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (1994), *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (2006), *St John and the Victorians* (2012) and *The Athenæum: 200 Years of ‘the brainiest club in the world’* (2020).
Introduction

Mary Hammond

What is a ‘modern reader’? How can historians reliably constitute him or her, or even begin to think about ‘modern readers’ collectively? *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* designates ‘early modern’ as ‘a period of European history broadly equivalent to that of the 16th and 17th centuries’,¹ but has no entry for ‘modern’. *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History*, however, gives the date parameters of ‘the modern’ as 1800–2000,² while the *Oxford Handbook of Modern African History* focuses on ‘the history of the continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although also looks back to the era of the Atlantic slave trade’.³ As these three scholarly works from the same stable – all with international contributors – imply, the idea of ‘the modern’ is not only different in different geographical locations, but changes according to the subject matter under review. ‘Literary terms’ appear to have a different timeline from ‘politics’, and ‘British politics’ to differ again in its modernity from ‘African history’. Perhaps more to the point for our purposes, who is not, in his or her own analysis, a ‘modern’ reader? The answer is probably no one; and since it is our contention that a history of reading must pay close attention to the self-constitution of its subjects, we begin this second volume of the *Edinburgh History of Reading* fully cognisant of the fact that ‘modern readers’ are as plural as their ‘early’ counterparts covered in the first volume, and that any attempt to periodise them is probably doomed to failure. That said, there are subtle but important methodological differences in the ways in which historians of reading must tackle subjects of different periods, and one of the foremost of these is a change in the type and quantity of evidence they have left (or indeed are still leaving) behind.

This second volume moves us from early (pre-nineteenth-century) readers and the methodological problems attendant on recovering and in some cases reconstructing the traces of their habits to readers in what we have (perhaps contentiously) termed the ‘modern’ world. This rich evidential tranche covers post-industrialisation Western
contexts in most cases, and the methods of recovery and analysis naturally therefore change accordingly, as increasing literacy rates and a corresponding increase in the accessibility and prevalence of a wide range of reading material in Western culture have led to a far richer and more accessible range of sources. Many readers began to leave traces of their habits and practices in this period. Judicial and media bodies also began to record them more comprehensively, and historians are thus faced with a new set of problems: how to capture and understand a body of evidence that is often overwhelming, but sometimes paradoxically skewed in favour of a particular gender, age group, ethnicity, profession or class.

The chapters in this volume apply a range of methods – from the empirical to the scientific, from an analysis of crime and accident reports through individual reader testimony to the deconstruction of official propaganda about reading – to make sense of this evidence. Christopher Ferguson (Chapter 1) raises a key issue here: reading requires not just material texts, but particular physical conditions. He uses his analysis of reading at night in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, drawing on autobiographies, newspaper accounts and Old Bailey proceedings, to situate many readers as caught between reading’s physical and ideological costs. ‘When choosing to read at night’, he argues, ‘ordinary readers embraced the economic and physical costs of reduced sleep, and the risk of fire, but gained the freedom to read, think and feel for themselves, free from interruptions or regulations’. This was surely true for ‘early’ readers also: and the late appearance of the kinds of evidence he examines is able to show us how we might fruitfully read backwards from the ‘modern’ situation.

We are careful, then, not to assume too radical a break with the past here. Many chapter authors, like Ferguson, dip back into the historical terrain covered by *Early Readers*. Readers in this sense serve as vibrant reminders that to be human is just as likely to be messy, stubborn, chaotic, eccentric and attached to tradition as it is to adhere to neat historical time slices or obediently go along with the march of progress, and that historiography had better take account of that fact. The methodological problems and potential solutions (like the time periods) are not, therefore, entirely distinct between these first two volumes of *The Edinburgh History of Reading*, although in many cases they need adjustment to take account of new problems. In their jointly authored chapter in the first volume, for example, Helwi Blom, Rindert Jagersma and Juliette Reboul discuss in detail some of the problems associated with using library catalogues as sources for reading history. In the present volume, too, Karen Attar notes in
Chapter 3, on the library of the nineteenth-century mathematician Augustus De Morgan, that library collections both are and are not evidence of reading, and that even marginalia are not totally reliable. As she explains, ‘De Morgan’s marginalia provide instances where annotation does not prove reading, or where it proves reading of a book other than the one in hand’. Messy readers indeed.

Michael Wheeler, however, finds in William Gladstone’s library not only irrefutable evidence of ownership and reading but also an extraordinary commitment to engaging critically with the publications of his contemporaries (Chapter 4). Gladstone’s annotations were made in his own private code and deciphering it has required a considerable amount of detective work. But these annotations – so often witty, perplexed, contemplative or even profoundly troubled – reveal an intensely personal experience that was – while far from typical for the period, given Gladstone’s social status – deeply and perhaps universally human nonetheless.

In many chapters in this book, in fact, the contributors must still wrestle with the kinds of problems that dogged the historians in the first volume. This problem is particularly apparent in those chapters dealing with lower-class readers, with regions where record capture has been patchy or virtually non-existent for whatever reason, with non-industrial nations and regions, or with reading practices that are more ephemeral than those that usually appear in the official record. These contributors, too, must find other ways to ‘get at’ the history of reading practices, building up a plausible story out of fragments. In order to do so, for example, Natalie Fossey and Lize Kriel (Chapter 2) use the concept of ‘visuality’ to examine the politics embedded in images of missionised readers in nineteenth-century Africa, arguing that in doing so they are able to demonstrate the complex interplay between a number of images that were recycled as engravings as well as photographs in different print contexts over the span of more than a century.

My own chapter (Chapter 5) analyses the traces of reading habits left behind by travelling readers in the long nineteenth century, now collected in the Reading Experience Database 1450–1945. I argue that many recent critical deconstructions of images of travelling reading and its attendant dangers are more useful as stories of cultural anxiety and ideology than as evidence of real readers’ experiences. In my analysis, women, the working classes and children were all easily able to ignore such negative depictions in order to get happily lost in a book to while away the tedium of travel, and they paid scant attention to the nay-sayers. John McAleer (Chapter 6) broadens the discussion of travelling readers to consider those who crossed the oceans, using as
his evidence personal diaries, ships’ records, ships’ newspapers and travelogues. For McAleer, ‘reading was a crucial technology, aiding European travellers to overcome distance, unfamiliar environments and practical obstacles’, and he concludes that the ‘place where one reads matters’. Again, we might usefully ‘read back’ from this testimony into earlier periods when readers, not just texts, were on the move.

Several of the contributors benefit from the increase in evidence the ‘modern’ period enables. Christine Pawley (Chapter 7) examines a rare tranche of student records at the Wisconsin Library School. Her sample of 118 librarianship students who graduated between 1907 and 1927, who submitted a combined total of more than 2,400 books read for pleasure, demonstrates that ‘despite the fact that we know their names and a few bare facts about them, these really are “ordinary” readers who largely lived out their lives in anonymity’. In this sense, the find gives us an invaluable glimpse into the reading habits of ordinary people who, while on course to become professionally bookish, reserved the right to read for pleasure many texts that would not have found their way onto the period’s library shelves.

Simon Eliot (Chapter 8), by contrast, explores a body of readers who were, it was assumed by government propagandists, likely to be (or likely to need to be) more ‘obedient’ in response to a grave national emergency. He focusses on the papers, posters and pamphlets distributed or available to UK readers during the Second World War, using Ministry of Information records to illustrate how the wartime reading subject was ideologically constructed through an astonishing range of materials disgorged through official channels.

Cheryl Oestreicher (Chapter 9) moves us into the post-war period in the USA, her focus on a single text and author rather than a single reader or organisation. She is able to demonstrate through an analysis of readers’ letters to the author that a surprisingly wide range of readers of a non-denominational self-help book by Rabbi Joshua Liebman, Peace of Mind (1946), gained comfort from it whatever their faith. This evidence, she concludes, provides a fascinating insight into post-war ideas of faith and psychiatry, as well as readers’ habits and preferences. This should warn us not to assume too readily that even in deeply religious eras (such as many of those covered in the first volume, Early Readers), faith-based reading itself might not have been as dominant as we have tended to assume, and that readers may have explored their spirituality in a number of surprising ways.

Joan Shelley Rubin (Chapter 10) gives us another example of complex readerly interactions, this time with different media simultaneously. She examines books about music, and designed to be read
while listening to music, in America in the period between 1920 and 1970. Intriguingly, she suggests that the tenor of readers’ letters to the composer and music writer Leonard Bernstein reveal that ‘for part of Bernstein’s audience the experience of reading a work on music – albeit one in an accessible register – was not qualitatively different from reading a novel’. She is also able to demonstrate here that ‘intensive reading’ – the practice of studying a single text deeply and often repeatedly over time – did not die out in the early nineteenth century as ‘extensive reading’ for pleasure became the norm, as has so often been assumed since 1969, when Rolf Engelsing first posited the idea of an eighteenth-century ‘reading revolution’. As Rubin is able to show, among ‘modern’ readers intensive reading was – and still is – alive and well for certain categories of book.

Amanda Laugesen’s chapter, on the other hand, posits a stark contrast between this evidence of genuine readerly independence in the USA in this period and the official US-driven promotion of reading (particularly certain types of reading) in other locations (Chapter 11). For her, ‘efforts to promote ideologies of reading and print culture at the global level in this period were imbued with the politics of Cold War foreign policy, and took place within a context of decolonisation, modernisation and the rise of nationalism in newly independent and developing countries’. As we have seen, evidence of real readers’ practices and habits as analysed by many of the contributors was emerging more fully, and being captured in more stable forms, in the USA and Europe in the modern period. But in many other locations in the world, such as those affected by the UNESCO reading programme investigated by Laugesen – namely Africa, Brazil, Iran and India – the old problem of paucity of evidence not only remains, but emerges as politically constructed. Here, ‘the “real” reader – reading as a lived experience – remains frustratingly elusive for the most part. Real readers were often ignored or even disapproved of, and an “ideal reader” was promoted or assumed.’ Readerly freedoms, like evidence, are geographically relative.

Other contributors who examine evidence such as fan letters or blogs, which are both definitively ‘modern’ in different ways, throw the issue into even starker relief; and in so doing they also manage to demonstrate that relative readerly freedoms and the traces of readers’ interactions with texts can be remarkably revealing of broader political agendas, even those at the international level. Angelle Whavers (Chapter 12) examines readers’ letters to a popular 1950s pulp fiction magazine, Amazing Stories. She is thus able to demonstrate that such magazines were once a central piece of American popular culture,
and that they paid close attention to what their readers wanted. But they also, crucially, became ‘a key player in debates about censorship and juvenile delinquency during the moral panics of the early Cold War’. Such evidence would be impossible, of course, without high literacy rates, cheap literature and a cheap and efficient postal system, all of which are resolutely features of a technologically and politically ‘modern’ period that did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. But the application of this type of evidence in the service of wider social histories of morality and crime offers an unexpected bonus: reading, as I insisted in the Introduction to Early Readers, is always a deeply imbricated, political social practice, and its history can be of use way beyond the boundaries of our discipline.

Several contributors to the present volume offer invaluable links between the past and the present that underscore our contention that some readerships readily break period, generic and technological boundaries. Cait Coker (Chapter 13) examines Anglo-American science fiction fandom, providing a historical overview of changing print and digital practices from 1930 to the present. She demonstrates that while several disparate fields of study have accounted for various parts of this phenomenon of readerly interaction, none has yet joined the dots to explore how groups of readers have emerged and coalesced over time, able to share long-standing affinities even as technologies change.

We end this volume with new research on how to capture and try to understand what is going on in the reading brain. Philip Davis and Josie Billington (Chapter 14) are based in the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society, University of Liverpool, in association with national UK charity The Reader. Their project analyses the psychological and neurological effects of reading Victorian literature on ‘people who would not normally be involved in reading literature: people in drug and rehabilitation centres, prisons, hospitals, drop-in centres in local medical practices, dementia care homes, facilities for looked-after children, schools and libraries’. Their ‘combination of . . . qualitative and quantitative research measures’, they suggest, ‘provides rare empirical insights into private processes of reading, a window onto what is usually hidden within solo literary reading but is here made spontaneously manifest.’ In so doing, they indicate in the most vivid way possible that ‘old’ literature can cross boundaries, both appealing to and even helping to create ‘new’ readers, for whom the experience can be life-changing.

The chapters in this volume are overwhelmingly Anglophone, for the obvious reason that for some years from the eighteenth century
onwards Anglophone cultures dominated the making of the modern publishing industry, and tended to capture evidence of readerships more efficiently due to the emergence of niche marketing. But, as McAleer, Coker, Laugesen and several other contributors so ably demonstrate, in the ‘modern’ period it is problematic to consider literature as in any sense exclusively ‘national’, or the Anglophone (or any other language) as a stable linguistic-textual category (or indeed in terms of a centre–periphery model). Many Anglophone records ignore altogether evidence of the long tradition of book culture in Continental Europe, the Arab world or in India for example, although their textual products reached far beyond national borders in a number of different versions and impacted Anglophone cultures in profound ways. Texts travelled in this period more widely than ever before, and their journeys are not only geographic but also linguistic, as they were translated (sometimes simultaneously) into other languages. They also effortlessly crossed media, as they were adapted, borrowed, pirated or can be seen to have influenced other textual forms. And they time travel across period boundaries in ways we have only just begun to understand.

The readers and reading experiences the contributors try to capture in this book are at times very vocal, at other times silent, or even silenced. What the contributors collectively reveal, though, is the intriguing and sometimes startling extent to which not only modern readers, but also potentially readers whose experiences are lost to us, might somehow have found a way to exert their reading will, no matter what their circumstances, or what form that will eventually took. The intricate particularities of their engagement with texts might even help us to understand just a little bit more about the elusive part of human nature that feels the need to transmit and imbibe ideas and information across vast tracts of time and space.

Notes