

REVIEWS

Willa Z. Silverman, *The New Bibliopolis: French Book Collectors and the Culture of Print, 1880–1914*. Studies in Book and Print Culture. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. xiii + 312 pp. ISBN 978 0 8020 9211 3. US\$75.00.

Reviewed by Angus Martin

This study focuses on a relatively brief period in France (it would be more accurate to say in Paris) at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, when book collecting and luxury book production prospered thanks to growing numbers of wealthy patrons but at the same time reflected, in ways that were hard to reconcile, contemporary conflicts between tradition and modernity. The importance, for instance, of new printing technologies in creating art books is outlined in the first chapter, but enthusiasm for such techniques as photomechanical colour reproduction is contrasted with the continuing desire for an output of volumes produced by traditional, small-scale methods. A second chapter treats the bibliophilic battle of the ancients and the moderns that pitted against each other collectors of rare examples from earlier centuries (typified by the members of the Société des bibliophiles français—the spelling of this last word proclaiming their antiquarian bent) and the “bohemian gentlemen” (12) who, in rival groups like the Société des bibliophiles contemporains (or, later, modernes) were proponents of recent publications (such as the *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon* in 1883) that, with limited printings (at times as few as a single copy), united artistic and literary merit with highly expensive production values.

At the centre of this world (and as a central figure in Willa Silverman’s intriguing and wide-ranging study) stands the author, journalist, publisher and collector of substantial private means, Octave Uzanne. It was Uzanne who coined the term “the new bibliopolis” to characterise the modern world of book collection and production that he promoted, but at the same time he embodied, as a “reactionary modernist” (23), the ambiguities and contradictions of his contemporaries. Silverman peoples her study with other lively and, at times, eccentric characters: the writer Edmond Goncourt, who was opposed to what he called “old junk collection” (61) but kept his distance from the culture of “snobbism and dandyism” (12) that characterised the younger generation of moderns; Lucien, the son of the painter Camille Pissarro, who, in spite of his success as an art publisher in Britain and the support of his father, failed to make the grade in Parisian circles; the top dealer in old books, Damascène Morgand, whose wiles as a salesman exploited covetous bibliophiles and made him rich; Paul Gallimard, father of the founder of the publishing house and exemplar of the amateur turned publisher who “crafted volumes designated in advance as collectible” (5).

Just when, in chapters 3 and 4, the inherent contradictions in these opposing views are beginning to sound somewhat repetitive (and their proponents more than a little tiresomely self-indulgent), Willa Silverman moves in 5, 6 and 7 to three more general topics, illustrating shifting aspects of the meaning in society of the symbolic goods that are books. First is a discussion of the actual library of the wealthy dandy Robert de Montesquiou, where the aesthetic qualities of the volumes were matched by the aesthetic qualities of the library, raising the question of luxury books as an aspect of the decorative arts. Then comes a fascinating study of the misogyny of these collectors. Not only were there almost no women bibliophiles at the time, but the males appear to have indulged in an almost quirky sexualisation of books themselves, in spite of the homoerotic implications of their solely masculine and mainly bachelor cliques, imparting to them “feminine” qualities and experiencing their conquest of new volumes as lust triumphant. In conclusion, we return to Uzanne, with whom we began, and his published vision of the future. In one final self-contradiction, this promoter of the book as a rare and exclusive artefact, in a paroxysm of enthusiasm for the technical advances of his time, sees the physical object being replaced by recorded talking books. Silverman’s study ends by drawing parallels with the question of our own day: will digitised texts (rather than Uzanne’s phonograph disks) eventually replace printed books? Or will bibliophilia and some rare paper copies persist? Summing up a central theme of her whole study, Silverman asks (218) what, at any given time and in any given society, is “the relationship between books and their materiality.”

Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880–1920*. Studies in Book and Print Culture. University of Toronto Press, 2007. xv + 247 pp. ISBN 978 0 8020 9147 5. US\$65.00.

Reviewed by Alan Dilnot

In this volume Mary Ann Gillies sets out to chart the rise, from about 1880, of the literary agent in Britain. She selects two key figures, A. P. Watt and J. B. Pinker, for close study and explains how they made themselves necessary to the print culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how they modified it.

The first of her major figures, A. P. Watt, commenced his working life in publishing and became a literary agent almost unintentionally by giving friendly advice and assistance to the idealistic, hard-working, widely-talented yet chronically impecunious author, George MacDonald. MacDonald “ascribed to the ‘man of letters’ approach to his writing career” and “had no plan to manage the various facets of his professional life” (49). MacDonald was certainly always reluctant to promote himself: “I will do nothing to bring my personality before the public in any way further than my work in itself necessitates” (60). After a while Watt offered

to manage the business side of MacDonald's literary life in return for a ten per cent commission on everything of MacDonald's that he managed to place with publishers. Gradually Watt extended his business to include other writers, but he did not regard himself merely as the representative of authors. Rather, he thought of himself, and was considered, as something like a marriage broker, a middleman between authors and publishers who would act in the best interests of both parties. In MacDonald's case Watt's knowledge of the publishing world enabled him to fit the different kinds of writing that MacDonald produced—sermons, poetry, fiction for adults, fiction for children, short stories—to suitable outlets, much to MacDonald's benefit, but also to the advantage of publishers who were always keen to secure fresh and worthwhile material to satisfy the demands of the widening readership, which at the end of the nineteenth century was growing not only in total numbers but also in the range of its interests.

MacDonald was already an established writer when Watt began to assist him, and this set the pattern for Watt's dealings with others. He would typically approach writers who had already made a name for themselves and would offer to take the cares of negotiating with publishers away from them, leaving them to concentrate on their writing. Steadily more and more writers chose to use his services, and this led to some hostility on the part of publishers, notably William Heinemann, who, in a statement in the *Athenaeum*, 11 November 1893, with which Gillies commences her narrative, declared: "This is the age of the middleman. He is generally a parasite. He always flourishes. I have been forced to give him some attention lately in my particular business. In it he calls himself the literary agent" (4). Heinemann clearly was conscious of having lost negotiating power by being "forced" to deal with authors through a middleman. He feared that his profit margin, which he claimed was always narrow, would be whittled away by the operations of the "parasite." Literary activities, he implied, were no longer the preserve of gentlemen, and literature itself was being turned into a commodity just as if it were cotton or copper or copra.

In Heinemann's view authors themselves were as much the hosts of the parasite as were their publishers. That, however, was manifestly untrue, at least as far as A. P. Watt was concerned. Where authors in the past had relinquished copyright in their works in return for a larger initial payment or for cash advances, Watt set about buying back copyrights wherever he could, or would insert into new contracts a time limit—say seven years—for the transfer of rights, rather than permitting the transfer to hold good in perpetuity. He paid special attention to the conditions pertaining to foreign rights and translations and became expert in ensuring that his authors met the terms for securing copyright in the United States. True, he made sure that contracts provided for payment of his ten per cent commission, but his efforts on behalf of his clients usually won them far more than they would have made by themselves. Eventually publishers too found that there were advantages in dealing with businesslike agents rather than with temperamental, preoccupied and often inefficient authors. W. Robertson Nicoll, in the *British Weekly*, 12 November

1914, praised Watt's work thus: it "was largely that of a diplomatist ... Gradually ... he won his way to general confidence ... Of this there can be only one explanation. That explanation is that he was a very able and a very honest man doing a necessary work" (34).

However, although A. P. Watt brought about real changes in the conditions of authorship, his cultural influence was largely conservative. Because he dealt only with established writers and showed no interest in newcomers, his tendency was to encourage his authors to deliver more of what had made them successful in the first place rather than to experiment or to venture into new modes of writing. In the second of her case studies of authors, Gillies examines the relationship of Watt with "Lucas Malet," the pen-name used by Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison, a daughter of Charles Kingsley. In Gillies's judgment, Watt is partly responsible for the eclipse that Lucas Malet's work has suffered: "He needed to find publishers who knew how to market her work, and he had to be able to suggest editorial changes to her that would have allowed her work to appeal to the readership attracted by the emerging literature, while still retaining her share of the dominant market ... His failure to do so meant that her works did not find an audience that was learning how to read literature like hers" (85–86).

In what Gillies terms "The Second Wave of Agenting" the chief figure is J. B. Pinker. Pinker was much more adventurous than Watt—he perhaps had to be in order to make space for himself in a print culture where Watt was the established agent—and he specially sought out unknown writers who showed some promise of originality. The list of writers whom he took up and encouraged is impressive, including as it does George Egerton, T. S. Eliot, Henry James, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Rebecca West, and "Somerville and Ross" (Edith Somerville and Violet Martin). Several of these are cornerstones in British Modernism, and most in the early stages of their careers were regarded as outside the mainstream of English Literature. A common quality amongst them was their preference to be considered as totally dedicated to the production of beautiful verbal artefacts regardless of whether they would find favour with the reading public. To have a commercial objective was to be impure. Paradoxically, this intensified their need for a literary agent who would handle the dirty work of business and leave their reputations unsullied. Pinker was the right man to do this, as he was in many ways more than an agent. He advanced considerable sums of his own money to Lawrence, for example, in order to keep him afloat, and his reward was to lose his money and have himself abused by Lawrence as someone of second-rate sensibility with no understanding of literature. Joyce was more aware of what he owed to Pinker, but nevertheless preferred to deal with Pinker through a third party, such as his brother or Ezra Pound (who emerges from this account rather endearingly as someone who would do whatever he could for his writing friends but who paid very little attention to his own interests). Conrad was an especially difficult author for Pinker, because he would not abide by the

arrangements with publishers that Pinker had set up and to which he had agreed, but would make fresh arrangements with other publishers behind Pinker's back. Nevertheless, Conrad came to regard Pinker as a close friend, even as a brother, and it is likely that without Pinker's assistance Conrad's literary career would have ended in a shambles very early on.

Gillies frequently uses the now familiar distinction between financial capital and cultural capital. Pinker was able to win good financial returns for his clients without diminishing their cultural capital. Remarkably, although it is often thought that modernist authors wrote for minority readerships, the sales figures for some of the period's key works, such as *The Heart of Darkness*, *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, are impressive, and Pinker should be given some credit for his efforts to place such works to best advantage. Clearly Pinker had some understanding of the nature of the appeal of Modernism and knew how to get recognition for it.

However, Pinker has been accused of pushing "Somerville and Ross," who are now remembered as "popular" rather than "serious" authors, to lower their cultural sights by running a fresh series of the R. M. stories instead of producing more novels like *The Real Charlotte* (1894), which the authors themselves declared "the best of our books" (125). Gillies defends Pinker in this instance: "He recognizes that the R. M. stories will sell and that they will also generate favourable critical reviews because they are, simply put, good literature," whereas *The Real Charlotte* had "disagreeable characters and a story that was too depressing for the average reader" (128). It must at least be conceded that "Somerville and Ross" are now remembered largely for the R. M. stories.

Both agents were generous, and both, Pinker especially, formed friendships with some of their clients. Both influenced literary culture. Watt was cautious and conservative, a product of mid-Victorian times. He dealt in what was already proven and did not seek to change it. The agency he founded survives to this day. Pinker was a risk-taker, encouraging the innovative and experimental, and helping to bring about the birth of Modernism. His agency went into liquidation ten years after his death.

This is a compact, informative account, based mainly on the rich archives of the two agencies selected. It lets us see canonical writers and their works in a fresh light, it tells us much that is illuminating about the massive cultural changes that overtook Britain during the period, and it draws our attention to the potential value of currently neglected works by MacDonald, "Somerville and Ross," and Lucas Malet. One would not wish to see anything omitted, but perhaps the study might be amplified by including a third agent, Curtis Brown, as well as detailed studies of additional writers such as Arnold Bennett or Rebecca West. However, it is doubtful whether such amplification would significantly alter this book's central conclusions.

Timothy W. Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life*. New York: Knopf, 2008; London: Bodley Head, 2009. ISBN 978 1 4000 4204 3. US\$25.95. ISBN 978 1 84792 072 0. £18.99.

Reviewed by Patrick Spedding

Adolf Hitler was a passionate reader and book collector when he was poor and obscure, and it is no surprise that with riches and power his book collection(s) grew enormously. Timothy Ryback estimates that Hitler owned approximately sixteen thousand volumes when he died. These volumes were unevenly distributed between his alpine retreat (the Berghof) and his house, offices and bunker in Berlin. No catalogue survives, and the vast majority of these volumes are now lost: destroyed, looted and dispersed since 1945. (The 1,244 books that have definitely not been lost are listed in Philipp Gassert and Daniel S. Mattern's *The Hitler Library: A Bibliography* (2001). A further ten thousand volumes seized by the Soviets, the entire Reich Chancellery library, *seems* to have survived in Moscow into the 1990s (224, 231).) Ryback uses the available historical records, historical accounts and academic literature, as well as personal interviews and the surviving volumes from Hitler's library, to produce a series of historical, biographical and psychological vignettes of Hitler. The ostensible purpose of these vignettes is to suggest to the reader which of Hitler's books "shaped his life," a phrase that implies Ryback has identified, and will discuss, the books that were the formative—that is, the most important—influences on Hitler's life.

Ryback is not altogether successful in this aim, and, given the huge gaps in our knowledge of the contents of Hitler's library, he could hardly be successful. Moreover, if Ryback's purpose was as ambitious as his subtitle suggests, and as focused on Hitler's psychological development, there would be little justification in reviewing this book here. What Ryback *actually* does, however, is to examine in great detail a small number of books for which there is compelling evidence that Hitler both owned the book and read it closely. Each of the nine chapters deals with only a single volume, providing a detailed account of the moment of its acquisition, personal and historical, and a close reading of the various marks left by its reader. The interpretation of these marks provides Ryback with the opportunity to discuss the wider evidence of Hitler's book acquisitions, his reading, writing, (endless) table-talk and speeches.

Although this book does not provide the methodical and systematic analysis of the evidence for Hitler's book buying, library organisation, reading, writing and publishing that a book historian may desire, Ryback does discuss all of these questions in the course of his book. And since Ryback's book is organised chronologically, these subjects are treated in the order in which they emerge naturally, that is, biographically. Also, although aimed at a more popular readership, this is a serious and scholarly book, with over sixteen pages of notes and four appendixes containing transcriptions

or translations of all of the surviving accounts of Hitler's libraries. By drawing heavily on European scholarship—almost all of it in German—Ryback provides book historians with important material not previously available in English.

I was surprised to discover the extent of Hitler's reading and his engagement with his books. As Ryback notes, there is a seeming paradox in Hitler—"a man who famously seemed never to listen to anyone, for whom conversation was a relentless tirade, a ceaseless monologue" (xvii)—quietly reading through at least one book per night for decades on end (106, 115), engaging with the text, and carefully marking and annotating his books. It is also hard to reconcile the ranting and gesticulating Führer with the weary WWI soldier spending his pay on, and reading, a guide to Berlin architecture (7), or the Munich beer-hall agitator who borrowed over one hundred titles from a lending library between 1919 and 1921 (50), who bound his own battered books (238), whose first item of furniture—whenever he moved—was a bookcase (49), who spent about seventeen hundred marks per year on books in 1930–32 (95), and who earned about fifty million marks in royalties on his publications (238). Of course, there is no paradox here: Hitler's speeches and ceaseless monologues were fuelled by his reading, he was an autodidact who supported his idiosyncratic world view with close but eclectic reading. Consequently, books were important to him.

Probably the most interesting aspect of Ryback's book is the way in which he analyses the evidence of Hitler's engagement with his books. I can't say "Hitler's reading of books," because Ryback mentions a range of detritus in Hitler's books, as well as a range of indications of reading beyond pencilled marks, annotations and marginalia. So, for instance, Ryback mentions discovering mud stains and "a fine grit" (8), "gritty fingerprints" (15) and "a wiry inch-long black hair that appears to be from a moustache" (27) in Hitler's trench-reading. Other books are "especially well thumbed" (172), "well worn" (112, 172), have "quite obviously" been read "from cover to cover" (170), have "pages bent and spines well-exercised, so they open leisurely" (112). Yet others contain non-verbal annotations: "extended lines ... trailing off in a series of staccato dashes" (82), "double str[uck] passages," "a thick line" (160), "a series of extended dense lines" (161), or "parallel strikes accompanied by an exclamation point" (183), "question marks" (112) and "underscorings of individual phrases" (183). Ryback observes Hitler "ambl[ing] through" a book, "his pencil catching and marking individual sentences or entire paragraphs" (181), tracking (118), "tracing" or "following along" as an author "outlines his notion[s]" (160). Yet others have "extensive marginalia" (170, 173). Occasionally specific details are provided: "nearly one hundred pages of pencilled marginalia" (112) and "thirty-two pencilled intrusions" on twenty pages (182).

There are also various types of evidence of non-reading: books "remain uncut" (173) or only partially opened (219), some pages are "limber" as the result of careful reading, others "held taut by the binding," having never been read (140). Many of these unread books were gifts. Ryback comments that Hitler probably "never

saw, let alone read, a large portion of these books" (97), but he comments on the sycophantic gift inscriptions, occasionally analysing handwriting (106, 167) and language (97, 167) to characterise the gift-giver. Even books that are lost altogether still provide Ryback with evidence: Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Address to the German Nation* (1848), the most important volume in, and the only volume missing from, an eight-volume set of Fichte's works given to Hitler by Leni Riefenstahl (108), and Sven Hedin's *America in the Battle of the Continents* (1942), sent by the author to Hitler, who read it in a night, acknowledged it in a letter the next day, and referred to it repeatedly in the following days (186, 198).

Ryback discusses the difficulty of positively identifying Hitler as the author of the annotations, relying on "corroborating evidence" (xx) in books proven to have been in Hitler's possession, such as "a notable alignment between" the marginalia and ideas expressed by Hitler (145, 181), and the chiming of marked passages in other books: "We find near-identical passages marked in ..." (146), "In these passages we find echoes of similar highlighted sentences and paragraphs from Hitler's copies of ..." (159). As Ryback states: "Like footprints in the sand [these marks] do not necessarily reveal the purpose of the journey, but they do allow us to see where Hitler's attention caught and lingered, where it rushed ahead, where a question was raised or an impression formed" (145).

The marginalia analysed by Ryback add "little to our understanding of Hitler per se or the Nazi movement in general" (118). What *is* new is the subtle and convincing interpretations of these various marks of ownership, and the patterns of annotation. It is here that Ryback is at his most impressive and has the most to offer book historians interested in the interpretation of marginalia and marks of ownership. Although much of Hitler's inner-life remains a mystery, his public life is well documented and the subject of particularly intense analysis. Ryback has at his disposal, therefore, the sort of historical records—tax records, table-talk and newsreels—that scholars of earlier periods, and more obscure subjects, can only dream of. In using these records he offers an outstanding example of what can be achieved through the close examination of material remains: i.e., books.