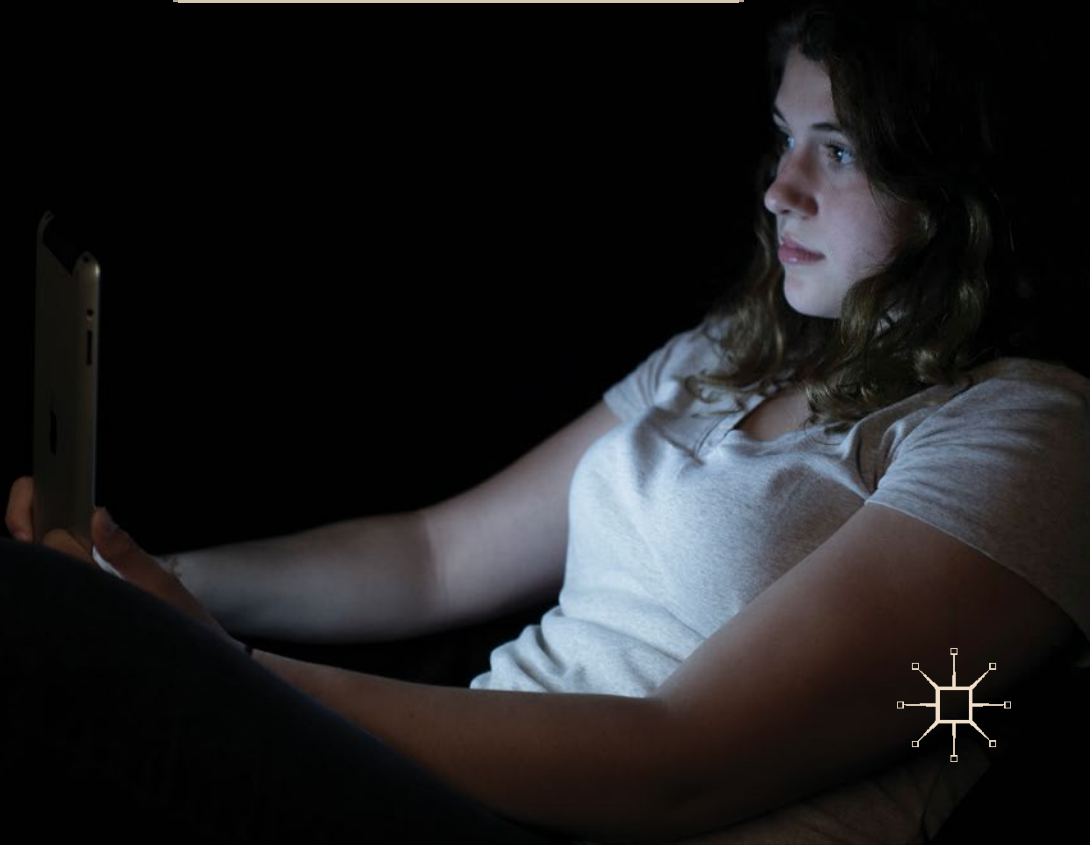




**NEW
DIRECTIONS
IN BOOK
HISTORY**

*Publishers,
Readers, and
Digital Engagement*

MARIANNE MARTENS



New Directions in Book History

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For Carlos, Alexander, and Christian

PREFACE

When I worked in children's publishing at North-South Books in New York, by the mid-1990s early digital book formats such as CD-Roms gave us pause. Were these new formats going to end print publishing as we knew it? If we licensed digital editions of our books, would parents and educators select those over the high quality print editions for which we were known? Most of the short-lived CD-Roms for children turned out to be either educational or game-related (or both), and during that time, few of us felt that there was any chance that one day digital formats would replace print books for young readers. At the time, most of us who created children's books viewed reading print picture books with children as an almost sacred activity. Common sentiment was that the art of a high quality picture book could never be properly rendered in digital formats. And perhaps more importantly, no one imagined that any digital device could ever replace the cozy experience of sitting with a child on your lap as you shared a *print* picture book.

But twenty years later, digital formats are far more sophisticated. No longer do you have to sit at a desktop computer and insert a CD to view a "book." Instead, light-weight platforms such as Kindles, Nooks, iPads, and other tablets have made reading in digital formats far more accessible, and far more visually appealing. Sophisticated picture book apps are able to reproduce art in great detail—and make that art interactive. Suddenly reading to young children in digital formats is a reality. From picture book apps for the youngest readers, to multiplatform books for young adults, interactivity changes the reading experience as we know it.

A curiosity about these new formats led me to the research of this book. As a former publisher, I was aware of publishers' reviewing websites, such as *RandomBuzzers*, shortly after they began to appear. In 2009, when I first started studying the *Twilight* phenomenon, I was astonished to see the amount of user-generated fan content that existed online, that later was channeled into the official site, *TwilightSaga.com*. And when I first read about *The Amanda Project*, I knew that I wanted to study it as well. I was just the type of bookish girl, raised in libraries and bookstores, who would have enjoyed participating in *The Amanda Project* had it been around when I was 13. Together, *RandomBuzzers.com*, *TwilightSaga.com*, and *The Amanda Project* represented a progression of digital interaction around books.

As I started, I realized that it was not enough to study the formats in isolation. Digital formats are deeply rooted in book history. They borrow much from, and are closely related to, printed books. Books are not static, and even in the case of analog books, formats have evolved and changed. Beyond studying publishing and library history, I realized I would need to look at different pieces of the digital mix, from creation, to dissemination, to reception. The fact that I was studying digital phenomena as it emerged presented real challenges. Years after starting the initial research, many sites have been taken down, and old links are broken. A challenge with studying digital formats and participatory websites is that they are ephemeral in nature, which in turn means that the need to study them is immediate, and constantly subject to change. In the case of studying such sites that are aimed for a teenage audience, the teens themselves have in many cases grown up and left.

Earlier versions of some of the work in this book have been published elsewhere. For example, a (2010) book chapter called "Consumed by Twilight: The commodification of young adult literature about the Twilight" about *The Twilight Saga* was published in a collection called *Bitten by Twilight: Youth culture, media, and the vampire franchise*, edited by M. Click, J. Stevens Aubrey, and L. Behm-Morawitz and published by Peter Lang. A (2011) article called "Transmedia teens: Affect, immaterial labor, and user-generated content", was published in *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. A (2013) article about the history of children's publishing and librarianship called "The Librarian Lion: Constructing children's literature through connections, capital, and criticism," was published in *The Journal of Education in Library and Information Science*, and is largely about New York City

librarian Anne Carroll Moore. This article connects to Chapter 2, the historical chapter of this book. A book chapter called “Reading the Readers: Tracking Visible Online Reading Audiences,” is included in a (2016) collection called *Plotting the Reading Experience: Theory/Practice/Politics*, edited by P. M. Rothbauer, K. I. Skjerdingsstad, L. E. F. McKechnie, and K. Oterholm and published by Wilfred Laurier University Press.

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Thanks to all who allowed me to interview them for the book, and to the assigned readers of *The Amanda Project*. Thanks to those trail-blazers who created participatory sites for readers, especially to Lisa Holton for having the vision to fearlessly create *The Amanda Project*, and thanks to the great Mimi Kayden for guiding historical elements of the book.

Thanks to Dr. Carolyn Brodie (who brought me to Kent State University), and my colleagues in the SLIS youth services working group: Michelle Baldini, Belinda Boon, Flo Cunningham, Meghan Harper, and Mary Anne Nichols, all of whom have offered direct and indirect help, support, and guidance along the way. Thanks to Psyche Castro for her work on permissions and references. A huge thank you to Norma Jones for careful reading and thoughtful edits, even while knee-deep in Texas floods. And thanks also to Christine Andersen for last minute editing.

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Introduction

Prior to the expansion of digital technologies around reading, teachers, parents, and librarians were the primary gatekeepers responsible for getting books into the hands of young people, and researching readers was an elusive process. But a combination of convergence in the publishing industry and the development of new digital technologies around reading have enabled publishers to create disintermediated digital enclosures in which they can communicate directly with their reading audience. Access to their favorite authors attracts teen readers to the sites, where they are encouraged to participate via quizzes and games, to act as peer-to-peer reviewers and marketers, and even to have an authorial role as content creators or contributors. Within these online collaborative communities around reading, the construct of Iser's (1974) largely invisible "implied reader" is replaced by a visible and vocal reading audience. By examining three progressive case studies of reading-related websites for young people: *RandomBuzzers.com*, which was Random House's interactive website for teen readers; Hachette's *TwilightSaga.com* (based on the books in the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer); and *The Amanda Project.com* as evidence of such visible audiences, this book exposes how teens contribute their immaterial and affective labor as they engage in participatory reading experiences via publishers' and authors' interactive websites and use of social media, and how in turn, publishers are able to exploit such labor as they get invaluable market research, peer-to-peer recommendations, and even content which can be used in other projects—all virtually free-of-charge. As Young Adult

literary content moves from print to digital formats, this book will demonstrate how the roles of “author,” “marketer,” and “reviewer” are being redefined, and present a twenty-first century configuration in the field of cultural production for young people.

Starting with an historical look at the formative period of children’s librarianship and publishing at the beginning of the twentieth century, this book will provide an overview of the field of production of literary products for young people during an era of convergence in the field. This work examines how publishers’ book-based cultural products for young adults are created, produced, disseminated, received, and consumed within a contemporary practice of producing transmedia and multiplatform books that are embedded in technology and rely on user-generated content. Weedon et al. (2014) describe how the “book’s social function as *the* high status vehicle for communicating new ideas and cultural expressions is being challenged by sophisticated systems of conveying meaning in other media” (p. 109). Subsequently, publishing practices increasingly mirror production and consumption practices of other media industries, resulting in a new political economy of the field which emphasizes earnings-power, or what McChesney (2013) calls hypercommercialism.

The fields of children’s librarianship and children’s publishing arose as interconnected fields in the early twentieth century, and before the expansion of reading-related websites and social media around books, teachers, librarians, and parents were the primary gatekeepers responsible for getting literature into the hands of young people. But with interactive online environments, publishers create disintermediated spaces in which they can communicate directly with their target reading audience. Such technologies provide publishers with transparency on a population that previously was ephemeral and difficult to reach.

In this context, the publishers’ economic model changes. In return for access to authors and book-related content on publishers’ sites, teens contribute their immaterial and affective labor around the books they love by participating in peer-to-peer reviewing and marketing, and by contributing user-generated content. Publishers can solicit focus-group-style feedback via online quizzes and Q&A sessions, which reveal evidence about young readers’ likes and dislikes. In addition, teens’ labor guides their participation across such corporate sites creating a loyal, branded readership, which in turn, can be used by publishers to market commodified cultural products back at this population.

Teens’ participation provides rich evidence of reader preferences, engagement, and a record of activity. Through their contributions, young

people construct themselves as a visible, participatory audience, leaving written evidence of their reading via a detritus of content across publishers' websites. Young readers are commodified as participants because they are expected to participate as fans of the cultural products they are consuming themselves. However, despite the publishers' sometimes blatantly commercial objectives for such participatory sites, and efforts at establishing guidelines for participation, this newly visible teen readership is not always an obedient audience, and evidence of participants' transgressive behavior such as: not following site owners' guidelines, or posting story spoilers or other inappropriate content, demonstrates that sites are not entirely under publishers' control. This results in new labor requirements for publishers and their agents, who must continuously police their sites and remove evidence of undesirable participation. As we read the readers across participatory websites, this research explores how a dichotomy of intentions produces conflicts between those who create the fora of participation and necessarily attempt to govern the readers, and the ensuing visible—and somewhat rebellious—reading audience.

Across three progressive sites: Random House's *Random Buzzers* review site, *TwilightSaga.com*'s online fan site, and *The Amanda Project* (the first multiplatform book series for teens which was intended to be a collaborative, co-written series by work-for-hire authors and influenced by storylines from teen fans), this book explores digital enclosures (governed by sites' end-user licensing agreements) that encourage teens to participate via quizzes and games, to act as peer-to-peer reviewers and marketers, and even to have an author-like role in contributing content. In return, publishers get invaluable market research free-of-charge, effective peer-to-peer recommendations, and even content which can be used in future books in a series. These blurring roles present a twenty-first century configuration in the field of cultural production for young people. As Young Adult literary content moves from print to digital formats, roles of "author," "marketer," and "reviewer" are being redefined. While librarians used to be the primary gatekeepers responsible for getting books into the hands of young people, technology enables publishers to create disintermediated environments in which they can communicate directly with a visible reading audience.

This book takes a look at the digital shift in reading experiences, and in the field of cultural production for young people. In doing so, it aims to provide a rich understanding of a contemporary phenomenon, comparing and contrasting the various levels of teens' understanding of the digital cultural products created for them, to publishers' plans and goals for such products—all within a historical and comparative framework.

And in writing “digital shift,” one clarification must be made. The use of this term throughout this book is not intended in a deterministic way, as I do not believe that we are at the point at which digital formats will replace print formats completely. The format currently known as a *book* exists on a continuum of evolving formats. Historically, children’s book formats have included primers covered with a layer of protective horn known as hornbooks which started in England in the fifteenth century. Chapbooks, sold from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, were a precursor to the twentieth-century Penguin paperback, and represented an early form of mass-market books. These cheaply made booklets were sold on the street by *chapmen*. Eventually, printed books with covers as we know them today appeared in the nineteenth century. In the world of printed books for young people, other formats, some which included interactivity, emerged as well, from moveable books and pop-ups to choose-your-own adventure stories, paperbacks, board books, cloth books, books with electronic buttons that when pressed make sounds (for example animal noises), audio books, mass-market film adaptations—indeed nothing is static about format in the realm of printed children’s books. The picture book *Babar* is a prime example. Initially created and illustrated by Jean de Brunhoff in 1931, and then upon his death in 1937, continued by his son Laurent, Babar presents a perfect example of an analog multiplatform book series. Kent State University houses the *Babar Collection of John L. Boonschaft*, which is comprised of many first edition books by both authors in multiple languages. In addition to the international editions, the collection of 214.33 ft of Babar-related materials demonstrates how licensed merchandise was intended to extend the story experience, just as transmedia products such as *The Twilight Saga* do now.

The collection includes spin-off versions of books and licensed merchandise, from toys and games to furniture and china. According to the collection’s finding aid (Allamon et al., 2000), in addition to the original hardcover picture books, there are smaller-format, abridged versions, anthologies, large-format books, board books, board books with toy elements (like clocks with moving arms), board books with die-cuts, pop-up books, video tapes, audio cassettes, records, compact discs, calendars, and non-print items that extend the story experience from books, to clothing, a tricycle, an inflatable children’s swimming pool, rugs, sheets, crib-sets, and a breakfast cereal box (Honey Nut Cheerios) with Babar on the back.

Digital formats enable a fast-forward production when it comes to innovative formats. A generation ago, authors who wanted to experiment with innovative ideas, such as creating unique formats or foil-stamping illustrations in a

picture book,¹ had to wait for print and production technologies to evolve in order to support their ideas. Digital formats require more work on the hardware front, but they enable far more experimentation with new experimental and multimedia formats in a much quicker timeframe. E-formats and book apps mean that format is no longer restricted to specific dimensions that best suit reams of paper to be printed on printing presses, or specific formats to fit into shipping boxes. As Pires Franco (2014) writes: “If there is one thing the history of the book has shown us, it is that books, writing, publishing, and reading are not static; rather, these things evolve—in tandem—with cultural, social, economic, and technological changes. Expecting the book to persist ‘as we know it’ seems equivalent to asking for time to stop and for books to remain forever crystallized in their current form” (p. 35).

As we will see in this book, both digital and print formats appeal on multiple levels. In fact, with popular books, there is evidence that young people will purchase multiple formats—a hardcover book to treasure and display, and an e-book format for portability and convenience.

New digital formats for young people are best understood in the context of their origins, and Chapter 2 starts with an historical look at how the interconnected fields of children’s librarianship and publishing arose, providing a comparative base for the chapters that follow. In the United States, the field of literary cultural production for young people began with the library and the publishing house working in tandem. Views from the Progressive Era influenced first librarianship, which in turn influenced publishing for young people, as publishers recognized a burgeoning market in books for young people, and established children’s imprints within their houses, starting with Louise Seaman Bechtel at Macmillan in 1919. This chapter visits shifts in the field, from the earliest days of Anne Carroll Moore at the New York Public library and Louise Seaman Bechtel at Macmillan, the first children’s editor, during which publishers and librarians served as child protectors in their selections, to a shift at the mid-century, when Margaret Edwards at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore shifted from child protector to child educator—wanting young adults especially to be informed about Cold War and peace, to a shift in the 1970s when librarians officially became child advocates instead of child protectors. In the library, this was reflected by content in Carol Starr’s *Young Adult Alternative Newsletter*, which was circulated to a thousand librarians, and in the publishing house, with the 1967 publication of *The Outsiders*, which marked the beginning of realist fiction for young adults.

¹ *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister (1992) was the first foil-stamped picture book.