

## "I WANT TO FIND REAL READERS, DISCOVER THEIR RESPONSES TO BOOKS AND THEIR READING PRACTICES". THE STORY OF PRINTED PRODUCTION BY MARTYN LYONS<sup>42</sup>

"QUERO ENCONTRAR LEITORES REAIS, DESCOBRIR AS SUAS RESPOSTAS AOS LIVROS E AS SUAS PRÁTICAS DE LEITURA". A HISTÓRIA DA PRODUÇÃO IMPRESSA POR MARTYN LYONS

"JE VEUX TROUVER DE VRAIS LECTEURS, DÉCOUVRIR LEURS RÉACTIONS AUX LIVRES ET LEURS PRATIQUES DE LECTURE". L'HISTOIRE DE LA PRODUCTION IMPRIMÉE DE MARTYN LYONS

"QUIERO ENCONTRAR VERDADEROS LECTORES, DESCUBRIR SUS RESPUESTAS A LOS LIBROS Y SUS PRÁCTICAS DE LECTURA". LA HISTORIA DE LA PRODUCCIÓN IMPRESA DE MARTYN LYONS

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**ABSTRACT:** Martyn Lyons is an Emeritus Professor of European History and Studies at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Specialist in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his main research interests are the history of the book, reading and writing, French history and Australian history. He published around sixteen books with the results of his work and gave us this interview at the Third Argentine Colloquium on Book and Edition Studies (CAELE), held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from November 7 to 9, 2018. As a guest of honor, he presented the opening speech of the event entitled "The century of the typewriter. How the typewriter influenced writing practices" and generously, he agreed to give this interview to two young researchers in the field of publishing, book and reading in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Martyn Lyons, history of the book, reading and writing, publishing, Brazil.

**RESUMO:** Martyn Lyons é Professor Emérito de História e Estudos Europeus na Universidade de New South Wales, Austrália. Especialista nos séculos XIX e XX, os seus principais interesses de investigação são a história do livro, leitura e escrita, história francesa e história australiana. Publicou cerca de dezasseis livros com os resultados do seu trabalho e deu-nos esta entrevista no Terceiro Colóquio Argentino sobre Estudos do Livro e Edição (CAELE), realizado em Buenos Aires, Argentina, de 7 a 9 de Novembro de 2018. Como convidado de honra, apresentou o discurso de abertura do evento intitulado "O século da máquina de escrever. Como a máquina de escrever influenciou as práticas de escrita" e, generosamente, concordou em dar esta entrevista a dois jovens investigadores na área da edição, livro e leitura no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Martyn Lyons, história do livro, leitura e escrita, edição, Brasil.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Martyn Lyons est professeur émérite d'histoire et d'études européennes à l'Université de Nouvelle-Galles du Sud, en Australie. Expert des XIXe et XXe siècles, ses principaux centres d'intérêt en matière de recherche sont l'histoire du livre, la lecture et l'écriture, l'histoire française et l'histoire australienne. Il a publié environ seize livres avec les résultats de son travail et nous a accordé cette interview lors du troisième Colloque argentin sur les études et l'édition du livre (CAELE), qui s'est tenu à Buenos Aires, en Argentine, du 7 au 9 novembre 2018. En tant qu'invité d'honneur, il a présenté le discours d'ouverture de l'événement intitulé "Le siècle de la machine à écrire : comment la machine à écrire a influencé les pratiques d'écriture" et a généreusement accepté de donner cette interview à deux jeunes chercheurs dans le domaine de l'édition, du livre et de la lecture au Brésil.

**Mots-clés:** Martyn Lyons, histoire du livre, lecture et écriture, édition, Brésil.

**RESUMEN:** Martyn Lyons es Profesor Emérito de Historia y Estudios Europeos de la Universidad de Nueva Gales del Sur (Australia). Experto en los siglos XIX y XX, sus principales intereses de investigación son la historia de los libros, la lectura y la escritura, la historia francesa y la historia australiana. Publicó unos dieciséis libros con los resultados de su trabajo y nos concedió esta entrevista en el Tercer Coloquio Argentino de Estudios del Libro y la Edición (CAELE), celebrado en Buenos Aires, Argentina, del 7 al 9 de noviembre de 2018. Como invitado de honor, presentó

<sup>42</sup> The interview is part of an ongoing project coordinated by anthropologist Nathanael Araujo to map social scientists dedicated to the written culture and the printed world (Araújo & Sorá, 2019; Araujo & Faria Júnior, in press). This is the original interview, conducted in english. A version of this interview was published in brazilian portuguese by Revista Tempo Social (Araujo & Costa, 2019).

el discurso de apertura del evento titulado "El siglo de la máquina de escribir: cómo ha influido la máquina de escribir en las prácticas de escritura" y aceptó generosamente conceder esta entrevista a dos jóvenes investigadores en el campo de la publicación, el libro y la lectura en el Brasil.

**Palabras-clave:** Martyn Lyons, historia del libro, lectura y escritura, editorial, Brasil.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** Martyn, you were born in England and graduated there, weren't you?

**Martyn Lyons:** I was born in London and I made my PhD at the Oxford University. I successfully completed my doctorate in 1972 - it took 3 years and 3 months - but it had nothing to do with the history of the book. My first interest was in the history of the French Revolution, and I have always been an expert on French history. I started there, and for the interest in the Napoleonic's Era in Europe. But then I became interested in the history of the book, at first in France, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and later also in other countries. My interest lies in the history of reading and writing practices, especially those of average people of modest social origins and often little literary competence. My research on reading focuses on autobiographical, oral, and written sources - I want to find real readers, to find out their responses to books and their reading practices. This is a very human approach to history and I think that's a feature of my work. In 1977, I had emigrated to Australia to find a safe position at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, and since then I have been working there.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** Has your work initially followed the paths opened by researchers like Roger Chartier? What do you consider to be a differential compared to the work of other researchers in the history of books?

**Martyn Lyons:** I've learned a lot from Roger Chartier and also from Jean-Yves Mollier, a specialist in 19th and 20th century book history in France. My approach is not as cerebral as the first, either as focused on publishers as the last one. Unlike reception theorists, I am less interested in latent readers in the text and more in real readers who leave traces of their reading experiences in oral or written autobiographies. The use of these sources has been the central point to my work in both European and Australian reading practices. The written autobiographical evidence of the reading experience was the basis, for example, of my contributions to *History of the Book in Australia* (2001). In *Australian Readers Remember*, I showed the value of oral testimony to the history of reading practices. I have a huge debt with the theoretical insights of [Pierre] Bourdieu, Fish, [Michel] De Certeau and Chartier, but my main concern is less abstract: my target is the individual, the real readers and their perceptions and experiences. More recently, in the same spirit, I have turned to the individual writer. I think it's important to show that the *l'histoire du livre* crosses with historical questions of broad social or cultural significance. In nineteenth-century Europe, I became indispensable to our assessment of the so-called "Romantic Movement" and our interpretation of the political and intellectual conflicts of post-revolutionary society. My studies of commons writings contribute to the history of World War I and the experience of emigration. I think my work demonstrates the continuing strength of the history of reading and writing and its proven ability to clarify meaningful historical issues.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** And the methodological paths to it?

**Martyn Lyons:** I think there are three main methods for gaining access to the way the readers have historically responded to what they have read. First, a possible source is the material object itself - the book and all the characteristics, textual and paratextual, that provides the "con-text". The cover, the illustrations, the relation between the text and the image, the source, the layout, the format and the price, aim at a certain reader and ask for a certain interpretation. For example, Jules Verne's novels were sometimes produced as geography lessons and sometimes as adventure

novels. The physical aspects of the books themselves give clues to this. Secondly, I use what I call "normative" sources, that is, instructions on what to read and how to read, which are propagated by elites, institutions, and movements that wish to direct and structure people's reading - churches, schools, unions, feminists, and so on all of them have their own agenda and promote their own reading lists and interpretations. They exerted pressure, while governments and churches have imposed censorship to reinforce what they think people should read. Thirdly, I use autobiographical sources, and these are to me the most important, because they allow the historian to hear the voice of flesh-and-blood readers in the past.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** Can you better explain the differences perceived in anthropology and history the approaches? What does one get from another?

**Martyn Lyons:** Anthropologists have become very interested in the history of writing, and the work of, for example, Jack Goody and Walter Ong has been very influential here. They argue that writing allows for the creation of more sophisticated social and political organizations. Writing allowed governments to decide at a distance, apply impersonal forms of law, and keep systematic records of previous decisions. But Goody and Ong are not just talking about how writing strengthened the state - they argue that it changes the way we think. Writing imposes its own "logic", stimulates linear thinking and reasoning. It changes the processes of human thought and allows individuals to begin to think critically about ancient collective traditions. It helped science overcome myth and reason overcame custom. There are limits to what we, as historians, can draw from these anthropological theories. They have probably overemphasized the meaning of the Greek alphabet, drawing accusations of Eurocentrism in the process. Non-alphabetical societies have sometimes demonstrated considerable scientific knowledge - ancient China, for example. Another problem is the tendency of anthropologists like Ong to think of literacy and orality in terms of a dichotomy in which literacy replaces oral cultures and represents the progress of a primitive state of development. Historians know that such a clear polarization is unrealistic. The oral and the literate don't sit on separate ends of a spectrum - they are deeply involved with each other. There are many kinds of exchanges between oral and literate, and in many societies, both ancient and modern, at different social and cultural levels, oral and literate coexist and interact with each other. We don't think in such rigid terms of literacy expelling the oral culture.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** And about your contributions to the field of study of the history of writing?

**Martyn Lyons:** The history of writing is slightly different, and writing is something on which the anthropologists have offered several theories. But they aren't always similar with the more empirical views of the historians. As a historian of the writing practices, I realized that ordinary peasants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who historians often considered illiterate actually wrote when they were separated from their families by war, immigration, prison and so on. In the late nineteenth century there was a great burst of popular writing, which gives us an insight into the experiences of peasant soldiers in World War I and migrants in mass migration was from Europe to the Americas. This approach privileges the subjectivity of the writer. I think of it as a means of building a "New Story from Below". At the same time, I consider the materiality of writing and the ways in which the materials, tools and support for writing (bamboo, silk, parchment, paper) influenced writing practices. This idea was behind my lecture in Buenos Aires on the influence of the typewriter.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** When did you start writing about the typewriter and researching the materiality of writing?

**Martyn Lyons:** The idea of this project was originated in a museum. On a visit to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney which is basically a museum of technology. I had a nasty shock. I saw a very familiar item displayed in a glass cabinet with an explanatory label for the benefit of the uninitiated. It was a typewriter - a lively red living Olivetti from the 1960's - and it was familiar because I wrote my own doctoral thesis with the same model. I was confronted with the unsettling reality that an object that once played a major role in my life had become a museum exhibit, a curious survivor of a now extinct species. It was only later that I realized that the real dinosaur was myself. Olivetti's vision behind the glass was like a vision of myself as a historical artifact. My own writing practices certainly increased, but slowly. I happily use a MacBook, but I still use a fountain pen for some purposes, such as written checks, which today are another endangered species. When I used to do this in the department stores, it made the shop assistants look surprised. To quote Paul Auster with his Olympia typewriter, "I began to look like an enemy of progress, the last pagan haven in a world of digital converts." But the real point of these comments is that writing instruments such as pens and typewriters are everyday technologies that have a history of their own, and that history can only come to life if it is told by the eyes of its users. Such a history of writing materials needs to be told if we want to have a fuller appreciation of writing practices in past societies. A chance encounter with an Olivetti at the Powerhouse Museum gave me a new agenda for the cultural history of writing. Author and typewriter had a subtle relationship with each other, the typewriter was much more than just a faithful companion. She has actively contributed to shaping the literary work. The typewriter forced the writer to be precise. When the writer confronted the keyboard, he could crystallize his thoughts in a way that the word processor, with its infinite ability for quick review, could never do. Without the luxury of the delete key, the typewriter encouraged the author to be disciplined and even stingy with the words, because revision was only possible if the text was completely reformulated. The typewriter, therefore, collaborated with the writer in the creative process. The history of the typewriter forces us to consider not only the author's imaginative powers but also the material basis of creativity. Authors don't write books, write texts, and the way these texts become physical objects and the means by which they arrive in a readable form before an audience are crucial elements for creating meaning. Similarly, historians of writing culture emphasize the importance of writing materials and technologies. The support and the means by which textual communication operates helps us to understand its function and its meaning. The material presence of the text, together with the instruments that make it up, contributes to its impact and reception.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** Can you tell us what your research interests are in *The Printed Word*, and then *Books: A Living History*, after 12 years of distance between them?

**Martyn Lyons:** What happened between *The Printed Word* and *Books: A Living History*? Well, those were not the two most important milestones for me. First, I turned to the book's history in the late 1970's to study the workings of the French book trade in the nineteenth century, which led to my book *Le Triomphe du Livre* (1987). But in the course of completing this project, I realized that studying publishers, bestsellers, libraries, and bookstores told only part of the story. I wanted to know more about readers' responses, about what happens to the books after they are produced and sold. I was greatly aided in this research path by attending Roger Chartier's seminar at the

École des Hautes Études in Paris (as a guest) in 1984. I wrote a book about Australian readers, based on interviews with more than 60 older readers (*Australian Readers Remember* 1992) ; and a book on French readers in the nineteenth century (*Readers and Society in 19th century France*, 2001). This study focused on the fear of reading - how the expanding readership to include new social groups (workers, peasants, women) scared the elites and elicited strategies to control and direct popular reading to "secure" channels. More recently, I wondered: why do we, as historians, separate the twin stories from reading and writing? There have been some good reasons for this in the past, but now I'm interested in putting the two together again, and I turned to the history of writing practices. I noticed, as I said earlier, that ordinary peasants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wrote. When they were separated from their families due to war, emigration, arrest and so on, this became expressive. At the end of the 19th century there was a great explosion of popular writing, which gives us insight into the experiences of peasant soldiers in World War I and emigrants during the era of mass migration from Europe to the Americas. This approach privileges the subjectivity of the writer, in memoirs of war, letters of emigrants and other genres of popular writing. I think of this kind of story as a way to build a "New Story from Below," which inspired my book on *The Culture of Writing Common People in Europe* (2013). This has been my trajectory - first the story of the publication, then the story of the readers, then the story of the writers. This personal journey is also a reflection of where the discipline of the book's history has traveled in the last two or three decades. In addition to working in Great Britain and Australia, I spent brief periods as a visiting professor in France, Sweden, Spain and Brazil (at UFF in Niterói). But I visited Brazil for the first time in 1999 when I attended a conference at the Reading Congress (COLE), at the State University of Campinas, in São Paulo, after which Cyana Leahy invited me to give a small series of seminars for students postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Education of UFF. This experience taught me that in Brazil, unlike in Europe, the history of reading and writing depends on a strong encouragement from educators. In Brazil, I realized that the study of reading and writing was an urgent matter of immediate importance that was part of a current and widespread struggle against illiteracy, in which Paulo Freire's teachings were extremely influential. I enjoyed the seminars and I loved the Rio bay view of Niterói! Cyana Leahy organized and translated the book *The Printed Word: 19th Century Reading Stories* by the Casa da Palavra, co-authored to coincide with my visit - if it were not for her efforts, this would never have happened. We launched in a bookstore in Gávea, I remember that the public was quite demanding and kept me very focused! It was at this time that I became acquainted with the work of book historians such as Nelson Schapocknik and renewed contacts with Brazilian book' historians in 2013, when I gave a keynote speech at a conference sponsored by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publication (SHARP) in Rio. In 2013 I also gave a lecture in Belo Horizonte. Eliana Dutra, from UFMG, invited me to give some lectures in Belo Horizonte. She also introduced me to the art of Candido Portinari - there was an exhibition of his work in Belo Horizonte at the time. Of course I knew the wonderful city of Ouro Preto. This trip to Belo Horizonte ended up being very important because I met my colleague Mariana Silveira, who has now become a great collaborator in the history of the SHARP book, *Lingua Franca*.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** We found several of your books translated into Spanish, but a few into Portuguese...

**Martyn Lyons:** If I appeared in Spanish, it's mainly because of my friends and colleagues from the University of Alcalá and the publisher Ampersand in Buenos Aires. Their series "Scripta Manent"

includes several titles translated from the leading French, English, Italian and American historians of the book. My most recent book, *A World of Writing*, is the result of a collaboration with my colleague from Lisbon, Rita Marquilhas, who is a sociolinguistic historian, representing an angle of vision that we also need in the study of the culture of the scribes - the world of the Portuguese language has not been forgotten! There has been much research in recent years about transnational connections and exchanges in the book's history. There was a phase, in the 1980's, when we wanted to produce national book histories (and several national stories appeared in France, USA, Britain, Canada, Australia, and so on). But then we went further to examine exchanges that transcend national boundaries. The reception of nineteenth-century French fiction by the Brazilian press, for example, is an interesting example. Márcia Abreu was a scholar who developed this transnational angle from the Brazilian point of view. There has always been a problem with this approach - the historiographical "transnational turn" had ambitions that far exceeded the linguistic abilities of historians to satisfy them. Historians didn't know enough languages, and neither, enough of them to write detailed histories of several countries at the same time. I think that, as a result of these problems, more attention has now been paid to the translation and the translators. That is why SHARP decided to produce an electronic magazine, *Lingua Franca*, which publishes articles on the history of the book from around the world in English translation. There are many good works in various languages that English-speaking historians do not know and vice versa. SHARP, by the way, is the leading international scientific society on the history of books and reading and you should all be members of it.

**Nathanael Araújo and Ana Paula da Costa:** And in the early twenty-first century, do you believe that our area is growing in the early twenty-first century, or hasn't attracted the attention of historians, sociologists, and anthropologist yet?

**Martyn Lyons:** The history of books is booming. I think the contribution of an approach to book history, particularly to literary studies, is now well established. Probably the prophecies of the impending death of the book, or at least of the traditional codex, have aroused a great deal of interest in the history of the book. These prophecies have been exaggerated, and the traditional book is holding a substantial share of the market. (See the impressive number of bookstores in Buenos Aires!). But the changes in nature and the material support for reading certainly alerted us to the realities of the long evolution of textual communication. SHARP, which I mentioned earlier, has more than 1,000 members, which is a large number for this academic society. I am currently involved in judging the The Long Book Prize for Books in Book History published in 2018 - there are about 90 participants, and this covers only books in English! There is no doubt that the history of the book and reading practices is now part of the historical scene, and is certainly recognized by sociologists, intellectual historians, and literature scholars in particular. We have a number of periodicals of book history, which is another indicator of the strength of the field - the *History of the Book*, *Quaerendo*, but unfortunately the Spanish magazine *Cultura Escrita y Sociedad* went bankrupt a few years ago. I think we probably have enough research going on internationally to support one more academic journal.

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