

GLOBALITIES

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STEVEN ROGER FISCHER



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Hans Burgkmair's woodcut (1530) of a Renaissance scholar at his writing-desk.

FIVE

The Printed Page

With the first page printed with movable metal type in Mainz, Germany, in 1450, the Age of Parchment symbolically folded before the Age of Paper. To be sure, 'mediæval' reading – that communal, dogmatic, two-dimensional listening-*and*-reading described in the previous chapter – continued in many places well into the eighteenth century. But with Gutenberg's inaugural tug on the screw press, reading's material, matter, language and practice began to change. Of course the invention of printing marks not only reading's transformation, but all of European society's itself, so wholly did the printed page proceed to influence nearly every aspect of life there. Indeed, the invention announced one of world history's greatest social and intellectual ruptures.

Up until the end of the fifteenth century the hierarchy 'author > commentator > bishop > teacher > pupil' prevailed nearly everywhere, with each passive reader hearing, from the top down, not only what to read but also how to interpret each text in keeping with prescribed orthodoxy. Yet the second half of the fifteenth century saw readers becoming increasingly responsible for what they were reading: they were becoming *active* readers. With the lengthening lists of titles that printing prompted, ever larger reading audiences were reading what they wished. And in silence and seclusion they also began assessing and interpreting their chosen reading matter according to personal criteria, although still rooted in classically founded Christian education.

When printing began, the written word was anything but ubiquitous. Today we are used to seeing writing in nearly every imaginable circumstance, from morning till night: clock, newspaper, fridge note, jam label, dashboard, street sign, desk work,

TV titles and advertisements, night-stand book or magazine and so much more. But in the early 1400s writing was still something quite rare, even rarer than it had been in ancient Rome. Written letters on parchment yet evoked awe and veneration. A manuscript was a one-off treasure, its contents often existing in only the one copy, ordinarily too expensive for all but an aristocrat, bishop or patrician to own. (And several centuries were to pass before the written word was to attain that ultimate wonder, mundaneness, one of society's 'quiet triumphs'.)

Printing suddenly made the written word omnipresent.

Because the printed word on paper was 'cheap', at least in comparison to handwritten parchment, the mass-produced printed book at once became non-unique, replaceable. The solitary physical book that before had represented class wealth now became intellectual property, something to be 'owned' and shared with like-minded book possessors. Books had always been merchandise. But with the advent of printing, several hundred readers (even as many as one thousand) could own identical copies of a work, its contents then public domain. Something like this had never happened before. And from this radically changed relation to the book a new intellectual community emerged, one transcending the abbeys, towns and principalities of scribedom. Within decades it was fashioning and feeding the Renaissance, that sudden and dynamic expansion of Western culture that dared to transgress the margins of mediævalism.

It was no longer the scholar's duty merely to reveal knowledge, but to add to it.

In his 1831 novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), Victor Hugo (1802–85) post-prophetically proclaimed that printing would destroy the Church and that:

human thought, in changing its outward form, was also about to change its outward mode of expression; that the dominant idea of each generation would, in future, be embodied in a new material, a new fashion; that the book of stone, so solid and enduring, was to give way to the book of paper, more solid and enduring still.¹

For the hundreds of thousands of 'post-mediæval' readers soon-to-be, this change, so poignantly assessed by Hugo, came with

great loss, but for greater gain: orality for literacy; the picture story for the printed story; Latin for the vernacular; vassalage of thought for independence of thought; tutelage for majority. Because, with printing and its repercussions, Europe's readers finally came of age.

As more lay readers began to read the Bible without their parish priest, questioning and thinking for themselves, they of course started also to read other, non-religious things. Soon discarding dogma, European readers advanced society through their own innate intellect, the 'humanistic' creed that indeed broke the Church's monopoly on learning. Central to this cultural movement of the Renaissance, the West's conscious return to its classical wellspring, was the reading of the Greek philosophers in the original Greek (that is, no longer in Latin translations of Arabic translations). These works were now studied and commented on in widely distributed, printed editions. It inspired a surge of intellectual innovation that, in time, eventually engendered the West's reductionist thinking, proof-based science and the Enlightenment. Indeed, printing's emancipation of the written word defined that essential dynamic of our modern world, the accelerated accessing of information.

And it all began with Gutenberg in Mainz. The innovation impacted much more swiftly than most people realize. In 1450 only one printing press was operating in all of Europe. By 1500, around 1,700 presses in over 250 printing centres had already published about 27,000 known titles in more than *ten million* copies. Within only two generations Europe's several tens of thousands of readers had grown to several hundreds of thousands. In the last five hundred years, nothing has contributed more to society than the invention of printing.

'The gradual shift from the world of orality to the society of writing', the French historian Henri-Jean Martin has reminded us, '... led, in the final analysis, to something quite new – the unleashing of mechanisms that prompted a new view of self and a spirit of abstraction ... It encouraged a logic of the act as well as a logic of the word, and also an ability to reach reasoned decisions and a higher measure of self-control'.²

These were doubtless the printed page's greatest achievements of all.

When Mainz's Johann Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg personally invented replica-casting of 'matrix' letters and a special ink that would adhere to metal type, and then began using these with a screw press in 1450 to mass-produce printed pages of paper, the last thing on his mind was to change the world. Profit was his goal, through creatively augmenting production to maximize sales. The details of Gutenberg's story and of the rapid diffusion of his invention can be read elsewhere.³ Central to a history of reading is printing's astonishing effect on, above all, the *quantity* of production, thus determining, in time, both audience and reading matter.

Gutenberg's contribution can perhaps be overdramatized, as printing owes its immediate impact to what had been achieved in the Middle Ages.⁴ Printing's appearance around 1450 is foremost to be explained by the demands of that robust literate culture that Western Europe had already attained, one strong enough to warrant and sustain the mass production of printed books (see Chapter 4). Yet Gutenberg, to allow him his due, had unwittingly come upon what was certainly the most efficient way to multiply texts written in Europe's particular writing system, although neither he nor anyone else in Europe was aware of this fortuitous convergence of circumstances at the time.

For printing by movable type was indeed the ideally suited technology for complete alphabetic writing. In contrast to whole-word or syllabic writing, for example, alphabetic writing represents the spoken word through its (superficially) 'smallest' constituent features – its consonants (like *p*, *t*, *k*) and vowels (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*), which are written sequentially and linearly as equal members of the same system. Printing a complete alphabet by movable type multiplies a text with ease and efficiency because a printer here uses only a small inventory of letters (customarily between 20 and 30 higher-order systemic ones) to reproduce any given word in the language: so a printer's stock of cast type easily remains within physically manageable and financially affordable bounds. (Chinese printers, in contrast, need a separate character for nearly every single word, hypothetically tens

of thousands; until rather recently this fact rendered block or whole-page printing a more practicable, though still arduous, recourse there.) In this way alphabetic writing allows movable-type printing to express a utilitarian advantage impossible for societies using non-alphabetic writing systems to emulate. So the advent of the printing press at once gave the West a cultural advantage over the rest of the world.

Yet printing only succeeded because of the availability of paper. (Although some early printers did use parchment, its costs were prohibitive.) Printing's chief advantage lay in inexpensive mass productions, which only paper – never parchment – allowed. Developed in China around AD 100 and used throughout East Asia ever since, paper arrived in Islamic countries around the ninth century and became common in Western Europe in the 1300s. By the mid-1400s paper was replacing parchment nearly everywhere there. With the advent of the printing press only paper provided that perfect writing material for cheaply multiplying the written word. Parchment then vanished, except for ceremonial and official use: presentations, diplomas, titles, conveyances, charters and the like.

The approximately 27,000 individual titles that appeared in print between 1450 and 1500 (the number of hand-copied manuscripts growing apace, too, because of the great demand for reading material) meant an expansion and diversification of publishing and reading, within only two generations, of unparalleled proportion. Until around 1480 cast type simply imitated common scribal letter-shapes: typographers everywhere had intentionally designed founts (a complete set of type of one style and one size) to copy the standard hands found in contemporary manuscripts. As this was what customers had been used to reading, this was what they had wanted and what they had been willing to pay their pounds, livres and gulden for. Not only letter-shapes, but rubrics, initials, illustrations and even subject matter had all followed the manuscript tradition. But once printers began testing and expanding the parameters of their new craft the market itself had to adapt. Already by the last two decades of the 1400s printing's internal dynamics – standardization, clarity and mass appeal – were being recognized

and commercially exploited. With this development printing became its own autonomous trade, leaving hand-copied production to wane with the Middle Ages.

What did the very first printers turn out? Short texts, ephemera in great quantities (such as letters of indulgence), calendars, almanacs, Donatus's Latin grammar for schools and many other things. Less common were those grand undertakings that remained the domain of scribes: the 42-line Bible, the 36-line Bible, Balbi's *Catholicon* (a sort of mediæval encyclopædia) and a few other books of substance. For unlike in East Asia, where literary production always followed the predilection of the rich and royal, in Western Europe during the later Middle Ages printers were foremost merchants who had to earn their own way, nearly always without wealthy patrons. So the market itself determined the print-run. After having recognized the specific niche for their new craft, the first printers concentrated on large runs of circulars and short texts in cheap editions for a local market. More often than not these were in the vernacular, the everyday language of the people. And soon entire books were appearing in the vernacular, too, at prices no scribe could ever compete with. Quantity over quality became the ethos that drove the printing revolution, always a capitalistic venture.

One immediate consequence was the reduction in book size. Most publishers in the fifteenth century were already producing books according to one of three page-size formats: *folio* (from Latin *folium* or 'leaf'), folded once; *quarto* (after the four squares this produced), folded twice; and *octavo* (eight squares), folded thrice. Printing now made this scheme official. Those enormous folio Bibles made from the skin of 200 slaughtered calves for the castle, cathedral or parish church lectern dwindled with the demand for cheaper, more portable paper Bibles in quarto and octavo formats. In 1527 François I decreed standard paper sizes for all of France, their disregard punishable by imprisonment. Other countries soon followed suit.

Of the more than 250 printing centres operating in Europe by 1500, Venice – to where many Germans, because of civil unrest in their home principalities, had fled (nearly all the first printers were German) – ranked as the most dynamic and innovative.⁵ Two brothers, Johann and Wendelin of Speier, had

operated Venice's first press in 1467. Competition came in the 1470s from the brilliant Frenchman Nicolas Jensen, who, however, died in 1480 while visiting Pope Sixtus IV. Venice's premier printer in the 1480s was then another German, Erhard Ratdolt of Augsburg, but he returned home in 1486. By 1500 Venice was home to no fewer than 150 presses, the most celebrated being that of Aldus Manutius (*d* 1515), an Italian from Bassiano.

Financially backed by two princes, the 'humanist' (more aptly, classicist) Aldus began printing in Venice about 1490, having resolved from the beginning to produce a series of books that would be 'scholarly, compact, handy and cheap'.⁶ Rather than the customary run of 100 or 250 exemplars, Aldus purposely printed no fewer than *one thousand* copies of each edition in order to assure a profit. His earliest titles comprised the Greek classics of Aristotle, Plato, Sophocles and Thucydides; within a few years Aldus was including Latin classics as well, printing Virgil, Horace and Ovid. Consulting daily with some of Europe's leading 'humanists', his invited guests, Aldus knew these also happened to be the authors most in demand among Europe's classicists, guaranteeing his business's financial success.

But profit was not everything. Aldus insisted that these classical authors were read 'without intermediaries': that is, printed in their original languages almost wholly free of intrusive glosses or annotations by intervening authorities. As a 'humanist' himself, he wanted his readers to 'converse freely with the glorious dead'.⁷ To enable this conversation, Aldus also published separate classical dictionaries and grammars in order to facilitate access to the ancients. In this way Aldus presented his readers with a means to study for themselves without having to trek to Bologna, Heidelberg, Paris or Oxford. In other words, with one of Aldus's small printed books in hand, each reader could become a scholar.

In order to accommodate as much text as possible on each small page, Aldus chose to print entire works in cursive, that most space-saving of founts. For this he used a cursive designed by his own punch-cutter, the famous Francesco Griffo, a native of Bologna. Based on precedents and immediately recognizable by its forward slant, this new cursive allowed far more letters to

be fitted on each line, without evoking the appearance of crowding; only much later did it come to be called 'italic'.⁸ (The French typefounder Claude Garamond later created a typeface that blended CAPITALS, lower case and *italics* as 'fellow halves of a single design'.⁹) Griffo's various contributions at Aldus's Venetian print-shop created a printed page that allowed greater ease of reading, principally by eliminating ornateness.

Because of these and similar innovations elsewhere, a book was no longer an elaborate, prized investment, but a simple and elegant tool of scholarship. For many, reading ceased being a painful process of decipherment, and became an act of pure pleasure. By this time there was a whole new generation of readers who had grown up reading only printed books and who harboured little affection for superannuated folios of ecclesiastical treatises:

The *conoscenti* and *dilettanti*, the gentlemen of leisure who had imbibed the taste and a little of the scholarship of the humanists, and the school masters, parsons, lawyers, and doctors who had passed through their university courses of *litterae humaniores* wanted books which they could carry about on their walks and travels, read at leisure in front of their fireplaces, and which would incidentally be within the financial reach of the poorer of these potential book-buyers. Aldus had one of those brainwaves which distinguish the truly great publisher.¹⁰

For Aldus now invented the first 'pocketbook'.

He began with Virgil's *Opera* in April 1501, then issued a new volume every two months over the next five years, each with the same format. Using texts supplied by leading classical scholars, after 1502 each of his 'Aldine' editions, named after himself, bore the device of a dolphin twisting around an anchor (adapted from a coin of the Roman emperor Vespasian). Superbly printed in clear legible type, the works were impeccably edited and priced 'cheaply': that is, still within a lowly person's budget.

Aldus's idea of 'pocketbook' editions spread like wildfire throughout Western Europe. It soon became the basis of an

entire industry. In fact, the book you are holding is a direct descendant.

By then Europe was brimming with printing presses, most of them located close to their targeted clientele. Because of its proximity to the University of Paris, the city's Latin Quarter, for example, became Paris's centre for printing, with booksellers' shops lining the rue Saint-Jacques and printers and bookbinders in nearby streets and alleys. Here an entire book-producing industry arose; within a century several thousand printers, binders, journeymen, dealers, related middlemen and their large families were all earning their living from the production and distribution of books in the neighbourhood and even abroad. Other Parisian booksellers opened specialist shops near their respective clientele, too: devotional books alongside Notre Dame, law books by the Palais de Justice and so forth.

As an integral part of the general history of civilization, printing changed society in a fundamental way. By making almost unlimited copies of identical texts available by mechanical means, it brought society from limited access to knowledge to almost unlimited access to knowledge. Printing actually enabled modern society. It would be no exaggeration to claim that printing has been as important to humankind as the controlled use of fire and the wheel.¹¹

THE BOOK 'AGAIN' AS TOOL

Aldus's insistence on Greek had not been accidental. The conquest of Constantinople by Ottoman Turks in 1453 had forced many Greek scholars to flee for their lives to Italy. Scores of them settled in Venice, where an interest in Greek instruction had existed for over a century. The city became a great centre for classical studies, just when the first German printers, similarly fleeing civil unrest, were arriving. With the Greeks came a different attitude towards reading, individualistic and analytic. And with the Germans came a new way of sharing it, printing. The unprecedented combination fuelled the dynamo of 'humanism', a term coined at the beginning of the

nineteenth century that is in fact misleading through its failure to capture the movement's true complexities.

At this time, between 1460 and 1470, the scholastic method was being actively challenged in all Europe's principal centres of teaching. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 4), isolated voices had already questioned scholasticism as early as the thirteenth century, but only now was scholasticism seriously challenged (although scientific discourse in Latin continued well into the eighteenth century). The reason? There were principally two: the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the invention of the printing press enabling greater availability of books. An immediate upshot of the new, direct approach to reading, besides its awakening the pupils' enthusiasm to learn more, was that many more graduates of the church, cathedral and civic schools were now fluent in Latin and able to draw more out of each text. (One pupil even enthused about how his headmaster prioritized 'milking the text for every drop of sense'.)¹² Christian virtues and morals, however, remained dominant, some teachers even insinuating Aristotle's precept that a man behaves in later life according to the education he has received. Indeed, this attitude inspired all Western education well into the twentieth century.

'Humanism' now turned reading private, questioned received wisdom and creatively sought new alternatives. Common orthodoxy had to yield to individual opinion, as each reader became an authority. The social manifestation of this fundamental shift in attitude – chiefly prompted by altered reading habits – was the Renaissance, which brought vast changes in every sphere of daily life in Europe: Luther's theses and Protestantism, Copernicus's cosmology, expansion to the New World and into the Pacific, and much more. The rediscovery of the written vernacular played a salient role in this process.

Printers actually favoured the vernacular, as these commonly sold more copies and so made them more profit. Of the approximately 90 books, for example, published by the first English printer, William Caxton (c. 1420–91), during his sixteen-year career in printing, amazingly 74 of them were in English, not Latin. This was neither penchant nor command, but reflected London's market at the time: most Latin books were imported from the Continent. Caxton included in his production the

works of England's greatest authors: Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate and Malory. It was a wholly new era in literary production, and prefigured all future publishing. Here, booksellers were not propagandizing but reacting, their goal being to maximize profit. This was different from mediæval book production, which had been determined from the top down: scholarly and ecclesiastical reading in Latin for the affluent clergy, and epics and romances chiefly in the vernacular for the wealthy nobles. Now, the rising bourgeoisie took charge of reading's direction and introduced other tastes, much more frequently expressed in the vernacular.

By the end of the fifteenth century the written word was again enriching European society in a way that had not been seen for nearly a thousand years.¹³ Most administrators now depended on reading and writing, commercial correspondence was thriving, classification and retrieval of written information followed systematic schemes, and there was a volume of spiritual literature and speculative thought that, because of printing, was unprecedented. In addition, written national literatures were quickly filling Europe's growing domestic and institutional libraries.

The world of reading, however, still remained rigidly compartmentalized. Only several hundreds of thousands of Europeans scrivenered, calculated, notaried, copied, studied and, most rarely of all, authored. The number of literates continued to grow as public education spread among more affluent communities. Yet around fifty million people still held to traditional oral devices for all their daily needs. A tension had been created between the commonly privileged, élite literate and these masses of illiterates. Writing of course favoured the literate and, being unassailable, prevailed. As the oral national epic had earlier yielded to the written courtly romance, now all orality broke before literacy. Though the wellspring of written literature had been oral literature, now written literature began drawing from itself for inspiration. Oral traditions drastically declined, then disappeared. Once literacy had arrived in strength, there was no return to the oral prerogative. Literate society forced the illiterate to change. The community of literates, themselves no longer privileged or

élite, grew larger and diffused, creating in the process a wholly new Europe.

The book was 'again' a tool, but this time it was a higher-order tool. No longer solely the vehicle of human speech, it was now recognized, at the end of the fifteenth century, as educated society's most important medium for accessing knowledge. Indeed, the perception was so profound and widespread that practically every book, not just Scripture, assumed near-sacred status among the educated élite. Only fools, ran a common motif of the era, misused reading by wasting their time with useless books. In this vein the Strasbourg lawyer Sebastian Brant commenced his 1494 classic, *Das Narrenschiff* ('The Ship of Fools'), with the item 'On Useless Books', including a woodcut by the young Nuremberg artist Albrecht Dürer, over which the leader heralds:

The fore-dance one has left to me
For I have many books uselessly
That I don't read or understand.¹⁴

Surrounded by his books, and in fool's cap with whisk in hand against pesky flies, the bespectacled 'Book Fool' declares:

That I sit fore in the ship [of fools],
That has truly a special reason;
It is not without design:
I trust in my *libry* [books/library].
Of books I have a large horde,
Understand in them however nary a word,
And yet hold them in such prize
That I'll shoo off the flies!

The jest here is that this late-mediæval bibliophile is also a *domine doctor* (then the equivalent of a full professor) who, however, "knows precious little Latin; / I know that *vinum* means wine, / *Gucklus* an idiot, *stultus* a fool, / And that I'm called *domne doctor!*", a pun on mediæval Alemannian German *domne/damme* ('damn').

Inspired by Brant's phenomenally successful satire, the

popular preacher Johann Geiler (1445–1510), one of the most influential moralists of the later Middle Ages, born in Switzerland but reared in Kaisersberg in German-speaking Alsace, based a series of sermons on the *Ship of Fools* only one year before his death. In his first, treating just this item 'On Useless Books' by Brant, Geiler urged his congregation from the pulpit of Strasbourg Cathedral: 'He who wants books to bring him fame must learn something from them; he must store them not in his library, but in his head'.¹⁵ Books were foremost tools, Geiler was insisting. Fame is not won from showing the externals of knowledge, the amassed volumes, but from displaying the essence of knowledge, through learning of the volumes' contents – just as the Roman philosopher, statesman and dramatist Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65), one of Geiler's and the humanists' favourite authors, had preached nearly 1,500 years earlier.

Such moralists as Geiler were eschewing the mediæval commonplace of resentment towards haughty men of letters, those using reading, for something altogether different: resentment towards those *misusing* reading. Reading was too precious a tool to misuse, was the message here. Books being 'acquirable' at last because of printing (they were still rare, however), their proper use was not merely advisable: it was imperative, for books were humanity's most important tool to learn and grow. For this, reading had to be the purview of all, not just of the élite scholars and clerics who, throughout the Middle Ages, had dominated the practice. Reading was now everyone's duty. But 'correct' reading, which at last meant individual analytic reading.

Open to interpretation, the distinction was soon to split Europe in two.

'BURN ALL THE RECORDS OF THE REALM'

So the printed book had ceased to be a reproduction of the handwritten manuscript, and was soon taking on an identity of its own. Readers no longer deciphered each word of a text, no longer adapted, improved, corrected and/or censored the author as one hand-copied for colleagues, friends and family.

The printed text was petrified, immutable, final. It is little wonder that, with printing, readers' attitudes changed: for a printed text no longer held that personal invitation of the handwritten mediæval manuscript, but carried the impersonal challenge instead. In this altered perception of the written word in the second half of the fifteenth century, modern reading was born.

Of course reverence for the written word, though now printed, continued. The Dutch 'humanist' Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466–1536) devoutly kissed his printed volume of Cicero before opening it. The Florentine statesman and political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), at the conclusion of a day's work, always donned his best clothes before reading his favourite authors, again in print. But this sustained reverence did not halt the accelerating transformation of the written word into something different.

In the sixteenth century printed texts were radically streamlined in order to reduce fount costs and facilitate ease of reading even more. Those mediæval abbreviations, ligatures and suspensions used by most early printers all but disappeared. The hundreds of typefaces were first homogenized to a small number of clearly legible ones – either light Roman or heavy Gothic – then standardized into a system of CAPITALS, lower case and *italics*, each of whose usage was then determined by universally accepted rules. Market forces (the demand for many and, above all, inexpensive books) required these innovations. For books now became mass goods, a volume of reading a commodity, an article of commerce, an exchangeable unit of economic wealth like any other primary product.

In consequence, 'humanist' printers' concept of what a book should look like and contain also changed. No longer favouring the mediæval custom of marginal commentaries and interlineal glosses to steer the reader towards the one 'correct' reading of a work, they wanted instead to make an original work available in the most accurate version possible; external reading aids, like dictionaries and encyclopædias, should assist if needed. The reader was to make the most of a text for herself or himself. For the reader, no longer the text, was the fulcrum of knowledge. Turning the mediæval world on its head, the ethos informed

'humanism'. And all truly educated persons have read in this fashion ever since.

Yet despite Petrarch and the 'humanists', the scholastic method of reading – personally censoring each text according to prescribed criteria – still prevailed well into the sixteenth century in all universities as well as in all monastic, cathedral, civil and parish schools. Its influence endured even longer than this. Most grievously felt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was censorship above all that determined in Europe not only what, but also how one read. One particular problem was that an immediate effect of printing, as we have seen, had been the production of an increasing number of vernacular works targeting the largest possible audience. In the sixteenth century far-sighted and enterprising booksellers then addressed the national market, in the vernacular, with a new kind of literature aimed specifically at a relatively well-educated lay readership of public officials, affluent merchants and, for the first time, women. Printers even invited scholars to write for them that sort of propaganda the less scholarly would best understand.

This led to a polarization not only of literature, but of society itself.

Some revolutionary illiterates, resenting the literates' preferred position in society, had already called for an end not only to printing, but to books and education, which were perceived as tools of the powerful to subjugate the powerless. Just such a call echoes in Act IV, Scene 7, of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part Two*, recreating the 1450s, when the clothier and rebel Jack Cade, a common bullying labourer, champions oral tradition, crying out: 'Away, burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England!' After which he calls for Lord Say to be beheaded 'ten times', railing at him:

I am the besom that must sweep the court clean of such filth as thou art. Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school: and whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used ...

Shakespeare was taking poetic licence: Caxton had opened England's first press on 13 December 1476, a full generation after Jack Cade. A product of the following century, here Shakespeare was concerned foremost with contrasting the oral culture of the brutish commoners with that written culture of education and administration he knew would triumph in future. Jack Cade does indeed have Lord Say beheaded in the fury of the moment, but soon after is slain himself; his cause fails.

To the violent interface of orality and written culture that printing prompted at this time came the establishment of strict systems of repression and censorship: 'rulers, who were more often arbiters than parties to the disputes, found they had to play an active role in the organization of book distribution circuits if they wanted to keep the public peace and maintain economic prosperity'.¹⁶ Suppression of literature struck again soon after the invention of printing. In 1478 the creation of the Spanish Inquisition, which effectively continued for the next 400 years, led immediately to the severe censorship, indeed constraint, of all written material in Spain, crippling the country's intellectual growth for nearly as long. In March 1479, having been appealed to by the doctors of the University of Cologne, Pope Sixtus IV ruled that all printers, buyers and readers of heretical books were to be chastised, and booksellers were first to ask permission of their local Church authority before launching a new work. Six years later the archbishop of Mainz spoke out against the 'improper' use of the printing press by meretricious booksellers, criticizing vernacular translations of Latin texts on canon law and such liturgical works as missals, as well as translations of classical Greek and Latin writers. He stipulated that authorization to print any book had to be obtained beforehand from a four-member commission. Further centres soon took similar measures.

Around 1500 thousands of Jewish and Arabic books perished in the Spanish Inquisition's pyres. The Spanish king and queen then seized the initiative and, in 1502, decreed that no book could be printed without their royal authorization or that of persons whom they had personally designated – essentially checking the Inquisitors' control over literature, rendering it a royal prerogative. This was something unprecedented in

Europe. At the Fifth Lateran Council in 1515 Pope Leo X prohibited everywhere in Christendom the publishing of any printed work without prior authorization of one of two persons: in Rome, the Vicar of His Holiness or the Master of the Sacred Palace; outside of Rome, the local bishop or inquisitor.¹⁷ Six years later, François I ordered the French Parliament to prohibit the publication of all religious books that failed to obtain an imprimatur (sanction or approval to print) from a member of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris.

Yet one century after the invention of printing the sheer numbers of book titles, on any subject under the sun, thwarted all human scrutiny – and any effective control. Authorities would still not relent. In 1559 the Sacred Congregation of the Roman Inquisition, the judicial institution of the Roman Catholic Church established in 1232 to suppress heresy, published its first *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*: those titles the Church judged to be harmful towards the faith, whose possession would bring censure, or worse. (The *Index* ceased only in 1966.) The list was frequently effective in Catholic countries, sometimes forcing authors into exile, otherwise merely transferring the publishing of prohibited titles to Protestant centres.

At such non-Catholic centres the book trade flourished, adding to these northern Protestant nations' intellectual growth, scientific and technical advancement and subsequent wealth and power. It was at this time – and because of reading and the book trade, education, Protestantism and other causes – that the economic and intellectual fulcrum shifted from the south to the north of Europe where it has remained ever since. (The Industrial Revolution and, later, the Electronic Revolution have been direct results of this transfer of the intellectual franchise, brought about in part by restricting the freedom of reading in southern lands.)

Still, censorship continued unabated, even growing more widespread with increased reading and publishing. In 1563 France's King Charles IX decreed that no book could be published without the 'leave, permission and privilege' guaranteed by the royal Grand Seal through the agency of the chancellor; as in Spain, this then allowed the kings of France to compete with the Catholic Church in controlling the press there. The

doctors of the Sorbonne, however, actively fought for the right to assess all printed works for themselves, tolerating no other censorship but the trained, liberal mind. Within a century this led to a breakdown of Church and royal censorship in France: as printers and booksellers proliferated, works were often published and openly distributed without any prior authorization at all. In contrast, in Spain the Council of Castile was claiming as late as 1627 the right to inspect all documents – including even those of only several pages – prior to printing.

As ever, the Roman Catholic Church clung to tradition, with the parish priest responsible for conveying Latin Scripture to the almost exclusively Latin-illiterate faithful. The Vulgate Latin Bible of St Jerome was declared to be the only 'authentic' version. The papal bull *Dominici gregis* of 1564 laid down universal rules relative to reading: the books of the principal heretical leaders (Luther, Hus and others) were prohibited; all non-Christian books on any religious subject, all obscene and immoral books, all books on magic and judiciary astrology were prohibited; Bible translations and controversial books were to be read only after prior consultation with a priest or confessor; no children were to read classical Greek and Latin authors; publication of any printed work required prior Church authorization, and ordinaries were regularly to inspect printshops and booksellers' premises.

England experienced similar measures. A royal proclamation by King Henry VIII in 1538 forbade the publication of any book lacking the written permission of the Privy Council, and this national principle of prior censorship was reinforced by Edward VI in 1549 and 1551, and then by Elizabeth I in 1559. During Mary Tudor's reign (1553–58), any expression of Protestantism, including printing and reading, was cruelly suppressed. Many devised ingenious ways to avoid detection, as English readers refused to be deterred from their devotional reading.

The Protestant ancestors of Benjamin Franklin, for example, owned a forbidden English-language Bible that was 'fastened open with tapes under and within the cover of a joint-stool'.¹⁸ When it came time for a family service, Franklin's great-great-grandfather:

turned up the joint-stool upon his knees, turning over the leaves then under the tapes. One of the children stood at the door to give notice if he saw the apparitor coming, who was an officer of the spiritual court. In that case the stool was turned down again upon its feet, when the Bible remained concealed under it as before.

The English craved the immediate written word in the vernacular no less than did continental Europeans. Under the same Mary Tudor, one Rollins White, a poor fisherman, paid to have his son go to school so that when White returned home from fishing the boy might read the Bible to him after supper; and Joan Waist of Derby, a poor blind woman, saved up to buy a New Testament and then paid people to read aloud to her. Of fundamental importance, it was felt, was the reading of the Bible for oneself, and in one's native English, without the agency of the Church as mediator of a Latin salvation.

At the end of the 1500s the Puritans, through the Cambridge University presses, campaigned vociferously for freedom from state intervention in all matters of faith. Yet the Star Chamber (the Privy Council sitting as a court of equity) decreed in 1586, under Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603), that all books were to be submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury or Bishop of London before they could secure the Stationers' Company registration, a prerequisite to publication. As a result, many black presses flourished in London, Presbyterian propaganda flowed out of Scotland, and Dutch Protestant works flooded the English market.

Prior approval of manuscripts intended for publication was again decreed by England's Star Chamber in 1637 under Charles I, yet open printing and distribution still continued. Censorship and registration suddenly ceased in 1640 – the Star Chamber itself was abolished the following year – but then the absence of all regulations resulted in chaos. In 1643 the Presbyterians and Puritans dominating the House of Commons reinstated prior censorship to curtail the printed propaganda of their adversaries. Prior censorship was to characterize British publishing for the rest of the century, having the effect of reducing the number of

London's printing establishments by almost two-thirds (down to twenty) and inviting a wave of pirated editions.

REFORMATION AND READING

Europe was not ready for universal literacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Civic authorities in the metropolises focused on higher education, and so primary schools, served poorly, for the most part remained relatively isolated phenomena. The majority of Europe's children attended no school at all. They visited catechism classes only irregularly, and remained illiterate. Hence what each new generation knew came only through rote memorization, using orally taught formulas. As a result, ignorance and superstition abounded. This situation lasted well into the seventeenth century.

Moreover, although more reading was taking place because of printing, this involved mostly circulars and other shorter printed texts. Only very few people owned proper books, as principally the era's probate records witness. In Florence, for example, whereas in the period between 1413 and 1453 books had been owned by around 3.3 per cent of those who, at death, left behind a child or children to become a ward of the city, between 1467 and 1520, after printing's introduction, this had fallen surprisingly to only 1.4 per cent. And it barely improved later: between 1531 and 1569, 4.6 per cent; and between 1570 and 1608, still a paltry 5.2 per cent.¹⁹ Among those who did own books, most had fewer than ten: before 1520, 75 per cent; in the mid-1500s, 67.5 per cent; and near the end of the 1500s, a little under 50 per cent. Books remained rare, and reading a book was a special, indeed memorable, experience that was still out of reach of most.

In sixteenth-century Valencia, Spain, for example, 75 per cent of all books mentioned in the probate records belonged to judges, physicians and the clergy. As in Italy, the advent of printing in Spain incited no social revolution, here because the country, having recently completed the *reconquista*, was effectively bound by strong nationalist tradition. Other Spanish centres, such as Valladolid in the north-west, then briefly the

nation's capital, were somewhat more cosmopolitan, buying large numbers of devotional, classical, travel, law and 'humanistic' books as well as chivalrous romances. But then Valladolid was also a university town.

In nearly all of Europe, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, most readers of books were physicians, nobles, wealthy merchants and the clergy, just as in the Middle Ages. Tradesmen, craftsmen and common merchants could sometimes read, if imperfectly. These often preferred booklets of ballads or stories, cheap Books of Hours and the primers their children would perhaps use at the local school, if there was one. Yeomen, peasant farmers and day labourers seldom could read. Owning and reading an actual book, a volume bound in rich leather and printed on fine paper, were still the franchise of the wealthy and socially smart. Book-reading culture cemented social castes, setting apart and supporting the few who yet controlled the many. Book reading was still far from becoming a public prerogative.

But, primarily because of printing, profound changes were happening.

It began in Germany, home of the first printing press and most of the earliest printers. Always championing the printed word's distribution, Germany led Europe in literacy in the sixteenth century. It was also in Germany that the demand for printed books as well as circulars, pamphlets and tracts was greatest, a demand most often satisfied by book pedlars who plied the smaller towns, villages and rural settlements with their packhorse, cart or covered wagon heavy with leather-bound books and booklets. Usually, once bought, a printed work in such a rural locale – a castle, hall or vicarage – was then read aloud to gathered family members and neighbours by the sole individual there who could read. And with greater access to knowledge came greater questioning of one's relationship to those in power. It was hardly accidental that, soon after printing's invention, Germany became the crucible of the Reformation, that religious and political movement that began as an attempt to renovate the Roman Catholic Church and resulted in the establishment of Europe's Protestant Churches.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the German Martin Luther (1483-1546) was declaring that not through the agency of the Church but through one's own faith alone did God's grace descend. Heretical though the idea may be, it was hardly revolutionary, having already been voiced in the luminous twelfth century, and then each century thereafter. And for it Luther's predecessors had burnt at the stake. Luther himself barely escaped the pyre in Augsburg. But, because of printing and the economic power of central and northern German princes, who found independence at last from the Roman yoke financially advantageous, Luther and his heretical ideas not only survived, but became the basis of a new Church in Europe, the Protestant Church (though this had never been Luther's intention).

In 1519, as the Roman theologian Silvester Prieria declared that the book on which the Holy Church was founded had to remain a 'mystery', to be explained only through the mediation of the power and authority of His Holiness the Pope in Rome, Martin Luther and his supporters in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland were announcing far and wide that each person - male and female - possessed the 'divine right' to read God's Word for themselves, without intermediary, and in their own language. Two years later Luther even began publication of his German-language Bible (the New Testament appeared in 1522) and within several years central and northern Germany teemed with Lutheran publications, whereas southern Germany abounded with anti-Lutheran printings supporting the Roman Catholic revival. The writing-based polemic, something that had never happened before, being the direct result of printing's new dynamic, divided the German people and invited social disaster, not only for Germany but for all of Europe.

In 1529 Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, pressed by the Roman Catholic Church, rescinded all privileges that had been granted to Luther and his supporters. It was an ill-considered move, since six Lutheran princes and 14 free German cities rose up immediately in protest, declaring in a printed manifesto that was widely distributed: 'In matters which concern God's honour and salvation and the eternal life of our souls, everyone must stand and give account before God for

himself.' The issue split Europe; we are still recoiling five hundred years later. And it essentially centred on people's right to read and think for themselves.

Luther's own instructions in this matter had been clear. In his 1520 tract *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation* ('An Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation'), he had urged that every child be introduced to the Gospels before the age of nine or ten, and that all secondary study should focus on reading Scripture for oneself. In the preface to his New Testament translation two years later, he had further advised all Christians to read daily the Gospel according to St John, or St Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Only through such personal efforts, Luther was to assert for the rest of his life, could one earn salvation for oneself: through devotional reading, through just such individual expressions of faith.

Martin Luther exerted an unparalleled publishing influence in all German-speaking lands, his translations of the Bible becoming the very mainstay of the central and northern German press. The New Testament that first appeared in his residence of Wittenberg experienced fourteen reprints there over the next two years, then 66 reprints in Augsburg, Basel, Strasbourg and Leipzig. Within a short time it enjoyed 87 editions in High German and 19 in Low German (a northern tongue similar to Dutch). Luther's Old Testament translation, which finally appeared in 1534, experienced several hundred editions merely up to 1546. (Print-runs were then still quite small.). From 1546 to 1580 Luther's Wittenberg publisher Hans Lufft alone produced a further 36 editions. In fact, Lufft was responsible for the distribution of no fewer than 100,000 copies of various biblical texts from 1534 to 1574.²⁰

Erasmus of Rotterdam, for one, waxed eloquent in his support for personal devotional reading in the vernacular:

I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospel - should read the Epistles of Paul. And I wish that these were translated into all the languages so that they might be read and understood, not only by Scots and Irishmen, but also by Turks and Saracens [Muslims] ... I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the

plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle.²¹

Everywhere in Europe, the Bible began to appear in printed vernacular editions (New Testament/Old Testament): English (1526/35), Dutch (1526), Danish (1526/41), French (1535), Icelandic (1540/84), Polish (1551), Slovenian (1555/84), Czech (1579/93), Welsh (1588) and many more. In the sixteenth century several *million* volumes of the Old and New Testaments were published, bought and read in German lands alone. That wonder of the cathedral and parish church – Scripture – had at last, thanks to Reformation presses, arrived at the family hearth.

Many clergymen were not happy. The sudden flood of vernacular translations was responsible, they felt, for Bible versions that were ‘corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original’, as the Puritan Dr John Rainolds told the ‘king of Great Britain, France and Ireland, defender of the faith’ in 1604: King James I, having ascended the throne only one year earlier following Queen Elizabeth’s death, agreed and, to banner his new reign, commissioned the country’s leading scholars to effect a new, ‘authorized’ translation of the Bible (see below).

Luther himself had had occasion to question whether he had been right to translate the Bible and (reminiscent of Socrates’ complaint) put it within the reach of readers who might arrive at conclusions he actually condemned. (As there was no longer the mediation of the Church, who was there to interpret ‘correctly’ a text for the untutored reader?) In common with many ‘humanists’ of the period, Luther had also fretted whether the sudden proliferation of titles might not encourage readers to read too superficially and thus miss those several layers of meaning the trained scholar knew each text held. Nor was translating a simple task, as he had complained in 1530: ‘*Ach*, translating is in no way the art of everyman, as the mad saints assert; to it belongs a just, pious, true, diligent, timid, Christian, learned, experienced, skilled heart’.²²

It was also dangerous to effect Bible translations. It undermined Church authority, turning even the ploughman into a Bible scholar. The father of the English Bible, William Tyndale (c. 1490–1536), born in Gloucestershire and educated at Oxford

and Cambridge, was a case in point. Tyndale had fled England for Germany in 1524 when he was condemned as a heretic by King Henry VIII for having criticized the monarch’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon. One year later in Cologne he published his New Testament, translated directly from the original Greek, in simple, clear, everyday English. Later publishing in Worms, Tyndale saw his English New Testament appear in several editions up until 1534, each secretly smuggled into England. Tyndale began translating the Old Testament, too, from the original Hebrew. But he was betrayed by enemies in 1535 and imprisoned near Brussels. In a letter addressed to the Governor of Vilvorde Castle where he was being held, Tyndale first begged for some warmer clothing, then penned:

I wish also for permission to have a candle in the evening, for it is weary work to sit alone in the dark. But, above all things, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procurer, that he may kindly suffer me to have my Hebrew Bible, Grammar, and Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study.²³

On 6 October 1536, just after shouting ‘Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!’, Tyndale was strangled to death. Then his corpse was burnt at the stake. Perhaps fittingly, it was Tyndale’s English New Testament that introduced into common usage the new words ‘passover’, ‘peacemaker’ and even ‘beautiful’, so admired was his Bible translation in England. (The first printed edition of a complete English-language Bible had been produced just one year earlier, the work of Miles Coverdale, who had translated not from the original Greek and Hebrew, but from the German and Latin Bibles.)

Henry VIII’s break from the Roman Catholic Church, prompted by his failure to secure from the Pope a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, left the country’s Church libraries in ruin, their holdings either plundered or burnt. The libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, and those of the cathedrals, survived unscathed, however, and now began to experience unprecedented expansion, often through donations of despoiled Church collections. At the same time, the dissolution of Church

land titles and their transfer to a new landed gentry distributed unprecedented wealth among England's middle class, making the country's rural merchants, wealthier yeomen, propertied craftsmen and especially the landed gentry a dynamic force whose like had been unknown in Europe. Their immediate contribution was to provide most of the country (except the north and west) with a more egalitarian society, including better education. In contrast to their peers on the Continent, England's physicians, lawyers, clergy and even primary-school teachers in the provinces would own up to several hundred books, selected according to profession and taste but primarily treating of theology, law and the sciences.

In the rest of Europe the interface of oral and written cultures remained an expansive, grey, dangerous zone inhabited by many types in this era of extreme religious fanaticism. One particularly poignant fate in the latter half of the sixteenth century was that of the miller Menocchio of Friuli, the region between the Alps and the Gulf of Venice.²⁴ From an owned or borrowed Italian-language Bible, *Rosario della gloriosa Vergine Maria* and *Golden Legend*, Menocchio, who had never been trained how to read intelligently and thus was incapable of reasoned comprehension, understood these three vernacular texts only fragmentarily and literally (as is the wont of many self-taught people), then combined his piecemeal gleanings with oral tradition to invent his own 'coherent' theory of the world. Soon he began espousing his new creed publicly, defying both common sense and the Church.

The deluded devotee of the written word was tried for heresy and burnt alive at the stake by other deluded devotees.

DOG-EARS AND TORAHS

For the few people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who did own books, printed devotional texts, as a rule, graced the bedroom shelf: a Book of Hours, a Bible, saints' lives, a breviary (containing psalms, hymns or prayers to be recited daily) or perhaps the Church Fathers – above all St Augustine. Antiquity's two 'bestsellers', Homer and Virgil, were seldom

absent from libraries of two hundred volumes or more. Such large domestic libraries were still rare, however. England claimed most, as a result of Henry VIII's Reform, which had led to the wholesale despoliation of Roman Catholic libraries. In Amiens, France, between 1503 and 1575, twenty-one of the town's élite owned more than one hundred, and one leading citizen up to five hundred volumes.²⁵ Of special interest to the few who owned books in sixteenth-century Florence were writings about the Virgin Mary, again the *Golden Legend*, treatises on popular religion and, of course, the works of St Augustine (almost all of these volumes still in Latin, not yet Italian). Florentines read classical authors, too, if less frequently: Virgil, Ovid, Valerius Maximus, Horace, Livy, Plutarch and Boethius. And for 'modernity' the works of Boccaccio, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto and the scholar-cardinal Pietro Bembo were eagerly devoured alongside the Arno.

Still quite rare, books were nearly as highly valued in the Renaissance as they had been in the Middle Ages, their theft commonly punishable by death, just as if they were horses or cattle. Countless volumes of the era carried inside their front cover an owner's 'book curse', such as the plain-spoken German

*Das puech ist mir lieb
Wer das stilt ist ain dieb
Er sei riter oder knecht
Er wer dem galgn gerecht.*²⁶

('The book is dear to me / Whoever steals it is a thief / Be he knight or serf / He would deserve the gallows.')

Despite Aldus Manutius's introduction of a smaller, more portable book for everyman, most books still tended to be of impressive, sometimes even daunting, proportions: folios and quartos that were about twice the size of today's standard book, and even much larger. But then the octavo and duodecimo formats became popular, frequently the size of today's smaller paperbacks. This had several reasons. Though large volumes attracted the affluent clientele, large books used up too much expensive paper; they were very expensive to produce and bind. The pirated editions proliferating everywhere, almost all of

them in small format, forced more and more authorized publishers to conform in order to survive. More importantly, readers preferred the smaller format in this age of the 'police state', when titles were publicly scrutinized and when secretiveness saved lives. But, above all, the smaller size meant a cheaper selling price, putting books within the reach of non-affluent individuals, who comprised the majority of consumers. So the smaller the book, the greater the sales. It was foremost the demands of the free market that shrank the European book. Since the mid-1600s most books in Europe, and then throughout the world, have been printed in these octavo and duodecimo formats.

More affordable books also meant more books, and more books brought a diminution of their traditional respect. Nothing could be more indicative of this than the ubiquitous appearance of 'dog-ears', the folded-down corners of book pages. Virtually unknown with the expensive parchment books of the Middle Ages, dog-ears become commonplace in the sixteenth century. In Act iv, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, for example, Brutus picks up a book, saying: '... is not the leaf turn'd down / Where I left reading?' Certainly Brutus could not have 'dog-eared' a papyrus scroll of the first century BC. Shakespeare, again anachronistically, imagined Brutus using a codex, a book, just as if it were a relatively inexpensive sixteenth-century commodity. Apparently, already within a century of printing's invention, many were discarding their traditional bookmarks to begin folding pages' corners to signal where they had left off reading. The simple gesture marks a fundamental shift in attitude. The hitherto wondrous and precious object had finally become ... a simple book.

As the aristocracy had used reading and writing from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries to challenge the Church, the new 'middle class' – the rising producers, merchants, distributors, middlemen and investors – began using reading and writing from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries to challenge the aristocracy in turn. (At Europe's periphery the process continued into the twentieth century.) Reading titles flourished as middle-class readers (not nobles or the clergy) now determined the book market, sidelining their élite predecessors.

At first, as the pendulum swung to the other extreme, everything imaginable was printed, with each publisher competing through novelty to secure his share of the market. Qualitative competition (font, scholarly substance, binding) yielded almost everywhere to quantitative competition, and so within fifty years – by the mid-sixteenth century, when a reader now had over *eight million* books to choose from – book quality had plummeted. The century that had begun with intellectually minded publishers eliciting eminent scholars' participation in and endorsement for a project, finally ended with commercially orientated publisher-booksellers who 'were no longer concerned with patronizing the world of letters, but merely sought to publish books whose sale was guaranteed. The richest made their fortune on books with a guaranteed market, reprints of old bestsellers, traditional religious works and, above all, the Church Fathers.'²⁷

At this time, wives of merchants and shopkeepers very often learnt to read and write in order to help out at the family business as bookkeepers and accountants. In this way a middle-class female readership developed as well, whose purchasing power, because they primarily lived in cities and towns, immediately affected the selection and direction of 'popular' titles, often being mercantile women's preferred reading.

One of the printing industry's chief markets in the sixteenth century was the local school, usually the grammar school for boys. Printers vied with one another to supply glosses for lectures, manuals of Latin grammar and, above all, individually printed sheets for hornbooks. Ubiquitous from the 1500s up to the 1800s, a hornbook was commonly the first thing a girl or boy ever held to read. Comprising a thin wooden board – usually as long and wide as an adult's hand – with a small handle on the bottom, it was covered on the front side with a transparent film of horn to discourage soiling, hence the name, and the whole ensemble was cased in a brass frame. The hornbook's single printed sheet normally displayed, from top to bottom, the lower-case alphabet, the upper-case alphabet, occasionally the first nine digits or special syllabic combinations, and the Lord's Prayer.

Although England's country folk remained almost entirely

illiterate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its suddenly flourishing middle-class townsfolk embraced reading wholeheartedly. England's first municipal libraries were established in the early 1600s, significantly through merchants' subsidies. University libraries and public school libraries augmented their holdings many fold, often through the belated acquisition of once-plundered monastic libraries. Private homes increasingly held books, too. Between 1560 and 1640 in the Kentish towns of Canterbury (5,000–6,000 inhabitants), Faversham and Maidstone (c. 2,000 each), for example, the number of houses owning books increased from one in ten to five in ten.²⁸ This latter figure, much higher than anywhere on the Continent, including Germany, witnesses England's acquired lead in book distribution and consumption by the seventeenth century. Many books were now kept in the kitchen, where much reading aloud took place among family and staff, revealing a greater familiarity and intimacy with reading. Because of the influence of the Puritans, one of England's major cultural forces at the time, Bible reading of course took pride of place at such gatherings.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, however, the bedroom remained the favourite place to read and store books. But the bedroom was then also customarily a passageway, so that even in bed one was seldom undisturbed while reading. If a person wished to read privately, then one had to retire elsewhere with a candle or, if day, outdoors, where a great amount of reading still took place, just like in the Middle Ages.

In Europe's still severely communal societies, such impassioned solitary readers frequently became objects of suspicion, persons apart from the crowd. 'I do not know the man I should avoid / So soon as that spare Cassius', Shakespeare's Cæsar tells Antony in Act 1, Scene 2 of *Julius Cæsar*: 'He reads much ...' Yet even future saints counted among such souls. When still a young girl, Spain's Teresa of Avila (1515–82), for example, who later reformed the Carmelite order of nuns, was a ravenous reader herself, and of chivalrous novels no less:

I became accustomed to reading them, and that small fault made me cool my desire and will to do my other tasks. And I

thought nothing of spending many hours a day and night in this vain exercise, hidden from my father. My rapture in this was so great that, unless I had a new book to read, it seemed to me that I could not be happy.²⁹

Throughout Europe, reading became food itself – the ultimate cuisine for mind and spirit. Indeed, the 'reading-as-comestible' metaphor was a commonplace. Like her contemporary Teresa of Avila, also an authoress, England's Queen Elizabeth I described her devotional reading in just such terms:

I walke manie times into the pleasant fieldes of the Holye Scriptures, where I pluck up the goodlie greene herbes of sentences, eate them by reading, chewe them up musing, and laie them up at length in the seate of memorie ... so I may the lesse perceive the bitterness of this miserable life.³⁰

Women actually began to excel in the male-dominated realms of reading and writing. A further contemporary, Louise Labé (c. 1524–66) of Lyon, perhaps surpassed them all. Neither sainted nor royal, she could draw from the wellspring of unfettered human passion, composing in earthly, sensuous realism; her works figure among France's most inspired. Attractive, witty, dynamic, Louise had been instructed in all the manly arts of letters, weaponry, hunting, riding, lute-playing and singing. At 16 she fell in love with a knight and actually rode off to the far south-west to fight alongside her beloved at the siege of coastal Perpignan. Eventually she married a middle-aged, wealthy, Lyonnais ropemaker, with whom she was apparently very happy, but then dedicated herself wholly to literary pursuits, writing sonnets, elegies and a play and maintaining Lyon's foremost literary salon. Her private library housed not just Latin, but French, Italian and Spanish works as well. Some of France's greatest contemporary poets celebrated her in verse. Of her own productions, best remembered are those sonnets recalling her adolescent dreams, such as: '*Baise-m'encor, rebaise-moi et baise ... Kiss me again, re-kiss me and kiss: give me one of your most delicious, give me one of your most amorous: I will give you*

back four hotter than coals ...'. A volume of Louise Labé's collected works, published by the celebrated Lyonnais printer Jean de Tournes, appeared as early as 1555 when she was about 30 and at the height of her talent and celebrity.

Of reading one's own writings, Louise penned:

The past gives us pleasure and is of more service than the present; but the delight of what we once felt is dimly lost, never to return, and its memory is as distressing as the events themselves were then delectable. The other voluptuous senses are so strong that whatever memory returns to us it cannot restore our previous disposition, and however strong the images we impress in our minds, we still know that they are but shadows of the past misusing us and deceiving us. But when we happen to put our thoughts in writing, how easily, later on, does our mind race through an infinity of events, incessantly alive, so that when a long time afterwards we take up those written pages we can return to the same place and to the same disposition in which we once found ourselves.³¹

For Louise Labé, then, the reader who reads of her own past passions does not merely recreate, but actually relives them, triumphing over frail memory. Hers is a profound and timeless insight into reading's innate power.

In Slavonic lands, the printed word remained in general a much more primitive affair. Though a variety of alphabets conveyed a number of different Slavonic languages, there were actually very few literates to use them, and these read almost exclusively religious works. Only a handful of professionals read, chiefly in Latin, the law, sciences and medicine. In 1563 Tsar Ivan IV, known as 'The Terrible' (ruled 1533-84), founded in Moscow Russia's first semi-permanent print-shop using Cyrillic letters; by the late 1600s this print-shop, which had moved to the village of Sloboda Alexandrovskaya, had produced about 500 titles, all but seven of them religious. The Ukraine counted around 15 print-shops in the seventeenth century, the two leading ones run by Lvov's Ruthenian friars and Kiev's Monastery of the Caves. Eastern Slavonic reading was almost exclusively male, religious and traditional. In taste, style and

content Western Slavonic reading (that of the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles) was more Western European, however, with the Latin language predominating until the eighteenth century, when the vernaculars finally became popular among a growing literate public who were creating new national literatures.

The Russian literary tradition commenced only from the middle of the seventeenth century, borrowing nothing from the native mediæval genres and everything from Western trends. It constituted a translation or adaptation of Polish, German, French and Italian works and styles into the Russian medium, and addressed a very small, if enthusiastic, audience mainly in St Petersburg and Moscow. Most of the few who could read still preferred to read in the original languages, however, long a characteristic of Russia's sophisticated élite. Russian print-shops flourished in the eighteenth century, but were subject to severe prior censorship, something which has characterized Russian book and periodical production up to the present day, precluding those benefits a free press can bestow on society. An indigenous Russian literature only became popular in the eighteenth century, and blossomed in the nineteenth with Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Gogol, Chekhov and many other luminaries. Up until the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian élite still preferred, however, the fashionable French, Italian, German and, increasingly, English works in the original.

Elsewhere, Ottoman rulers – who had been presiding over the mighty Turkish empire in Europe, Asia and North Africa since the late thirteenth century – opposed printing texts in Arabic letters, maintaining the manuscript tradition up into the nineteenth century because of religious conservatism. In consequence, nearly all Islamic lands failed to share in the Western innovations in culture, science and technology. The rejection of printing marginalized, then fossilized Islamic culture. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Arabic literature, even in manuscript, was declining into the unimaginative imitation of Classical Arabic genres and styles. Often it involved simply a pedantic transmission of and commentary on the classics of Arabic literature; similarly popular were historical compendiums, selections of writings from different authors of various past epochs. Several writers, such as Suyuti (*d* 1505), in imitation

of Christian historiographers' probing of printing's capabilities, directed their efforts towards all-encompassing histories in several thick tomes. Thereafter, with the changing fortunes of a fragmenting society that had been greatly influenced by the Turkish intrusion, Arabic literary production turned inward and became increasingly isolated. From the late nineteenth century when, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, printing and Western models were adopted, Egypt and Syria again became the centres of Arabic literary production, which now, however, almost exclusively imitated French, English, German and Italian genres, styles and even ethos. This has since led in Islamic countries to a greater rift between classical and modern reading than is witnessed elsewhere in the world, the first often perceived as indigenous, pious and proper, the second as foreign, infidel and threatening. The polemic remains, and today fuels extremism.

In striking contrast, Jews of the Diaspora continued to speak a variety of languages: Spanish, Yiddish (German), Dutch, English, French, Italian, Polish, Russian, Greek, Arabic and others. (But, as their learned and liturgical language, they everywhere preserved in writing the traditional Hebrew.) Also, when printing arrived, Jews embraced it immediately as a 'holy work'.³² Indeed, it is generally assumed that Jews figured among Mainz's first printers in the 1450s. Jewish print-shops were already operating in Italy and Spain in the 1470s, and in Portugal in the 1480s. Expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 1490s, many Jews took refuge in Italy, which had already been the centre for the 'humanistic' study of Hebrew. This reinvigorated the scholarly market for printed Hebrew works, one perhaps controlled and directed by Christians, but clearly under Judæo-Spanish tutelage.

For the liturgical chanting of the Torah in the synagogue, Jews insisted on reading from traditional leather or parchment rolls, just as Arabs insisted on manuscript Qur'āns. But all other Jewish writings were printed and found wide distribution. These had an almost exclusively male readership, as females were forbidden scholarly study and disputation of Jewish theology. All other forms of Jewish reading occurred in the respective country's vernacular. Non-devotional reading, however, was

generally frowned upon by traditional Jews and especially rabbis, with the exception of the law, sciences and medicine, works on which were usually read in Latin.

In Turkish Constantinople, Sultan Bajazet II (ruled 1481–1512) welcomed the émigré Jewish printers, who then printed Hebrew works nearly uninterruptedly up into the early 1800s. The greatest Jewish printing centres of the era were those of Prague (as of 1512), Kraków (1534) and Turkish Thessaloníki in Greece, where Jews represented half the population (until the Greek reconquest in 1912). But there were also noteworthy Hebrew presses in Fez, Morocco (1516–21), and in Cairo, Egypt (1557), as well, and the Jewish printer Isaac Ashkenazy of Prague established the Middle East's first print-shop in 1577 at Safad, Galilee (today's Zefat in northern Israel).

Jewish scholars of the sixteenth century elaborated two different ways of reading the Bible. Sephardic scholars of Spain and North Africa focused on the grammatical or literal sense. Ashkenazi scholars of France, the German-speaking countries and Poland, studying not just each word, but every line and paragraph in concert, searched both the literal and allegorical – that is, the symbolically moral or spiritual – sense. Wishing to uncover all possible meaning, Ashkenazi scholars commented on every preceding commentary in Talmudic literature, the primary source of Jewish religious law, leading back to the original text. In contrast to Christianity's superseding literature, then, whereby each new text replaces the one before it, Talmudic literature became accumulative: each new text included all previous texts.

Like Dante, most Ashkenazi Talmudic scholars drew upon four senses of reading. But their divisions differed significantly from Dante's. The *pshat* was the literal sense. The *remez* was the restricted significance. The *drash* held the rational meaning. And the *sod* comprised the mystical or occult interpretation.

It was the *sod*, for example, that revealed why the first page of each of the chapters in the Babylonian Talmud is missing. As the eighteenth-century Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev explained, 'Because however many pages the studious man reads, he must never forget that he has not yet reached the very first page'.³³

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries the major part of the business of Europe's leading booksellers still lay in learned Latin productions intended for the libraries of churchmen and scholars.³⁴ The use of Latin as the language of scholarship internationalized the book trade. Dealers from all over Europe converged at annual book fairs to trade in a shared commodity: the Latin book, eminently readable from Dublin to Moscow. But then the demand for vernacular books demolished this borderless commerce, fragmenting the trade by 'nationalizing' production, particularly in the seventeenth century.

London's mighty Stationers' Company, for example, eliminated entirely its stock of Latin books in 1625, since the trade had simply become unprofitable. Throughout Europe the Latin market collapsed as scholarship came under the vernacular dictate, which knew wholly different dynamics. By the end of the seventeenth century Latin was gone from most European publishing lists, except for theological and scholarly editions of limited circulation. Most scientists of the seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth were still resisting the trend, as it hindered international dialogue. Celsius, Galvani, Halley, Kepler, Leibniz, Linnæus, Newton, van Leeuwenhoek and their contemporaries continued to share their ideas in Europe's single language of scholarship: Latin. (But not the scientists of the later eighteenth century: Herschel, Kant, Laplace, Lavoisier, Malthus, Ritter, Volta, von Humboldt and others, who imparted their science in the vernacular.) And Roman Catholic theological works and classical studies never ceased to appear in Latin; indeed, their publication in Latin survives today, albeit in highly restricted circumstances.

Though now in the people's tongue, the latest works nearly all publishers were promoting still came in exquisitely bound editions priced beyond the purse of most. Recognizing the problem, many more publishers, in order to reduce costs and lower list prices, began drastically diminishing quality, chiefly by eliminating expensive bindings, fine paper and elaborate illustrations. More significantly, they altered their marketing strategy, too, now targeting a much wider readership through

new or resurrected genres. As a direct result, the modern novel came of age: Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Quevedo's picaresque novels in Spain; Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus* in Germany; Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England; and Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie* and *Le grand Cyrus*, as well as Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, the 'first "best-sellers" of modern times',³⁵ in France. Novels now sold in unprecedented numbers, for the genre appealed to many different levels and tastes: middle-class adventure and travel, with aristocratic protagonists and settings; women's 'romance'; vicarious, sustained experience; social critique in an age of renewed questioning; and many other things, not least of which was the imaginative recast of a genre once so admired in antiquity.

In the seventeenth century one still frequently gathered to hear informal reading. But no longer was it almost exclusively from the Bible, *Golden Legend* or a religious tract – instead, it was increasingly from one of these adventurous novels or romances. The interruptions and digressions that always formed a part of natural storytelling had of course little place in these works, which offered in their stead a rhetorically streamlined, linear tale that was more the product of literary artifice than natural invention. This clash of styles – oral versus literary – was poignantly satirized by the Spanish poet and writer Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) in *Don Quixote* when, after Don Quixote beseeches his servant Sancho Panza to 'speak connectedly and tell [the tale] like an intelligent man, or else say nothing', Sancho replies, 'My way of telling it ... is the way they tell all stories in my country, and I don't know any other way of telling it. And it isn't fair of your worship to ask me to pick up new habits.'³⁶

But the public reading of novels was robustly moulding a new audience according to the literary dictate. Again, Cervantes captures this with inimitable ingenuity. In pursuit of Quixote, the zealous curate who has burnt Quixote's books, for fear they have poisoned his mind with tales of chivalry, explains Quixote's peculiar malady to the company at an inn where he has stopped. The innkeeper remonstrates, however, that he himself very much enjoys books of chivalry, adding:

When it is harvest time, the reapers often do gather here during the midday heat, and there is always someone who can read who takes up one of those books. Then, around thirty of us gather around him, and we sit listening to him with so much delight that it keeps off a thousand grey hairs. Speaking for myself, when I hear tell of those furious and terrible blows that the knights hand out, I long to be doing the same myself; I'd like to be listening to them day and night.

Whereupon his wife agrees, for the only quiet she gets in the house is when her husband is listening to the reading! His daughter then adds that she doesn't like 'the blows that delight my father; only the lamentations that the knights make when they are away from their ladies sometimes make me weep, so much pity do I feel for them.' At which moment a fellow guest produces three big books and some manuscript sheets and the curate himself then reads aloud to them three long chapters from eight sheets entitled 'The Tale of Ill-Advised Curiosity', which everyone at the inn interrupts at will with a personal comment.

England's unprecedented and unrivalled prosperity between 1520 and 1640 (from Henry VIII to Charles I) changed the land's reading habits as well, as already indicated above. With a doubling of the general population (London itself actually increased during these years from 60,000 to 450,000), but a tripling of landed gentry through the redistribution of lands formally owned by the Roman Catholic Church, the increased prosperity encouraged growing communities to foster local education: schools sprang up virtually everywhere and widespread literacy was the immediate result.³⁷ Civic schools run by local bodies vied with the established public schools with paid tuition, such as Westminster, Winchester and Eton. Oxford and Cambridge accepted a growing number of students in the first half of the seventeenth century: every year between 1620 and 1640, for example, each university enrolled over a thousand 'new boys', who then still averaged 14 years of age. By 1640 England's higher institutions of learning were teaching a volume of students not to be attained again until the early 1800s. In this case quantity produced quality: for from this generation

came many of England's greatest parliamentarians, legal experts, clerical intelligentsia – but at the price of thousands of jobless graduates, as the land's traditions, administration and professions were not yet prepared for a truly educated élite.

Perhaps the greatest tangible result of England's educational revolution was the generations of shopkeepers, freeholders and yeomen farmers who, having attended one of the new Puritan primary schools for several years, could read the Bible in their own English, as well as other literature that happened their way; they – and often their wives – could also despatch the daily accounts for themselves in writing. There still remained that gap, however, between the literate townsfolk and the illiterate, or barely literate, country folk. In 1642 around 60 per cent of those in English towns could write their names, but only 38 per cent in rural parishes, declining to 20 per cent in the far north and west. (In 1638–43 only one out of four Scots knew how to write his name.) It has been estimated that 'three-fourths of the shepherds, fishermen, construction workers, and smallholders, two-thirds of village shopkeepers and craftsmen, and half of the masters in the clothing and textile trades could read a bit but were unable to write.'³⁸

A similar educational revolution to England's had been occurring in German-speaking lands. However, both this and the English movement came to a rude halt. In the German principalities it was because of the extraordinarily savage Thirty Years' War (1618–48), which killed one out of three Germans; and in England, because of the later and shorter Civil War (1642–9). In consequence, complete literacy was not attained in either land.

France failed to experience a similar educational development, its schools remaining small, poorly funded and almost always connected to the local parish church. Rural Frenchwomen and Frenchmen seldom knew how to read. The farmer's supposed daughter reading and writing in Molière's 1662 play *L'École des femmes* provided shock value. All the same, France now dominated the publishing world: over Italy, which was suffering a recession; over Germany, ravaged by the Thirty Years' War; and over Britain as well, whose economic growth had been halted by the Civil War.

With all of Europe now teetering on the edge of recession, the book market was demanding new ideas once again, and it made no difference whether these ideas were to emerge from the still dominant devotional market or from the up-and-coming secular market, such as novels.³⁹ Only one out of ten published works sold well, and the one 'bestseller' then helped to finance the publication of those that did not sell well. (This scheme functioned eminently, providing society with variety and quality, until the 1970s, when it was almost universally abandoned for 'guaranteed' sales in order to maximize profits for corporate giants.) Nevertheless, in dominant France, for example, the stars of publishing were hardly the land's now-immortalized poets, playwrights or novelists, but still the authors of devotional works, their names today largely forgotten. At this time religious texts were what the thriller, romance or horror novel was to become in the twentieth century – a publisher's bread and butter. It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that even British North America's first published book was not a novel but *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre*, printed by Stephen Daye of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1640.

Provincial printers continued to undermine metropolitan printers by publishing cheaper pirated editions aimed at a larger audience, usually copying expensive first editions as soon as they came out in the metropolis. Less market-wise metropolitan printers often countered by selling their books at the highest possible price the market could bear: in Paris in 1660, for example, the first edition of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie* sold for thirty livres (half the dowry of a journeyman printer's wife) for the novel's ten, calf-bound, octavo volumes. As a result, book pirating – occurring everywhere, but chiefly in Germany and Italy – supplied most books to those who otherwise could not afford to own one. Pirating greatly increased the number of books in circulation, promoting more reading than ever before.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ephemeral, official and educational reading still accounted for a large proportion of a printer's production: broadsheets, pamphlets, local news sheets, administrative and judicial documents, primers, catechisms, class texts and etiquette books for parish

use. But increasingly printers also noted what locals were willing to pay for with their hard-earned money, and chose to print these titles as well. It created the 'popular' book trade, as distinct from the clerical, scholarly and administrative book trades.

Almost immediately the first paperbacks, France's celebrated 'Bibliothèque bleue' series, appeared. In early seventeenth-century Troyes the printer Nicolas Oudot produced slim, small-format books using worn founts on cheap paper covered with a blue paper binding (hence the 'Blue Library'). He sold each for a pittance. Tens of thousands were bought. Indeed, the idea proved so successful that by the end of the century Oudot's successors in Troyes were taking on Paris itself, and venturing even further afield. By 1722 the Troyes warehouses held forty thousand of these slim blue booklets selling for only a few pence each, as well as 2,576 reams of printed sheets sufficient to produce 350,000 octavo volumes of 48 pages.⁴⁰ When the Oudot dynasty finally ceased publication, the Garnier family took over, whose holdings in the 1780s were even more voluminous. The Bibliothèque bleue's subjects were 'popular' in the broadest sense: fables, chivalrous romances, eruditely edited tales (especially in the eighteenth century), but also Christmas songs, catechisms, etiquette books and school primers. The Bibliothèque bleue contributed greatly to making eastern France the nation's most literate region. Other French regions then copied the idea.

The world's first newspapers were also being read. Europe's periodical press originated in the fifteenth century when authorized correspondents had begun sending regular reports to leading bankers, merchants, statesmen and others about financial affairs and the politics affecting them: battles, invasions, weddings, investitures and the like. Small pamphlets related remarkable occurrences: comets, catastrophes, miracles, monsters, natural phenomena and many other fascinating things. These reports and pamphlets were widely copied, as demand for such reading was great. In time it created a commercial market that had not existed earlier. By the sixteenth century such reports and pamphlets, under several different titles, were being printed in enormous numbers in a variety of small, cheap formats. Many rulers, and later civil courts as well, printed their

decrees as flyers or posters for public circulation. Printed letters supporting one faction or another were also circulated by clever rulers to control and steer potential insurrectionists; like the news reports, these were then similarly read aloud and debated in inn, barn or courtyard. (Of course the practice was anything but new: recall the election propaganda found on Pompeii's walls.)

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then, a veritable library of ephemera was adorning Europe's walls, doors, posts and windows. These included pastoral letters, scholarly challenges (like Luther's 95 theses for debate printed on a placard nailed to the door of Wittenberg's castle church in 1517), notaries' announcements, death notices, notices of public events, a prince's decree, advertisements for bull fights or a theatrical company's impending arrival. Such posters and placards were printed in their tens of thousands, and eagerly read – or heard – by all. They were, in fact, the 'radio and television news' of the era.

There was also an assortment of different printings containing current news items. Most popular was the single-sheet handbill that provided skeletal outlines of events throughout the province, nation and Europe. Special publications detailed particularly striking events: an assassination, royal death, civil war, the arrest of personalities. Publications flooded the streets of London, Paris, Hamburg, Lisbon, Madrid, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Venice if political factions clashed, each vying for popular support. Some pamphlets addressed profound theological issues and were aimed at a very small, but powerful, intelligentsia. But the majority of such ephemera were short and succinct and addressed the masses, particularly when a national crisis loomed. From the sheer volume of such printings we can assume that they touched nearly every member of a community. It has been estimated for Paris alone that between 1649 and 1653 – only four years – no fewer than five to six thousand ephemeral titles were printed and distributed: as many as four new titles each day of the year.⁴¹

Such newsworthy reports were regularly included in Europe's inexpensive almanacs and annuals, which sold widely. But towards the end of the sixteenth century regular, subscribed

periodicals or series of news-books also began appearing. In Antwerp the periodical news-sheet *Nieuwe Tidinghe* was launched in 1605 as a weekly; after 1620 it was selling three times a week. The first English-language news-book was printed by the Dutch map-engraver Pieter van den Keere at the beginning of 1621, followed half a year later by the 'corantos' of running news items issued by the London stationer Thomas Archer. By the middle of the seventeenth century these 'gazettes' (from Venetian *gazeta de la novità* or 'a halfpenny of news', as Venice's sold for a *gazeta*, a coin of small value) could be purchased in every metropolis, which often had many competing titles, as well as in many provincial towns. By then these were providing Europe's most frequently read material, next to Scripture. Although print-runs still remained relatively low – 1,200 copies of Paris's weekly *La Gazette*, 500 for its Bordeaux, 200 for its Grenoble subscribers – there were many readers per issue: while a private subscription to *La Gazette* cost twelve livres a year, a circulating rental subscription (one passed the paper along to the next subscriber) cost only half as much. And listeners were from ten to fifty times this number.

In a similar scheme, men of science and letters, having discovered that their circulated communications in Latin no longer sufficed to reach the majority of their peers, turned to publishing their theories, opinions, scientific findings and book reviews in Europe's first periodically printed scholarly journals: Paris's *Journal des savants*, London's *Philosophical Transactions*, Germany's *Acta eruditorum* (edited by Leibniz), as well as other prestigious publications that also enjoyed a wide, if select, readership. (Within a century the innovation was contributing to the cultural and scientific nationalization of Europe, as by then even these journals had abandoned Latin.)

Small, cheap booklets resembling those of France's Bibliothèque bleue series were sold nearly everywhere in Europe from door to door and village to village by those itinerant pedlars who were still hawking songs, ballads, hymns, prints, engravings, almanacs, calendars, catechisms, Books of Hours and prayer-books. The book pedlars had played an important role in the circulation of literature about the Protestant Reformation, as well as that about the Roman

Catholic Counter-Reformation. Often on horse-drawn carts and wagons, but more commonly on foot with a packhorse, they would travel hundreds of kilometres until their assorted wares, sometimes including large and expensive editions of complete works, were disposed of. In Act iv, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, probably written in the early part of 1611, the pedlar Autolycus offers, for example, among others, 'a merry ballad, but a very pretty one ... Why, this is a passing merry one and goes to the tune of "Two Maids Wooing a Man": there's scarce a maid westward but she sings it; 'tis in request, I can tell you'.

Naturally Europe's book pedlars adopted local itineraries aimed at maximizing profits. London provided nearly all the stock for the English tradesmen, and so as a result London reading – and London tastes, culture and vocabulary – began homogenizing and standardizing English provincial society. Southern Europe received its books from pedlars purchasing at Avignon, France, and at Venice and Brescia in northern Italy; these pedlars were often Slavs of the Venetian mainland, whose itinerary included not only the Greek isles and Albania, but also Spain and Portugal.

It was also through such book pedlars that a town or village first encountered banned, esoteric or foreign writings. Magic and the black arts circulated widely in this way, despite the local Protestant pastors and Roman Catholic parish priests, as did new political and economic philosophies. Until the nineteenth century these book pedlars flourished; in Europe's peripheries they traded well into the twentieth century. But then, in most countries, large-scale national educational systems and the imposition of book ordinaries (official inspectors) brought the book pedlars' rapid decline. The independent pedlars' book lists – for many centuries enviably liberal and universal – shrank before the customarily conservative and exclusive lists of respective national ideologies.

Reading and writing, for so long the resented symbols of the ruling élite, were everywhere becoming respected and desired. It was precisely this perceptual shift that allowed Shakespeare to exploit creatively the historical figure of Jack Cade as the

epitome of uneducated bigotry: an object of loathing and contempt, Cade personified that seeming 'mediæval mentality' that had been so completely replaced by printing and its manifest benefits. Or so the London playwright was heralding a century and a half after the fact. For by Shakespeare's generation and thereafter, books, now eminently affordable and in sizes that allowed easy transport and handling, were ubiquitous, while among many circles an ability to read was commonplace. Nearly everyone was now 'eating' the written word ... or wishing to.

Indeed, several savants of the era had even been recommending how this paper fare might best be profited from. The English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561–1626), for one, had suggested that, 'Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested'.⁴² To be sure, the 'reading-as-comestible' metaphor had by then become so common in European languages that several took the liberty to satirize it. In his play *Love for Love* of 1695, for example, the English dramatist William Congreve (1670–1729) has the man-about-town Valentine telling his valet, 'Read, read, sirrah! and refine your appetite; learn to live upon instruction; feast your mind, and mortify your flesh; read, and take your nourishment in at your eyes; shut up your mouth, and chew the cud of understanding'. Whereupon his Sancho Panza-like valet Jeremy rejoins, 'You'll grow devilish fat upon this paper diet'.⁴³

Veritable monuments were being printed and lauded. King James I, persuaded by England's foremost churchmen and scholars, commissioned a new and royally 'authorized' translation of the entire Bible. Eventually completed by 49 leading theologians and philologists at Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge, it was of course the 'King James Bible' of 1611, or *The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall Tongues: and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, by His Maiesties Speciall Comandment. Appointed to be Read in Churches*. It became the most influential book ever published in English. Because it was the Crown's ultimate endorsement for its own Anglican Church and, in this way, Protestantism's decisive triumph in the British Isles, the project had been foremost a political act. England (as of 1603 also called 'Great Britain' in order to

emphasize King James's new dominion) now had its very own Anglican Bible, and in a version to be read communally and universally. In this, the King James Bible fulfilled its charge eminently. First carried to British North America, then later throughout the British Empire, it served a global community of devotional readers all professing the same, or very similar, faith. In time, the identical text was read and heard from London to Auckland. Yet beyond the geopolitical pale, the King James Bible was a masterpiece of written English, one of the finest works of literature ever to appear in the language.

Still, ancient reading customs remained. A prominent example, the practice of *sortes Vergilianæ* (antiquity's divining with a randomly selected line from Virgil), was never wholly forgotten. Even King Charles I of England resorted to it when visiting the Bodleian Library at Oxford at the end of 1642 (or beginning of 1643). Lord Falkland, the King's ally during the ongoing Civil War, had suggested that His Majesty 'make a trial of his fortunes by the *sortes Vergilianæ*, which everybody knows was an usual kind of augury some ages past'. Whereupon the King randomly opened the proffered volume of Virgil's *Æneid* to Book IV, lines 615–16, then read aloud in Latin: 'beset in war by the arms of a gallant race, driven from his borders ...'. Six years later Charles I was beheaded.

'Reading maketh a full man', declared Francis Bacon, who urged people to 'read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider'.⁴⁴ As of the second half of the seventeenth century, a new attitude towards reading and who should share in it had been making itself felt, particularly in that hitherto most egalitarian of European societies, the British. In 1660, his first year on the throne, King Charles II of Great Britain and Ireland decreed, through the Council for Foreign Plantations, that all plantation owners in Britain's colonies were to provide their slaves and other members of their household with Christian education. It was a noble, if naïve, gesture.

For immediately the colonial élite of British North America and the Caribbean protested, alleging that those who could read the Bible would soon be reading other writings as well that would then make them think, rather than merely obey. In the

Bible, too, were many stories of enslaved peoples rising up to gain their freedom. The overriding complaint was that – to preserve one's wealth, power and social standing – reading was far too dangerous a gift for those one had to keep suppressed. And so the plantation owners largely ignored King Charles's decree, and generations of slaves and even freepersons were consequently kept illiterate by their British colonial masters. This sorry state of affairs especially obtained in the southern colonies of British North America, where surprisingly harsh punishments fell on those caught teaching Africans and their progeny to read and write; blacks who were discovered reading could be hanged. Yet read they did, and they taught their fellows to read, too. Like faith itself, reading can nowhere be truly suppressed.

As with Socrates, reading was again being perceived as a perilous tool. But not because written words, being ambiguous in a relatively primitive script, might confuse proper understanding, Socrates' principal complaint. Much more significantly, it was because the second half of the seventeenth century recognized the act of reading to be not just an educated élite's, but all of society's most important medium for accessing knowledge. In reading's material and conceptual advance from papyrus tongue through parchment eye, the faculty's latest manifestation, the printed page, was at last imparting – as the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) was soon to proclaim – 'majestic expressions of the universal conscience'.

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