

## *Introduction*

FROM THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, when the new technology of printing provided the means (and a constant temptation) to print more copies than could readily be sold, the complementary techniques of advertising, marketing, promotion and publicity took on a new importance for the book trade. The ease of production of multiple copies justified a much greater investment of time, money and imagination in the attempt to stimulate demand, manipulate customer choice and expand the market. This development mirrored in many respects the growing sophistication of all aspects of entrepreneurial commercial life in late medieval and early modern Europe, as networks of trade and transport and of credit and business relationships became more complex. One interesting way in which the book trade differed from others, however, was in the extent of its involvement in, and control over, the medium of advertising. In producing printed advertisements, the book trade was its own customer. From the beginning, this probably encouraged the production of book advertisements in much larger quantities, and with more flexibility and experimentation with promotional genres and techniques, than would have been typical of other commodities.

The mixed uses of marketing, both as product information and as a means of expression of trade identity and commercial rivalries, give the genre a special interest, sometimes providing an opportunity for members of the book trade to speak with their own distinctive voice, and offering a glimpse into trade practices and the circumstances of individual careers. Much of what happens in the book trade, as in most other spheres of human activity, is a product of the erratic interventions of individuals driven by their own combination of commercial and personal motives. Book-trade history has to accommodate a range of approaches and one of the points of confluence between the general, what might be described as the action of market forces, and the particular, that is the specific responses of individual personalities within the trade, is provided by the engagement with publicity.

From the beginning of the hand-press period, advertising was an integral part of the book trade, creating and consolidating the lines of communication between wholesaler and retailer, bookseller and customer, producer and consumer. The trade made use of a mass of single-sheet material, such as posters, handbills and run-on titlepages, usually

described (and dismissed) as ephemera. The circulation of promotional material was essential to the sale of books through the formal mechanism of markets and fairs, as well as through less formal distribution points. It served also to underpin the system of exchanges and risk-sharing partnerships through which much of the trade's business was conducted.

Much of the book trade's printed advertising was a direct by-product of book production, taking advantage of type that was already set up, left-over paper stock, blank versos or spare leaves at the end of books. But from the sixteenth century onwards, more and more examples survive of sophisticated marketing tools, separately produced and issued, such as detailed lists and catalogues of backlist and forthcoming publications. At the same time the distinction became more explicit between marketing material aimed at retail customers and that intended for other booksellers.

Trade periodicals dedicated to publicizing new books, most notably the various series of Frankfurt and Leipzig fair catalogues, began in the second half of the sixteenth century and were quickly absorbed into the information networks of the republic of letters. This development, which also provided the focus for fierce competition for prominence within the trade, was consolidated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as part of the burgeoning output of newspapers, commercial serials, fashionable literary reviews and learned journals – all of which could be exploited by booksellers, in a range of different ways, to advertise their wares and promote their own brand.

After 1800, the volume of promotional material expanded exponentially, reflecting the huge increases in the number and range of printed serials. Advertising itself became big business and the bewildering range and quantity of output led directly to the emergence of a distinct industry centred on the process of commercial promotion. This was manifested within the field of serial production (the advertising manager/department) and in the professionalization of copy-writing and graphic design, as well as in the independent existence of advertising agencies with their own publications, such as directories. The twentieth century saw many new possibilities, especially with the advent of the mass media of radio and television, but the book trade seems never to have been able to make full use of these opportunities; instead, the new media found ways of exploiting the old, with the establishment of firms such as BBC Publications. More significant, perhaps, was the rise of publishers' book clubs and the use of direct marketing by post, which was in some respects a precursor to the most revolutionary change of the

past hundred years, the arrival of the internet. By its combination of mass marketing and advertising with an efficient method of distribution and sales, the internet has transformed bookselling in the space of a few years.

This varied history of the advertising and marketing of books – and of the use of print to promote the self-image of authors, booksellers, publishers and printers – provides the starting point for this collection of original essays. Through a range of case studies and examples, the contributors tease out some of the intricacies of promotion in the book trade from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century.

Lotte Hellinga provides a comprehensive account of the surviving single-sheet advertisements issued by the international book trade in the fifteenth century, distinguishing between those which described a single title and those which already set out to promote a list of publications. By a close study of individual examples, she shows how, even at the earliest stages of the use of print, a range of inventive marketing techniques were developed by the booksellers as a crucial support for their business; these in turn offer some clues regarding the structure of the retail and wholesale book trade. Bringing into consideration the pattern of locations of surviving copies of the titles advertised, she is also able to suggest some important new connections between the mechanism of advertising and the development of partnerships and networks for the sale and distribution of books across Europe in this period.

During the following century, a towering figure in the European book trade was the printer Christopher Plantin, whose finest achievement is now considered to be the eight-volume *Biblia Regia*, printed between 1568 and 1572. This was an international effort, involving an enormous commitment of resources. Plantin brought to bear all his personal and commercial contacts to promote it and made full use of the opportunities offered by the Frankfurt fair. Julianne Simpson examines in detail the sale of copies of this work, looking in particular at the way in which differentiation of copies by price and paper quality was used to make the *Biblia Regia* appeal to different types of customer. She also introduces an important new discovery, two printed single-sheet advertisements for the *Biblia Regia*, and compares these with the manuscript drafts which survive in the Plantin archives.

The interaction between marketing methods and the conduct of specific businesses within or on the fringes of the book trades, as well as with the careers of individual tradesmen, is considered by Michael Harris. By looking at the business of John Houghton, who used his *Collection for Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* to orchestrate his

Register Office business, and at the cross-over between the trades in print and patent medicine, as revealed in the careers of George and Henry Parker, some idea of the impact of advertising on the practitioners themselves is identified. The activities of Houghton and the Parkers provide good evidence not only of diversification and cross-subsidy within the book trade, but also of the self-reinforcing way in which control of the medium of print could be used systematically to advertise a portfolio of commodities and services.

Moving further into the world of eighteenth-century consumer society, Phillippa Plock examines the previously unresearched collection of trade cards built up by Ferdinand de Rothschild, now preserved at Waddesdon Manor. Trade cards were issued as a marketing device by tradesmen in a variety of businesses, but particularly by those involved in selling discretionary luxury goods and catering for a relatively wealthy clientele. This image of high quality and good taste was one which the trade cards sought to project, partly by the use of decoration and illustration and partly by imaginative association, in order to attract and retain customers. The cards issued by members of the Parisian book trade were often beautifully designed and were used to promote a variety of commercial activities, including the generalized function of the *Bureau d'Adresse*.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the Irish book trade expanded considerably, mainly through the rising level of imported books from England and Scotland. Various options were open to publishers who wished to promote their wares in the Irish market: among these were the issuing of subscription proposals or of separately printed catalogues, and the inclusion of stocklists in the back of other publications, but much more important was the purchase of advertising space in Irish or English newspapers or reviews. Charles Benson uses a wide range of documentary sources to analyse the considerable expenditure on advertising of new books for the Irish market in the period up to 1850. Using detailed evidence of the relative costs of advertising on wrappers, on inserted leaves or in the main text of the periodical, he traces the emergence of a specialized structure of advertising within the Irish press.

As the pace of technological change continued to accelerate into the twentieth century, the physical structure of the book itself was shaped by the need for effective promotion in what was becoming a mass market. Alan Powers investigates the particular use of the book jacket in this new commercial environment. Originally intended merely as a protective

wrapping, this pragmatic device became an integral component in the publishing process, both as a vehicle for information and as a colourful and relatively cheap way of catching the customer's eye and increasing the attractiveness of bookshop displays. Jacket design became the main element of branding, establishing customer recognition of particular series or imprints, and projecting the image of the author, with photographs and biographical information, promotional blurbs and endorsements. Such was its importance in the second half of the twentieth century that the jacket, rather than the text of the book, became the main preoccupation of publishers' representatives and bookshop proprietors alike.

Another development in the twentieth century was the way in which publishers have sought to exploit literary prizes as marketing opportunities. Peter Straus traces the history of this process from the emergence of modern literary prizes in the late nineteenth century – such as the Nobel Prize for literature, first awarded in 1901. Drawing on his own experience as a literary agent, he provides an insider's account of the rarely predictable relationship between the economics of the trade and success in the growing number of literary competitions. A particular focus is offered by a detailed case study of the dramatic impact of a prize on the sales of *Midnight's Children*, for which Salman Rushdie was awarded the Booker Prize in 1981.

The increasing importance of the internet to the book trade of the twenty-first century is explored in the final essay in this volume. This is a contentious subject and the story of this aspect of the book business is only beginning to be written, as yet mainly by its protagonists. Among these is Udo Göllmann, who brings to bear his own knowledge of AbeBooks and his insight as a trained historian to identify the reasons for the success of internet bookselling and provide an account of its strengths and weaknesses. In this area the combination of promotion and marketing with sales and distribution is a key element, and one which threatens to erode many of the traditional features of the book trade. It is interesting, nevertheless, to observe the many parallels with the bureaux and register offices of earlier centuries.

The conference at which these papers were first presented, the thirtieth in the annual Book Trade History series, took place at the Foundling Museum in Brunswick Square, Bloomsbury, on 29 and 30 November 2008. The conference was held under the auspices of the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association and we would like to offer our warm thanks to

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