

A Brief History of Book Studies in Münster

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As students, we are intimately familiar with books. They are one of our main tools of learning, pages dog-eared and passages highlighted, as we piece together term papers, presentations and theses. We know the book, but we do not necessarily consider it beyond the text it provides. But for some students at the University of Münster's English Department, the book itself is put under the spotlight.

Book studies is currently part of the curriculum of the National and Transnational Studies and British, American and Postcolonial Studies master's programs. Those wanting to delve deeper into the pages of this little-known field of study can go beyond the compulsory first semester course *Text, Book and Culture: Introduction to Book Studies* and choose from a small selection of elective courses on offer every semester, with some past options including *"Printed Poison": the English Book Trade in Religious and Political Conflicts and Print Is Dead? Publishing in the 21st Century*.

Book studies, for those unfamiliar with the term, is just as it sounds: the study of the material book, as well as its production, distribution and reception in society. Also known as book history, it is a field that can help explain, to give a few small examples, why a seventeenth century illustrated fishing book, *The Compleat Angler*, remains one of the most reprinted books in English – and it is not because hooks and rods are so titillating to English readers (Scurr); why Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* was first published in France rather than the United States, the country of its author (Pearson); and what books children in the fourteenth century read, based on evidence in the form of doodles in the margins of manuscripts (Thorpe). Book studies is often an interdisciplinary field that can have a wide array of approaches. Reading experiences, typogra-

phy, bibliography, book smuggling, manuscripts, paper-making, publishing, cataloging, e-books, book prizes, cover art, and many more subjects fall within its purview.

Perhaps more than other disciplines, the field of book studies understands the incredible impact of the recorded word. Looking at an early printed book, it can be shocking to see how dark the black ink has remained on the page after hundreds of years, the text still easily readable and waiting to reveal histories otherwise forgotten. Therefore, with this inaugural edition of *Satura*, it seems a proper beginning to set in ink a short history of book studies at the University of Münster (WWU), one of just five universities in Germany – the country from which the printed book hails – that offer courses in book studies.¹ Of these universities, the WWU is the only one with a specific focus on English-language book history, and it is for this reason that students may end up in a course about William Caxton, England's first printer, or Mudie's Select Library, a circulating library that helped shape Victorian values as well as book forms.

However, book studies at Münster did not begin with courses. It began, instead, in the 1950s, as a room with a large collection of antiquarian books and an unassuming sign on the door.

After an interruption caused by World War II, Prof. Dr. Heinrich Lausberg returned to academia, taking up the position of Chair of the Romanisches Seminar at the WWU ("Geschichte des"). A specialist in Romance Studies perhaps best known for his *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*,² Lausberg found that old

¹ The others are the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Leipzig University, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

² Originally published in German as *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*. Lausberg is also remembered by Italian linguistics as his name marks a dialectic region in Italy, called "area Lausberg" ("Geschichte des").

books were being sold cheaply, their value as objects of study and material interest not yet established or recognized – something difficult to imagine today. Lausberg collected books and used the fledgling institute to pursue his research, mainly medieval manuscript culture and paleographic studies. After he stepped down, the institute was briefly taken over by Prof. Otto Herding, a humanist scholar, who named it Institutum Erasmianum, after Renaissance thinker Erasmus of Rotterdam³ (“Zur Geschichte”).

Starting in the mid-1960s, the Institutum Erasmianum was jointly headed by Prof. Dr. Marvin Spevack, originally of New York, and Prof. Dr. h.c. Bernhard Fabian, taking on the additional name *Forschungsinstitut für Buchwissenschaft und Bibliographie* (Research Institute for Book Science and Bibliography). At this time, the international world of book studies was experiencing an interest in analytical bibliography, which looks for material evidence of how books were constructed (Suarez and Woudhuysen 525), and in new bibliography, which uses physical evidence to solve textual problems (963). While Profs Spevack and Fabian headed the institute, the research done was chiefly on the “history of books, the invention of printing, analytical print research, and the history and also the current status of the library system” (“Zur Geschichte”, my trans.). It was also at this time that the institute began to focus on English books and book history in particular, and became linked to the English Department for the first time. This change can be seen as the result of several factors, first and foremost being the research interests of the two heads, who were both professors at the English Department. International communication between book scholars was increasing as well, and both Spevack and Fabian worked on and with international projects. Spevack not only taught abroad, but he also received numerous fellowships from institutions such as the Huntington Library, The British Library, and The Folger Shakespeare Library (Munkelt). Fabian worked to help de-

³ The name, which was one of several, later dealt with some confusion caused by the popularity of the Erasmus student exchange program.

velop *the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue*⁴, which, despite its name, and due to its massive scope, required the funding and support of international researchers and institutions (Eck 242).

It is impossible to list all the accomplishments of Profs Spevack and Fabian in an article such as this. Both are renowned scholars with lengthy bibliographies to their names; however, a short look at a few of their projects is not only necessary for detailing the history of book studies at the WWU, but also helps to understand the trajectory of the field itself and how it has come to be what it is today.

Perhaps surprising to many current students is that one of the earliest ever digital humanities projects was undertaken by Prof. Spevack and his research assistants, decades before the term “digital humanities” had even been coined. Culminating in the nine-volume *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, the work was later released as the single-volume *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* in

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1973. The project used card computing to make the works of Shakespeare electronically readable; but because the WWU did not have sufficient computer facilities at the time, work was done at the German Computing Center in Darmstadt, on a large-frame IBM 7094 computer. According to our own Dr. Marga Munkelt, who worked on the project, Spevack’s *Concordance* “not only broke new ground for other computerized research in non-numerical disciplines but has also become, since then, a source and inspiration for electronic Shakespeare scholarship worldwide” (Munkelt).

It is also through Spevack and his Shakespeare research that the university is in possession of a Hinman collator. The machine, a behemoth compared to today’s technology, was used by Charlton Hinman in the 1950s to compare Shakespeare’s First

⁴ The Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalog was later named the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), and expanded its database to include works “from Caxton to 1800” (Jefcoate 147.)

Folio, published in 1623, and it “transformed analytical bibliography” (Suarez and Woudhuysen 793). The collator uses a system of flashing lights to allow an operator to detect variants between two physical copies of the same edition. If there is variation – say, because a printer realized and fixed a mistake mid print run or because of pirated copies – the differences appear to move, or dance, as a result of the flashing lights. Although the most famous Hinman collator is at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C., Münster’s collator is still in working condition and continues to be used in projects for the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, with the purpose of creating critical editions (“Der Tanz” 4).

The other head at this time, Prof. Fabian, helped to create a new consciousness in European libraries about antiquarian books through decades of library cataloging projects. Go to the book studies library, a small but labyrinthine building located on Aegidiistr. 5, and in the reference room on the bottom right shelf – the entire bottom right shelf – is the 47-volume set of *Handbuch der historischen Buchbestände* (Handbook of Historical Book Holdings). One of several enormous projects undertaken and supervised by Prof. Fabian, whose work over the years was funded by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the *German Research Foundation* and the *Volkswagenwerk* (“Zur Geschichte”), the *Handbuch* catalogs English books held in German and Austrian libraries, as well as German books held in non-German-speaking European libraries. At the time, these books were often shelved according to their individual topics, making the books difficult to find and thus separating books which had similar origin stories. To give an example of the ways books of varying genres could find their ways to different countries en masse, many English books found at the University of Göttingen printed before the 19th century arrived there through the university’s connection to George II, a German, and the last foreign-born King of England (Fabian xi). The cat-

aloging of books such as these necessitated contact with numerous libraries in Europe, no easy feat at a time when many European countries were part of the Soviet Union. Through his *Handbuch*, Prof. Fabian highlighted the value of cataloging and storing these types of books together, which resulted in important changes to library science. The five largest libraries in Germany – Berlin, Frankfurt, Göttingen, Munich and Wolfenbüttel – catalog their German-language books printed from 1450-1912 according to Fabian’s concepts (“Max-Herrmann-Preis”).

The research pursuits of Profs Spevack and Fabian are a testament to the fact that, although certainly an interesting and important part of the field, book studies is about more than looking back; it is also about moving the study of the book forward, with new research methods, practices and technologies.

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For students, Münster’s own history with book studies was greatly changed by Prof. Dr. Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser, who began as chair in 1998. During her time as head, the institute was endowed with a new name: Institut für Buchwissenschaft & Textforschung (Institute for Book Science & Text Research), and research centered on English book history of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation, with Prof. Müller-Oberhäuser launching several funded research projects (“Zur Geschichte”), such as, to give just one example, “New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe” (“Prof. Dr.”).⁵ However, it was Prof. Müller-Oberhäuser’s development of book studies modules which were able to be integrated into new master’s courses at the English Department – including a master’s program in

⁵ Others include: “Das Buchgeschenk im englischen Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit”, “Buchzensur und Büchervernichtung im englischen Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit, am Beispiel der Ketzerbewegung der Lollarden und der Reformation”, and “Das Buch als Waffe in religiös-politischen Konflikten: Gewaltdiskurse und ihre Vermittlung in England im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert” (“Prof. Dr.”).

book studies and British, American and Postcolonial Studies – that made it possible for students to take structured courses in the history of the book for the first time. It is not an overstatement to say that book studies in Münster as we students now know it is thanks to Prof. Müller-Oberhäuser. She not only made courses available to students, but taught the majority of book studies courses before her retirement, also finding time for research; to publish numerous chapters and articles about courtesy books, female readers, book gifts, and many more subjects (Hötker-Bolte xi–xiii); as well as to supervise master's and doctoral student theses, something that she continues to do to this day. Moreover, Müller-Oberhäuser strengthened the institute through international connections. Cooperation with the University of Leiden's Book and Digital Media Studies master's program began in the year 2000 after a meeting between herself, Prof. Adriaan van der Weel from Leiden and Prof. Simon Eliot from London. The result of this has been numerous workshops and excursions between Münster and Leiden over the years. There has also been cooperation with the University of Turku, Finland, and closer-to-home connections, such as with the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz and Münster's own *Ehrenpreis Centre for Swift Studies*,⁶ headed by Prof. Dr. Hermann J. Real.

Upon her retirement in 2015, Prof. Müller-Oberhäuser was recognized with a Festschrift, titled *Material Moments in Book Cultures: Essays in Honour of Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser*. The contributors include esteemed colleagues as well as past students, who have become teachers and research assistants, received master's or doctoral degrees, and, in the case of Ulrike Graßnick, become the Chancellor of the University of Trier. These academic contributors are a testament to Prof. Müller-Oberhäuser as an instructor and to her influence on the field of book studies in Münster and

beyond.⁷

In 2015, book studies was incorporated into the National and Transnational Studies Master of Arts program. Under the supervision of Dr. Simon Rosenberg, book studies at the WWU has continued, with courses on offer every semester. Collaboration with Leiden University has been maintained through excursions and student workshops, the most recent having taken place in 2018 at Landhaus Rothenberge and at which students from Leiden and Münster presented research topics. It was after this student workshop that two participants, Laura Ntoumanis and Natalia Tolstopyat, took up the gauntlet of starting a student-run journal, so that students of book studies and later the entire English Department could display their research and writing.⁸ Other recent excursions include a visit to a printer's shop in Osnabrück and a shorter jaunt to the university's own Manuscript Reading Room to view a facsimile of the richly decorated Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript. Students are often invited to guest lectures on a variety of book-related topics, and the Book Studies Film Night, first spearheaded in early 2017 by then-student Erin Kummer, screens films and documentaries related to the study of the book.

The history of book studies at Münster has long been, and continues to be, interdisciplinary and collaborative, reaching across academic disciplines as well as oceans, finding itself in somewhat unlikely locations, such as East German libraries and, more recently, the strange realm of fanfiction studies by way of master's student theses. Considering this history, it is not unfitting that book studies is now part of two master's programs that ask students to think beyond national and research borders.

Many of the original antiquarian books belonging to the former institute have been integrated into the general library collection and can be

6 The *Ehrenpreis Centre for Swift Studies* is an excellent resource for budding book historians interested in the works of Jonathan Swift, with the Centre holding many rare books, including "the world's largest reconstruction of Swift's library in identical imprints" ("About Us").

7 To read more about the early history of book studies at Münster as well as the establishment of a book studies master's program, see Müller-Oberhäuser 57–66.
8 This initiative was also inspired by Leiden's student publication, *TXT*, copies of which can be found in the book studies library.

recognized by their Institutum Erasmianum stamp. The current book studies library houses over 9,000 volumes, and, besides a few unique treasures (such as a second-hand book that was once in Mudie's Select Library), this collection mainly contains instructive books, with topics ranging from illuminated manuscripts to e-books. There are specific research areas addressed – library studies, bibliography, book illustrations and technologies of the book – but Dr. Marie-Luise Spieckermann, senior lecturer for book studies, advises that new students begin with the call number BH: book history. The section makes most apparent how intimately the book and society are intertwined, whether through book burnings and censorship,⁹ or through Oprah's book club.¹⁰

In our own academic society, the book remains an important object, for study and also of study. A poll of students' favorite books in the book studies library provides a fittingly book-oriented conclusion in the form of a short bibliography:

Altick, Richard Daniel. The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900. Ohio State UP, 1998.

Bhaskar, Michael. The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network. Anthem Press, 2013.

Bromer, Anne C. and Julian I. Edison, eds. Miniature Books: 4,000 Years of Tiny Treasures. Abrams, 2007.

Houston, Keith. Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols, & Other Typographic Marks. Norton, 2013.

Jack, Belinda Elizabeth. The Woman Reader. Yale UP, 2012.

Kells, Stuart S. Penguin and the Lane Brothers: The Untold Story of a Publishing Revolution. Black Inc., 2015.

McKitterick, David, ed. The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 6, 1830-1914. Cambridge UP, 2009.

Meale, Carole M, ed. Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500. Cambridge UP, 1996.

Thompson, John B. Books in the Digital Age: The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States. Polity Press, 2005.

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⁹ Try, for example BH 543:23 and BH 608:22

¹⁰ Found at BH 751:8 and BH 751:9.

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- Pearson, Neil. *A Very British Pornographer: The Jack Kahane Story*. Directed by Jon Willers, Secret Knowledge, 2016.
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Ellen Barth graduated from the National and Transnational Studies master's program in 2018 with a focus in book studies. Her thesis looked at publishing in the digital age. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.