



Towards a History of Books and Readers

Author(s): Cathy N. Davidson

Source: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Special Issue: Reading America (Mar., 1988), pp. 7-17

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713139>

Accessed: 17/12/2013 15:24

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Towards a History of Books and Readers

CATHY N. DAVIDSON
Michigan State University

Book, either numerous sheets of white paper that have been stitched together in such a way that they can be filled with writing; or, a highly useful and convenient instrument constructed of printed sheets variously bound in cardboard, paper, vellum, leather, etc. for presenting the truth to another in such a way that it can be conveniently read and recognized. Many people work on this ware before it is complete and becomes an actual book in this sense. The scholar and the writer, the papermaker, the type founder, the typesetter and the printer, the proofreader, the publisher, the book binder, sometimes even the gilder and the brass-worker, etc. Thus many mouths are fed by this branch of manufacture.

—*Allgemeines Oeconomisches Lexicon* (1753)¹

AS GEORG HEINRICH ZINCK'S EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DEFINITION MAKES CLEAR, the very concept "book" is problematic. A book exists, simultaneously, as a physical object, a sign system, the end product of diverse arts and labors, and the starting point for intercultural and intracultural communication. To understand what books are and do in the societies that create them (societies that are, in turn, influenced by books) requires the most dextrous kind of scholarship—scholarship firmly rooted in the details of book morphology and printing history (the usual terrain of the textual scholar and the analytical bibliographer) but scholarship innovative enough to raise speculative questions about the private and communal interactions between texts and readers (the territory of the intellectual historian and the literary theorist).

The separate aspects of books and book production have been studied seri-

I would like to thank the American Council of Learned Societies, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Kobe College (Japan), and Michigan State University for their generous support during the editing of this issue. I also wish to thank the staff of *American Quarterly*, particularly Janice A. Radway, and Rod Phillips, my research assistant, for making it possible for me to finish the editing of this issue while I was a visiting professor in Japan.

ously at least since the Renaissance, but only recently have scholars conjoined their research on the discrete dimensions of the book to found a comprehensive discipline. Known in France as *histoire du livre*, in Germany as *Geschichte des Buchwesens*, and, in England and North America as the history of the book or the history of books, the parameters of the field vary, naturally, from country to country. But no matter what the historical or national focus or the specific emphasis of a given study, the new book history is based on certain fundamental assumptions about the importance of the printed word. In the formulation of Robert Darnton, one of its foremost theorists and practitioners, the history of the book is concerned with nothing less than the “social and cultural history of communication by print . . . how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behavior of mankind during the last five hundred years.”²

The “Bible” of this field is *L'Apparition du Livre* (1958) by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, which, as its English subtitle attests, analyzes “The Impact of Printing 1450–1800.”³ Febvre and Martin explore one essential—and remarkably complicated—question: How did the advent of printing change the shape of culture? Other scholars, primarily European, continue to address this topic, often by integrating the key questions of book history with the socioeconomic methodologies of “the *Annales* school” of French history. Three landmark studies written by American scholars in the 1970s—Natalie Zemon Davis’s *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), Robert Darnton’s *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the “Encyclopédie,” 1775–1800* (1979), and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein’s *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979)—also investigate the extensive European history of the book and pose, along with the Continental studies, crucial questions regarding that history. How were books produced? By whom? And for whom? What relationships existed between the author and the publisher? How did national ideologies (especially with respect to censorship or propaganda) affect what books were printed and how ideas would be disseminated? What relationships existed between legal arrangements (such as copyright laws) and the economics of authorship and publishing? How much did books cost? Were books the province only of one class or could the ideas from books (if not the actual books themselves) be transmitted throughout the populace, regardless of such factors as class, region, race, or gender? How were books distributed to readers and what were the circumstances by which citizens acquired sufficient literacy to allow them to participate in print culture? How much influence did cultural authorities (political leaders, educators, ministers, reviewers) have on the evaluation or the popularity of books, the metamorphosis of a “book” into “literature”?

The implicit political content of all of these questions—essentially questions about the power and authority of the printed word—is made more explicit in

a number of important British studies such as Richard Altick's and Robert Webb's investigations of working-class readers or Raymond Williams' Marxian analysis of the "long revolution," the technological and social march into the modern world.⁴ Other sociological approaches to reading—from Robert Escarpit to Pierre Bourdieu—focus especially on the politics of book distribution and consumption, the definition of taste, and the relationships between society and culture.⁵ In America, these questions have been effectively (and differently) addressed by literary critics such as Nina Baym, Fredric Jameson, Annette Kolodny, Paul Lauter, Janice A. Radway, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Jane Tompkins.⁶ The influence of post-structuralist literary theory and German-inspired reception theory is now beginning to be incorporated into the history of the book, and here too is fertile new ground for assessments of the power relationships inherent in the structure of communication.⁷

There is, however, in America and elsewhere, little consensus about which of the many questions raised by book historians deserve the most attention. Indeed, part of the excitement of the field (and particularly in America) lies in the diversity of approaches being employed to understand what impact books have had upon American culture. The study of books here has remained notably multidisciplinary, as is evident even in this issue of *American Quarterly* where scholars write from a variety of disciplines—education, journalism history, social history, American culture, literary criticism and theory. The extensive documentation in these essays similarly attests to the breadth and depth of book scholarship in America.

As I have suggested, one concern of book historians has been the relationship between the dissemination of books and the larger institutional structures of a society. It should be noted that book historians, too, work within such structures, and, in America, at least some of the inspiration for the present interest in book history must be attributed to the establishment of two important centers for book research in the U.S. In 1979 the Library of Congress established its Center for the Book as both a locus for scholarly activity (hosting conferences as well as publishing numerous books and pamphlets on subjects ranging from copyright law to the history of literacy) and a public outreach program which, in the words of Daniel Boorstin, is designed "to organize, focus, and dramatize our nation's interest and attention on the book, to marshal the nation's support—spiritual, physical, and fiscal—for the book."⁸ In keeping with both goals, the Library of Congress recently published Alice D. Shreyer's *The History of Books: A Guide to Selected Resources in the Library of Congress* (1987) and also declared 1987 the "Year of the Reader," a project designed to increase public awareness of the importance of literacy and reading.

Similarly, in 1980 the American Antiquarian Society established the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture, a program that effectively

utilizes the Society's extensive holdings for the first two-and-a-half centuries of American history (the period before 1877). AAS sponsors the annual James Russell Wiggins lecture in the history of the book and other lectures, workshops, and seminars, as well as a residential fellowship program, and also publishes numerous books and pamphlets in the field. In addition, a thrice-yearly newsletter, *The Book*, includes abstracts of work in progress, reviews of scholarship in the area of the book, and announcements of various events of interest to historians of the book.⁹

The bibliographical and historical work being accomplished at both the Library of Congress and the American Antiquarian Society suggests the vitality of the history of the book in America. Inspired in part by the eminent bibliographer G. Thomas Tanselle, the Bibliographical Society of America has also increasingly addressed the kinds of social questions that preoccupy historians of the book. Tanselle, however, rightly insists that one cannot rush to generalizations about the "influence" or "impact" of books on culture without paying close attention to the actual books themselves and grounding one's speculations about book history in the bibliographic "facts" of printing and the evidence of book morphology.¹⁰

The five essays in this issue of *American Quarterly* well represent the range of approaches, methodologies, theoretical assumptions, and interdisciplinary concerns that characterize the study of the book. The essays are arranged chronologically by subject matter. The first focuses primarily on the seventeenth century and the last on the early- to mid-twentieth century. The essays address issues from the elemental (the question of literacy, of just who can read, at a given time, any book at all) to the elite (the question of canon-formation, of how highly trained professional readers determine what can or cannot be designated "serious literature" and thus also partly determine what books will be available and to what audience).

Just who could, in fact, read at any particular time is one of the most basic questions in any study of the influence of printing and it is one of the most difficult to answer. The illiterate rarely leave historical traces nor can contemporaneous assessments of literacy be entirely trusted. John Adams, for example, liked to boast that "a native American who cannot read and write is as rare as a comet or an earthquake." Yet slaves in John Adams' America were explicitly forbidden literacy and even Abigail Adams complained about the lamentable state of women's literacy levels in her era.¹¹ Moreover, literacy itself is never a simple "rate" but embodies an ideology, a philosophy of education, of who should be educated, at what public cost, and to what end.¹² These are the kinds of qualitative and philosophical questions that E. Jennifer Monaghan addresses in "Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England." Monaghan surveys a number of important literacy studies, emphasizing the theoretical assumptions that inform their conclusions,

and then adds a nonquantitative note of her own to our understanding of early American literacy. She interrogates the meaning of the mark (as opposed to a signature) appended to early American documents and then goes beyond that mark to consider the meaning of “literacy” itself. Does the mark mean the writer could not write? If so, does that also mean the writer could not read? What ideologies of gender—social assumptions about the usefulness of writing for women as opposed to men—might have created a class of women who could read but not write? By examining private and public documents, Monaghan assesses not just questions of literacy but how social assumptions influence educational principles and procedures. Although her study focuses primarily on the seventeenth century, many of her assumptions about the relationship between social inequities and illiteracy are as true today as they were in early America.¹³

Who could or could not read is crucial to any understanding of books, and so is the question of who actually *did* read particular works. One important methodology employed by historians of the book to determine who read is to trace out the dissemination of books as indicated by such surviving evidence as purchase orders, account books, lending library rosters, and subscription lists, as François Furet and Jacques Ozouf do, for example, in *Reading and Writing: Literacy in France from Calvin to Jules Ferry* (1977). Similarly, David Paul Nord, through meticulous historical sleuthing, has tracked down the class, occupation, and address of actual late eighteenth-century readers of *The New-York Magazine*. His conclusions about readership provide a much-needed corrective to purely text-based projections of implied readers. A simple content analysis might suggest that *The New-York Magazine* was a thoroughly traditional periodical intended only for an elite audience. Nord, however, has identified a surprising number of readers belonging to the working class. His essay reminds us that the implied reader of a text is not necessarily its actual reader and any theories based upon readers’ responses must be apprized of that discrepancy.¹⁴

Who could read merges into the question of who did read, which itself merges into the inescapable economic questions of who could afford access to books, what forms that access took, and what meaning that access had in individual lives and communities. These issues deserve some attention here as they are among the most essential—and the most hotly debated—of book history. They are especially pertinent when we consider the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and the advent of new printing and paper-making techniques as well as better transportation systems (i.e., facilitating book distribution). Numerous historians have argued that these changes were as momentous as Gutenberg’s invention of movable type, and that this era experienced a “reading revolution” as a result of increasing literacy, expanding mass education, and the developing technologies that made possible for the

first time relatively inexpensive printing (the precise relationship between improved mass literacy and larger print runs providing a locus of chicken-or-egg style ontogenetic debate among book historians).

What does it *mean* when more books are suddenly more available to a larger audience than ever before? German historian Rolf Engelsing, who coined the term “*Leserrevolution*,” has argued that the reading process itself—as individual action and community interaction—changed as a result of the new availability of books.¹⁵ In an earlier more restricted print world, Engelsing maintains, readers read “intensively,” rereading over the course of a lifetime the same few precious books and incorporating those books into life’s most intimate and portentous activities (as seen, totemically, in the action of recording births, christenings, marriages, and deaths on the end leaves of the family Bible). By contrast, in the modern world of mass production, readers read “extensively,” rapidly consuming more and more books while placing increasingly less significance on the books they read. There is a moral and social implication embedded in Engelsing’s vivid description of postindustrial reading. More is definitely less; books dwindle to commodities; formerly engaged readers become passive consumers.

Other scholars (and I must include myself among their number) have sought to modify this model of a reading revolution on a number of counts. Most obviously, certain books continued (and continue) to be read intensively and the notion of a reading revolution has to be reconsidered in light of the fact that, even now, the majority of Americans do not read many books in the course of a year and certainly cannot be accused of consuming books as frequently (or as programmatically) as they do, say, tubes of toothpaste or television shows.¹⁶ The reading revolution was not universal in America. It did not by any means encompass all potential readers. Moreover, within one society (pre- or postindustrial) there can exist many different and often overlapping reading communities and many kinds of readers. An individual can participate in more than one reading community and can have different reading strategies and purposes in different situations (the professional paleographer, for example, might also be a detective mystery addict or a closet reader of Harlequin romances—an extreme but perhaps not inapplicable example for readers of this journal). Much of the controversy hinges on the word “consumer,” a word employed with some frequency by both Marxian and non-Marxian historians. As Janice A. Radway has argued persuasively, the consumption metaphor of reading is a false one because it reduces a complex interaction between a reader and a text to a simple, passive process of “ingestion.” As Radway observes, “by focusing on social process—that is, on what people do with texts and objects rather than on those texts and objects themselves—we should begin to see that people do not ingest mass culture whole but often remake it into something they can use.”¹⁷

The reading revolution thesis fully acknowledges the indisputable influence that technological changes in the print world have had on readers, but it does not sufficiently acknowledge the ways in which readers continue to make meanings from the books they read. By extension, the reading revolution model assumes that print culture develops exclusively (and uniformly) from the top down. Yet as John P. Feather and other historians have suggested, the implementation of a new printing technology itself can be a *response* to political processes and social needs (real or perceived). Feather notes in this regard that Gutenberg “was not only the first printer, he was also the first printer to go bankrupt. It was not until the 1480s that printing was established on a sound commercial and financial basis. Printing was ultimately successful not simply because it represented a technical advance on copying by scribes, but because it became available at a time and in a place where it was economically, socially, and politically desirable. . . . The printing press was an agent of change because it was to play an important role in the society in which it was invented and from whose needs it had been developed.”¹⁸ Feather’s comments do not minimize the importance of technology but place it within a larger context. Similarly, but focusing on the postindustrial era, William Charvat has argued that, so far as the book trade is concerned, we need to replace the diadic model of producer and consumer (the traditional capitalistic model) with a triadic and interactive model of print culture: “The book trade is acted upon by both writer and reader, and in receiving their influence the book trade interprets and therefore transmutes it. Correspondingly, the writer and reader dictate to and are dictated to by the book trade.”¹⁹

Ronald Zboray’s essay, “Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation,” situates itself at the center of this debate over the changes in readership wrought by the technological advances of the nineteenth century. The well-chosen word “ironies” in Zboray’s title signals a departure from both the view that the development of new printing methods promoted a “diffusion of knowledge” among America’s citizens and the opposite view that nineteenth-century industrialism, emblemized by printing technologies, forever alienated and fragmented American culture. Zboray shows how the same technologies that could make more books available than ever before to *some* Americans also displaced another class of readers—primarily the artisans in the older printing shop. His essay explores the relationships between the technological aspects of book production (printing, publishing) and the life of the mind, but also shows that technological innovation can have a dramatically different impact on different social groups or classes or in different regions of the nation.

Zboray’s essay effectively underscores the point that different levels of participation in print culture persisted even after massive industrialization in America, a point assumed in Hortense Spillers’ “Moving on Down the Line.”

Although there is increasing documentation of valiant attempts by slaves to learn to read, the proscriptions against slave literacy continued to have an impact on the black community after manumission. John Hope Franklin has estimated that in 1870 as many as eighty percent of all black Americans above the age of ten may have been illiterate or minimally literate.²⁰ It must be remembered that, for the same time period, literacy for white men and women was well over ninety percent. When a prosperous and largely literate nation tolerates and even promotes pockets of both poverty and illiteracy, the history of the book must also address the political, social, and moral implications of that denial, both for those who perpetrated it and for those who endured it. This is one agenda in Hortense Spillers' analysis of the role of the African-American sermon. How did the African-American sermon mediate between the forbidden printed word of the dominant culture and the "community of the insurgent," the African-American community?

As Spillers notes, "African-American sermons offer a paradigmatic instance of reading as process, encounter, and potential transformation." Her essay raises methodological and metacritical issues clustering around the question of how scholars can retrospectively decipher the ways in which a community alienated from the dominant print culture can nonetheless be influenced by some of its messages (messages mediated through and politicized by the African-American preacher whose words were subsequently recorded to become part of the printed historical record).²¹ If the sermon was, at some level, a way of communicating both knowledge and a strategy for survival within the African-American community, how do we read between the lines of the written sermon to the politics of literacy to which it speaks? What is the relationship between the written-down sermon that has been preserved in books and the actual speech-act, at the community level, of not the writer but the preacher? In short, what signs of the original oral/aural transaction can be drawn from the written documents that survive? As Spillers notes, "the African-American church . . . sustains a special relationship of *attentiveness* to the literal Word that liberates."

The concluding essay in this collection raises questions about the different ends to which books are finally consigned. What role do cultural authorities play in the shaping of what we think of as "literature," as something that is part of the nation's accomplishment and thus a record to be saved? Sharon O'Brien's study of the declining literary reputation of Willa Cather shows how changing political climates and evolving academic structures—Leftist Thirties intellectuals and the establishment of American literature as an academic discipline—also *change* the criterion whereby this institutional judgment is rendered. The same book can look very different depending upon the criterion used to assess it. As O'Brien argues, assumptions about gender are also implicated in critical judgment. Aesthetic questions, even when

formulated by authoritative arbiters of cultural taste, are not always purely aesthetic but are partly grounded in the other interests of those who make them. Thus O'Brien too (as do the other contributors to this issue) dispenses with a monolithic idea of "the reader" and acknowledges that there can be different communities of readers within a culture—within, indeed, a very narrow segment of that culture—and even for a given book. Whose reading counts and why? Cather, incidentally, believed strongly that her most important readers were not critics or academics, but those frequenters of bookshops and libraries who happened to pick up one of her novels and find it good.

What is a book? As these essays (like Zinck's early definition) indicate, the question itself is multi-faceted and can be approached in diverse ways, all rich with historical, literary, and theoretical possibilities. Books cannot be understood apart from the society that creates them, and, conversely, no literate society can be understood without some study of the books it produces. At least since Gutenberg, "books" and "history" have been inseparably intertwined. Although relatively new as a distinct field of study, the history of the book explores that long-standing double complicity.

NOTES

1. Georg Heinrich Zinck, *Allgemeines Oeconomisches Lexicon*, trans. and quoted in Martha Woodmansee, "The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17 (Summer 1984): 425.

2. Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111:3 (Summer 1982): 65. This essay is reprinted in Kenneth E. Carpenter, ed., *Books and Society in History* (New York, 1983), another important contribution to the history of books. See also, Darnton's "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (Jan.-April 1986): 5–30; and "Reading, Writing and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature," *Daedalus* 100 (Winter 1971): 214–56. For other overviews of the history of the book, see Raymond Birn, "Livres et Société after Ten Years: The Formation of a Discipline," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 151 (1976): 287–312; and the special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17 (Summer 1984), edited by Birn. See also Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick La Capra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), 13–46; John P. Feather and David McKitterick, *The History of Books and Libraries: Two Views* (Washington, D.C., 1986); Feather, "Cross-Channel Currents: Historical Bibliography and l'Histoire du Livre," *The Library* 6th ser., 2 (1980): 1–15; David D. Hall, *On Native Ground: From the History of Printing to the History of the Book* (Worcester, Mass., 1984); idem, "A Report on the 1984 Conference on Needs and Opportunities in the History of the Book in American Culture," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95: 1 (April 1985): 101–12; and G. Thomas Tanselle, *The History of Books as a Field of Study* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981).

3. *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*, trans. David Gerard; ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (1976; rpt. London, 1984).

4. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900* (Chicago, 1957); Robert K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader* (London,

1955); and Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York, 1961); *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977); and *The Sociology of Culture* (New York, 1982).

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); and Robert Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. Ernest Pick (London, 1971).

6. Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981); idem, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 130–48; Annette Kolodny, "The Integrity of Memory: Creating a New Literary History in the United States," *American Literature* 57 (May 1985): 291–307; Paul Lauter, "Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties," *Feminist Studies* 9 (Fall 1983): 435–64; Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984); Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Value," in *Canons*, ed. Robert van Hallberg (Chicago, 1984), 5–40; and Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York, 1985).

7. See, for example, Roger Chartier, "Du livre au lire," in *Pratiques de la lecture*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris, 1985), 62–87; Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York, 1986); and Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9–21.

8. Quoted in Robert A. Carter, "The Center for the Book: Seeking Outreach," *Publishers Weekly* (Jan. 4, 1985).

9. Of special interest to readers of this volume is the AAS collection edited by William L. Joyce et al., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester, Mass., 1983). See especially the excellent introduction by David D. Hall, "The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600–1850," 2–47.

10. G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Bibliography and Textual Study of American Books," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95:2 (Oct. 1985): 113–51; and Tanselle, *The History of Books as a Field of Study*.

11. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850–56), 3: 456; idem, *Letters of Mrs. Adams, the Wife of John Adams*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Boston, 1841), 2: 79.

12. For a survey of recent literacy studies, see Carl F. Kaestle, "The History of Literacy and the History of Readers," in *Review of Research in Education*, vol. 12, ed. Edmund W. Gordon (Washington, D.C., 1985). See also William J. Gilmore's *Elementary Literacy on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution: Trends in Rural New England, 1760–1830* (Worcester, Mass., 1982); and his forthcoming *Reading Becomes a "Necessity of Life": Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1830* (Knoxville, 1988).

13. For a provocative discussion of contemporary issues in literacy, see Kenneth Levine, *The Social Context of Literacy* (London, 1986).

14. For a discussion of actual readers and reading communities, see Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984); Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 6–10, 65–79, and *passim*; Davidson, *Ideology and Genre* (Worcester, Mass., 1987); Elizabeth Long, "Women, Reading, and Cultural Authority: Some Implications of the Audience Perspective in Cultural Studies," *American Quarterly* 38 (Fall 1986): 606–10; David Paul Nord, "Working-Class Readers: Family, Community, and Reading in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *Communication Research* 13 (April 1986): 156–81; and Radway, *Reading the Romance*.

15. Rolf Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesen in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973); "Die Perioden der Leser-geschichte in der Neuzeit," in *Zur Sozialgeschichte deutscher Mittel- und Unterschichten* (Göttingen, 1973), 112–54; and *Der Bürger als Leser. Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800* (Stuttgart, 1974). For critiques of Engelsing's position, see Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 249–52; Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 69–79; and Reinhart Siegert, *Aufklärung und Volkslektüre exemplarisch dargestellt an Rudolph Zacharias Becker und seinem "Noth- und Hilfsbüchlein" mit einer Bibliographie zum Gesamtthema* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1978).

16. For discussions of variable literacy skills and reading habits within a society, see especially Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1987); idem, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York, 1979); Joseph F. Kett and Patricia A. McClung, "Book Culture in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 94 (1984): 97–138; and Ian Watt and Jack Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," in Jack Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968).

17. Janice A. Radway, "Reading is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor," *Book Research Quarterly* 2 (1986): 26.

18. John P. Feather, "The Book in History and the History of the Book," in Feather and McKitterick, *The History of Books and Libraries*, 6.

19. William Charvat, "Literary Economics and Literary History," *English Institute Essays*, ed. Alan S. Downer (1949; rpt. New York, 1965), 74–75.

20. Patricia Herman, "Southern Blacks: Accounts of Learning to Read Before 1861," *Reading Education Report No. 53* (Urbana, Ill., 1985); and Janet Cornelius, "'We Slipped and Learned to Read': Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1800–1865," *Phylon* 44:3 (1983): 175; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1956).

21. For a critical overview of various arguments concerning the differences between written and oral communication, see Deborah Tannen, "The Myth of Orality and Literacy," in W. Frawley, ed., *Linguistics and Literacy* (New York, 1982).