

as grounded in black subjugation, a formation that has yet to be undone” (225).

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SCHAEFER, Heike, and Alexander STARRE, eds. 2019. *The Printed Book in Contemporary American Culture: Medium, Object, Metaphor*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. xv + 277. ISBN 9783030225445, Hardback \$119.99. ISBN 9783030225476, Paper \$84.99. ISBN 9783030225452, eBook \$64.99.

This relevant and timely book asks what does “book” even mean anymore? We know in 2021 that reading a book no longer necessarily involves print and paper. I’m certain this is something that you will have an opinion about already. The opposition between physical books and digital ones is, as Schaefer and Starre point out, not best served by antagonistic accounts. This collection doesn’t take a side but observes that “the onrush of all things digital revitalizes book culture rather than threatening it” (5). Times have changed.

At the turn of the millennium and shortly after I was arguing, in *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Fiction* (2005), that historic and chronic critical neglect of texts which made full and unconventional use of the codex form had hampered the reception of Beckett’s early novels and of the work of B. S. Johnson, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Alasdair Gray. I made the point that the form of the book grounded the reader rather than being the distraction it tended to be for critics expecting the codex to be used as what Schaefer and Starre call a “passive container” (8). Their editors’ introduction helps cast new light on what has changed: “For the longest time, the medial specificities of books were obscured by their pervasive presence and constant use in everyday life” (6). Familiarity with digital culture, particularly desktop publishing, has changed our attitude to pages. Devices that would have caused trouble for typesetters in the past now regularly appear in mainstream novels that have little interest in being innovative, avant-garde or experimental. Aleida Assman’s chapter places the key generational split roughly between Jonathan Franzen and Jonathan Safran Foer (born, respectively, in 1959 and 1977) (140). Both are still novelists and both use their pages as they see fit, but Franzen’s use of italics for thought passages or representations of letter and e-mail layouts are far less challenging to the reader than Safran Foer’s use of colored text,

photographs and pages printed to illegible density. Since the millennium, critical interest in what the book form can contribute has also burgeoned.

Capturing all of the texts discussed in *The Printed Book in Contemporary American Culture* under one disciplinary heading remains difficult and this is one of the underlying discussions that the collection has with itself and its many intertexts. Schaefer and Starre situate their contribution “at the crossroads of American Studies, comparative literary studies, book studies, and media studies” to consider “the current state of book culture from an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective” (14). And they deliver on the series title “New Directions in Book History” by orienting very much to the contemporary as a scrying glass for book futures.

The outlier in a book with *Contemporary American Culture* in the title is Monika Schmitz-Emans’ chapter on book design as a literary strategy, which focuses on Aka Morchiladze’s *Santa Esperanza*, published in Georgian in 2004 and in German in 2006 but not, as yet, in English. Morchiladze’s booklets-in-a-bag format might seem a useful metaphor for a collection like this, but there are chapters offering new ways into well-known texts, too. Reingard M. Nischik’s “Books and Books and Books . . . an Oasis of the Forbidden: Writing and Print Culture as a Metaphor and Medium for Survival in Margaret Atwood’s Novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*” considers Offred’s response to illegal books and her narrative’s survival as a verbal account in a postprint future subject to academic analysis and suspicion. There is also Assman’s analysis of Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* (1998) that draws out how the novel intimately involves its reader in the writing, action, and reading of novels by capturing three versions of authorial self-doubt through what she terms “a new form of intertextuality” (144), and depending on the reader’s memory and experience while reflecting on an immersed reader, the novel’s Mrs. Brown character, who is reading Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Other essays discuss the perceived fault line between digital and book culture more directly, such as Regina Schober’s chapter on Robin Sloan’s *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore* (2012) and Joshua Cohen’s *Book of Numbers* (2015). Here the texts worry about the relationship between the different types of knowledge serviced by novels and databases, between words and binary code, between life and abstraction. The feel is of a world creeping towards the situation of Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Library of Babel” in which the librarians can only make sense of a few of the books in the vast library holding all codex possibilities. Antje Kley’s analysis of *VAS: An Opera in Flatland* (2002) by Steve Tomasula and Stephen Farrell is something of an antidote, in which “beautifully difficult writing” and highly inventive design confront datamining,

genetics, and eugenics with individual specificity showing how books can re-present and renew ways of understanding (if we let them).

Janice Radway's chapter on zines and book culture asks us to rethink what counts as a book more broadly, taking a lead from the non-conformist publications resisting corporate strictures and archived by innovative librarians. The high point of this phenomena seems to have been the 1990s, just before the online blog absorbed the enthusiasts' vitality and social media usurped the public sphere. Christoph Blasi's chapter records the rise of digitization from online sales in the 1990s to the rise of eBooks in the following decade. Caught between these developments the book business has struggled, despite eBook-only readers being just 9% of the market (121). Rather grim statistics about American book reading are included, all the more so when the possible improvements to empathy offered by reading literature is indicated by reference to David Kidd and Emanuele Castano's 2013 studies, but the evidence cited doesn't appear to preclude these benefits being delivered electronically. Blasi's points about the permanence, prestige, and gift possibilities of material books are more solid, and tie in with Jessica Pressman's piece about Sean and Lisa Ohlenkamp's *The Joy of Books* (2012) and other stop-motion (i.e. analog) animated celebrations of the material book. Yet Pressman is also live to the economic and ritual elements of this fetishization and its consumption in screen formats rather than by reading. She seems well positioned to add a postscript on the role on the bookshelf in online meetings.

Alison Gibbons' chapter on Mark Z. Danielewski's *The Fifty Year Sword* (2005/2012) deals with remediation, Danielewski's obsession since his *The House of Leaves* (2000) effectively remediated the fictional video *The Navidson Record*, and shows how the novella in question remediates oral storytelling as represented by the campfire tale in a Halloween setting. I have some history with this text, having written a chapter on it for Alison Gibbons and Joe Bray's collection *Mark Z. Danielewski* (2011) only to find the original 2005 edition immediately drop out of print to be replaced with the 2012 edition Gibbons has access to here. While the colored printing and eccentric page design are still present and accounted for in this chapter, Gibbons focuses usefully on the linguistic tricks, compound words, and mishearings Danielewski exploits through the complex interplay of the five fragmentary narrators.

Kiene Brillenburg Wurth's chapter also deals with remediation but in relation to what she calls "Anne-Carson's Quasi-Artist's Book *Nox*". The "quasi" arises because Carson's text reproduces the immediacy of a limited-edition artist's book but is mass-produced. Wurth performs a "mate-

rial reading” on the text’s presentation as a memorial package to answer the question: “Do these mechanisms compel us, scholars of literature, to reconsider the death of the author?” (228). It is the most challenging essay in the collection and the only one in which I was a little uncertain about the English usage in the following few instances. The description of the text as “kitsch”, defined as “leftover” and “nostalgic”, doesn’t seem quite right; “memorialize” might have been better than “remember” (232); and an “a” is missing from the intention to “open up new venues in literary studies” (228). But the issue the chapter pursues about “Author Impression” is very interesting, particularly when it unearths the original publication for Roland Barthes’ seminal essay “The Death of the Author” (1968) in an issue of the boxed avant-garde journal *Aspen* (1965-71). Packaged with a general discussion of fine art, the scope of Barthes’ intent appears somewhat narrowed, if not its applicability. In fact, this discovery takes us deeper into the heart of a fascinating and contentious area. When the Author has clearly exerted considerable control, as in the case of Anne Carson, over the form of the text — what Wurth calls “a curated object” — is the effect nevertheless to “deactivate authorial intent and the imprint of personality”? (253). To put it another way, do author-designed bookish objects assist in the death of the Author or ultimately reveal their calculating presence lurking behind the devices they have set up to disguise it?

Carson’s strategy is to attempt to reproduce the immediacy of a found object, despite the fact the reader knows very well the original is elsewhere. This is the risk visual texts take with criticism — the cry of “the Emperor’s new clothes” from the person who hasn’t understood the game of make-believe. The substitution the text seeks is almost exactly equivalent to the impression we get of realist prose referring to reality, when it in fact stands for the original observation and seeks to duplicate it. Suspension of disbelief is required because that is how books work.

At a conference on Samuel Beckett in 2006 I presented a paper about the materiality of the text the author sought to exploit in *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1953), and in a more limited compass in *Malone Dies* (1951). I was kindly encouraged to visit the Beckett archive in Reading, which holds many of his manuscripts, to look at the doodles upon them. I have now done so by proxy, but it was clear my point had not gone across. For all the interest and aura of the manuscripts they were just means to an end: the printed book, which was the best route at the time to commercial and artistic success as an author. It still is, as it was three hundred years ago when Daniel Defoe offered *Robinson Crusoe* as a journal and *Moll Flanders* as an edited biography. Such texts did not present readers with the handwriting

of their supposed authors because it was not technologically possible to do so. *Nox* wishes to be read as a memorial to a dead brother, not a novel, to appear to be the original from which we are always one step removed. The novel can strain against that gap but can never bridge it (nor, I suggest, can the eBook). The one-off artist's book can. There's the rub.

In the Afterword, Garrett Stewart points out both the diversity and convergence of the foregoing chapters and emphasizes a disciplinary focus on the "long-form story" as the primary avatar of the "bookish" event whether digital or physical. He does a good job of containing the range of booklets in the bag (to refer back to Morchiladze's *Santa Esperanza*) though the e-publication of the collection means these chapters never have to be encountered either physically or as a group. I've been reading the eBook with "Review Copy — / For personal use only" diagonally in grey across every page, but I won't be satisfied until I possess a physical copy of this useful and thought-provoking collection.

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VECHINSKI, Matthew James. 2020. *Twentieth-Century American Fiction in Circulation: Short Stories Written for Magazines and Republished in Linked Story Collections*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 208. ISBN 9780367424466, Hardback \$160.00. ISBN 9780367824174, eBook \$48.95.

Drawing on reception studies, periodical studies, and genetic criticism, Matthew James Vechinski examines the relationships between short stories originally published in magazines and then collected as sequences in book form. This (sub)genre, often referred to as a "composite novel" or, in Vechinski's preferred term, a "linked story collection", operates distinctly from a simple assortment of stories published within a particular span or comprising an author's lifetime, generating tighter links among recurrent characters, common settings, and/or thematic threads. While several studies have considered this form of fiction, Vechinski's is the first monograph to read such collections with and against their original periodical versions, thinking of the earlier magazine publications not as implicit drafts to be repurposed in books, but as texts that have been "finished twice", standing as independent entities in each print medium (2). As Vechinski explains, the original published forms of these stories "were considered complete and able to be appreciated singly by a magazine audience prior to having