D. Pearson, *Speaking Volumes: Books with Histories* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2022)

The bibliophile and collector, Richard Heber (1773-1833) reputedly stated that 'no man can comfortably do without *three* copies of a book. One he must have for his show copy…Another he will require for his own use and reference; and unless he is inclined to part with this, which is very inconvenient, or risk the injury of his best copy, he must needs have a third at the service of his friends.'[1] Pearson has long advocated for the examination of the 'use' of books, going beyond that of the reading of the texts they contain. Although features such as annotations and bindings are increasingly studied, documented, and valued by researchers, libraries, and collectors, with a pressure on space, funding issues and the rise of digital resources, the future is an uncertain place for libraries and their books. This book showcases the 'cultural value' (p.1) of studying the materiality of individual books and the stories they tell through these physical properties.

As Pearson points out in chapter two, many of Heber's 150,000 or so books can still by identified from a small rectangular stamp, 'Bibliotheca Heberiana', which was likely added to the books when they were sold (p.18). Indeed, Pearson begins his book by looking at the value gained from examining book ownership. He argues that we can not only use this to explore and question the received canon of reading, but also the 'matrix' (p.28) of individual motivations behind book ownership, some of which are neatly expressed in Heber's quote above. His third chapter explores annotations. By exposing different types of annotation, Pearson showcases the methods and motivations that individuals interacted with books. One particularly memorable example is an incunable from Peterhouse, Cambridge. Some eighteenth-century students at the college have diligently scratched their names into the gold leaf initials of the book, alongside some dates and insults, making it a nice time capsule of their interaction with the volume. The addition and removal of materials in books are explored in chapter four. This details the creation of new composite books, 'book mutilation' (p. 110) or the removal of parts of a copy, the restoration of incomplete texts using other volumes, and the impact of religious and moral censorship. Chapter five looks at book bindings, stressing the value that can be gained from analysing a volume's binding in context, and what it can tell us about use, ownership, and relative importance. This includes a very effective double page case study, 'One book, five bindings' (p.130-1), depicting one edition bound in five different ways, showcasing levels of expense, and later rebinding concerns. Accidents, incidents, and talismans are explored in chapter six, highlighting the importance of the physical condition of the book. It shows that books can have evidence of accidents or be part of a wider cultural record of fires, floods, and wars. I was particularly taken by the example of a fourteenth-century *Pontifical* from Salisbury which bears a large oil stain just where the text discusses the application of holy oil. The final chapter considers the digital world, pondering 'who needs books' (p.199) in an era of ebooks and large internet publishers, underlining the importance of looking for and acknowledging material features and individual histories, advising that we 'create a culture and an approach…where we recognise that marginalia, and all the other things which people add to (or take away from) their books, do not need to be protected from obliteration, because their value is acknowledged' (p.212).

The broad scope of the volume is noteworthy. Pearson is careful to not focus solely on illustrious book collectors. He discusses female and non-elite book owners, and volumes contained in twentieth-century segregated libraries in the USA, for example. Although many examples are books from the early modern period, his principal focus of research, discussion ranges from classical libraries and ninth-century manuscripts to contemporary examples. Likewise, this book will have a wide appeal and the large number of high-quality colour images and memorable case studies printed on their own distinct pages, enhance his points extremely well. The lack of footnotes renders it very readable, yet there is a short further reading section at the end for interested general readers and researchers. His description of often overlooked details of books, the folded corners of pages and the occasional pressed flower, also offers useful food for thought for rare books librarians and antiquarian book dealers.

[1] Obituary of Richard Heber, Esq., *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 155 (1834), 107.

This book therefore underlines the vital importance of material features for better understanding the relationship between books and people. Indeed, I always end lectures on the materiality of books to trainee archivists at the University of Glasgow with a request that they 'mark their books, so that people like me can study them in 300 years.' Although usually said somewhat in jest, my hope is to encourage them to see beyond the ubiquitous nature of books and, as Pearson puts it, to 'not underestimate the interest which posterity may find in your ideas' (p.7). As per Pearson's request, my review copy of this book already contains some of the material evidence he explores. On the title page, for example, I have signed my full name, the date I finished the book, and briefly referred to this journal. There is a very slight rip in the dust jacket, a small tea stain, a colourful card from the journal's reviews editors enclosed inside, and a short, speckled cat hair caught in the guttering between two pages. Although this sounds rather dramatic, from the outside, and to an untrained eye, my copy would still look like any other. I have also underlined sections, written in asides and comments, both to myself and the author, and inspired by the discussion, have squeezed a lengthy idea for a research project into all traces of blank space at the end of a chapter. Although, unlike Heber, I'd rather keep all my interaction with a book in *one* volume, I for one will relish the opportunity of rediscovering and exploring this material evidence at some point in the future.

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