Lecture 18: the industrialization of book production

Reminder: no section this week, Friday April 21.
Readings for section on April 28 (modified from the syllabus):
  Gissing, *New Grub Street*, vol. 1=chs. 1-12; *History of Reading* ch. 12
  William St Clair, "The Political Economy of Reading" John Coffin Memorial Lecture (2005) (on-line from the course website)
Major benchmarks: new sources of power: steam (1804); gas (1870s); electricity (1890s). Railways start in 1825. 1760-1830 Britain dominates mechanization of book production; 1830-60 Germany and US take the lead

I. Paper production:
  • Made in rolls rather than sheets (Didot working in Britain, 1799, 1816 models still in use now)
  • chlorine dev’d 1774: cheap way of bleaching
  • search for alternatives to rags: chemically treated wood as of 1860
  • by 1900 paper represents only 12% of the costs (65% in 17th)

II. Mechanization of printing
  • Iron press more precise and durable 1799
  • Cylinder press: starting in 1814 (Friedrich Koenig working in Britain); cylinder + flatbed, then double cylinders. Perfecting machine: printing on both sides
  • Stereotypy: good for curved printing surface. Excellent for large output.

III. Other parts of the process
  • Mechanized keyboard composing; linotype machines to add justification (1886 New York Tribune)
  • Binding: prefabrication of cases; first sewn; later glued; cloth for covers
  • Gathering machines 1900 =fully mechanized process of book prod’n
  • Illustrations: steel engraving for banknotes; lithography; photographical methods: Daguerre 1839; lithography; halftone photoengraving for newspapers; offset discovered by accident 1904

V. Labor
  • Printing labor is skilled—not the worst off; unions; some machine-breaking. But bad conditions.
  • Publisher increasingly distinct from bookseller: specialized in Europe, not in US