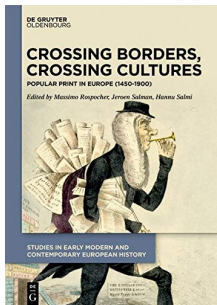


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Massimo Rospocher, Jeroen Salman, Hannu Salmi (eds.)

Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures

Review by: Antonio Castillo Gómez



Editors: Massimo Rospocher, Jeroen Salman, Hannu Salmi

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In the postface to *Colportage et lecture populaire. Imprimés de large circulation en Europe, XVIe-XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1996), Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, one of the editors together with Roger Chartier, noted that the conference where this book originated had been convened five years earlier with the aim of «visualising 'popular' literatures in a comparative framework and on a European level». He also acknowledged that, although this comparative and transnational perspective was central to conference discussions, it was only a minority presence among the eventual contributions to the volume (p. 425).

These assessments opened up a line of analysis pursued in subsequent publications, including notably *Les lectures du peuple en Europe et dans les Amériques (XVIIe-XXe siècle)* (Bruxelles, 2003), edited by Lüsebrink himself, York-Gothart Mix, Jean-Yves Mollier, and Patricia Sorel. A transnational and diachronic approach was much in evidence here, together with various approaches to publishing strategies, forms of mediation and representation of almanacs, which were the printed form under discussion.

In this context, *Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures. Popular Print in Europe (1450-1900)* (2019) is one landmark in a long research tradition which dates back to the 1960s and early 1970s, when a series of important monographs appeared on the broad subject of popular literature in print (by Robert Mandrou, Rudolf Schenda, Geneviève Bollème, and Julio Caro Baroja, among others). This volume is drawn from a conference held in Trento in 2017, organized under the auspices of a research project into European Dimensions of Popular Print Culture (EDPOP), directed by Jeroen Salman and subsidised by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO)[1].

Following a line of research proposed by Robert Darnton in the 1980s, this book delves into the rapprochement between the history of the book and the social and cultural history of communication by print. Massimo Rospocher, Jeroen Salman and Hannu Salmi conceive popular print not as «a clearly defined product, but rather as spectrum in a dynamic popularisation process» (p. 2). The book's 15 chapters exemplify this, outlining a prolific and heterogeneous output, in which there is room for broadsheets, pamphlets, almanacs, prose novels, ballads, penny prints, history prints, newspapers, and jest books.

The first section, «Media, Intermediality», opens with an essay by Daniel Bellingradt on the dynamics of communication in England and Germany in the early modern period. He analyzes the interdependence of different forms of communication and the transnational echos of a few successful titles disseminated via popular print. He focusses more specifically on the recycling of images, in the form of engravings of monsters reproduced in different broadsides distributed in Germany and Britain during the wars between Christians and Moslems in the seventeenth century.

The communicative power of cheap print illustrations, bearing in mind their hybrid and multimedia character, also interests Rebecca Carnevali. In her case, the focus is on a series of images, some religious and others not (such as printed board games), circulating in post-tridentine Bologna and catering for a socially heterogeneous public in a wide variety of environments like the street or in domestic settings. Andreas Würzler takes a complementary approach as he revisits some semantic problems around the usage of terms like «print», «German», «popular» in different projects on the German Language Area (GLA) between the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. From this starting point, he considers different uses of popular printed works from the consumer's point of view, supported by extensive print runs but without neglecting the connotations of the individual language in which they appeared.

The market for popular print constitutes the central theme of the second section of the book on «Markets, Prices, and Collections», which brings together three studies with different chronological and geographical contexts. Francesca Tancini presents one of the publishing and commercial innovations of the nineteenth century: the yellowbacks, sold in train stations, named after their distinctive covers (in color and illustrated by notable artists of the period). Sold in station kiosks, these books also appeared in publishers' series like Louis Hachette's *Bibliothèque des Chemins de Fer*, and reached a varied and in a sense passive public, given that they read in order to alleviate the boredom of a long journey.

Of course the question of pricing is fundamental in order to comprehend the massive diffusion of popular print literature, and it is very relevant in Goran Proot's case study of the Plantin-Moretus print shop between 1580 and 1655. Using mainly quantitative data, he outlines the evolution of publications from this period, considering prices, formats and the use of illustrations. He concludes that, after 1641, the Plantin Company, based in Antwerp, abandoned production of popular titles in small format. Flavia Bruni also turns to quantitative data in her survey of the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* at the University of St Andrews, in order to calculate the proportion of cheap print titles of Italian editions recorded in it. She concludes with a detailed analysis of some ephemeral productions, including some pamphlets related to the Council of Trent. Although she is considering titles reproduced in great quantities, she stresses the rarity of their presence in bibliographical collections, which have always been (and perhaps still are) more interested in the preservation of works of greater typographical craftsmanship.

Without neglecting the issues mentioned above, the studies in the third section, «Transnational Approaches», represent different ways of looking through a transnational lens. Jean-François Botrel and Juan Gomis discuss the Spanish chapbook literature and reveal its pan-European character, seen in terms of its typography and content, as illustrated by «gallows literature», widely diffused in Spain as well as in France and Great Britain. They emphasize transnational similarities in publishing strategies, in the work of Agustín Laborda in Valencia and Cluer Dicey in London in the eighteenth century. They also see it in distribution methods using itinerant peddlers, with a special role for blind sellers in different parts of Europe. Alice Colombo demonstrates another possibility, in an example of the cross-fertilization of work on translation with book history. Although up to now this connection has mostly applied to different genres, here it is brought to bear on street literature and its mobility across cultures. She analyzes nineteenth-century Italian production, embracing translation into other languages (German, French, and English), and from other languages (Spanish) into Italian, to reflect on the impact that translations and publishing strategies had on broadening the audience for these texts.

Jordi Sánchez-Martín has a similar point to make about Iberian tales of chivalry, a genre which circulated widely in Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century, when they were translated into several languages. Sánchez-Martín surveys this output and the effect of both translation and publishing decisions (about format, paratext, division into volumes, changes in the narrative cycles) in popularizing a literary genre which had originally been aristocratic. The importance of publishing strategies in the transnational diffusion of certain texts also emerges from Julia Martins's essay on Italian books of secrets, composed of household recipes, cosmetic remedies, and health advice. This genre developed from the publication of the *Difficilio di ricette* in 1529, which had enjoyed great success in Italy, Germany and Britain up to the eighteenth century and also in France, where it formed part of the *Bibliothèque bleue* right up to the nineteenth century. It was translated from Latin into vernacular languages, which involved selections and interventions aimed at unravelling a few linguistic knots in order to reach a wider and more varied public. This becomes clear from a comparison between the Latin and the vernacular editions of Alessio Piemontese's *Secreti* and Giambattista Della Porta's *Magia Naturalis*. This part of the book closes with Niall Ó Ciosáin's study on print publication in 'non-official' languages, namely Irish, Gaelic, Welsh and Breton. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, religious works predominated, as a result of the spread of Christianity and the work of certain religious orders (for instance the Jesuits in Brittany). Later on, the repertoire expanded to include hymns, almanacs, and ballads. In order to gauge the extent of this phenomenon, the work concludes with a more detailed analysis of publishing output in (Scottish) Gaelic

and Welsh, illustrated by maps of each showing the geographical distribution of printing locations.

A few of the already mentioned contributions demonstrate the substantial pan-European circulation of certain genres and titles, which approached the level of bestsellers, and this is precisely the theme of the last section of the book («Genres and European Bestsellers»). Claudia Dematté returns to the subject of the popularity of tales of chivalry and their connection with small-format publication. Firstly, she turns to Italy, where they became the most popular genre between 1550 and 1610. At the beginning they circulated in Spanish editions, given that several Italian territories were part of the Spanish Kingdom, then later, from the 1540s in Italian, promoted especially by the Venetian entrepreneur Michele Tramezino and the author Mambrino Roseo de Fabriano, who translated the majority of Spanish tales of chivalry. The journey continues through translations into French and Flemish, with special reference to *Palmerin*, which achieved 200 editions in six languages between 1511 and 1620. Almanacs are another genre typical of popular print production, which is studied by Elisa Marazzi. She focusses on one which started to appear in Italy in 1762, under the name of the fictitious astronomer Barbanera, achieving wide diffusion in the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries. Italian emigrants even brought it to America in the twentieth century. Consulting the extraordinary collection of 8000 copies preserved by the Barbanera Foundation in Spello, the author is writing a monograph and here she presents her main conclusions (*Sotto il segno di Barbanera. Continuità e trasformazioni di un almanacco tra XVIII e XXI secolo*, Milano - Udine, 2017). She notes that some almanacs, like one example from 1762, were printed in loose sheets, so that they could be posted on walls; however, the work is mainly concerned with the production of books of 48 to 68 pages with print runs which reached 200,000 copies annually. She analyzes their typical contents (meteorological data, religious information, ephemera, astronomical predictions, items on education, health as well as brief biographies), and points out the evidence of usage from handwritten annotations. Reinhart Sieger offers another case study: the dissemination in German-speaking areas of Rudolph Zacharias Becker's *Noth- und Hülfsbüchlein* (1788-1798), a clear example of a practical instruction manual targeting peasants as part of the Enlightenment's attempt to spread knowledge of agronomy. It was a sort of encyclopaedia of domestic and rural economy with headings on education, practical advice on managing the land, together with other references to legal situations which might concern peasants. Besides Germany, where 400,000 copies were printed in the nineteenth century, which is to say one for every 65 inhabitants, the book also circulated in the Baltic countries and was translated into several languages of areas where German had some influence, including Italy; however, its impact was not comparable to that of other contemporary German works like Bernhard Christoph Faust's *Gesundheits-Katechismus* (1792) or Heinrich Zschokke's popular novel *Das Goldmachedorf* (1817). Lastly, Rita Schlusemann looks at the publishing history of *Griselda* in German and Flemish between the end of the fifteenth century and 1900. The work derives from a tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron* which enjoyed great success in print from the end of the fifteenth century on. Its style of *novella* was very much in tune with the most successful literary genres of that period, enjoying another fine resurgence in the eighteenth century because of the growing interest in stories with female protagonists. Petrarch's Latin version of Boccaccio's tale was translated into 20 languages, with significant variations in *Griselda's* message as a perfect example of female submission. Whereas the Flemish versions emphasized the virtue of patience and the tale barely changed, the German versions stressed the woman's obedience to her husband, and the story passed through several variations and was adapted for different media (novels, theatre, opera).

In conclusion, *Crossing Borders, Crossing Cultures. Popular Print in Europe (1450-1900)* exploits a rich seam of studies on popular print literature and offers us a succulent collection of essays that traces its production from the beginnings of print in Europe up to the dawn of the twentieth century. While recognizing the individual characteristics of different European cultural traditions, its pan-European focus takes us far away from excessively national or regional perspectives, which generally do little to advance our knowledge. The transnational dimension does exactly that, but it emphasizes the importance of translation in the wide diffusion of certain texts, in tune with the central role that translation plays on the historical research agenda^[2]. Moreover, trans-media dynamics force us to consider the interaction of print with the spoken word, images, and music: sometimes because the written word and images work in tandem to spread information, histories, and stories; and at other times because the communication event is based on performance, at least in the street, where texts were read, recited or sung, depending on the nature of the texts, to the sound of the hurdy-gurdy or other musical instruments.

This combination of approaches is situated at the crossroads of frontiers and cultures evoked in the book's title, and is apparent in some genres and titles. In this respect, the pan-European circulation achieved, for example, by Spanish tales of chivalry, Italian books of secrets or the story of *Griselda* would be inconceivable without taking into account, on one hand, the importance of translation, and on the other, the range of publishing strategies and the choice of cheap formats to ensure that they were well adapted to a diversity of reading publics. Both of these operations were key factors in the construction of meaning which occurred at the point of reading, given that this and not the corpus of works underpins different horizons of expectation and uneven forms of appropriation, when we talk about elites and popular classes.

Translation by Martyn Lyons

[1] Further findings of this collective project can be found in M. Grenby - E. Marazzi - J. Salman (eds.), *European Dimension of Popular Print Culture*, in «Quaerendo», 51, 2021, 1 - 2.

[2] P. Burke - R. Po-chia Hsia (eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007; P. Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009; R. Chartier, *Scrivere e tradurre nel XVI e XVII secolo*, Roma, Carocci, 2020; R. Chartier, *Won in Translation. Textual Mobility in Early Modern Europe*, Philadelphia PA, University of Pennsylvania

