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Introduction

Hindsight in 20/20

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DOI
10.1163/15700690-12341467

Publication date
2020

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Quaerendo

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Dijkstra, T., & Dijstelberge, P. (2020). Introduction: *Hindsight in 20/20*. *Quaerendo*, *50*(1-2), 9-14. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700690-12341467

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QUÆRENDO 50 (2020) 9-14

Quærendo

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Introduction

Hindsight in 20/20

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This year, *Quaerendo* celebrates its 50th anniversary. To commemorate such an historic moment, this special issue brings together a broad range of innovative approaches to current book historical research on the theme: 'The Past of our Future. Moving Perspectives on Innovation and Tradition in the Book Market.' With the past, present, and future of *Quaerendo* in mind, we may be tempted to overestimate the clarity of our current vision, anno 2020. To draw a 'glaring' parallel with opticians' jargon: '20/20 vision' is after all nothing more than normal sharpness of sight. Only time can tell which of the research themes and methodologies that are now in vogue will truly prove innovative in the long run.

History tells us that there are indeed those who were blessed with clearer views or higher viewpoints. The works of these scholars have served as guideposts for others who might otherwise have kept on trudging along the same path. In 1970, Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, Ton Croiset van Uchelen, W.G. Hellinga and G.W. Ovink opened up new book historical vistas with their inauguration of *Quaerendo*. A short overview of the journal's history may be found in the introduction to this volume by Croiset van Uchelen himself, who was *Quaerendo's* editor-in-chief for over forty years, until 2012. The first issue of *Quaerendo* appeared at a time when book history was moving from a primarily Anglo-American focus on analytical bibliography, towards the 'new style *Histoire du Livre*' of the 1980s. While the book has remained the central object of study, the focus of book historians has gradually shifted from bibliography to a more sociological approach; from production to communication; from clearly demarcated medium to more broadly defined forms of handwritten and printed material.

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The 1990s saw a consolidation of the history of the book, marked by a growing focus on interdisciplinarity, the mediation of print, and the 'new media'. Book historians with diverging views were brought together through the *Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing* and its much-lauded mailing list SHARP-L, established in 1992. The Society's first meeting was held in New York in 1993: over the course of 3 days, 130 attendees and 47 North American speakers assembled in 18 panels, a plenary session, a business meeting, 2 exhibition tours, and a wine reception. At the most recent conference, held in 2019 in Amherst, 291 scholars from Australia, North and Central America, Europe, Asia, and Africa gathered for 3 days, consisting of 30 sessions, 3 keynotes, 4 receptions, a banquet, a general meeting, a plenary discussion, 2 seminars and 3 library and museum tours.

Clearly, book history has come into its own as an academic discipline. It is no longer a handmaiden to such disciplines as history, linguistics, literary studies, or cultural history. According to SHARP's website, in 2020, 18 centres in Europe, North America, and Australia sponsor academic or professional-level coursework, research, and conferences, while 27 programs worldwide grant degrees in book and media studies. No fewer than 38 journals are devoted to the history of the book in some way or another, while 20 publishers' series are primarily concerned with the subject.

The power of tradition and the appeal of innovation are two opposing forces that push academic scholarship forward. For this 50th anniversary issue of *Quaerendo*, we asked scholars to address these forces through the central theme 'The Past of our Future. Moving Perspectives on Innovation and Tradition in the Book Market.' The nine contributions clearly demonstrate that this invitation may be interpreted in various ways. Some of the authors implement innovations in research methods and in new insights from book history itself, while others focus on new materials of study.

One obvious advancement in book history has been the rise of the digital humanities. Drawing on digital tools, Lucas van der Deijl demonstrates their potential for new insights into even such well-researched topics as Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1677). Likewise, digital databases form the foundation for many computational avenues of research. In this volume, Rindert Jagersma and Joanna Rozendaal discuss the uses and impact of *Middlebrow Enlightenment: Disseminating Ideas, Authors, and Texts in Europe, 1665-1830*, a database that brings together early modern book sale catalogues. Their case-study of the private library of Joanna Koerten, a Dutch paper-cutting artist, shows what can be achieved using such databases. Marieke van Delft also

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concentrates on two digital resources in her contribution: the *Incunabula Database* and the recently developed CERL *Provenance Digital Archive*. She demonstrates how the use of digital resources foster international collaboration in the field of provenance research. Meanwhile, Nina Geerdink and Alie Lassche illuminate how digital means can offer a broader and more inclusive approach to the popular early modern genre of wedding poetry, with a focus on the Dutch Republic between 1600 and 1760.

Historical innovations in book production itself take centre stage in Lisa Kuitert's contribution 'Moving Perspectives on Innovation and Tradition in the Book Market'. Lisa Kuitert, the current editor-in-chief of *Quaerendo*, considers the 'mother of all inventions' from a novel perspective: the transmission of myths about the invention of the printing press in a colonial context. Her article on Laurens Jansz Coster combines a global approach towards book history with the question how readers and book producers employed the pretended inventor of print to boost Dutch status in the colonies and the Netherlands' international prestige.

Another innovative line of book historical research covered in this special issue pertains to the inclusion of often neglected materials and elements of print, such as trade 'unfinished' book bindings, handwritten notes and printed ephemera. This contribution by Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen addresses the theme of innovation through its focus on new materials of research. The authors build upon the *Short Title Catalogue Netherlands* to argue that more than 80 per cent of all printed matter produced before 1800 cannot in fact be found in that same catalogue. Their article offers a first examination of what is missing, and where one might find these, mostly ephemeral, printed materials. In the next contribution, Bram Vannieuwenhuyze and Martine De Reu illuminate yet another type of forgotten material: hand-written slips of paper that record mural inscriptions of the early modern city Brussels. These slips provide insights into the preparatory work involved in the publication of a town history or description. In a similar vein, Nicholas Pickwoad's article charts decades of work on ephemeral bindings made for the book trade, covering the period from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Since these bindings were never meant to remain intact, very few today remain. By assembling a large corpus of these materials, Pickwoad sheds light upon the important role these bindings long played in the book trade. Finally, Paul van Capelleveen examines nineteenth-century statements about limited editions, as well as copy numbering, which were often meant as signifiers of quality. Over the course of the 1800s, the purpose of limited editions and copy numbering changed, from legal protection to proof of authenticity, marks of quality and signs of exclusivity.

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Although the researchers of today are at least one academic lifetime removed from *Quaerendo*'s inaugural issue,[1] changes in the field of book history often remain invisible to those experiencing them, or what we might call '*histoire* (*du livre*) *immobile*'. Indeed, the journal's fiftieth volume echoes its inaugural predecessor in many respects. While Jagersma and Rozendaal's article on book sale catalogues is innovative in its (digital) methods, this subject was already discussed in January 1971, in P.S. Morrish's 'A collection of seventeenth century book sale catalogues'. Spinoza's works have also been the subject of various articles in *Quaerendo's* early days. Consider for instance Adri F. Offenberg's 'Spinoza's library. The story of a reconstruction' in volume 3.4. Furthermore, contributions on incunabula, the Dutch East Indies, and Laurens Jansz Coster appeared in *Quaerendo* during the 1970s. Underexposed materials such as wedding poetry, limited edition statements, (unfinished) book bindings, and manuscript slips, also find their counterparts in earlier issues. See for instance G.A. de Zeeuw's 1975 examination of Amsterdam publishers' bindings from about 1600, or De la Fontaine Verwey's discussion of wedding poetry in a number of his contributions. Pettegree and der Weduwen rightfully encourage the quest for these and other neglected or lost materials, which is a welcome innovation of the field. But they are just as much part of a tradition: as early as 1972, W.L. Braekman called for an examination of pamphlets not listed in the *Short-Title Catalogue*.

This is of course not to say that the history of the book is simply repeating itself. Continuing and building upon research of yesterday with today's methods and perspectives leads to innovations as propagated by the Digital Humanities, Global History, and Gender Studies, to name but a few. What do these current and future innovations mean for book history, which may one day be discussed when *Quaerendo* reaches the respectable age of 100 years? Even from 'the eye of the storm', some (not too) tentative predictions may be given.

Like the history of the book itself, *Quaerendo* has gone through major developments over the past fifty years. For one thing, the journal's geographical

1 This first issue of *Quaerendo* contained the following contributions: L. Brummel, 'In Memoriam Dr. Maria Elizabeth Kronenberg'; W.J.A. Arntz, 'Maaskamp's Book of Costume-Prints'; E. Cickx-Indestege, 'The First Edition of the Naembouck by Joos Lambrecht (1546)'; L. Indestege, 'New Light on Ludovicus Ravescot'; H. De La Fontaine Verwey, 'The First "Book of Etiquette" for Children'; F. Unterkicher, 'Ein Einblattdruck in den Manuskripten des Johannes Gielemans in der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek'; P.S. Morrish, 'A Collection of Seventeenth-Century Book Sale Catalogues'; E. De La Fontaine Verwey, 'The Grolier Bindings in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek'; J. Veyrin-Forrer, 'Erwana Brin (†1969)'; F. Baudin, 'Les rencontres de Lure'; 'Bookreview'; 'Notes and News'.

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focus has broadened: originally primarily dedicated to the study of the history of the book in the Low Countries, over the years the journal has come to include research of the book in Western Europe, and subsequently in Europe in general. Over the coming decades, *Quaerendo* might just begin to publish comparative studies in global book history. For another thing, as *Quaerendo* proudly propagated the study of both print *and* manuscript fifty years ago, today, it increasingly will look at the digital world—as evidenced by various contributions in this anniversary issue alone. Future issues will perhaps include studies of recent innovations, like digital printing and the various ways in which digital media and design techniques influence the production, dissemination, and reception of text and image. These developments have already influenced *Quaerendo*'s presentation and dissemination. Until 2001, the journal was only available on paper. Today, current and previous editions can be consulted both in print and online, and this greatly influences accessibility: in 2019 hundreds of *Quaerendo*'s articles were individually downloaded each month. Perhaps the centennial issue will not even be published on paper, which will no doubt be lamented by many. At the same time, the growing possibilities for Open Access, and digital production and distribution, may increase *Quaerendo*'s accessibility in years to come, to the benefit of book historians and the humanities in general.

Despite the various shifts in research focus, methodologies, and subjects for study, our 20/20 hindsight on the past fifty years suggest that the foundation of research proper will likely not be so different from today. Scholarship will always be about writing well and convincingly, expressing diverse positions and varied perspectives, and these will invariably reflect the preoccupations of the age. Or, as Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1837: 'we will put our own interpretation on things, and our own things for interpretation'.[2]

In early to mid-2020, the scholarly preoccupations seem rather bleak: COVID-19 has all but put a halt to academic conferences, classes, and meetings (among them the much anticipated SHARP2020 conference in Amsterdam). These mass shutdowns put a further strain on the already struggling humanities. But if anything, the current crisis also demonstrates how we as (book) historians form a community, a true Republic of Letters brought together by email, telephone, video-calls, and indeed *Quaerendo*'s 50th anniversary issue. In the seventeenth century, the Carthusian monk and scholar Noel d'Argonne optimistically observed:

2 R. Waldo Emerson, *The Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2 vol. (Boston 1870), p. 87.

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> [T]he Republic of Letters is of very ancient origin [...] and existed before the Flood. Never has a republic been so great, so populous, so free, and so glorious. It embraces the whole world and is composed of people of all nations, social conditions, ages, and sexes, neither women nor children being excluded.[3]

In d'Argonne's age, scholars wrote letters. Today the internet is the preeminent platform for historians to exchange ideas, fostering cooperation and communication across borders, even when the physical borders are closed at the time of writing. It has never been easier to stay in touch, and just as the Republic of Letters has weathered many storms, the scholarly community of today will not only overcome its current trials and tribulations and it will no doubt thrive and foster new connections and innovations.

3 N. d'Argonne, *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (Paris 1740), pp. 166-7.

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