

# EVIDENCE OF READING IN THE PAST

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Since its beginning as a field of scholarly research, the history of reading has faced the problem of finding representative evidence about reading in the past. Sources that document the reading practices of historical readers are often obscure, scanty, fragmentary and scattered. This paper takes a look at the most important among them, both those that offer a good insight into the reading habits peculiar to individual readers and those that record reading practices shared by communities of readers in a given cultural context, showing the possibilities, difficulties and challenges of using them in writing a history of reading. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that although all of these sources are imperfect and only to some extent reliable they can be quite revealing if historians of reading know how to use and interpret them.*

## Introduction

As Robert Darnton, one of the most important authorities in book history research has argued it in his famous methodological essay *First Steps toward a History of Reading*, which was published as far back as 1986, “reading has a history [...] a point so simple that it may escape our notice.”<sup>1</sup> It is an activity, Darnton has stated, that “we share with our ancestors yet can never be the same as what they experienced.”<sup>2</sup> Laying out an agenda for future scholarship, Darnton has alerted us that “it should be possible to develop a history as well as a theory of reader response.”<sup>3</sup> Studies of reading in the past are now commonplace in the history of the book.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not the case two or three decades ago. Until the 1990s, readers and their reading practices tended to be taken for granted in book history studies despite calls for a shift in focus from the book to the reader.<sup>5</sup> Most of the studies focused on authors, booksellers and printers, while “readers appear mostly indirectly, through their presumed role in constituting “the market” for particular genres.”<sup>6</sup> As a corollary of that, the reader was, as David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery have put it in *An Introduction to Book History*, the “missing link” of book history.<sup>7</sup> Since 1986, however, the historiography of reading has advanced quickly as Jonathan Rose has suggested in his equally important article entitled *Arriving at a History of Reading*, published in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Studies centred on the

- 1 Robert Darnton, “First Steps toward a History of Reading,” in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, ed. Robert Darnton (New York-London: W. W. Norton, 1990), 187. The chapter was first published in the *Australian Journal of French Studies* in 1986.
- 2 Ibid., 155.
- 3 Ibid., 157.
- 4 Although some scholars have used the history of the book interchangeably with the history of reading, the history of reading is a much broader field, encompassing a greater body of evidence than that found in books alone. Historians of reading have drawn the attention beyond the content of the printed page to readers and reading practices and experiences. As a result, the history of reading derived from many disciplines, not only book history and bibliography, but also literary criticism, social, cultural and intellectual history, history of leisure, gender and popular culture, as well as communication studies. See: Heidi Brayman Hackel, “Practising and Teaching Histories and Theories of the Book,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 40, 2 (2005): 3-9.
- 5 Ian Jackson, “Approaches to the History of Readers and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *The Historical Journal* 47, 4 (2004):1042.
- 6 Ibid., 1044.
- 7 David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, “Readers and Reading,” in *An Introduction to Book History* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), 101.
- 8 Jonathan Rose, “Arriving at a History of Reading,” *Historically Speaking* (2004): 36-39.

history of reading have proliferated, such those of Richard Daniel Altick,<sup>9</sup> Carlo Ginzburg,<sup>10</sup> Janice Radway,<sup>11</sup> Martin Lyons,<sup>12</sup> Kate Flint,<sup>13</sup> Alberto Manguel,<sup>14</sup> Robert Darnton,<sup>15</sup> Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy,<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Pearson,<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Rose,<sup>18</sup> Heather J. Jackson,<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth McHenry,<sup>20</sup> Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier,<sup>21</sup> William St Clair,<sup>22</sup> Karin Littau,<sup>23</sup> William Sherman,<sup>24</sup> Rosalind Crone, Katie Halsey, W. R. Owens and Shafquat Towheed,<sup>25</sup> Belinda Jack,<sup>26</sup> Stephen Orgel<sup>27</sup> and many

- 9 For instance, Richard Daniel Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).
- 10 For instance, Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
- 11 For instance, Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Woman, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) and Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
- 12 For instance, Martin Lyons and Lucy Taska, *Australian Readers Remember: an oral history of reading, 1890-1930* (Melbourne: OUP Australia and New Zealand, 1992), Martin Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Martin Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2008) and Martin Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).
- 13 For instance, Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 14 Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
- 15 For instance, Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Revolutionary France* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997) and Robert Darnton, *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander in France from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
- 16 Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy, eds., *The experience of reading: Irish historical perspectives* (Dublin: Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland, 1999).
- 17 For instance, Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 18 For instance, Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
- 19 For instance, Heather J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) and Heather J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).
- 20 For instance, Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 21 Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003)
- 22 For instance, William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 23 Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
- 24 William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
- 25 Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens, eds., *The History of Reading. Volume I. International Perspectives, c. 1550-1990* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens, eds., *The History of Reading: Volume II. Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750-1950* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed, eds., *The History of Reading. Volume 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 26 Belinda Jack, *The Woman Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).
- 27 Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

others.<sup>28</sup> Scholars have adopted a more reader-centred approach, coming to understand that histories of print production and distribution are incomplete without the history of reception.<sup>29</sup> The topics and approaches of studies have been so diverse that Leah Price has described the history of reading as “less like a field than a battleground.”<sup>30</sup> Several large-scale research initiatives appeared as well, such as the internationally focused *Reading Experience Database*,<sup>31</sup> the US-based database *What Middletown Read*,<sup>32</sup> or the *Scottish Readers Remember Project*.<sup>33</sup> All of these studies, projects and databases have gathered valuable data about reading experiences of “historical readers.”<sup>34</sup> What they all have in common is first of all an approach that considers reading as both a social phenomenon and an individual experience.<sup>35</sup> In addition, since “the experience of reading van-

28 For a more extensive account of studies in the field of history of reading see Leah Price, “Reading: The State of Discipline,” *Book History* 7 (2004): 303-320.

29 David Paul Nord, “Historical Readership Studies: A Methodological and Autobiographical Note,” *American Journalism* 33, 1 (2016): 86.

30 Studies of reading have taken a variety of forms: some are organized around a particular reading public (for instance, Flint’s, Pearson’s or Jack’s studies on female readership or Rose’s study on working class readership), some around a genre of book and its reading public (for instance, Radway’s study of reading romances) and some around a particular form of evidence (for instance, Jackson’s study on readers writing marginalia in books). Price, “Reading,” 303-308.

31 The Reading Experience Database (RED) is a research project and an open access database launched by the Open University and the British Library in the 1990s, joined later by Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Netherlands. Based on a multitude of sources, including diaries, memoirs, marginalia, commonplace books, sociological surveys, criminal court and prison records, the database captures the reading experiences of British subjects, both at home and abroad, and of visitors to the British Isles, between the invention of the printing press in 1450 and the end of the Second World War in 1945. The database was moved online in 2006. “The Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945,” accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/>.

32 The project began in 2003. The database was built upon the circulation records of the Muncie (Indiana) Public Library from 1891 until 1902. It documents every book that every library patron borrowed during that period. “What Middletown Read,” accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.bsue.edu/libraries/wmr/about.php>.

33 The research project ran from 2006 until 2009. It focused on the reading experiences of Scots in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based mostly on the interviews across communities in Scotland, complemented by the use of archival and other sources. “Scottish Readers Remember: Project Overview,” accessed October 1, 2016, [http://sapphire.ac.uk/scottish-readers-remember-\(ahrc-funded\)/](http://sapphire.ac.uk/scottish-readers-remember-(ahrc-funded)/).

34 Nowadays many historians of reading prefer to use the term ‘historical reader’ rather than the ‘typical’ or ‘common reader’, the latter usually referring to the reader of newspapers, penny fiction and other reading material considered ephemeral and being the term previously widely employed by many historians (Richard Altick and many others). The term ‘historical reader’ takes into account “the way in which the individual reader is situated within a personal history [...], as well as the broader historical contexts of gender, class, and race.” Stephen Colclough, “Readers: Books and Biography,” in *A Companion to the History of Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2007), 53.

35 “As an individual practice, reading is a form of interpretation. As a social act, reading is part of the history of reception.” Finkelstein and McCleery, “Readers and Reading,” 101-102.

ishes with the reader,”<sup>36</sup> as Jennifer Howard put it, they all face the problem of finding representative evidence about the reading practices of readers in the past. This paper takes a look at the most important sources that document reading in the past, showing the possibilities, difficulties and challenges of using them in writing a history of reading. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that although all of these sources, both those that offer a good insight into the reading habits peculiar to individual readers and those that record reading practices shared by communities of readers in a given cultural context, are imperfect and only to some extent reliable, they can be quite revealing if historians of reading know how to use and interpret them. The sources used are both primary and secondary. The primary sources are identified partly by searching the relevant book history databases and partly by doing my own research on historical readers. The secondary sources are identified by using the literature review research method.

## Historical Records of Reading in the Past: Possibilities, Difficulties and Challenges of Research

Why is important to study reading in the past? First of all, reading seems to be at the centre of a series of socio-cultural and political developments such as the commercialization of leisure, the development of political radicalism, the changing role of women, etc.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, evidence of reading helps us to recognise the impact of significant texts on individuals and on society as a whole at key historical moments, for instance, their role in shaping popular ideas and opinions.<sup>38</sup> It helps us to understand the reception of a certain literary text or author, that is, the formation of literary canons.<sup>39</sup> After all, “no book’s history concludes with

36 Jennifer Howard, “Secret Lives of Readers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012), accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Secret-Reading-Lives-Revealed/136261>.

37 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1041.

38 “History of Reading Tutorial 1. Finding evidence of reading in the past. Introduction,” accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=1994&printable=1>.

39 Ibid.

its publication. As soon as a book has a reader it has been changed.”<sup>40</sup> In Darnton’s well-known “communication circuit,” readers and reading are its vital components – books are sold to readers, whose demand creates a market for more books, and printers and booksellers respond to that demand. Readers complete the circuit because they influence authors, readers themselves, both before and after the act of composition.<sup>41</sup>

However, as Darnton has stated in his 1986 essay, the reading experiences of the past might be difficult to uncover and reconstruct since “The documents rarely show readers at work, fashioning meaning from texts, and the documents are texts themselves, which also require interpretation. Few of them are rich enough to provide even indirect access to the cognitive and affective elements of reading, and a few exceptional cases may not be enough for one to reconstruct the inner dimensions of that experience.”<sup>42</sup> The same has been suggested by many other historians of reading. Jackson has claimed that “historical readers have been more often taken for granted than examined in depth because the sources for historical reading experience are scanty and problematic; and even those that are available to us usually tell us more about what people read, and the contexts in which they did so, than about why they read what they did, and what they made of it.”<sup>43</sup> David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery echoed the same statement: “As written or printed texts are what survive, the reconstruction of reading history presents difficulties in the amount and nature of evidence available.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the evidence on the act of reading is often obscure, scanty, fragmentary and scattered.

Nevertheless, when they survive, the sources for the first question, “who read what?” are rather easily identified. These are, for instance, private inventory books and library catalogues, lending library records, subscription lists, and last wills and testaments. One cannot, however, construct the history of reading only on book ownership because book owners are not

40 Orgel, *Reader*, 154.

41 Robert Darnton, “What is the history of books?,” *Daedalus* 111, 3 (1982): 67.

42 Darnton, “First Steps,” 157.

43 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1046.

44 Finkelstein and McCleery, “Readers and Reading,” 118.

necessarily book readers just as book readers are not always book owners.<sup>45</sup> Lending library records can tell us what individual readers of some library checked out. They can provide a quantitative record of books borrowed, but they tell us little about how and why books were actually read and what effect reading had on the lives of their readers. Subscription lists make it possible for book historians to identify the extent, character, geography and social stratification of all those who financially supported the printing of a book but no more than that.<sup>46</sup> Last wills also only specified the disposition of property, including books. One cannot construct the history of reading on the basis of what was published and in how many editions and copies either. Publishers', printers' and booksellers' records can only generate useful statistics of book production and distribution (print runs, prices, purchasers) but cannot tell us how or even whether listed books were read. Thus, we have to look for evidence of how readers responded to texts and the nature of their reading experience, the term defined by the *Reading Experience Database* as "a recorded engagement with a written or printed text beyond the mere fact of possession."<sup>47</sup> We have to look for sources that give answers to more challenging questions of "where", "when", "how" and "why" historical readers read, the key questions put by most of the historians of reading. We have to look for the sources that contain evidence not only of what readers thought about what they read, but also of the social and cultural context of reading in the past, that is, in what circumstances historical readers read – alone or in a group, silently or aloud, while sick, in the bath, on the train, etc., where the reading took place – at home, at work, at the coffee shop, in nature, etc., at what time of day it occurred – in the morning, during the day, late at the night, etc., for what purpose – whether books were read casually and for the purpose of amusement, whether books were read to satisfy curiosity and a desire for

45 See: Jelena Lakuš, "Thinking like a book historian: searching for the evidence of book ownership," in *Records, Archives and Memory: selected papers from the Conference and School on Records, Archives and Memory Studies University of Zadar, Croatia, May 2013*, ed. Mirna Willer, Anne J. Gilliland, and Marijana Tomić (Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru, 2015), 193-221.

46 See: Jelena Lakuš and Jelena Vukadin, "Pretplatničke liste kao izvor podataka za povijest knjige i čitanja: primjer pretplatničkih lista knjiga tiskanih u Dalmaciji u prvoj polovici 19. stoljeća," *Libellarium* 5, 1 (2012): 33-70.

47 "The Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945," accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/>.

knowledge, for the purpose of spiritual elevation or for the political and/or ideological reasons, whether a text was read in one sitting or over a stretch of time, whether attitudes towards books differed amongst various social classes, religious denominations, men and women, the young and the old, and so on. Some of the most important and most often used historical records of reading in the past are presented and discussed below.

### *Autobiographical writings: diaries and memoirs*

Since diaries and memoirs are perhaps the richest of all sources, they are most commonly used to study reading experiences. The diary of Dragojla Jarnević (1812-1875), a famous woman author from the period of the Croatian National Revival and an active participant in the social events of Croatian nineteenth century culture, is a good example.<sup>48</sup> Since Dragojla Jarnević loved to read, the diary provides a great deal of information about her reading habits and experiences. For the purpose of illustration, several diary entries have been selected. The first selected diary entry, dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1845, shows that her whole daily routine was revolving around books and reading:

*U jutro kako mléko progutam odem sa knjigom ili u bašću ili i dolje preko brégovah 2-3 sata; potom dospévša kući sédнем k stolu i šijem do 12; po obedu odem opet s knjigom do 2-3 sata i onda opet šijem do 6.*<sup>49</sup>

On 4th January 1837 she was remembering the time when she was a 12-year-old girl minding her sister's child and reading everything available to her, with no selection or direction:

48 The diary covers a period from January 1833 to November 1874. Dragojla Jarnević began writing it when she was 21, concluding at the age of 62, after more than four decades. Its first comprehensive edition, including over 800 pages, was published only in 2000. The diary provides rich insights not only into her emotional and everyday life, but also into the socio-political and cultural circumstances of the times in which she lived. Dragojla Jarnević, *Dnevnik* (Karlovac: Matica hrvatska Karlovac, 2000).

49 "In the morning, after I've had my milk, I take a book to the garden or go down over the hills for 2-3 hours; after coming home, I sit by the table and sew until noon; after lunch I take my book again for 2-3 hours and then sew again until 6." Ibid., 279.

Čitah bez izbora jerbo nepaziše nitko na mene. [...] Malo bijaše spisatelja od onda, koji mi nisu rukuh dopali. Lafontaine, Kotzebue, Schilling i Schiller, Kramer i Pichlerica, Frohberg, La Motte Foque, Clauren, W. Scott, Coper, Körner, Uhland, Byron i ostali. Sve čitah s pohlepom i bez da sam kojemu prvenstvo dala. Tek u zrelijoj dobi pronikla sam Körnera i Schillera, i za ovima dvama težila je duša moja.<sup>50</sup>

The quoted passage shows a wide range of genres, from poetry and drama to novels and travel journals, and a wide range of styles, mostly from the Romantic period. Another diary entry, dated 31st December 1837, testifies to impressions that the books had on her:

Jedina je moja stečevina da sam nemirna, nezadovoljna, i kri-la si želim za daleko u sviet moći proljetiti. Kooperovo pripovjedanje me dušom odnese daleko preko mora u amerikanske pustare. Skott me mami u britansku mrku glavnu varoš i vodi me skotskimi maglovitim briegovi i obalami – a Petrarka me zove u klasičku Talijansku; pod blago podnebjje i u sriedu umotvorah kakovih jedino njezini žitelji proizvodjati umiju. Oj i u Grčku me čeznuće tjera, kuda je nedavno Byron pjevao i kuda bih i ja želega tumarati medju razvalinama nekadašnje slave grčke.<sup>51</sup>

Answering the questions “who” (Dragojla Jarnević) read “what” (Scott, Lafontaine, Schiller and others), “how” (without any selection, with

50 “I read without any selection because nobody was paying attention. [...] There are few authors I haven’t laid my eyes on since. Lafontaine, Kotzebue, Schilling and Schiller, Kramer and Pichler, Frohberg, La Motte Foque, Clauren, W. Scott, Coper, Körner, Uhland, Byron and others. I read everything with greed, not giving preference to anyone. Only in my later years did I understand Körner and Schiller, and it was the two of them that my soul yearned for.” Ibid., 85.

51 “Being restless and discontented is my only achievement. If only I had wings to fly far away. Cooper’s storytelling takes my soul far across the ocean, into the American wasteland. Scott lures me into the dark British capital city and takes me to misty Scottish hills and shores – Petrarch invites me to classical Italy; to the mild climate, into works of art that none but its citizens could produce. It is to Greece that my longing takes me, too, where Byron composed his poems not long ago, and where I would love to wander among the ruins of the former glory of Greece. Ibid., 99-100.

greed), “when” (in the morning, after lunch), “where” (in the garden, in the hills) and “why” (for instance, “Cooper’s storytelling takes my soul far across the ocean”), these quoted passages, together with a number of others, demonstrate that Dragojla Jarnević’s diary can be used as a legitimate source for the history of reading.<sup>52</sup>

Another excellent source for the history of reading is the diary of Thomas Turner, an 18<sup>th</sup> century village merchant and a passionate reader living in the Sussex village of East Hoathly in England.<sup>53</sup> The diary entry selected for the purpose of illustration, dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1756, reveals plentiful information about his reading habits: what he read (Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe*), who he read with (his wife), where (presumably at home), when (in the evening), how (passive because his wife was reading to him, which also implies reading aloud), even what impressions the book made on him:

*In the even my wife finished reading of “Clarissa Harlowe”, which I look upon as a very well-wrote thing though it must be allowed it is too prolix. I think the author keeps up the character of every person in all places; and as to the manner of its ending, I like it better than if it had terminated in more happy circumstances.*<sup>54</sup>

That Thomas Turner also practised reading to others suggests the following short diary entry, dated 1st May 1763: *Sam. Jenner drank tea with me, and to whom in the evening I read two of Tillotson’s sermons.*<sup>55</sup> Some diary entries even reveal what he thought about what he read. The follow-

52 See: Jelena Lakuš and Anita Bajić, “Dnevnik Dragojle Jarnević kao izvor za povijest knjige i čitanja,” *Književna smotra: časopis za svjetsku književnost* 46 (2014): 129-43; Jelena Lakuš and Anita Bajić, “Interpreting Diaries: History of Reading and the Diary of the Nineteenth-Century Croatian Female Writer Dragojla Jarnević,” *Information & Culture* 52, 2 (2017): 163-185.

53 He kept the diary about ten years, from 1754 until 1765. The diary, containing about a third of the massive whole of the diary, was published in 1984. Thomas Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765*, ed. David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

54 *Ibid.*, 32, accessed October 17, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=6220](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=6220).

55 *Ibid.*, 270, accessed October 17, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=6551](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=6551).

ing entry, dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 1758, concerns William Wake's catechism *The principles of the Christian Religion explained in a brief commentary*, which was at the time widely circulated:

*In the even finished reading Wake's "Catechism", which I think is a very good book and proper for all families, there being good instructions in it and also something which is prodigious moving. It is wrote in a lively, brisk manner and not as if the author wrote more out of form than for the good of people's souls, and at the same time it is a very plain, familiar style, suitable I think to the meanest capacities that can read. And so far as I can judge there is everything contained in it necessary to a man's salvation.*<sup>56</sup>

As can be seen from these examples, diaries are rich sources of information for historians of reading. Memoirs are very similar. However, unlike diaries that are usually written near the time of the event they record, memoirs are often written many years later, usually focusing exclusively on only one period or one aspect of an individual's life, covering, for instance, only professional life. In addition, unlike diaries that are usually kept for personal use, memoirs are intended for the public.

In his well-known book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), Jonathan Rose has used more than 900 memoirs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British working classes demonstrating that they are excellent sources for the history of reading. One of these memoirs was Michael Stapleton's memoir *The Threshold*, published in 1958. It provides a plentiful of information about what and how he read as well as about how he acquired books, as shown in the following abstract, describing his longing for books and knowledge:

*So I [...] started examining every book in the house, ransacking forgotten cupboards and the hole under the stairs. I read*

56 Ibid., 149, accessed October 17, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=6374](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=6374).

everything I could understand, and begged twopenny bloods quite shamelessly from the boys at school who were fortunate enough to enjoy such things. I absorbed an immense amount of useless information, but occasionally a treasure came my way and I would strain my eyes under the twenty-watt bulb which lighted our kitchen. A month-old copy of the ‘Wizard’ would be succeeded by a handbook for vegetarians, and this in turn would be followed by ‘Jane Eyre’. ‘Tarzan and the Jewels of Ophir’ was no sooner finished than I was deep in volumes three and four of a history of ‘The Conquest of Peru’ (the rest of the set was missing). I would go from that to ‘Rip van Winkle’ and straight on to a tattered copy of the Hotspur.<sup>57</sup>

The memoir of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian politician, writer and journalist Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac (1824-1912), entitled *Mladenačke uspomene iz Hrvatske* (Youthful Memories from Croatia) is of similar value.<sup>58</sup> Tkalac was a genuine intellectual, constantly seeking for knowledge and a very passionate reader. For these reasons, his writings are abundant in remarks on books and reading, as shown in the following two examples:

*Radovalo me jedino čitanje pa sam gutao svaku njemačku, talijansku ili francusku knjigu koja bi mi slučajno dopala ruku.*<sup>59</sup>

*[...] moja najmilija lektira onog vremena bila je „Povijest neobičnih istraživačkih putovanja” u četiri sveska. [...] Iz biblioteke grofa Đure Draškovića ponio je brat nekoliko svezaka romana Waltera Scotta. Knjige smo spremili u ruksak i radosna srca odjahali u novu pustolovinu.*<sup>60</sup>

57 Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 373, accessed October 1, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=5029](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=5029).

58 The memoir was first published during his lifetime in 1894 and then only again in 2002. It covers a broad period from the beginning of his schooling until the time he engaged politically in the early 1840s. Imbro Tkalac, *Mladenačke uspomene iz Hrvatske* (Karlovac: Gradska knjižnica Ivan Goran Kovačić, Matica hrvatska, 2002).

59 “I only liked reading books so that I swallowed every German, Italian or French book that accidentally came to my hands.” *Ibid.*, 117.

60 “[...] my favorite reading of the time was “The History of Unusual Research Trips” in four volumes.

As we could see, diaries and memoirs provide important evidence about reading as an everyday practice that often cannot be recovered from other sources.<sup>61</sup> However, these sources have some research limits. First of all, not all of them contain references associated with reading and books, and those that do do not provide the same level of details about the author's reading habits.<sup>62</sup> Second, to commit someone to writing a diary often depended on time and resources (paper and pen), a very important fact when thinking about the working classes in history.<sup>63</sup> In addition, autobiographies and memoirs are not that common among anonymous persons and were more often written by those who enjoyed fame in their lifetime.<sup>64</sup> Concerning diaries in particular, it has to be said that many of them include what literary historians call the "paradox of desire to change life through the text" and that diarists often write when in a bad mood, which usually results in a "negative selection of events and experiences recorded, possible fictionalisation of the author's self, and the fact that diary text is always a selection providing insight into fragments of the author's life."<sup>65</sup> As Kate Flint has claimed, autobiographies and memoirs are forms of self-fashioning and involve the selection and arrangement of events,<sup>66</sup> although it is also true for sources such as letters.<sup>67</sup> As a corollary of that, sometimes authors did not record all that they had read, for instance, newspapers read on a daily basis or low literature they had read and enjoyed but they neglected to mention because they were ashamed.<sup>68</sup> Or, they may claim to read books they did not, wishing to give the impression of being learned persons. Even if they were honest, the passage of

[...] my brother took several volumes of Walter Scott's novels from the library of the Count Đuro Drašković. We put books in a backpack and joyfully rode to a new adventure." Ibid., 97.

61 Colclough, "Readers: Books and Biography," 53.

62 "History of Reading Tutorial 1. Finding evidence of reading in the past. 2.1 Diaries, journals, autobiographies and memoirs – the anecdotal sources," accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/history-reading-tutorial-1-finding-evidence-reading-the-past/content-section-2.1>.

63 Ibid.

64 There are, however, some exceptions. Already mentioned Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* has been based mainly on the memoirs of the working class people.

65 Marija Ott Franolić, "O Dnevniku Dragojle Jarnević, o dvjestotoj obljetnici rođenja," *Hrvatska revija* 3, 12 (2012): 51, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.matica.hr/media/uploads/hr/2012/hr-2012-3.pdf>.

66 Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 187.

67 Colclough, "Readers: Books and Biography," 60.

68 Jackson, "Approaches," 1049.

time between the event and writing about it may result in forgetting some works, authors or reading experiences.<sup>69</sup> It is for all these reasons that the use of these sources requires some caution.

### *Proceedings of the Inquisition and police records*

Specifying in his article *Arriving at a History of Reading* the most often used historical records of reading in the past, Jonathan Rose has stated that the proceedings of the Inquisition and police records are the most helpful sources for historians of reading since “they asked precisely the questions we want to ask: What did you read it, and how did you read it? Where did you obtain the book? Did you discuss it with anyone? How did you interpret this particular passage?”<sup>70</sup> The most famous example is an excellent book by Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980), a book based on the trial records of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian miller Domenico Scandella, also known as Menocchio. Menocchio was brought to trial during the Inquisition because of his beliefs that were opposed to the Church’s doctrine and teachings. In his trial testimony Menocchio made references to more than a dozen books which he interpreted in his own way, blending the teachings of the Catholic Church and his rural experience to construct his own views of religion and his beliefs,<sup>71</sup> as shown in the following passage of the book:

*In the first interrogation, we recall, Menocchio had insisted that he didn’t believe in the immaculate conception of Mary by virtue of the Holy Spirit “because many men have been born into the world, but none of a virgin woman,” and also because in a book called ‘Fioretto della Bibbia’ he had read “that St. Joseph called our Lord Jesus Christ his son.”<sup>72</sup>*

69 “History of Reading Tutorial 1. Finding evidence of reading in the past. 2.1 Diaries,” accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/history-reading-tutorial-1-finding-evidence-reading-the-past/content-section-2.1>.

70 Rose, “Arriving at a History of Reading,” 36.

71 His philosophical teachings earned him the title of a heresiarch and Menocchio was eventually burned at the stake in 1599, at the age of 67.

72 Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 36.

The proceedings of the Inquisition also reveal how Menocchio acquired books:

*It is true that I once read a book lent to me by our chaplain, Father Andrea da Maren, who now lives in Monte Real. That book was entitled Il Cavalier Zuanne de Mandavilla; I believe it was French, printed in the vernacular Italian language. It may be five or six years ago that he lent it to me, but I returned it to him at least two years ago. And this book dealt with a journey to Jerusalem, and certain differences between the Greeks and the pope; and it also dealt with the great Khan, with the city of Babylon, with Prester John, and Jerusalem, and also with many islands [...].*<sup>73</sup>

Criminal court records are very similar sources. Some of them offer a series of important evidence of reading – the socio-economic group and occupation of the reader, the time and the place where the reading occurred, whether the reading was practised in the company and aloud or alone and silently, and so on. For the purpose of illustration, the account of the criminal trial that took place at the Old Bailey, London's central criminal court, has been selected.<sup>74</sup> It is the trial of James Greenacre and Sarah Gale, accused of the murder of a certain Hannah Brown. On 1st January 1837 Henry Wignal was one of the witnesses. Reading was an activity that he remembered doing on the day of the crime:

*Henry Wignal: 'the 1st of January was Sunday—on the 1st of January I was in my own room, upstairs, reading the newspaper—he was in Mrs. Gale's apartment—I was reading the newspaper that morning to my wife, and a friend of mine, and my sister—I read of the trunk of a body being found in the Edgware-road. Q. Did you read loud enough for the prisoners to hear you? A. They must have heard me read it—they*

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>74</sup> Accounts of various trials, almost 200,000 of them, were regularly published from 1678 until 1913.

*had the door of their room ajar, and must have heard me— they stayed there all day, and slept there all night—they did not say a word about this trunk that was found.’<sup>75</sup>*

This short quotation reveals plenty of evidence on reading, namely, what Henry Wignal read (the newspaper), who he read with (his wife, sister and a friend, while the accused may have been listening from the room next door), where (at home, in his own room), when (in the morning), and how he read (in company, reading aloud the newspaper to his wife, sister and a friend).

Such kind of sources can be certainly useful, but they nevertheless have severe research limitations. First, the court records only indicate the reading habits of a small minority, usually of a damaged party or pawnbrokers who most often appeared at the court as witnesses since they seem to have read carefully the crime news in newspapers to avoid accusations of being receivers of stolen goods. Others, who possibly read the crime news but did not go to court even though they had witnessed the crime, had seen the stolen goods or knew the accused, are not included.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, each selected case cannot tell us much if we do not try to find some reading patterns across similar court records, for instance, if we do not try to answer questions such as who read newspapers in general, how and why.<sup>77</sup>

### *Marginalia*

As Ian Jackson has suggested, marginalia are perhaps “the most direct source of evidence for a reader’s immediate reaction to a text,”<sup>78</sup> providing, as Anthony Grafton has emphasized, “the scent of human flesh and blood,” as the best historical evidence always does.<sup>79</sup> It is for that reason that we

75 Old Bailey Proceedings Online. “Trial of James Greenacre and Sarah Gale 3 April 1837 (t18370403-917),” accessed October 2, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=24954](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=24954).

76 “History of reading tutorial 1. Finding evidence of reading in the past. 2.2 Inquisitorial sources – glimpses on common practices?,” accessed October 2, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/history-reading-tutorial-1-finding-evidence-reading-the-past/content-section-2.2>

77 Ibid.


78 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1046.

79 Anthony Grafton, “Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and his Books,”

can consider marginalia quite a reliable source. Marginalia shed light on the mental, emotional and intellectual process of reading, even changing historical patterns of reading practice.<sup>80</sup> Marginalia may be of various kinds – from very simple marginal notes such as exclamation marks, the hand-with-pointing-finger symbols (the so called “manicule”), simple vertical lines that assist quick reference and serve to locate a particular sentence or paragraph, various drawings, corrections of printers’ errors, to corrections of the content itself in the form of comments to glosses or critiques. Throughout history, marginalia was a widespread practice, perhaps more than today. For the purpose of illustration two cases of Thomas Carlyle’s marginalia have been selected – his “manicule” in *Journal kept during a visit to Germany in 1799-1800* by Melisina Trench (Figure 1)<sup>81</sup> and his comments in the margins of *Introductory lessons on modern history* by Thomas Arnold: *A most conciliatory candid style of writing (which means here of thinking also and of living): that is the grand merit of the Book* (Figure 2).<sup>82</sup> Commenting on the author’s style of writing, Carlyle entered with him into a sort of dialogue, confirming that he had read the book carefully. Occasionally, more than one reader left a mark in some book. Such notes reveal evidence of reading as a social process.<sup>83</sup> If we accumulate a large database of marginalia and we know how to interpret it, we can unquestionably frame useful generalisations about historical readers as Heather J. Jackson did, for instance, in her book *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (2001). However, many historians have been doubtful

*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 91 (1997): 157.

- 80 “Marginalia: Six Personal Libraries,” accessed April 19, 2017, <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/reading/marginalia.html>.
- 81 Melesina Chenevix St. George Trench, *Journal kept during a visit to Germany in 1799, 1800* (London: 1861), 8, accessed October 5, 2016, [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:13911307\\$20i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:13911307$20i).
- 82 Thomas Arnold, *Introductory lectures on modern history: delivered in Lent term, MDCCCXLII, with the inaugural lecture delivered in December, MDCCCXLI* (Oxford: J. H. Parker; London: B. Fellowes, 1842), 357, accessed October 5, 2016, [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:14002610\\$369i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:14002610$369i).
- 83 Such is the case with Vernon Lee’s copy of Rudolf Goldscheid’s *Höherentwicklung und Menschenökonomie: grundlegung der sozialbiologie* which she lent to her friend, the Italian pragmatist philosopher Mario Calderoni. Calderoni returned the book with his own remarks, some commenting on Lee’s first notes, which encouraged Lee to re-read the book, and leaves some additional marginal marks, completing in such a way a literary conversation. “History of reading tutorial 3. Famous writers and their reading - Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Vernon Lee,” accessed October 3, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/history-reading-tutorial-3-famous-writers-and-their-reading-elizabeth-barrett-browning-and-vernon/content-section-3>.



on to accompany me in my round of visits. She is a beautiful grandmother, with irresistible manners. At six Mad. de Busche called to take me to pay my visits ; we only dropped tickets, and afterwards she introduced me, according to an arrangement of the Prince's, at Mad. de Wallmöden's. The Maréchal de Wallmöden is son to George the Second and the beautiful Lady Yarmouth. Our company only consisted of our host and hostess, the two Princes, an officer who played on the violin, some musicians, and Mr. Tatler, who educated the Princes Augustus and Adolphus, and now lives with the latter as a friend.

*Nov. 18.*—The Prince, who regularly sends me the newspapers, was so kind as to call on me at five in the evening with a French gazette ; and afterwards Mr. Tatler, whose adoration of him is truly interesting, sat with me the rest of the evening. He enlarged much on his goodness, saying he never had done, and never would do, anything to give the king, his father, a moment's uneasiness. He cannot speak of his father without tears in his eyes. •

*Nov. 20.*—Dined at Court ; an invitation dinner of about thirty persons. Prince Adolphus of course re-

**FIGURE 1** Thomas Carlyle's marginalia: his „manicule” in *Journal kept during a visit to Germany in 1799-1800* by Melisina Trench

is very well that we should not swim with the stream of public opinion : places like this are exceedingly valuable as temples where an older truth is still worshipped, which else might have been forgotten : and some caricature of our proper business must at times be tolerated, for such is the tendency of humanity. But still if we make it our glory to run exactly counter to the general opinions of our age, making distance from them the measure of truth, we shall at once destroy our usefulness and our real respectability. And to believe seriously that the movement of the three last centuries has been a degeneracy ; that the middle ages were wiser, or better, or happier than our own, seeing truth more clearly and serving God more faithfully ; would be an error so extravagant that no amount of prejudice could excuse us for entertaining it.

It has been my object in this and in my last lecture to exemplify from that history which is most familiar to us all, the method of historical analysis ; by which we endeavour to discover the key as it were to the complicated movement of the world, and to understand the real principles of opposite parties amidst much in their opinions and con-

A most curia-  
-ing candid style  
of writing (which  
means less of truth  
-ing also and of  
living) : that is  
the grand merit of  
the book.

FIGURE 2 Thomas Carlyle's marginalia: his comments in the margins of *Introductory lessons on modern history* by Thomas Arnold

about using marginalia to reconstruct reading practices, questioning whether annotations give any useful insight into the mental process of reading. They have said that readers annotated books only occasionally and that such marginal notes are too scattered or too short to tell us much about those who wrote them down.<sup>84</sup> They have claimed that anyone making notes in the margin of a book is restrained by the amount of room available at the edge of the text.<sup>85</sup> They have also said that those who left their remarks and comments were well aware that their notes are likely to be read and interpreted by someone else, their friends or family members, which could imply that some readers did not always openly express their thoughts and opinions. According to this, marginalia was in some sense public.<sup>86</sup> Some, however, have claimed that “marginalia is not explicitly intended for publication, and therefore the opinions expressed might be much more direct and unguarded than usual.”<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, they have argued that we should not assume that just because a book is unmarked, it is unread,<sup>88</sup> and that the absence of marginalia may be as significant as their presence.<sup>89</sup> Yet, as Ian Jackson has warned, “the fact that some readers chose to document their reading is itself worth noting as evidence for how they saw reading.”<sup>90</sup>

### *Commonplace books*

Commonplace books can also serve as a direct evidence of a reader’s reaction to a text. The era of the commonplace book probably began in the 12th century and reached its peak in the late Renaissance, when a paper was still scarce and expensive and many could not afford to buy books. With the early 20th century, the commonplace book disappeared. A commonplace book is a sort of scrapbook that contains items of every kind: recipes, tables of weights and measures, letters, poems, proverbs, prayers,

84 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1046.

85 Colclough, “Readers: Books and Biography,” 54.

86 “History of reading tutorial 3. Famous writers.”

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Howard, “Secret Lives of Readers.”

90 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1049.

and the like, often organised under topical or thematic headings, in order to serve as a memory aid to its creator. However, it also often contains quotes and excerpts from literary and other works which its creator considered important, useful or interesting for some reason. Such excerpts were sometimes supplemented with creator's comments and critical evaluations, as shown in the following two extracts, dated to the 1920s, and taken from a commonplace book of a 20th century English novelist and a short story writer Edward Morgan Forster:

*Clarissa Harlowe. Have read 1/3 of [...] Certainly I am bored, but the book is not tedious through repetition -- the endless variety and modulations are not in themselves interesting enough [...] Granted her premises about copulation and relations, Cl. deduces with delicacy and truth. Within her conventions, she is sound. She is tragic and charming. Rich[ardson]. had a tragic mind [quotes passages] [...] 'The book raises the question of subject-matter. Within its limits it is great. But what limits!' <sup>91</sup>*

*Under heading 'Peer Gynt': 'The main ideas of this great and bitter poem become clearer at this last hasty reading (3-1-28) though my former criticism stands [i.e. that it is a poem pretending to be a sermon [...]'. <sup>92</sup>*

The first extract, written at some point in 1926, explains Forster's impression with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, while the second one, dating back to 1928, refers to Henrik Ibsen's poem. Both extracts testify of the way in which Forster interacted with the literature he had read. It is for that reason that we can consider commonplace books, just like marginalia, quite reliable sources.

91 Edward Morgan Forster, Philip Gardner, ed., *Commonplace Book* (London: Scolar, 1985), 11-12, accessed October 3, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=20745](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=20745)

92 Ibid., 35, accessed October 3, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=20833](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=20833).

## Correspondence

Correspondence is an equally significant source for the history of reading. An extract from the letter written by Jane Austen to her niece Anna on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1814, selected for the purpose of illustration, gives us an answer to a series of questions Darnton has considered important to historians of reading: who (Jane Austen) read what (unpublished story by Anna Austen that Jane Austen received the day before), when (in the morning), how (aloud and in company, which suggests the personal pronoun “we”), the opinion about the manuscript (“we are all very much amused, & like the work quite as well as ever”):

*We have just finished the 1st of the 3 Books I had the pleasure of receiving yesterday; I read it aloud - & we are all very much amused, & like the work quite as well as ever. - I depend on getting through another book before dinner, but there is really a great deal of respectable reading in your 48 pages. I was an hour about it. - I have no doubt that 6 will make a very good sized volume.*<sup>93</sup>

Another example is the letter written in 1830 by Charles Darwin to his second cousin William Darwin Fox in which he suggests he read Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe*, and expresses how much the novel impressed him:

*I performed one Herculean task, having nearly finished Clarissa Harlowe, the most glorious novel ever written, & I advise you begin it as soon as you can.*<sup>94</sup>

Letters like these two have significant historical value as records of his-

93 Jane Austen, *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 268. (Letter from Jane Austen to Anna Austen, August 17, 1814), accessed October 5, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=11751](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=11751).

94 Darwin Correspondence Project. “Letter from Charles Darwin to William Darwin Fox, Cambridge, 1830,” accessed May 1, 2017, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=16469](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=16469).

torical readers' experiences and showing that reading was closely intersected with their daily lives. Some scholars, however, have claimed that letters, just like autobiographies and memoirs, involve the selection and arrangements of events, and thus it is important to exercise a certain amount of caution when using them.<sup>95</sup>

### *Fan letters*

Fan letters are often overlooked as sources for the history of reading. If the authors did save them, fan letters provide evidence of immediate responses to a certain text. As Clarence Kerr has suggested, "Whereas the evidence found in diaries and letters is fragmentary, collections of letters from readers provide a concentrated mass of responses to a corpus of works. Both the reading of those works and the writing of the letters were intense, emotional experiences, which reveal an honesty of emotional interaction rarely found in the printed documents."<sup>96</sup> Some authors received plenty of letters from readers. 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of them. Having published his famous *La Nouvelle Heloise*, the greatest bestseller of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he began receiving a number of letters from readers who were explaining how much the novel impressed them. One claimed that reading cured him of a cold, another that reading made him mad because of the incredible emotional engagement, while some believed that the characters were not fictional but real,<sup>97</sup> as shown in the following two extracts. The first one was written by Mme Du Verger on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1762, while the second one was written by the Protestant minister Paul-Claude Moultou on 7th March 1761:

*Many people who have read your book and discussed it with me assert that it is only a clever fabrication on your part. I can't believe that. If so, how could a mistaken reading have produced sensations like the ones I felt when I read the book?*

95 Colclough, "Readers: Books and Biography," 60.

96 Clarence Kerr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), 154.

97 Darnton, "First Steps," 156.

*I implore you, Monsieur, tell me: did Julie really live? Is Saint-Preux still alive? What country on this earth does he inhabit? Claire, sweet Claire, did she follow her dear friend to the grave? M. de Wolmar, milord Edouard, all those persons, are they only imaginary as some want to convince me? If that be the case, what kind of a world do we inhabit, in which virtue is but an idea? Happy mortal, perhaps you alone know it and practice it. [...] I would not speak to you so freely, if your way of thinking were not already known to me by your works. Besides, I should say straight away that if you were determined to make conquests, mine would not flatter you.*<sup>98</sup>

*No, Monsieur, I can no longer keep quiet. You have overwhelmed my soul. It is full to bursting, and it must share its torment with you Oh Julie! Oh Saint-Preux! Oh Claire! Oh Edouard! What planet do your souls inhabit, and how can I unite mine with yours? They are the offspring of your heart, Monsieur, your mind alone could not have made them as they are. Open that heart to me so that I can contemplate the living models of the characters whose virtues made me weep such sweet tears.*<sup>99</sup>

Writing letters to authors was at the time a very common practice so Rousseau was certainly not the only celebrity author who received them. Letters were received by Voltaire, Zola, Balzac, and many others,<sup>100</sup> including Samuel Richardson, an 18th-century English writer and printer, best known for his three epistolary novels: *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). Having read his *Clarissa*, an English critic and poet Thomas Edwards wrote a letter to Richardson, dated to 15<sup>th</sup> January 1755:

98 Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," in *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Penguin, 1985), 245.

99 Ibid.

100 Darnton, "First Steps," 156.

*Your works are an inexhaustible fund of entertainment and instruction. I have been this day weeping over the seventh volume of Clarissa, as if I had attended her dying bed, and assisted at her funeral procession. O may my latter end be like hers!*<sup>101</sup>

All of these letters show what reading meant to readers in the past. As Darnton has stated, “reading and living, construing texts and making sense of life, were much more closely related in the early modern period than they are today.”<sup>102</sup> However, the problem is that such sources represent just the circle of the most enthusiastic readers, those who interacted most passionately and most emotionally with the text.<sup>103</sup> A similar problem is with peer reviews since they were usually written by a narrow circle of experts in the appropriate field, that is, by qualified professionals.<sup>104</sup>

### *Letters to newspaper editors*

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a very common thing for readers to send letters to editors of newspaper(s) to which they had subscribed. Studying these letters, particularly those without editorial interventions, helps us to understand how readers actually used newspapers and how they made sense of what they read. Critics, however, have claimed that such letters seem an unreliable source since they are often edited and sometimes even written by editors.<sup>105</sup> The most famous among a few studies dedicated to the topic is perhaps David Nord’s *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (2001).<sup>106</sup> Nord

101 Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ed., *Correspondence of Samuel Richardson [...] Selected from the original manuscripts, bequeathed by him to his family* (London, 1804), vol. 3, 111-12, accessed October 3, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=28376](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=28376).

102 Darnton, „First Steps,” 157.

103 Kerr, *Authors and Audiences*, 154.

104 Peer reviews appeared in its modern connotation only in the late 20th century. Aileen Fyfe, “Peer review: not as old as you might think,” *Times Higher Education*, June 25, 2015, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/peer-review-not-old-you-might-think>.

105 Rose, “Arriving at a History of Reading,” 36.

106 David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

discovered and carefully investigated an archive of unpublished readers' letters sent to the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Herald* between 1912 and 1917. These were not letters offered for publication but personal letters sent to a Chicago newspaper editor named James Keeley by various readers complaining about something in the paper. What is fascinating about these letters is that they perfectly show how readers could read the same news stories in completely different ways. Especially revealing are readers' reactions to coverage of the First World War – while some considered the *Chicago Tribune* pro-German newspaper, some others considered it pro-Allied.<sup>107</sup> Readers' letters about religion are similar. While some letter writers criticised the editor for being anti-Catholic, others criticised him for being pro-Catholic.<sup>108</sup> Nord has argued that readers constructed their own meanings as they read, but this process was often guided by organised cultural and political power. In other words, readers were taught how to read newspapers.<sup>109</sup>

### *Sociological surveys of reading*

Most of the studies in the field of history of reading have tended to look at famous people.<sup>110</sup> However, if we want to study the reading habits and reading experiences of the ordinary people, we should choose sociological surveys of reading.<sup>111</sup> An example selected for the purpose of illustration is the survey conducted in Croatia in 1923 by Dragutin Kniewald, a professor at the Faculty of Theology. The aim of his research was to identify reading habits and experiences of young Catholic girls. The questions that were being put were: What kinds of books do you like reading most? Of what subjects and genre? What do you like most in books you read? What do you think are the benefits of reading? Why are you reading? Do you

107 Rose, "Arriving at a History of Reading," 38.

108 Nord, *Communities*, 92; David Paul Nord, "Reading the Newspaper: Strategies and Politics of Reader Response, Chicago, 1912-1917," *Journal of Communication* 45, 3 (1995): 66.

109 *Ibid.*

110 Of course, there are some exceptions such as already mentioned Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* or Ginzburg's study *The Cheese and the Worms*, based on the trial records of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian miller Domenico Scandella, better known as Menocchio.

111 Sociological surveys of reading go back in the latter part of the 18th century. Perhaps the oldest one is the one conducted in Scotland in the 1790s. Rose, "Arriving at a History of Reading," 36.

think that some books can be harmful? Have you read such books? What do you and your female friends think about reading novels? and so on. The results, published in a scientific periodical in 1925 under the title *Psihologija omladinske lektire* (The Psychology of Compulsory Reading for the Youth) reveal the reading habits of more than two hundred girls who answered the questionnaire. For instance, the majority of them liked reading the belles-lettres. In books, they sought knowledge and amusement. They did believe that some books could be harmful, particularly novels because they teach them immorality, excite their imagination, stimulate their passion, and so on.<sup>112</sup> The results of this study should be used, however, with some caution. It is a question whether the girls were answering honestly or they just responded according to what was expected of them.

However, the working people in London, street-entertainers, prostitutes, thieves and vagabonds had probably no reason to be dishonest while being interviewed in the 1840s by a 19<sup>th</sup> century English social researcher and journalist Henry Mayhew. Mayhew was interested in their daily routine, which also included questions on their reading habits (what they read or used to read). Interviewing a boy of 16, a vagabond and an inmate of a casual ward of a London workhouse, Mayhew found out not only what he read but also how he obtained books and what was his general attitude towards books and reading:

*My father had no books but religious books; they were all of a religious turn, and what people might think dull. But they never made me dull. I read Wesley's and Watt's hymns, and religious magazines of different connexions. I had a natural inclination for the sea, and would like to get to it now. I've read a good deal about it since -Clark's 'Lives of Pirates', 'Tales of Shipwrecks', and other things in penny numbers (Clark's I got out of the library though). I was what people called a deep boy for a book; and am still. Whenever I had a penny, after I got a bellyful of victuals, it went for a book, but I hav-*

112 Dragutin Kniewald, "Psihologija omladinske lektire," *Bogoslovska smotra* 12, 3 (1925): 345-360.

*en't bought many lately. I did buy one yesterday -the 'Family Herald' -one I often read when I can get it. There's good reading in it; it elevates your mind -anybody that has a mind for studying. It has good tales in it... I've read "Windsor Castle" and "The Tower", -they're by the same man. I Liked "Windsor Castle" and all about Henry VIII and Herne and Hunter. It's a book that's connected with history, and that's a good thing. I like adventurous tales.*<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, the results derived from sociological surveys such as these two selected for the purpose of illustration can be more or less reliable, depending on the type of questions being asked, respondents themselves and the overall context of surveys.

### *Oral history*

If we want to investigate readers of the fairly recent past, we can choose to use oral history techniques. Oral historians “document the past by preserving insights not found in printed sources.”<sup>114</sup> A brilliant example is a book by Martin Lyons and Lucy Taska, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading 1890-1930* (1992), which is based on an investigation into the reading habits of sixty Australians and their parents, who were asked to recall and comment on what they were reading in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A book offers an account of readers’ memories of various genres – novels, poetry, children’s books, and newspapers. It examines how the interviewees obtained access to books. It also analyses the status of reading, attitudes towards books, as well as the myths and prejudices surrounding the act of reading. However, the oral history method should also be used with caution. Just as in the case

113 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, Stationers’ Hall Court, 1861), 3, 388-389 (Henry Mayhew interviews a boy of 16, a vagrant and inmate of a casual ward of a London workhouse, London, between 1 Jan 1840 and 31 Dec 1859), accessed October 7, 2016, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=1295](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=1295).

114 David A. Russell, “Oral History Methodology: The Art of Interviewing,” *Oral History Program*, 1, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/oralhistory/199xDRussellUCSBOralHistoryWorkshop.pdf>.

of diaries and memoirs, the passage of time may result in forgetting some works, authors or reading experiences.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the interviewees may claim to read books which they actually did not, wishing to give the impression of being cultured persons, or may neglect to mention low literature that they read, for instance, because they were ashamed of that.<sup>116</sup>

### *Visual representations of reading: paintings of people reading*

At first sight, paintings of people reading may appear to be a questionable source. Is the motif of people reading based on real life situations? Before we answer that question, we need to know that from the earliest times symbols have been very important to artists, and a book has been a symbol, too. In medieval paintings, a book in the hands of evangelists and apostles often represents the New Testament, in the hands of the founder of a religious order it represents the rules of that order. A book on the paintings of the Blessed Virgin Mary usually symbolises the Book of Wisdom or the Annunciation. If a book is in the hand of the Holy Child or in Mary's lap, it is a clear allusion to the Holy Scriptures. A book with the letters alpha (A) and omega (Ω) symbolizes the Christ and so on.<sup>117</sup> In the early modern period, a book symbolises the profession of the one who holds it in the hand, as well as his or her wisdom, knowledge and education. Other details in paintings are important, too. For instance, when a reader in paintings has fingers on several pages at once, it enabled historians of reading to understand why the codex superseded the scroll in the early Christian centuries – while scrolls only permitted linear reading, codices allowed the reader to go back and forth.<sup>118</sup> Thus, as much as details in paintings are important to art historians, they are important to historians of reading also.

Equally important in paintings is the context, atmosphere and environ-

115 "History of Reading Tutorial 1. Finding evidence of reading in the past." 2.1 Diaries," accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/literature-and-creative-writing/history-reading-tutorial-1-finding-evidence-reading-the-past/content-section-2.1>.

116 Jackson, "Approaches," 1049.

117 James Hall, *Rječnik tema i simbola u umjetnosti* (Zagreb: August Cesarec, 1991), 66.

118 Rose, "Arriving at a history of reading," 37.

ment in which reading took place. In the Middle Ages, reading was not associated with comfort at all – readers in the university libraries read standing up, protected against the cold by cloaks and hats, while books were put in chains.<sup>119</sup> In the early modern period, particularly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, readers were portrayed in armchairs in comfortable and relaxed positions such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s *A Young Girl Reading*, 1773–1776, or Claude Monet’s *A Woman Reading*, 1872.<sup>120</sup> The attitude towards reading obviously became significantly different. Books were read not only for the purpose of spiritual growth or education but also for the purpose of amusement.<sup>121</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the emergence of newspapers and increased hunger for information, readers were often portrayed reading collectively and reading aloud.<sup>122</sup> For all of these reasons, paintings should not be completely neglected as the sources for the history of reading.

### *Visual representations of reading: documentary photography*

Paintings, however, do not have documentary value. The act of reading, as it really was throughout history, can be demonstrated by documentary photography such as photographs made by a Hungarian-born photographer André Kertész. Kertész captured people reading in public social settings in many parts of the world over a long period of more than fifty years, from 1915 until the 1970s (for instance, his photograph *Boy reading newspaper*, New York, 1944,<sup>123</sup> or *Esztergom*, Hungary, 1915).<sup>124</sup> A collection of these photographs, simply called *On Reading*, was published

119 Darnton, “First Steps,” 167.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 German History in Documents and Images (GHDI). “Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany (1866-1890). Images – Culture. Wilhelm Leibl. Peasants in Conversation / The Village Politicians [Ba- uern im Gespräch / Die Dorfpolitiker] (1877),” accessed April 20, 2017, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1314](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1314).

123 Blake Morrison, „The Power of Reading,” *The Guardian*, July 23, 2009, accessed October 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jul/23/andre-kertesz-photography-reading>

124 Florence Waters, “Andre Kertesz at the Photographer’s Gallery,” review of *On Reading*, by André Ker- téész, *The Telegraph*, July 22, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/5886226/Andre-Kertesz-at-the-Photographers-Gallery-review.html>.

in 1971 and then republished in 2008.<sup>125</sup> The example of a Haitian painter and photographer Gérard Blancourt is similar. Some of his photographs also depict the atmosphere and social settings in which reading took place.<sup>126</sup> Most of these photographs, both those made by Kertész and those made by Blancourt, answer the questions of who, when, where, how, and sometimes even why someone reads. They can also show the intensity of the reading experience and absorption of a person with a book through the posture of the body, gestures and expressions.<sup>127</sup> However, they only rarely answer the question of what someone reads.

## Conclusion

To conclude, most of these sources contain evidence that can tell us what particular readers read, often where, when and how they read, or how they obtained what they read, but also sometimes what reading meant to them personally and how they responded to what they read. However, all of these sources are fragmentary, imperfect and only to some extent reliable. As mentioned, perhaps the most direct sources of evidence for a reader's immediate reaction to a text are marginalia, commonplace books or fan letters sent to authors. In spite of that, as already explained, these have research limitations. Some sources are confined to a narrow circle of readers: fan letters, for instance, represent the circle of those readers who interacted most passionately and most emotionally with the text, while peer reviews represent the circle of qualified experts in the appropriate field. In addition, memoirs are usually, though not exclusively, written by famous persons, those who have enjoyed fame in their lifetime. Some sources (diaries, memoirs, correspondence or even sociological surveys) may be selective as regards to authors and works being read due to the pas-

125 Sven Birkerts, "Andre Kertesz: On Reading," *Literal: Latin American Voices* 26, accessed October 18, 2016, <http://literalmagazine.com/andre-kertesz-on-reading/>.

126 Pinterest: the world's catalogue of ideas. "Girls reading books from mobile library in Levallois-Perret, near Paris, c. 1960. Photograph by Gérard Blancourt," accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/54746951696642190/>.

127 Birkerts, "Andre Kertesz."

sage of time between the event and writing about it or due to the fact that readers intentionally dropped some authors they had read or/and added others that they had not. Finally, while some sources are good for studying the reading habits and reading experiences of communities of readers (sociological surveys, oral history), some others can serve as sources for studying the reading habits of individual readers (diaries, memoirs, correspondence, etc.).

All this, as Ian Jackson has warned, imposes the question of whether a historical reading experience is retrievable at all.<sup>128</sup> A number of studies centred on the history of reading demonstrate that it can be. However, there are some rules that must be followed. Historians of reading should integrate “understanding of the individual act of reading [...] and of the social history of reception – why you bought or borrowed this book, who you are, where and when you are reading this – often aggregated with details of other readers to create a social profile of readership.”<sup>129</sup> They should search, however, not only for sources that uncover the diversity of individual acts of reading but also for those that show reading patterns and widely shared reading practices. They should also be aware of the fact that each particular source should also be complemented with other sources because each of them perhaps reveals only one aspect of someone’s reading life.<sup>130</sup> Historical readers read a great variety of books for different purposes at different times in their lives, engaged in a diversity of reading practices and selected different reading strategies for different texts. The weaknesses in the sources must balance each other out.<sup>131</sup> As David Paul Nord put it down, writing about historical readership studies, “Like all historians in search of evidence, historians of reading must be clever detectives – or lucky dilettantes.”<sup>132</sup> A clever historian of reading knows that even a book’s apparent lack of use can be read as evidence. If pages of a book are completely uncut, this certainly tells us something about the owner of the copy. Thus, the history of reading should also in-

128 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1044.

129 Finkelstein and McCleery, “Readers and Reading,” 118.

130 Colclough, “Readers: Books and Biography,” 56.

131 Jackson, “Approaches,” 1049.

132 Nord, “Historical Readership Studies,” 87.

clude the history of not reading.<sup>133</sup>

Stating that “the history of reading is the history of interpretation,”<sup>134</sup> Jonathan Rose has highlighted that the interpretation of sources is just as important as finding them. As Barbara Hochman has also explained, “Interpreting readers’ testimony is as tricky as interpreting literary texts or historical events. [...] individual testimonies of reading always reflect a complex blend of personal motives and cultural norms. [...] the meanings we attach to reading are influenced by multiple factors, including the ways we acquire literacy [...], class, gender, and other kinds of cultural positioning. Our own relation to reading is inextricably entangled with personal and social history; responses of the past are all the more difficult to decode.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, a scholar seeking to identify the readers of the past often has to read between the lines.<sup>136</sup> He has to be well aware of “the biographical determinants of class, gender, and geographical location that helped to shape the individual’s reading life”.<sup>137</sup> He also has to be aware that every act of reading is personal and unique. And yet, as Nord has stated, “stand back and squint a bit, and cultural patterns can be discerned.”<sup>138</sup> Just like clever detectives do.

133 Leah Price gives an example of a copy of *Ulysses* kept in the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, whose previous owner was Ernest Hemingway. A copy was almost completely uncut which implies that was not read at all. Howard, “Secret Lives of Readers.”

134 Rose, “Arriving at a History of Reading,” 39.

135 Barbara Hochman, “The History of Reading and the Death of the Text,” *American Literary History* 21, 4 (2009): 850-851.

136 Howard, “Secret Lives of Readers.”

137 Colclough, “Readers: Books and Biography,” 59.

138 Nord, “Historical Readership Studies,” 95.

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## DOKAZI O ČITANJU U PROŠLOSTI

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*povijest knjige, povijest čitanja, dokazi o čitanju, povijesni čitatelj, povijesni izvori*

### SAŽETAK

*Od početka svog utemeljenja kao znanstvene discipline, povijest čitanja suočila se s problemom pronalaženja reprezentativnih dokaza o čitanju u prošlosti. Izvori koji dokumentiraju čitateljske prakse povijesnih čitatelja često su opskurni, u oskudnom broju, fragmentirani i raštrkani. Ovaj članak bavi se najvažnijima među njima, kako onima koji nude uvid u čitateljske navike pojedinačnih čitatelja, tako i onima koji bilježe čitateljske prakse koje zajednice čitatelja dijele u određenom kulturnom kontekstu, ukazujući na mogućnosti, poteškoće i izazove u njihovu korištenju. Svrha je ovoga rada pokazati da, iako su svi izvori koji se analiziraju nesavršeni i samo u određenoj mjeri pouzdani, oni mogu biti vrlo korisni ako povjesničari čitanja znaju kako ih koristiti i interpretirati.*