

CONTEMPORARY BOOK STUDIES IN FRANCE: THE INTERFACE AMONG RESEARCH, TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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The purpose of this paper is to present the situation of book studies in France today, in particular the interface between academic research and vocational training, and its development over the past 15 to 20 years. It provides an overview of places of learning devoted to the book, and of the various French institutions involved in research and/or training in this field. It discusses the leading figures and presents a map of the discipline, both historical and geographical. The impact on professional practice is also examined, as it becomes clear that book studies, through their very nature, necessarily include a practical and material component.

Key words: book studies, book research, training, practice

The French are notorious for their respect for books – where else than in the Republic of Letters does a presidential candidate need to be a published author to be taken seriously? As in many countries, the death of the book is predicted in France, and people are said to read less and less, and yet book history and book studies have never been so prevalent, as if attending to a dying patient. This development has taken place in the last 20 years, concomitantly in academic research and vocational training. Two documents, published recently, are significant. The first is a bibliography com-

iled by Jean-Yves Mollier, listing the major monographs and doctoral theses devoted to French book history and French publishing since 1789 [12]. It lists nearly 1,000 items, most of which appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. The second item is a 160-page guide to “Métiers du Livre” courses that lists over 60 different courses [2]; the term *métiers* means “trade”, “craft”, “profession”, so it encompasses a variety of trades linked to books, most of them in the areas of book-selling, publishing and librarianship.

The starting point for the paper was the following question: what happened? How

did this exponential proliferation come about? I thought I would start by looking at the pioneers and the places where they taught.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

It would be useful, to begin with, to present a brief overview of the places of research dedicated to book history and book science. The French have a very complex higher education system. Next to universities, we have “*écoles*”, schools, often at a very high level, most of which were founded during the 19th century, and which are independent bodies. Within these schools and universities, some pioneering individuals conducted ground-breaking research and taught students who in turn contributed to the science.

The first place and individual I will introduce are the Ecole Nationale des Chartes where the pioneer historian Henri-Jean Martin (1924–2007) both was trained and taught. This school was founded in 1821 to train young people so that they would be capable of organizing and classifying the masses of documents confiscated by the French state during the Revolution. It later evolved educating archivists, paleographers and “*conservateurs responsables du patrimoine*”, i.e. librarians and curators in charge of the French national heritage¹. H. J. Martin, who trained there as an ar-

¹ Une institution au service de l’histoire et du patrimoine. Website of l’Ecole Nationale des Chartes: <<http://www.enc.sorbonne.fr/l-ecole.html>> [accessed 21 December 2009].

chivist and a paleographer, exerted a seminal influence. The author of *L'apparition du livre* (*The Coming of the Book*) (1958), having first worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and then in Lyon (where he was instrumental in the development of the Printing Museum), started teaching at l’Ecole des Chartes in 1970 and set up a new discipline in book history, attracting many students. After his death in 2007, Elisabeth Parinet and Annie Charon have continued to run the seminars.

Roger Chartier (born 1945), of international repute, had a different background. He had studied history at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint Cloud. His meeting with Henri-Jean Martin, which led them to editing the *History of French Publishing* in four volumes (1982–1986) together, was fundamental to the blossoming of book studies in France. As J. Y. Mollier remarks, this work, the first of its kind, gave a legitimacy to the subject in academic circles [12]. R. Chartier taught at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), before transferring in 2007 to the Collège de France where he holds a regular seminar. His teaching activity abroad helped his work to become known internationally².

² Biography and bibliography of Roger Chartier on website of the EHESS: <<http://www.ehess.fr/crh/document.php?id=314>> and of the Collège de France : <http://www.college-de-france.fr/default/EN/all/eur_mod/index.htm> [accessed 20 December 2009].

Another founding father was Robert Escarpit (1918–2000) who was from roughly the same generation as H. J. Martin. R. Escarpit published his *Sociology of Literature* in 1958, followed by the *Revolution of the Book* in 1965. He had studied English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, but rapidly turned to new areas in the emerging social sciences. He was instrumental in establishing what became known as the “Bordeaux school”, because he taught at the University of Bordeaux III, where Robert Estivals (born 1927), author of *La Bibliologie* (1978), also worked. They were instrumental in putting pressure on the Ministry of Education to create a new academic section in 1975 and to recognize the sciences of Information and Communication as a legitimate university subject [14].

After the founding fathers, came a younger generation who published their seminal works in the late 1980s, namely Frédéric Barbier (born 1952) and J. Y. Mollier (born 1947). Their landmark books, *Livre, Economie et Société industrielles en Allemagne et en France au XIXe siècle, 1840–1914* and *L'argent et les lettres. Histoire du capitalisme d'édition (1880–1920)* came out at the same time, respectively in 1988 and 1989. F. Barbier (born 1952) who also trained as an archivist at the Ecole des Chartes, has a seminar and a doctoral school at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes [11]. As for J. Y. Mollier (born 1947), he has been an indefatigable figure in the dissemination of book history. Under his leadership, the first course in book and

publishing history within a university (as opposed to an *école*) was started in 1987 at the University Nanterre-Paris X. In 1993, he created a specific research group devoted to the history of the book, publishing and reading in Europe between the 18th and 20th centuries at the Centre d'Histoire Culturelle des Sociétés Contemporaines (Centre for the cultural history of contemporary societies) of the University Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. He has also been interested in the worldwide implications of the profession, and has been active in the OMEC network (Observatoire mondial de l'édition contemporaine, or the World Observatory of Contemporary Publishing)³.

The 1980s thus saw a rise of the academics, mainly with a background in history⁴, but also in sociology, and in the sciences of information and communication. The area of book history was no longer the sole preserve of librarians and curators, publishers or booksellers writing their memoirs, or bibliophiles, but became of interest to the academics. It also left the realm of the “écoles”, spreading to universities, where it attracted a larger and less elitist audience. Above all, it gained academic credibility.

³ The OMEC has organised conferences (Sherbrooke, Prato, Sydney). The CHSC has partners at University of Sherbrooke, University of London and Reading, Ecole française d'Extrême Orient in Beijing, Insitut Mora in Mexico, University of New South Wales in Sydney [1, 5].

⁴ We can mention, for example, Anne-Marie Thiesse, Elisabeth Parinet, Annie Prassoloff, Pascal Fouché.

With this came schools, university departments, and students, all generating intense activity in research and academic publishing. This was strengthened by the development of the sciences of information & communication as an academic field in the 1970s, their institutionalisation as it were, and a growing interest both in France and around the world in media studies, cultural history, and cultural and social studies. It is interesting how this academic research field found its way into teaching.

There are some purely academic endeavours, such as the courses at the Collège de France, the EHESS, the CHCSC, or the Institut du Livre, which I will discuss later on, but the majority of programmes involve a vocational component. Currently, there are 22 master's programmes at 18 different universities in France, devoted to "Métiers du Livre", and 24 undergraduate courses. They typically combine a vocational component, giving students the tools to work either in librarianship or publishing (traditional and digital), with a sound theoretical and historical framework. The weight given to each component obviously depends on the programme. Most of these courses were created after 2000. This exponential development is related to a multiplicity of factors, including high student demand and a general disaffection for purely literary studies, the French university system and the Bologna process, and the urge on the part of the French government to "professionalize courses" linked to the democratisation of higher education.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

What is obvious to any observer is that in the past 20 years, professional training for publishers and librarians has shifted from the professional bodies to the universities. Generally speaking, until the early 1990s, librarians trained future librarians at dedicated training centres, whilst in publishing and bookselling you learnt on the job. In 2009, again generally speaking, if you want to work in the field of books, you will attend a dedicated course at a university.

As Miha Kovač stated [7], why was work in libraries for academically educated professionals, while publishing was a job for enthusiastic amateurs? One of the reasons is that library education, at least in France, is clearly regulated. Indeed, libraries are for the most part public institutions funded by public money, and their staff are traditionally "*fonctionnaires*" (civil servants). You need to pass a competitive exam, a "*concours*" to become a librarian with a long-term contract. The first professional certificate was created in 1879, and until 1992 all training was carried out outside universities. I won't go into the administration of French libraries. Suffice it to say that in the late 1980s, there was a reform of the statute of librarians, linked to the laws on decentralisation, passed early in the decade, that gave regions more power, and control of their cultural institutions and amenities, such as schools and libraries. This affected the training of librarians with the creation, after a transition period from 1988 to 1992, of various institutions, both "*écoles*" and universities [13].

Les *conservateurs*, the top class of librarians, especially archivists, were still educated at the prestigious Ecole des Chartes in Paris. But they are also educated at the ENSSIB, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques (National Higher School in the Sciences of Information and Libraries) in Lyon, opened in 1992. In fact, the ENSSIB followed the ENSB, the national higher school for librarians, founded in 1963. However, as the change in name indicates, compared with the ENSB, the ENSSIB has also developed a clear research line (information science), and offers several master's programmes in book science and book history. The school also publishes the BBF, *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France*, a high-quality professional review⁵.

With the reform of the civil service, regional training centres had to be set up for life-long learning, especially needed for working librarians because of the IT revolution. There was a transitional period, but in 1992 a network of 12 centres emerged: Centres Régionaux de Formation aux Carrières des Bibliothèques, du Livre et de la Documentation (CRFCB) in Bordeaux, Caen, Clermont, Dijon, Grenoble-Lyon, Lille, Marseille, Nancy, Paris, Poitiers-Limoges, Rennes and Toulouse. They have

now developed many varied programmes, including work on a common platform for distance learning.

IUTs and IUPs have played a central role in developing vocational and university training in book trades. These acronyms stand for Institut Universitaire de Technologie (university institute of technology) and Institut Universitaire Professionnel (professional university institute). The IUTs were set up in the late 1960s and the IUPs in the 1970s and 1980s to meet the demand for specialized technicians in various fields: engineering, chemistry, business administration, and information and communication. They are the French version of the polytechnics in Britain, the Hogeschool in the Netherlands and Belgium, and the Fachhochschule in Germany and Switzerland, which have now all been transformed into Universities of Applied Science. IUTs and IUPs differ in this respect: the IUT traditionally delivered a two-year diploma corresponding to the first two years of university, whereas the IUPs did a similar thing, but corresponding to year 3 and 4, after a general course in humanities or social sciences⁶.

⁵ The ENSB was created in Paris in 1963 and moved to Villeurbanne, near Lyon, in 1974. It became the ENSSIB in 1992. It is the only national training center for library personnel of category A (cadres). There is a research centre in Book History under the leadership of Dominique Varry. Website : <<http://www.enssib.fr>>.

⁶ Portal to the French IUTs, with a link to the DUT Information-Communication. These departments offer several specialities: Publicité (Advertising), Communication des organisations (Organisational Communication), Gestion de l'information et du document dans les organisations (Information Studies), and Métiers du Livre et du patrimoine (Book and Heritage Studies): <<http://www.iut-fr.net/formations-diplomes/trouver-une-formation.html?diplome=17&diplomeType=1>> [accessed 21 December 2009].

The very first IUT *Métiers du Livre* was founded by Robert Escarpit in Bordeaux in 1967. It was a pioneering enterprise, bringing together professionals and academics. It was not until the early 1990s, however, that the specialty opened in many other IUTs – ten to date – to answer the need for training, arising from the reform of librarian statute mentioned earlier. The opening of the specialty was strongly supported by the Ministry of Education (it should be noted that university libraries, where many of these students would go on to work, are not governed by the Ministry of Culture like general public libraries, but by the Ministry of Education). It is worth noting that several IUTs work hand in hand with the regional training centres for librarians, namely Paris, Grenoble, Bordeaux, Dijon, and Nancy.

When the IUT *Métiers du Livre* courses were created in the early 1990s, it was clear that a course just for aspiring librarians would not attract enough students. Secondly, it seemed important that people who were intending to work with books should work together, and, careers being uncertain, it was best to give a common training in all three areas: bookselling, librarianship and publishing. Thus, the IUTs developed an original approach by focusing all facets of professional practice and academic thought on a single object, i.e. symbolically a book, and of course a more general information flux. Interestingly enough, in 2005, the course added a new expression to its title “*Métiers du Livre et du patrimoine*”; the

book was thus equated to the notion of heritage.

With the Bologna process, two-year courses were no longer appropriate, so many IUTs established a third year add-on, the *licence professionnelle*. Within the context of necessary professionalization of the universities, some universities outside IUTs (namely literature or history departments) also created these *licences professionnelles*, a one-year course with a strong vocational slant, after two years of general studies. Today, there are six of these outside IUTs. As for IUPs, they have disappeared or rather transformed into master’s programmes.

A word now about master’s programmes in publishing studies. In the wake of Escarpit, the very first one was compiled by Jean-Marie Bouvaist in 1973 at the University Paris XIII-Villetaneuse in the northern suburbs of Paris. Like the course created by Escarpit in Bordeaux, this was incredibly innovative at the time and brought together professionals and academics in a fruitful dialogue. To this day, following many evolutions, this university maintains its high reputation despite the increasing competition. As mentioned, the IUPs were transformed into master’s programmes, namely in Paris X (Pôle *Métiers du Livre* Saint Cloud which has opened an Erasmus Mundus master in collaboration with Oxford Brookes, the University of Lubliana, HTWK Leipzig, the University of Murcia and the University of Milan). In the last year or so, many other universities, under governmental pressure to produce “employ-

able graduates”, and in particular literature and history departments, have also opened these types of programmes. We may note that all these programmes are very cheap for students (a few hundred euros in fees). However, one of the main business schools in Paris, the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce, offers a programme costing 10,000 euros a year, under the pressure of demand from students – so great is the lure of publishing. A last development has been spearheaded once again by Paris XIII, namely a master’s in the form of a sandwich course, part-time study, part-time working for a publisher’s, increasing formal links between academia and the professional world. This is excellent for student placement in the long run. It will be noted that sandwich courses, or *apprentissage* (apprenticeship) as they are known in French, were initially created for manual jobs. Master’s programmes, including *en apprentissage*, not only offer vocational training, but are also increasingly providing research; for example, Bertrand Legendre and Corinne Abensour (University Paris XIII-Villetaneuse) have been doing research for the Ministry of Culture and the Syndicat National de l’Edition, the French professional association of publishers. What is interesting is the mutual irrigation of theory and practice.

I would like to describe how the majority of these courses operate, whether they be at undergraduate or graduate level. They typically offer three components: a strong theoretical approach combining book history, theory of information and com-

munication, sociology, economics, law; a practical component, communication techniques, DTP, book production, information processing, etc.; case studies, a dissertation, and a work placement. The courses are set up with professionals from the trade who often teach the practical components, while the academics specialize in more theoretical aspects. Practice nourishes theory and vice versa.

Alongside the universities and the “*écoles*”, professional bodies remain, namely the INFL, Institut National de Formation des Libraires, for booksellers, which is particularly active in the defence of independent bookselling; and the ASFORED, Association pour la Formation et le Perfectionnement Professionnel dans les Métiers de l’Edition, a professional training branch of the Syndicat National de l’Edition, which provides short courses for professionals working in publishing. The ASFORED also offers a course in book production (pre-press, paper, printing, binding) leading to the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur in Publishing (BTS Edition). This BTS can also be prepared at the prestigious art and design school, Ecole Estienne, in Paris, and at the Institut Rousseau in Toulouse. All this makes for a rather complex picture.

TODAY

What has been the impact of these developments on contemporary French society and professional practices? First of all, we must note a popularisation of book history. In the early 2000s, there were many

conferences and exhibitions on book history, including “Les trois révolutions du livre” at the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris in 2002 [9], a series of talks and visits aimed at the general public, organised by the Bibliothèque Nationale, which started in 2007 [4], talks and exhibitions at the Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris under the title “Paris, capitale du livre”, the development of the Musée de l’Imprimerie in Lyon – all these signalled a revival of interest in the printed matter and heritage. There is also an increasing number of children’s books showing how books are made, and numerous workshops are organised in schools, leisure centres and libraries aimed at children, so they can learn about publishing and make their own books. All this is linked to a growing interest in the book as a global historical artefact and to the development of cultural history. So, spearheaded by librarians and other people trained in the programmes listed above, there has been a great effort to inform and educate the general public in book history. Public interest is also undoubtedly a product of the spirit of the times.

As regards professional practice in libraries, after the library spirit of the 1970s mentioned by Magnus Torstensson [15], the trend is towards more technical expertise, specifically in IT, but also in management, marketing, communication, and event planning. There is also a stronger interest in career. Dominique Lahary notes that this is a question of generation, and has asked various generations of librarians to

comment on other generations, with very interesting results [8]. It appears that the younger generation is clearly influenced by their university training.

As regards professional practice in publishing, a perverse effect of the growth in the number of courses is the polymorphous presence of *stagiaires*, or students on work placement, which has provided cheap and flexible labour. Indeed, many publishers have a year-long position of *stagiaire*, often in several departments. Because the market itself cannot absorb the many graduates of these courses, it creates a floating workforce of highly educated young people who do not necessarily find the kind of jobs they are looking for. It makes for a lot of creativity and a lot of frustration.

Another consequence, as the human resources manager of a big publishing group explained to me, is the over-qualification of graduates for what is often mundane work – such as management of stocks and reprints, or copy-editing. After a few years of experience, understandingly they want to be promoted to more rewarding positions with higher levels of responsibility whilst the demands of the company lie in medium-level work; this creates personnel management issues.

Finally, worth pointing out is the active role played by many institutions and associations, some of which have existed for many years, others that are more recent, others still that have evolved over the years. The oldest, le Cercle de la Librairie, is a sort of union grouping publishers and booksellers.

It dates back to 1847 when it was created as a professional body. It publishes the trade journal *Livres Hebdo* and the national book database Electre for booksellers. The association has a publishing house called Les Editions du Cercle de la Librairie, founded in 1982. They publish about 130 titles with ten new titles a year. They have published, in particular, *l'Histoire de l'édition française* (in four volumes), *l'Histoire des bibliothèques françaises* (in four volumes) and *l'Histoire de la librairie française*. Their bestsellers are their books on various «métiers»: publisher, bookseller, information specialist, librarian. This publishing house, through its editorial policy of multi-volume histories, has favoured encyclopaedic knowledge of book history. It is interesting, and maybe indicative of the state of university presses in France, that it should be a professional body rather than a university press to publish such works [3].

The French state, through the Ministry of Culture, has an organisation dedicated to the book, le Centre National du Livre, created in 1976 and derived from the Caisse Nationale des Lettres set up after World War II to help writers. Today, the CNL finances a number of publication projects, including translations, and also a documentation service useful for researchers, as well as commissioning a number of studies. The latest, launched in 2007, is called “Livre 2010” and explores the future of the book [10]. One of the motivations of the CNL is clearly the defence of the French language and culture.

At the crossroads of research, publishing and state institutional input, the IMEC – Institut Mémoires de l’Edition Contemporaine (the Institute for the Memory of Contemporary Publishing) – is an original and active organisation whose mission is to collect, preserve and make available publishers’ archives. Its creation in 1988 coincides with the movement that saw the fusion of smaller old-style publishing companies into big publishing conglomerates. The physical move of the companies themselves to new premises might have endangered archives which are valuable to the historian – the whole question of archives is clearly a late 20th-century and 21st-century concern. First based in Paris and now in the Abbaye d’Ardenne near Caen in Normandy, the IMEC plays an active role in co-organizing many conferences and seminars [5].

I’d also like to mention libraries with special collections centred around the book and book trades. Room T (“la salle T”) at the Bibliothèque Nationale was opened when the national library moved in 1998, and specializes in documentation about the book and reading. The Bibliothèque Buffon in Paris, which is open to the general public, has a special collection on book trades.

Books about Books, a new information centre (with an English name) specialised in book studies and publishing, with a commitment to independent publishing, has been recently opened in Paris. An initiative of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers, it is free and open to students, and offers over 160 titles, includ-

ing subscriptions to specialized journals. It is clearly a militant activity, in part founded and run by former students of the various publishing masters [1].

To finish this overview, the Institut d'histoire du livre opened in Lyon in 2001, focusing on written communication. It brings several prestigious schools – the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the ENSSIB and the Ecole des Chartes, together with Lyon's City Library and Printing Museum, with its fine collections dating back to the 15th century. The purpose is to create a place of research drawing on interdisciplinarity, cultural transfers and digital technology. They also organise workshops that profess to be the European offshoot of the Rare Book School in Charlottesville, Virginia, and for which many classes are taught in English. Their website includes a directory of book museums in Europe, of which there are an amazing number (27 in France, 21 in Germany, 9 in the Netherlands, 8 in Belgium,

6 in Spain, 4 in Britain, 3 in Poland, etc.). The current trend in book history research and teaching mixes international scholarship, hands-on experience of rare books and printing technology, and the use of digital resources [6].

To conclude, as a result of the proliferation of courses, the number of publications, the amount of publicity, there may be a sense of overproduction, as if there have been too many developments too quickly. Time will tell no doubt. Things are in constant flux. It is likely that some of the 22 masters in *Métiers du Livre* will not survive, especially in the context of rationalising expenditure in research and higher education. We are also reaching the time when the older generation will retire. It will be most interesting to watch how the younger generation, a product, so to speak, of these new programmes where they were educated, will take over and shape the book science and the training of the future.

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ŠIUOLAIKINĖS KNYGOTYROS STUDIJOS PRANCŪZIJOJE:
MOKSLINIŲ TYRIMŲ, MOKYMO IR PROFESINĖS PRAKTIKOS SĄSAJOS

SYLVIE DECAUX

Santrauka

Pranešimo pagrindu parengtoje apžvalgoje nagrinėjama knygotyros situacija šiandienos Prancūzijoje, ypač akademinų tyrimų bei profesinio rengimo ir jo plėtros per pastaruosius 15–20 metų sąsajos. Supažindinama su Prancūzijos knygos tyrimų mokslo institucijomis ir or-

ganizacijomis, dirbančiomis šios srities mokslo ir mokymo darba, aptariami svarbiausi lyderiai, pateikiamas istorinis ir geografinis dalyko žemėlapis. Analizuojama profesinės praktikos įtaka, pastebima, kad bibliologijos prigimtyje slypi natūralus praktikos komponentas.

Įteikta 2009 m. gruodžio mėn.