

“becomes in effect a collaborator with the human reader, able to sense and respond to the reader’s desires and execute commands of a quite sophisticated nature” (80). I have no problem accepting that such a collaboration exists, just as long as the device or codex, though it may read to me or even with me, is not assumed to read *for* me. What this collaboration tells us about books and culture will require much more study, but the parameters for this exploration laid down by Hayles in *Postprint* are astute, convincing, and pragmatic.

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STAUFFER, Andrew M. 2021. *Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 288 + 36 illustrations. ISBN 9780812252682, Hardback \$49.95. eBook available.

What do we hope to learn from our textual artifacts? Examining their textuality in conjunction with their materiality, we scour them for signs they were and were not designed to reveal about their ideation, composition, publication, reproduction, remediation, distribution, circulation, reception, and even their destruction. We read them individually; genealogically, to craft narratives about composition and publication, for example; and collectively, in networks and datasets, to uncover social, political, technological, and aesthetic connections. The data thus extracted is deployed to many ends, but however it is channeled, the data extractors, “we”, tend to share a deep commitment to our artifacts and a belief in their lasting value — something like a sense of duty to their legacies. These feelings and convictions cluster, finally, around questions of meaning. Let’s call it like it is: these are labors of love. What we “hope to learn” is driven by “hope” as well as “learning”.

It is refreshing, dare I say bracing, to read a scholarly monograph in which all of that — love, hope, devotion — is right up front, coupled unapologetically with meticulous and imaginative bibliographic scholarship. Andrew Stauffer’s *Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library* is unusual in this regard, and in at least one other, its evolution. Stauffer’s motivations and arguments began as an activity in a graduate course he taught at the University of Virginia, grew into a crowd-sourced, multi-institutional digital project (<https://booktraces-public.lib.virginia.edu/>), then a database at UVA about its own collections (<https://>

booktraces.lib.virginia.edu/), and now appear in the present volume, more recognizably literary-critical in its format and methods but no less passionate about its ultimate mission: to save the library. Or rather, to be more precise, to save the industrial-era books that remain in the circulating collections of academic libraries — especially those that are eligible for public domain digitization — including duplicates, and in particular those copies marked up by their original readers. *Book Traces*, through canny detective work, extricates stories from and about such books retrieved from several major academic libraries across the country, reading annotations, inscriptions, and insertions in tandem with poetic texts and reception histories. Stauffer's findings are gathered neatly (but not too neatly) into four thematic chapters that explore particular kinds of readerly interventions as exemplary nineteenth-century modes of literary reception, all variations on “the personal appropriation of poetry” that was itself a product of “Romantic reading practices and the sociocultural developments that brought printed books into everyday domestic life in nineteenth-century Britain and America” (20). In these chapters — examining marginal comments, the pressing of flowers and other botanical souvenirs between pages, annotations with dates or other marks of temporality, and evidence of wear, of regard for the book as a beloved object — Stauffer extracts his data with acute observation, skill, and often lyrical grace, attentive not just to the interactions between texts and marginalia, but also to reader biographies, library collecting histories, and page lay-outs, decorations, and illustrations. His analysis is abetted by multiple photographs, including ten full-color plates.

I am a little surprised that Stauffer does not bring scrapbooks, albums, herbaria, commonplace books, or diaries into his assemblages, for in these codical cousins the act of self-inscription, somewhat secretly undertaken in the nineteenth-century annotated book of poetry, was central and explicit — and poetry, whether copied out, pasted in, or composed by an inscriber, was frequently in evidence. Indeed, in one of Stauffer's example books, a stanza of poetry has been carefully excised, almost certainly destined for a scrapbook or album. My guess is that he wanted to stay focused on his format, for reasons to be discussed below. Still, I wish he had made more than passing reference to this class of materials, shown more of the spectrum of personalized codices on which the annotated book of poetry sits, perhaps by engaging Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (2013), Elizabeth Siegel's *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (2010), and some of the extensive literature on the Vic-

torian diary, such as *The Victorian Diary: Authorship and Emotional Labour* (2013), by Anne-Marie Millim. Nevertheless, his configurations of books that belonged to actual people in the past, caught in the act of responding to poems (some of which did and others of which did not make the twentieth-century canonical cut), give “sentimentality” a new and striking reality. Most notably, in the biographies Stauffer unearths, the mortality of the nineteenth century is inescapable, especially the infant and maternal mortality. A reader in 2021 is certainly primed to empathize with this most ancient woe — and to feel, physically feel, the solace that a beloved poem can bring, speaking directly, intimately, and beautifully of loss.

What are the results of these in-depth, intricate investigations of the personal meanings taken from and given to books, discerned through traces that can be made to speak? In Stauffer’s final chapter, he lays out the stakes. Having shown us how much there is to learn from these marked-up copies about “literary works as evolving social acts [. . .] events traceable only within specific documents” (148), he warns his readers about the drastic “winnowing [of] the historical record” that is now taking place in academic research libraries as librarians deaccession circulating copies and move books to off-site shelving locations in favor of digital surrogates and new editions that get more use. He is eloquent and emphatic about the forfeitures this movement portends: a single copy of a particular edition accessible to multiple libraries through sharing agreements or digitization is not sufficient because “many meaningful features of books can be understood only as part of larger contexts of making and use. The books themselves are not merely reports on the nineteenth century; they are individual nineteenth-century scenes of evidence. [. . .] This archive of the history of the making and consumption of books cannot be replaced by representative copies or digital scans, and new scholars of the historical record cannot be trained on simulations” (148). That is to say, there is much that is individual about so-called duplicate copies, and scholars of the nineteenth century should not be deprived of this trove of primary sources just because their “unspecial” collections are not housed in the rare book room.

Here I must take off my hat as a fellow specialist in industrial-era book history and nineteenth-century transatlantic Anglophone literature, absolutely convinced of the bibliophilic poetics of self-hood in this period, and put on my other hat, the more practical headgear of a special collections curator. To be clear, Stauffer is not really blaming librarians; the original Book Traces project was undertaken with the participation of many librarians and library-affiliated folk, along with faculty and students, and in *Book Traces* he shows his awareness of the pressures on libraries, the

complex inter-dependencies at play. “Students and faculty members want more spaces to work and collaborate, but they do not use as many physical books as in the past”, Stauffer notes; meanwhile, “every book retained by a library costs between one and four dollars per year to store and circulate” (143). Moreover, “[a]s usage drops, libraries have trouble justifying storing these materials on valuable shelf space in central locations”: here my own marginal comment is “Correct!!!” (149). The devaluation of the humanities, writ large, is a factor; the massive costs of licensed digital resources, especially in the sciences, gobbling up huge portions of decreasing library budgets, is another.

Stauffer’s proposed solution is a bit vague — “To keep the books, librarians along with humanities faculty members and students will need to find common ground from which to articulate the ongoing value of the print collections and to demand more resources for their preservation” (152) — although I take that vagueness in part as a reflection of his understanding that the situation on the ground might vary, institution by institution. So what would it mean to actually do this work? I can imagine the Book Traces investigations scaled up systemically, with a focus on those libraries most likely to have the kinds of collections in question. The labor to “open every book”, as Stauffer insists we must do, simply does not exist in libraries as they are currently staffed — but perhaps this examination could be implemented through inter-institutional “humanities lab” courses in which students investigate their own stacks, comparing their findings with those of peers in other universities. The books yielded by these searches could be repaired as needed and moved to semi-protected status (library use only) if not special collections, and libraries could even build dedicated reading rooms for what we call “medium-rare” collections. . . .

Here, however, my curator hat pinches and the fantasy is checked, as I imagine what these endeavors would require at my own workplace. In my library, we are beginning a long-deferred renovation, necessary to keep people safe and healthy, to preserve collections, to accommodate current practices of study and research. The renovation will result, indeed, in the permanent relocation of a greater portion of the campus collection to our high-density off-site facility — which will be enlarged for the purpose — and we are incredibly happy to have this option, since it means less deaccessioning. There is no space in any version of the renovation plan for a medium-rare reading room that could take the pressure off our special collections reading room, which has to be staffed whenever it is open. But even if we take that dream off the table, constraints abound. What would it cost to update the cataloguing of those books with informed copy-specific

notes? What are the repair options for an industrial-era brittle book? And who would do the work, given that we are already under-staffed?

I air these local considerations to illustrate the types of real-world obstacles that a Book Traces-style recovery program might encounter. Libraries have limited resources and academic librarians often lack the institutional power that humanities faculty might leverage to argue for more funding. (Let us not forget the gendered and raced economy of libraries in this equation: libraries are predominantly staffed by white women; white men are over-represented in leadership; library policies, budgets, and clout are shaped by this historical labor force and its imagined social role.) In most libraries, it would come down to a name-your-poison dilemma: maybe we could find some of these books, reclassify them, and repair a few, but what would we have to give up in return?

This question brings me to a final point about *Book Traces*. Stauffer is frank about the provenance of the books he analyzes. American universities did not have proper research libraries until the twentieth century — and only in the mid twentieth century did academic libraries in the United States begin to operate in the way they do now, with reliable annual funding, special collections, and a specialized workforce. Thus, for decades, library print collections were built up from donations of books; the circulating stacks were often the only place for them to go, and many of them are still there. These donations, from alumni, faculty, local societies and families, constitute “one of the greatest archives of American middle-class reading” (19). And there’s the rub. The stories of book affiliation that Stauffer uncovers rely on book ownership, and more than that: in order to be traceable, the names of these book owners, inscribed on fly-leaves, also had to appear in census records, birth registries, newspapers, death certificates, and local histories. Not surprisingly, their lives, as Stauffer conjures them, “[reflect] the inequalities of the nation” just as much as the print collections where their books ended up; these are people who had the wherewithal to read and write, court and marry, practice professions, build up personal libraries — some of whom, as Stauffer reveals, also served in or supported the Confederate army (153). In contrast, I spend much of my budget and time gathering up materials for collections that never had the chance to be — to assemble, with many violent breaks in full view, evidence of lives deprived of such privileges.

The goal, of course, is not to be forced to pit one variety of scarcity against another. Collectively, we should undertake multiple kinds of recovery: we should go “shopping in the shelves” for middle-class readerships, bringing order to that neglected abundance, while simultaneously and seri-

ously investing in primary sources that document marginalized and persecuted communities. Multiple kinds of recovery will require multiple and ongoing resources, of course. Stauffer has done his job, much more than his job, advocating passionately and knowledgeably for the archive he cares about as a scholar of nineteenth-century literature and textual materiality. But it's necessary, if we are to work together on these crucial stewardship decisions of our time, for non-librarians to have a better sense of the bigger picture in libraries — a picture that goes beyond their specific fields of expertise, and opens up all that love, hope, and devotion to unfamiliar objects.

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TOTARO, Rebecca. 2020. *The Plague in Print: Essential Elizabethan Sources, 1558–1603*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. Pp. 300. ISBN 9780820704265, Hardback \$70.00. ISBN 9780271087283, Paper \$32.95.

A remarkable chapter of Maggie O'Farrell's recent novel *Hamnet* traces the progress of fleas transmitting the bubonic plague from Egypt to Warwickshire, with stops along the way in Alexandria, aboard ship outside Aleppo, then to Ragusa, Venice, Barcelona, Cadiz, Porto, La Rochelle, London, and finally Stratford-upon-Avon. O'Farrell also includes agonizing descriptions of Anne (she calls her Agnes) Shakespeare observing the effect of the flea bites, first staring down at the buboes swelling on the body of her daughter Judith, and then holding down her dying son Hamnet while realizing that "this pestilence is too great, too strong, too vicious [. . .]. It has wreathed and tightened its tendrils about her son, and is refusing to surrender him" (O'FARRELL 109).

Her experience, as Agnes knows, is common: "there are few in the town, or even in the country" who have not seen it before. The buboes "are what people most dread, what everyone hopes they will never find, on their own bodies or those of the people they love" (O'FARRELL 105). Perhaps it is our current experience of pandemic that has made us so sensitive to such descriptions, able to understand how present — and how incurable and terrifying — plague and diseases like smallpox were in the early modern period. Young Hamnet was different only because he had a famous father, but that did not protect him, as Queen Elizabeth had not been protected from contracting smallpox in 1562, a few years after her accession. As we have lost millions worldwide who have contracted the plague of Covid.