Credible Texts: Legitimacy and Reputation of E-books and E-novels

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Declaration

I, Laura Catharine Dietz, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:
Abstract

This thesis examines e-book cultural value in terms of legitimacy, particularly as framed by readers in terms of ‘realness’ and ‘bookness’. Legitimacy is only one aspect of cultural value, but for e-books it is a fundamental aspect, crystallising the central question of whether e-books can be classed with books and partake of the book’s cultural status and privileged cultural position, or belong in a separate, almost inevitably lesser, category. The research gathers data relevant to many types of digital texts but focusses on e-novels. The thesis uses a mixed methods study design to gather data from surveys, focus groups, interviews and three pilot experiments conducted with readers. The discussion investigates how e-book legitimacy is constituted by readers, and how these qualities relate to and interact with other e-book attributes (e.g. instant access, materiality, etc.). The dissertation concludes with discussion of the implications of these findings for readers, authors, and publishers.

Findings indicate that legitimacy in the form of realness or bookness remains highly relevant for readers, but conceptions of realness and bookness are flexible and context-specific. These data confirm that while realness and bookness are widely recognised as desirable qualities, many e-novels function as useful fakes, where realness is unnecessary or actually undesirable. Further, the moiety of unrealness is as important as the unrealness itself, with three main categories of unrealness emerging as most prominent: e-novel as ersatz book, as digital proxy, and as incomplete book. Individual readers move between conceptions, demonstrating willingness to adopt different ideas of realness (and by extension different stances regarding the nature, legitimacy and
cultural value of e-novels) depending on their needs in the moment, and what they require from a given e-novel at a particular time.
Impact Statement

The dawn of the mass e-reading era has made previously esoteric questions on the cultural value of e-books urgent and concrete. Authors, publishers, educators, librarians, archivists, and other participants in the communication circuit face immediate decisions regarding investment in digital formats, but to date have had access to very limited data on how e-book legitimacy is constituted for readers. Legitimacy is only one aspect of cultural value, but for e-books it is a fundamental aspect, crystallizing the central question of whether e-books can be classed with books and partake of the book’s cultural status and privileged cultural position. Legitimacy is consequently fiercely contested, with issues surrounding qualification as a ‘real book’ raised before the earliest reading device prototypes were built, and vied for since the launch of the earliest commercial e-book products (though the earliest hyperbolic promises of e-books as super-books superior to print have largely given way to more modest claims.) By providing empirical data on the legitimacy of e-books and e-novels as experienced by readers, this thesis creates new knowledge and offers insight that can inform decisions that shape the future of UK cultural institutions, as well as one of the UK’s largest cultural industries. Cultural, commercial, and scholarly applications of this knowledge all contribute to benefit to the public, but there is further benefit in offering ourselves as readers insight into how e-books and digital reading can be integrated into our reading lives and reading identities. As findings demonstrate, at this time e-reading and print reading are far from equivalent, but agency and meaning can be actively reclaimed even where consumer choice is limited.
Findings demonstrate that readers play an increasing role in the constitution of legitimacy. E-novels are indeed a distinctive category within e-books where legitimacy is concerned, and e-novel legitimacy is complex and unstable. Bookness is a form of legitimacy that matters to at least some readers at least some of the time, but neither bookness nor realness is essential in every circumstance. Moreover, readers move between ideas of what an e-book is, typically conceptualising their e-novels and e-books as real when realness is an asset, and unreal (ersatz books, digital proxies, or incomplete books) when any particular form of unrealness best suits their needs. The resulting shift in power from authors and publishers to readers and (to a degree) retailers suggests that presenting e-novels as items with cultural and/or monetary value requires ongoing negotiation with readers and constant consideration of context and usage, not just format.

To reach and benefit e-novel creators, distributors, scholars and readers, results of this research will be made public in various ways. In addition to publication in this thesis, findings have been and will continue to be presented at invited talks, seminars, and festival presentations open to the public as well as at scholarly conferences and academic showcases. Results will also be published in monograph and peer-reviewed paper form.
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**Introduction**

The cultural value of books is a central area of inquiry for Publishing Studies. Over the past decade, as e-books have expanded from niche products to fixtures of daily life, debate on the cultural value of e-books has emerged as one of the most dynamic territories within that area of inquiry. The potential of digital publishing to transform the processes by which such value is constituted and communicated is long recognized. Even the earliest, pre-digital proposals for specific mechanised reading technologies, such as Bob Brown’s 1930 Readies (Brown, R., 1930) and Vannevar Bush’s 1945 Memex (Bush, 1945) confronted the issue of value, and speculated as to how new reading functionalities would change readers’ relationship to texts, including how they evaluate and esteem texts (and in Brown’s case, argue that mechanized reading represented an existential threat to print). Before the earliest device prototypes were built, researchers acknowledged the capacity for disruption and proposed ways in which any future move to mass e-reading could transform the status of books and reading. The new ubiquity of e-books makes it possible, and essential, to empirically study the phenomenon of mass e-reading in new ways, and continue to bring these long-standing explorations of e-book cultural value from the hypothetical to the concrete.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine e-book value in terms of legitimacy, particularly as framed by readers in terms of reputation and ‘bookness’. Legitimacy is only one aspect of cultural value, but for e-books it is a fundamental aspect, crystallizing the central question of whether e-books can be classed with books and partake of the book’s cultural status and privileged cultural position. This dissertation will gather data relevant to many types of digital texts, but will focus on e-novels.
Using a mixed methods study design and gathering data from surveys, focus groups, interviews and three pilot experiments, the dissertation will investigate how e-book legitimacy and reputation are constituted by readers, how these qualities relate to other e-book attributes, and what role these qualities play in the larger formulation of value. Results have immediate implications for the publishing industry, but also for librarians and archivists, device designers, readers, and all other participants in the digital communications circuit (Squires and Ray Murray, 2013). Findings also help to illuminate questions about how perception of and relationship to novels changes when this type of literature is read on screen, and how these perceptions and relationships may shift the nature and the cultural role of the novel, the ‘world’s bestselling literary category’ (Fischer, 2004, p.302).

**Statement of the problem**

Research to date has demonstrated that e-book legitimacy is both complex and contested: only partially understood, but still recognized as relevant and important. Debates on legitimacy pervade discussion of e-books, scholarly and public, with competing conceptions of what legitimacy, bookness and even realness can mean for a digital cultural object. Examinations of e-book materiality (Gitelman, 2006; Kirschenbaum, 2012; Hayles, 2012; Galey, 2012; Drucker, 2013) intersect with debates on the realness of digital artifacts (Baudrillard, 1994; Bolter and Grusin, 1996), and activate longstanding controversies surrounding the evolving metaphor of the book (Drucker 2007; Striphas 2011; Siemens et al., 2011; Squires et al., 2012; Weedon 2012; Westin 2013; Gooding, Terras and Warwick 2013; Weedon et al., 2014; Uglow 2014; Rowberry, 2017). But it is not established that readers have been persuaded, or share...
any assumption that bookness or any other form of legitimacy is consistently an important factor in e-book desirability, utility, market value or cultural value. It is not known whether the readers who invest their money and their time in e-books do so because they believe that e-books are legitimate, or because they believe that legitimacy doesn’t matter (or at least does not matter all of the time). However fervent bookness messages from retailers might be (or however fervent the resistance from anti-e-book voices [Gooding, Terras and Warwick, 2013]), readers remain ‘active agents’ who can ‘resist the codes implicit in the text’ (Towheed, Crone, and Halsey, 2011, p.3).

Extensive work has been done to examine the changing metaphor of the book, primarily from a theoretical perspective. International teams such as those assembled by the INKE Project and UNESCO Crossing Media Boundaries: Adaptations and New Media Forms of the Book Project have been instrumental in gathering and synthesising research from different fields. In the UK, the AHRC-funded The Book Unbound project, based at the Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication at Stirling University, has provided some of the most targeted research into the changing status of the book as a cultural object, in the context of broader changes to publishing in the face of digital transformations. Legitimacy, as I will discuss later in this chapter, has been an aspect of many studies but the focus of few. I wish to progress this line of inquiry by producing a study where legitimacy is central: investigating how individual readers experience e-book bookness, and how conceptions of the e-book as legitimate or illegitimate influence and interact with their perceptions of novels read in digital form. I want to better understand how e-novels do and do not take part in ‘the book’s social function as the high-status vehicle for communicating new ideas and cultural expressions’ (Weedon et al., 2014, p.109) and how inclusion or exclusion may affect the
'intensity and depth of the relationship between reader and book’ (Weedon et al., 2014, p.109). As the novel straddles print and digital, a ‘format deemed lacking in cultural value’ (Westin, 2013, p.131) it is a matter of tremendous urgency for novelists, publishers, and novel readers to understand these interactions.

I further these enquiries via empirical methods by generating data on how readers experience bookness and how conceptions of legitimacy figure into their reading practices, reading identities, and reading lives. As Mangen points out, questions regarding differences (if any) between paper and screen reading experiences are ‘properly empirical questions’, yet there is a shortage of both empirical studies and of contact between disciplines on such studies (2016, p.244). I agree with Rose’s concerns about the risks involved in studying reading in the absence of data, though his admonitions against scholars who ‘dogmatise enormously about the sociology of reading without bothering to study actual readers’ (1992, p.425) are strongly worded.

Timing is also key: 2013-2018 has been a time of enormous change in the e-book environment, with developments such as the U.S. Justice Department ruling that Apple conspired with Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin and Simon and Schuster to fix e-book prices, the drastic rise in average price for mainstream-published e-books (Nielsen, 2016), the explosion in the availability of low-priced or free-to-reader fiction in the form of self-published novels (often via Amazon) and pirated copies, the launch of Kindle Unlimited, and the shift from Kindle reading to tablet and smartphone reading; all of these developments contributed to the most significant change, the plateau of e-reading and shift of e-book sales from mainstream commercial publishers to Amazon and self-publishing (Beldham, 2018). Gathering longitudinal survey data in
these years offered the potential for identifying change, or lack of change, coinciding with key events.

**Scope**

While the data collected will in many cases refer to participants’ perceptions of e-books as a whole, the focus of my analysis will be on e-novels.

**Focus on e-novels**

An extraordinary range of artefacts and humanistic knowledge objects have been placed at some point, by their creators or by commentators and scholars, in the category of ‘e-book’ (Siemens et al., 2011, p.49). But in terms of trade publishing, novels are the largest single subcategory, making up such a large proportion of commercial e-book sales that changes to sales practices of adult trade fiction books shift the entire e-book market. In 2015 two-thirds of e-books sold in the U.S. with ISBN were adult fiction, a category that claimed only a quarter of print book sales (and only a third of print sales before the start of the e-book revolution) (Tappuni, 2015). Nearly half (48%) of adult fiction titles with ISBN, and what was suspected to be an even larger proportion of non-ISBN titles, were e-books (Nielsen, 2016). Since 2015, the size of the e-novel market has become more difficult to quantify as an increasing share has been taken by Amazon, which does not share detailed sales figures (Duffer, 2018), and self-publishing, for which there are no detailed sales figures centrally compiled, but the predominance of adult fiction for these publishers (Beldham, 2018) suggests that the dominance of the novel has only increased.
Focus on readers

For this dissertation, I have focussed on a single point of the digital communications circuit rather than all points, pursuing depth over breadth (though follow-up studies on other participants such as agents or editors would be extremely valuable). I have chosen readers as circuit participants in a unique position regarding legitimacy. Readers are no longer routinely imagined as dead ends, as they were in some 20\textsuperscript{th} and pre-20\textsuperscript{th} century models depicting readers as the last link in a linear chain, passive repositories of material conceived and shaped by authors, editors, booksellers and other actors ‘above’ the reader in every sense (Darnton, 1982). But their onward contribution (captured in contemporary models such as Darnton’s and Squires and Ray Murray’s by dotted lines) is more flexible and optional than that of other participants: they do not have to take any further action, and the circuit will not come to a halt if they do not. They are the only participants who do not have as a central concern how the work will be passed on to the next participant, and how the next participant will be convinced that the work is a book, and a book of quality. Their requirements (or lack of requirements) shape the efforts of those ‘upstream’ to seek to please them, yet their definitions of legitimacy can be more personal and individual, even idiosyncratic. This makes readers’ understanding of legitimacy fascinating but elusive, both potentially complex and particularly in need of close examination.

Objectives

My aim in this research has been to investigate e-novel legitimacy, and how this legitimacy is conceptualised, constituted and experienced by contemporary readers. I
gathered and analysed data on readers’ choices, priorities, requirements, beliefs and values relating to e-novel bookness and cultural value, not as abstract questions but as they interrelate in the contexts of actual reading lives. As Galey demonstrates, ‘the book is never just an ideal object in isolation, but always contextualised by the systems that surround it, whether those systems are social or mechanical’ (2011, p.205). I wish to examine the e-book within these systems, in all their contradiction and complexity.

My objectives for this investigation are to:

1. Gather original empirical data on reader conceptions of e-novel bookness over a period of years, identifying potential trends as well as areas of stability.
2. Pilot different types of reading experiments to evaluate their viability for data gathering on these aspects of e-book legitimacy.
3. Critically examine the roles of e-novel bookness in context, considering them not separately from but in conversation with e-book affordances known or suspected to be important to a significant proportion of the e-novel reading audience (such as price, portability, and instant access), particularly pursuing trade-offs and opportunity costs.
4. Discuss the implications of these findings for the publishing industry, but also for all participants in the digital communications circuit. I am particularly interested in a) how authors might respond to perceived illegitimacy and b) how readers integrate e-novels and e-reading into their reading identities, and how conceptions of e-novel bookness and realness could affect their relationships to print novel reading.
Research questions

My primary research question is:

- How is an e-novel’s legitimacy constituted by readers?

My secondary questions, arising from the first, are:

- Is bookness a form of legitimacy that matters to e-novel readers?
- Are e-book bookness and e-book realness stable concepts, or different for different readers and/or in different contexts?
- Do readers have different standards of bookness for novels compared with other categories of e-book?

Overview of prior research

While I have taken the approach of an integrated literature review (Bryman, 2016, p.115) as appropriate to thematic chapters and mixed methods research design, it is essential that I begin with an overview of existing research relating to e-book legitimacy, and qualities of bookness and book realness. Key strands include the metaphor of the book, bookness, the realness of digital objects, e-book paratext, and e-book status.

General research on e-books

As noted earlier in the Introduction, e-novel reading has, in a generation, grown from a niche activity to a fixture of cultural and intellectual life, and a commonplace means (and for e-only novels, the only means) of accessing works of long-form fiction.
Though they are now the most popular category of e-books, e-novels were comparatively slow to emerge in a digital reading environment initially dominated by educational, reference and technical titles (Lebert, 2008; Strphas, 2011; Kirschenbaum, 2016), and were enmeshed from the beginning with gaming. As Kirschenbaum and Werner note, Pinsky, Hales and Mataga’s *Mindwheel*, the first identifiable work marketed as an ‘electronic novel’ (from publishers optimistic enough to trademark the term) was a ‘hybrid book/digital artefact’ that told its story across an adventure game on disk and prose in a clothbound volume, and was only subtly differentiated from disk/book packages sold under the label of computer games (2014, pp.441-2). *Mindwheel* was accessible only to those who could afford a then-costly home computer. Other early digital fiction projects had audiences limited by access to computers but also by access to membership networks or academic and artistic communities. Pre-Web, early hypertext fictions of the 1980s were often accessed via dial-up bulletin board systems (as with *Uncle Roger* [Malloy, 1986], released via The WELL), or read as well as created on proprietary software such as Intermedia, HyperCard and Storyspace (such as Joyce’s 1987 *Afternoon, a story*) (Coover, 1992). *Afternoon, a story* was not available for purchase by the public on CD ROM until 1990 (Kirschenbaum, 2012, p.180) and Project Gutenberg did not publish its first free e-novels until the 1990s (Lebert, 2008). Though some early commercial e-novel experiments, such as Penguin’s 1993 release of Peter James’s *The Host* on floppy disk as well as in print (Shaffi, 2014) were capable of achieving significant sales (12,000, according to James [Flood, 2014]), only a tiny fraction of new novels were available in electronic format. Users of early 1990s e-reading devices such as the RocketBook could choose from a minute selection that relied heavily on Project Gutenberg’s embryonic stock of out-of-print classics. Readership of electronic novels expanded
considerably in 2007 with the launch of both Amazon’s Kindle e-reader and Amazon’s aggressively marketed catalogue of low-priced recent-release titles, and again in 2010 with Apple’s April launch of the iPad, pre-loaded with the iBooks app, and June launch of iBooks for iPhone and iPod Touch. But it is only since late 2010 that e-books, e-novel and otherwise, expanded beyond 1-4% of the commercial book business, and then only in certain Anglophone markets. As a small segment, e-novels garnered only moderate levels of academic interest, and scepticism regarding the future of e-novels was justified. Technodeterminist predictions held that once the technology existed, audiences would simply materialise: Coover’s much-discussed 1992 New York Times Book Review essay ‘The End of Books’ posited a future where print would lose readership, and therefore relevance, because of its own limitations in presenting the new hypertext fiction. Successive waves, including hypertext experiments of the 1980s, commercially available handheld e-readers in the 1990s, and early e-ink reading devices of the early 2000s, were in their time heralded as harbingers of a new era where digital reading would become the norm and print reading rare or extinct (Striphas, 2011, p.xvi; Squires, 2007, p.32; Thompson, 2012, pp.314-5). Similarly, high-profile experiments in fiction for a mass audience distributed through the internet, such as Stephen King’s digital novella Riding the Bullet and serial novel The Plant, both released in 2000, failed to prove either profitable or influential (Striphas, 2011, p.19-20). After so many disappointments, it was not unreasonable to adopt a wait-and-see approach, or simply to predict that the Kindle, the Sony Reader and the Nook would go the way of the RocketBook and the Data Discman. Since 2011, scholarship has responded to give commercial e-books and e-reading the attention they merit, but there were and are shortages in terms of longitudinal studies and data gathering on key topics in times of rapid change.
The legitimacy of e-books is the central focus of only a few studies, but is a component (even if a small or subtle one) of nearly all discussions of the nature, function, and role of e-books. The question what makes an e-book an e-book, rather than some other sort of object or text, lives in some way inside every study of the e-book yet conducted as a necessary step in defining the corpus to be considered. It draws particularly on rich existing scholarship on the evolving metaphor of the book.

**The metaphor of the book**

The question of ‘what is a book’ may be an old one, but it can be asked not as ‘a tiresome postmodern game with words’ but rather as ‘an inquiry that is highly relevant to many facets of how a phenomenon acquires “cultural value”’ (Westin, 2013, p.130). Inquiries that approached books as concepts (Carriere and Eco, 2011), containers (Bhaskar, 2013), cultural transactions (Howsam, 2006), information architectures (Fitzpatrick, 2011), and other forms were in simultaneous use, and fruitful advances in the discussion often emerged from contrast. Weedon considered the value systems underpinning such metaphors (for example, of the book as a hinge, a crystal goblet, or a rose) (Weedon et al., 2014, p.109) as she explored the book as ‘a dynamic system to commodify ideas and cultural expressions’ (Weedon 2012; Weedon et al., 2014 p.120).

As ‘the word “book” refers to two distinct concepts…an empirically measurable object [and] a powerful and comprehensive type of metaphor’ (Siemens et al., 2011, p.49) scholars have immense discretion over whether to include e-books in discussion of books and bookness, and to frame bookness as something e-books can or cannot ever have. Even if they do choose to work with the book as a metaphor rather than an object,
they can place emphasis on ‘common features’ (Siemens et al., 2011, p.49) that e-books share with print books or instead direct focus towards features that e-books lack.

Emphasis on aspects such as fixedness (Striphas, 2011; Galey, 2012; McCracken, 2013), embodiedness (Mangen, 2016; Mangen et al., 2018; Wolf, 2018), or romance (Birkerts, 2006) foregrounds viewpoints from which e-books cannot easily be included in the category of book, while focus on aspects such as information seeking (Makri et al., 2007; Buchanan, McKay and Levitt, 2015) and reader communities (Weber, 2015; Murray, 2016; 2018) foregrounds uses of books where digital can genuinely participate, if differently from print. Historical approaches (including platform studies and some types of English Literature criticism) have frequently contrasted the era of digital book adoption with previous format shifts (e.g. scroll to codex [Kalay, 2008], manuscript to print [De Hamel, quoted by Preston, 2017], artisan production to industrial production [Raven, 2014], or hardcover to paperback) and signposted the ways in which the definition of book has in the past expanded to embrace new forms. This emphasis foregrounds how the definition of book could (even if they judge that it has not yet) embrace the e-book. In contrast, sociological and cultural studies approaches, in examining the roles books play in book cultures and reading lives (Striphas, 2011; Thompson, 2012), have tended to emphasise the ways in which e-books do not play the same roles or occupy the same position, hence foregrounding aspects of book status that currently, and may enduringly, exclude e-books. This is not to say that history and sociology or history and cultural studies are in any way in opposition: Westin’s 2013 ‘Loss of Culture: New media forms and the translation from analogue to digital books’ is the work of an archaeologist/historian approaching the question via critical heritage studies and Callon’s sociology of translation (2013, p.129). Westin used Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to approach the limitations of given book formats (for example,
the limitations of a .MOBI file as read on a Kindle) as non-human actants (Westin, 2013, p.131) that participate alongside human actors in the functions of society (Latour, 2005, p.5-10). He examined the ‘idea of a book’ as a ‘black box’ in the ANT sense of ‘grouping habits, motivational forces, thoughts and objects together [to] present them as something that no longer needs to be considered separately, but instead as a whole that fits together’ (Westin, 2013, p.134, citing Callon and Latour, 1981). In ‘Ebookness’ (2017), Rowberry argued that e-books are better understood as a service than a product, using a platform studies approach to investigate the porous borders of a form where ‘not all digital books are ebooks, but all ebooks are digital’ (2017, p.302). He identified three platform layers of e-books as technology, text and service infrastructure, and examined ways in which e-book conventions sacrifice functionality for the sake of bookish allusions and fidelity to print traditions: ebookness as tethered to bookness.

**Bookness**

Philip Smith claims to have ‘coined the term “bookness”’ (in quotation marks) in the 1970s; inspired, in appropriately literary fashion, by questions on the ‘horseness of horses’ in *Ulysses* (Smith, 1996). But in reality, the term has been originated many times over: remade in different settings and for different purposes, generally without reference to coinages that came before. Smith defined bookness against textness, describing a particular physical object (specifically a ‘hinged multi-planar vehicle or substrate on which texts…may be written, drawn, reproduced, printed or assembled’ [1996]) to exclude non-codex texts (such as Dickens projected on a wall or Austen painted on a fan [Dawson, 1997]) but include blank books, and hence demarcate the territory for book art as a sub-field of fine art. But at roughly the same time, Donald
Roy Howard was using the term in the context of literary studies, employing bookness in the 1976 *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* as an ‘opposing qualit[y]’ to ‘voiceness’ (1978, p.63). There, bookness encompassed aspects of status deriving from rarity, expense, and impressive materiality, the book as an ‘object of veneration...a thing with dignity, magic, and the power to inspire awe’ (1978, p.63). Later scholarly uses variously defined bookness against scrollness (in the sense of a physical scroll or a scrolling webpage), emphasising the manner of navigation through a text organised as a codex (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p.91), against audioness (Baron, 2015, p.38), or against other dimensions of print. Non-scholarly uses were and are even more various, deploying bookness as a vague synonym for bookishness, describing anything or anyone book-related (such as a personal blog by a person who likes reading or a Pinterest board of *Game of Thrones* memes) or simply as a play on words (as with the New York Public Library’s ‘Twelve Days of Bookness’ [Glazer, 2017] or a bookbinding workshop entitled ‘Mind Your Own Bookness!’ [Silva, 2014]). Whether it is called bookness or not, the concept of bookness is woven through debates on books in every era where books have existed: a concept left unnamed where it was deemed too basic and fundamental to require mention. It is ultimately a term without defined lineage and without fixed meaning: too scattered to serve as jargon, and perhaps too playful (or too often playfully used) to find a secure home in scholarly discourse. In each usage it is defined anew.

The two fields where it has something approaching a critical heritage are book arts and digital humanities, largely due to the enormous influence of Johanna Drucker’s work in both. In *The Century of Artists’ Books* (2004), first published in 1994, Drucker sought ways to examine a book’s book-ness (significantly, without quotation marks) as ‘its
identity as a set of aesthetic functions, cultural operations, formal conceptions, and metaphysical spaces’ (2004, p.7), a project she continues to pursue for e-books (Drucker, 2007; 2013; 2016) as well as print and artists’ books, a range captured by the 2015-16 Bookness: 14 Observations exhibitions linked to the Books & the Human: AHRC 10th Anniversary Debate for which she served as a featured speaker. Even in these fields, where bookness has a comparatively coherent suite of potential meanings, Drucker’s functions, operations, conceptions and spaces offer a broad canvas for scholars such as Hayles (2008; 2012), Kirschenbaum (2012; with Werner, 2014; 2016), and Galey (2012) to explore bookness from different angles.

Realness of electronic texts

Since the 1980s, when scholars were first grappling with hypertext fictions and other digital-first literary forms, the wider debate on the nature and realness of digital artefacts has moved substantially away from visions of the electronic as either super-real (what Baudrillard described as ‘hyperreal’ [1994, p.2]) or sub-real; Bolter and Grusin’s work on the nature of digital remediations was a key turning point in challenging conceptions of the digital as inherently less real (Bolter and Grusin, 1996, p.346). Input to the debate on digital realness has been forensic as well as theoretical: realness and materiality are in no way synonymous, but ‘tangible, fungible, visible existence’ (Shep, 2016, p. 323) of the kind observable in the physical world can serve as powerful evidence in an argument for real existence, and discussions of e-book realness are frequently developed with reference to digital materiality.
Technical advances in the understanding of materiality at the nanoscale level (Kirschenbaum, 2012, p.2) have made it increasingly difficult to intellectually defend a position of the digital as literally intangible (a position eloquently countered by theorists such as Paul [2007] and Blanchette [2011]). At the same time, the digital has remained to an extent ‘popularly construed as intangible, invisible, ephemeral, unstable, and virtual’ (Shep, 2016, p. 323) and ‘even the most astute and exacting critics of cyberculture tend[ed] to signal a certain ambivalence about the bodies that electronic texts have, judging at least from the frequency with which the word ‘material’ appears between scare quotes…logic is logic, but material is “material”’ (Gitelman, 2006, p.96). Shep observed that ‘the idea that digital objects should be reconceptualized as material, rather than virtual, has been the subject of considerable scholarly investigation in the humanities’ (2016, p.323), noting McGann (2001), Hayles (2002), and Drucker (2003) as key figures. Gitelman’s investigations dramatically advanced the debate, addressing the full range of digital texts (including problematic forms at the margin of working definitions of ‘text’) in works such as Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture (2006), but focusing more specifically on documents as understood in print contexts versus digital contexts in Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents (2014). For e-books, investigations of materiality have developed various systems for understanding materiality and identified various forms. These systems, however, are more often cooperative than mutually exclusive, and build and augment more often than they compete.

Kirschenbaum’s 2008 Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination was a milestone text, influential in fields including media theory, technology studies, and game studies as well book history and publishing studies. Kirschenbaum applied
archivist Kenneth Thibodeau’s ‘tripartite model of defining digital objects’ (2012, p.3) on physical, logical, and conceptual levels to differentiate between forensic and formal materiality. Forensic materiality ‘rests upon the potential for individualization inherent in matter’ (p.11) and recognizes the full range of physical traces, visible and invisible, of so-called ‘virtual’ artefacts such as files and software; with it, Kirschenbaum dismantled the myth of the identical copy as well as myth of intangibility. Formal materiality recognizes the ‘imposition of multiple relational computational states on a data set or digital object’ (p.12) and the way that the object becomes different when put to use by different actors at different stages, articulating a ‘relative or just-in-time dimension of materiality’ (p.13) for digital objects such as image files or, as Kirschenbaum specifically investigated later in the book, works of literature such as William Gibson’s Agrippa or Michael Joyce’s Afternoon: a story. Drucker built on Kirschenbaum’s forensic and formal categories, folding in Blanchette’s distributed materiality and its apparatus for examination of ‘co-dependent, layered contingencies’ of storage, software, hardware, networks and other components (Drucker, 2013) as she established her concept of the performative dimension in ‘Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface’ (2013). Performative materiality acknowledges that ‘the materiality of the system…bears only a probabilistic relation to the event of production, which always occurs only in real time and is distinct in each instance’ and that ‘what something is has to understood in terms of what it does, how it works within machinic, systemic, and cultural domains’ (Drucker, 2013). This ‘contingent’ (Drucker, 2013) materiality is wholly compatible with Kirschenbaum’s and Blanchette’s theories, but is antagonistic to ‘literal materiality’ that takes a mechanistic approach and ‘presumes objects of perception are self-identical and observer-independent’ (Drucker, 2013).
Explicit considerations of e-book realness are rare, but highly significant where they appear. ‘HCI-Book? Perspectives on E-Book Research, 2006-2008’ (Siemens et al., 2011) drew together key questions and areas of inquiry as identified by participants in the INKE project. Though it ranged far beyond e-books into the wider territory of electronic resources, such as scholarly databases and hypertext literature less governed by the metaphor of the book, it included in its capacious overview many of the most important debates and controversies surrounding ‘new forms of electronic-reader book-ishness’ (Siemens et al., 2011, p.35). It examined the book, as book-object and book-metaphor, in terms of features such as tangibility, browsability, searchability, referenceability, and hybridity (p.50-51), offering a model for less binary consideration of print and digital affordances. It also highlighted the critical role of magnitude, of a book being ‘more than can be consumed in a single visual event’ (p.57) in distinguishing an electronic book from other forms of electronic text. Galey’s essential paper on e-book materiality, ‘The Enkindling Reciter: E-Books in the Bibliographic Imagination’ (2012), explored the possibilities but also the limits of a forensic approach to e-book studies, noting that while study of the full suite of material inscriptions is necessary for understanding of any given e-book, it is not in itself sufficient. The ‘interplay of social and technical forces’ (2012, p.240) requires the reader never be excluded from analysis. Galey found that ‘e-books may have…no absolute Real that serves to anchor the evidence of our senses. The reason is simple: e-books, like all digital texts, require us to interpret phenomena not directly observable by the senses…digital objects never speak for themselves; someone always speaks for them’ (2012, p.240). Gooding, Terras and Warwick (the latter a participant in the INKE project as well) addressed realness in ‘The Myth of the New: Mass Digitization, Distant
Reading, and the Future of the Book’ (2013), pushing debates on the realness of an individual work of literature in digital form into deeper, more complex territory revealed by distant reading (Moretti, 2007; 2013; Jockers 2013; Archer and Jockers, 2016) and the realness of literary corpora ‘impossible for humans to engage with’ without automated tools or reconstitution into their original separate texts (Gooding, Terras and Warwick, 2013, p.17), and highlighting both the stridency and entrenchment of unexamined claims where little data exists (Gooding, Terras and Warwick, 2013, p.19).

**E-book paratext**

Digital presentation has been a factor for e-books since the first books were digitised, but the application of Genette’s paratextual theory (1997b) to mainstream e-books is in its early days. Paratextual theory is most often applied in literary studies, but since 2000 has been imported into fields from History and Philosophy to Film Studies and Information Studies, and applied to film, webpages, games and other digital or part-digital content (Åström, 2014, pp.8-9), extending its influence far beyond the books that were Genette’s deliberately exclusive original subject of study (Stanitzek, 2005, p.35). It is regularly applied in scholarship in and around the digital humanities, as with Cooper’s examination of how digital editions of medieval manuscripts can create new digital epitexts (2015) and to interactive electronic literature such as hypertext works (Desrochers and Tomaszek, 2014, p.163). Yet its application to mainstream commercial e-books, of the kind found on Amazon bestseller lists, lags behind: in early 2013, Birke and Christ found that there was no existing scholarly literature (2013, p.67). Since 2013 scholarship on the topic has gathered pace. That year saw Birke and
Christ’s cluster of articles on digital paratext in *Narrative*, 2014 one of the first edited collections specifically on paratext for digital texts, of which e-novels are one type, (Desrochers and Apollon, eds., 2014) and 2016 one of the first short-form monographs specifically on e-novel paratext, an extension of Ellen McCracken’s 2013 *Narrative* paper on ‘transitional’ electronic literature (fittingly, from the pioneering Palgrave Pivot, which is challenging the definition of what ‘counts’ as an academic book) (McCracken, 2016). Digital paratext has been represented in a number of important recent papers in book history and the book sector of platform studies (as a key thread, if not the stated subject of the paper) including Galey’s ‘The Ekindling Reciter’ (2012) and Rowberry’s ‘Ebookness’ (2017). New work on non-e-book forms of born-digital fiction, such as Leavenworth’s ‘The Paratext of Fan Fiction’ (2015) further informs e-book paratextual studies, and increasingly new works on literary paratext, such as Batchelor’s *Translation and Paratexts* (2018), incorporate analysis of e-book-specific aspects not as an afterthought but as a substantial component necessary to understand the reception of any new book released in both print and digital formats.

**Literary status**

Recent scholarship on status in the literary field acknowledges the impact of digital formats; many studies define their scope to exclude e-books, or e-only books, expressly because status is constituted and communicated differently away from print. However,  

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1 Had it not been published at virtually the same time (late 2012 vs early 2013) Galey’s paper would surely have challenged Birke and Christ’s assertion that there was effectively no literature to review.  
2 In May 2015, a Google search on “digital epitext” in quotes yielded exactly five results, one of which was my own conference abstract for SHARP 2015. In May 2016, the figure was seven results, and in May 2018, a superficially promising expansion to 46 results, though the great majority of these relate to a single student essay about Neil Gaiman for sale from an online essay mill. But simply the existence of such an essay, suggesting that someone at some point commissioned or tried to sell work for an assignment on digital epitext, is a sign that academic activity on the topic is growing (for there to be academic misconduct, there presumably must first be academic activity.)
other studies embrace the complexity and include e-books, including e-only, as central and essential. Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996) continues to serve as a foundational text for examination of literary cultural capital in the digital era, supplying a sociologist’s vocabulary for analysis of the sociology of books (D.F. McKenzie, 1999) and the socialization of texts (McGann, 1991). Thompson, writing in 2012, noted the influence of Amazon in the beginning of the disintermediation of sales reps and chain bookshop buyers, one example of the sidelining of some traditional gatekeepers and tastemakers (2012, p.332-3). Early 21st century examination of novels’ literary status and reputation by scholars including English (2005) and Squires (2007) often excluded digital, for, as Squires wrote in 2007, ‘electronic literature [had] yet to make any major impact on the market’ (2007, p.32). But their work is directly applied to born-digital literary work and online literary networks by scholars such as Hungerford. In *Making Literature Now* (2016) Hungerford used case studies of digital projects such as *McSweeney’s Internet Tendency* and the game/novel *The Silent History* to investigate the roles of “‘neglected agents” of cultural formation’ (2016, p.38, quoting English, 2005, p.14) in online settings. The most recent studies of how literary status is negotiated in what Murray calls the digital literary sphere (Murray, 2018), such as in online components of literary and writers’ festivals (Driscoll, 2014; Weber, 2015, 2018), on Wattpad (Ramdarshan Bold, 2016), in Goodreads ratings (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo, 2019), and celebrity book clubs (Marsden, 2018), continue to generate data on and deepen understanding of how legitimacy is constituted for both print-first and e-only e-novels.
**Addressing gaps in knowledge**

In pursuing these research questions the thesis will address clear gaps in knowledge. By focusing on e-novels, an understudied subcategory of e-books, and by placing legitimacy at the centre of the inquiry, not the periphery, this study will help to remedy conspicuous lacunae in current scholarship. Gathering empirical data on e-novel legitimacy and analyzing these data to generate new theories will represent original contributions to knowledge, as will evaluating the viability of selected experiment designs. Together, these actions will further understanding of the role, status, and nature of the e-novels that form such a large proportion of contemporary reading material, yet currently account for only a small proportion of empirical research in Publishing Studies.

**Definitions**

As commonplace words used differently in different contexts, several key terms require definition to clarify how they will be used in this thesis. These include terms from the thesis title – *legitimacy, reputation, credible, e-book* and *e-novel* – but also *reader*.

The complexities of the term *legitimacy* are evident from the first elements of its Oxford English Dictionary definition.

1. a. Conformity to the law, to rules, or to some recognized principle; lawfulness. Also: conformity to sound reasoning; logicality; justifiability.
   b. Normal, regular; conformable to a recognized standard type (OED, 2018)
The ‘also’ draws attention to the fact that there is more than one road to legitimacy. One route is that of conformity to laws or rules (as with a ‘legitimate government’), but another is conformity to norms, customs or a ‘recognised standard type’, while a third is in conformity to logic, in the sense of a position that can be soundly argued from first principles (as with a ‘legitimate viewpoint’). The definition embraces respect for convention, yet also respect for the kind of critical reasoning that makes it possible to innovate, and in turn inaugurate new conventions. In this thesis, I will use this conception of legitimacy as a destination that can be reached by more than one path, and acknowledge the role of communities as well as individuals in judging whether the destination has been reached or not. Explorations of legitimacy in social science frequently draw on Max Weber’s 1924 argument that the legitimacy of a social order depends on whether ‘action is approximately or on the average oriented to certain determinate “maxims” or rules’ (1978, p.31). Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, examining definitions of legitimacy from across social psychological and organisational literature, find differences in emphasis of various aspects, but identify some ‘fundamental similarities’, among them that ‘(b) Although legitimacy is mediated by the perceptions and behaviours of individuals, it is fundamentally a collective process. It comes about through and depends upon the implied presence of a social audience, those assumed to accept the encompassing framework of beliefs, norms, and values, and, therefore, the construal of the object as legitimate’ (2006, p.57). In this thesis, I will use legitimacy to describe such collective processes mediated by individuals, ones in which readers are neither all-powerful, passing judgement in a vacuum and unaffected by any implied social audience, nor powerless, passive observers of a process that does not involve them. (This differs from Bourdieu’s use of the term in distinctions between
‘legitimate’, ‘middle-brow’ and ‘popular’ taste [1986, p.8], where ‘legitimate’ still very much describes orientation towards rules and maxims, but specifically refers to categories more and less associated with elite audiences.)

*Reputation*, in contrast, is frequently defined as a phenomenon is which the individual is less directly involved. Reputation is generally understood to be a meta-belief, a ‘belief about beliefs’ (Trajkovski and Collins, 2009, p.246). An individual may decide that a reputation is undeserved and choose to defy it (as with a customer buying a novel on Amazon despite one-star reviews), or attempt to ignore it, but that is not the same thing as denying that the reputation exists and matters. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of reputation further foregrounds the relative aspect of reputation – that it encompasses not merely esteem, but whether it is more or less esteem than enjoyed by others – and ‘good name’, or the role reputation plays in marking out an individual or organisation as suitable for future relations.

1. a. *The condition, quality, or fact of being highly regarded or esteemed; credit, fame, distinction; respectability, good report.*
2. *The general opinion or estimate of a person's character or other qualities; the relative esteem in which a person or thing is held.* (OED, 2018)

This also emphasises that reputation is a ‘general opinion or estimate’: it need not be a consensus view to have a meaningful effect. This conception of reputation is particularly visible in Publishing Studies, where one instance of suspected client-poaching can cost a young agent her ‘good name’ (Thompson, p.81-2) or where Picador’s ‘reputation as a publisher of upmarket literary writing’ (Squires, p.150) does not mean that every novel on its list will automatically be seen as upmarket.
Management research, a field in which the study of reputation has increasing prominence (Veh, Göbel and Vogel, 2018, p.1), identifies a ‘triad of identity, image and reputation’ where ‘these concepts are related to but still different from each other’ (Veh, Göbel and Vogel, 2018, p.13). In my usage of the term in this thesis, I will similarly draw a distinction between identity, which implies authenticity and truth, and reputation, which only implies reasonably wide recognition. I will also draw a distinction between image, which even when shared by many individuals, or actively communicated by an organisation, is construed directly (Brown et al., 2006), and reputation, a meta-belief.

Credibility also involves belief, but in a much more direct way. *Credible* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘able to be believed in’ or ‘able to be believed’.

1. *Able to be believed in, justifying confidence; convincingly honest, principled, or authentic and often, as a corollary, accurate (passing into sense A.1b); trustworthy, reliable.*
   (a) Of information, evidence, etc.
   (b) Of a person, source of information, etc.

b. *Able to be believed; convincingly true or accurate.*
   (a) Of an assertion, account, etc.
   (b) Of a matter of fact: with anticipatory it.

c. *Able to be believed in as effective or operational. Originally of a nuclear weapon: considered likely to be used (cf. credibility n. 1b).* (OED, 2018)

As Rieh and Danielson point out in their examination of credibility in a multidimensional framework, researchers in different fields use diverse methodologies to study characteristics of source, comparisons between media, and evaluation of information (the latter typical of their own fields of Information Studies and Human-
Computer Interaction) but ultimately there is an individual at the end of the process: a person who is or is not convinced (2007). While credibility can be a component of reputation (Veh, Göbel and Vogel, 2018, p.16), and the judgement of the many is inarguably a factor in one person’s ability to trust, the individual is directly involved. In this thesis, I will use ‘credible’ and ‘credibility’ to indicate actors and objects that have convinced individuals or endeavour to convince individuals, whether as ‘honest, principled or authentic’ (as an author may be) or ‘effective or operational’ (as an app or device may be).

_E-novel and e-book_ are, as discussed in the overview of prior research, contentious terms that have been applied at different times to many varieties of artefacts and humanistic knowledge objects (Siemens et al., 2011, p.49; Rowberry, 2017). In this thesis I use the terms broadly and inclusively. Rather than attempt to police usage or to exclude any given artefact from the definition (for example, if it were conspicuously short, or comprised of video as well as text, or presented as a Microsoft Word file rather than PDF or .EPUB), if a survey, focus group, or interview participant chose to describe an artefact as an e-book, I have classed it as an e-book and included it in the analysis. Similarly, if a participant described an artefact as an e-novel, I have classed it as such, rather than vetting it for length, medium, etc. (or indeed, applying an attempt at criteria regarding fiction versus non-fiction). This has obvious effects on the results, making them more authentic to respondents’ experience, but not automatically generalisable to e-books or e-novels when defined more narrowly in other studies.

Finally, in this thesis I have defined _reader_ broadly and inclusively. Rather than limit this to some variation of ‘non-professional’, in the sense of a person not employed in
some manner in the publishing industry (a very problematic definition for an industry with porous borders, as discussed in Chapter 1, Methodology) or impose criteria regarding frequency of reading, I use ‘reader’ to mean any person who reads, whatever their background, knowledge base, or experience.

**Thesis structure**

Following a discussion of methodology in Chapter 1, the remaining chapters on this dissertation explore my research question from five directions: these directions are the key themes that emerged from the data via thematic analysis (please see Chapter 1, Methodology, p.60-61). They are arranged in roughly chronological fashion, reflecting not the order in which the data were collected but rather a reader’s potential progress with a given e-novel, moving from initial evaluation and decision to read (Trust), to obtaining a copy via purchase, loan, free exchange or piracy, and potentially establishing a form of ownership and place in one’s collection (Control), to reading the text, and experiencing (or not experiencing) enjoyment and satisfaction (Pleasure), to incorporating a read text into one’s reading history, self- and public images as a reader (Identity) and finally to a deep, lasting and personally meaningful connection to a digital text (Love).

Chapter 2, Trust, opens the discussion on what legitimacy and bookness can mean to readers in the context of digital novel reading. It considers legitimacy and reputation in terms of how readers first evaluate novels they encounter on screen, and what motivates them to take the leap of faith necessary to invest time and/or money in a given novel. It examines e-book and e-novel realness in terms of their status as cultural products and
cultural objects, applying Genette’s paratextual theory to the negotiation of status between reader and author, publisher, and/or author/publisher. This chapter includes, in addition to the survey, focus group and interview data present in every chapter, results from the first two pilot experiments on digital paratext.

Chapter 3, Control, considers legitimacy and reputation in terms of ownership and possession, keeping, and passing on: how readers exert control over the e-novels and e-books that they cannot hold (or in many cases legally own) in the way they can a printed book. It draws on legal scholarship, book history, and fan studies to explore how bookness and realness in the form of meaningful ownership and personal libraries may be constructed (should the reader wish it) even in the absence of traditional forms, and when readers may prefer temporary, informal or actually illegal uses to permanent and authorised ones.

Chapter 4, Pleasure, considers legitimacy and reputation of e-books in terms of enjoyment of the book experience: what kinds of pleasure readers want (in different settings, and at different times) from a book, and the ways in which an e-book does or does not deliver such satisfactions. Examining aspects such as tactile dimensions of embodied reading and the role of the material object, convenience and access, optimisation and customisation, and narrative immersion, and contextualising empirical findings with recent empirical research on screen reading, it draws conclusions as to how, where and when intimacy, sense of achievement, and the feeling of being ‘lost in a book’ can be found in e-reading.
Chapter 5, Identity, considers legitimacy and reputation in terms of self-image and public image: how readers incorporate e-books into their personal reading histories and reading identities. It explores issues of display (to observers and to oneself), sharing (conscious and ‘frictionless’), and privacy (the privacy of the reading device with no visible cover and the privacy of the print book with no retailer tracking). Working with theory from legal studies (especially Roberts’ intellectual privacy) and psychology (on the definitions and uses of embarrassment, guilt, and shame), it considered how and why readers reconcile e-book reading with personal definitions of bookishness and bookish values.

Chapter 6, Love, considers legitimacy and reputation in terms of deep, lasting, and meaningful connection to books and novels encountered on screen: do e-books, with their conditional and uncertain bookness and realness, inspire real love? Examining bibliophilia as both an identity and a set of bookish practices and values, it considers what it means to be a book-lover in an e-book era and reports on how readers form, strengthen, and express relationships to digital texts.

The Conclusion draws together the five themes to form deductions on e-book legitimacy, worth, cultural value, and realness as experienced by readers, and outline implications for all participants in the communications circuit.
Chapter 1: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of my research methodology, to ‘document the rationale behind [my] research design and data analysis’ as well as the ‘reasons why the research took the path it did (both analytic and chance factors)’ (Silverman, 2013, p.354, 352). To meet my objectives and answer my research questions, I chose an empirical approach. This allowed me to better investigate an under-studied and rapidly changing area of book culture, and also to make a further independent contribution by helping to remedy the shortage of empirical data on digital reading (as discussed in the Introduction, p.17).

For study design I selected mixed methods, using quantitative surveys and pilot experiments as well as qualitative focus groups and interviews to triangulate on findings more reliable than any one of these research methods could yield in isolation. Creswell observes that mixed methods are particularly appropriate when studying very new phenomena where there is a need to ‘both generalise the findings to a population as well as develop a detailed view of the meaning of [the] phenomenon or concept to individuals’ (2014, p.20) and where it is likely that a single data source could be inadequate (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p.8). Mass e-novel reading is the kind of new phenomenon that benefits from such triangulation. A convergent parallel form, with multiple categories of data collected at the same time, allowed me to confront and examine contradictions as they emerged (Creswell, 2014, p.15), and to avoid a premature stop in any one category of data gathering, important in an e-reading environment where technologies and commercial frameworks were and are changing quickly. The limitations of this approach were those common to mixed methods
studies. Gathering data in a mixed methods project takes longer (Creswell, 2014, p.21), not least because of the time required to master the technical details of survey platforms, recording equipment, and the latest versions of data analysis software packages. The sample sizes for each individual element are typically smaller (in this case, fewer focus groups, fewer interviews, and fewer participants for the experiments) than they would be for a PhD relying on a single method. Integrating the data from different strands (a step essential to a true mixed methods project, without which analysis will be fragmented and superficial) adds more time and a further layer of complexity (Bryman, 2016, p.657). As a means of further ensuring integration I chose to present my dissertation in the form of thematic chapters. Though Publishing dissertations, like those in the Digital Humanities, are often organized into experiment-by-experiment chapters, thematic chapters were right for both my mixed methods design and thematic analysis approach (discussed below).

For the components of the mixed methods project I chose three main strands. Quantitative data from a survey allowed me to assess the scale of these new phenomena (such as proportion of readers who choose digital for a specific reason, such as technophilia) and consider how factors may interrelate (for example, whether levels of technophilia vary according to genre of e-books, sources or e-books, device usage, etc.). While there are no definitive answers regarding ideal size of a survey sample (Bryman, 2016, p.183), I wanted a larger sample of at least several hundred to increase likely precision (Bryman, 2016, p.184). As gains in precision level off at points roughly in the region of 1,000 responses (Bryman, 2016, p.184), I made 1,000 my approximate ceiling. I used annual data gathering in 2014-17 to examine possible trends or changes over time, and used the same time of year as well as time in the field (late February to late
March) to avoid any variation based on season, proximity to Christmas book buying, etc. First-round survey findings informed design of the focus groups and pilot reading experiments. Qualitative data from six focus groups and two individual interviews allowed me to pursue topics emerging from the survey in greater depth, and explore meaning. Finally, data from three pilot experiments on digital paratext, examining front matter, page design, and font, offered further context and guidance on design and direction of future research.

As discussed in the Introduction, on scope of the project (p.18), I chose to focus on readers. While they were speaking as readers and members of reading communities, participants were not naïve about publishing, or wholly isolated from industry knowledge or perspectives. This is consistent with the porous borders of the literary world, which given its intensive trade in cultural capital invites and indeed relies on expert but not necessarily professional contributions from actors who may take part on a temporary, part-time, pro bono, volunteer, work experience or charity basis. Student fiction writers were sometimes already self-published authors, literary magazine editors, book bloggers, literary festival organisers, etc. Student publishers had often already undertaken internships and work experience, and had some idea of what it was like to professionally evaluate a submission, edit a manuscript, or market a novel. Survey respondents who identified themselves as academics were almost certain to have experience as academic authors and were likely to have experience as journal editors, peer reviewers, etc. But such experience was not limited to academic settings. One book group with no formal industry or academic affiliation included one professional librarian, one professional editor and one retired publisher, underscoring not only the porousness of borders, but the degree to which traffic across those borders was two-
way: participants did not ‘graduate’ to ever-more professional circles, but continued to value and take part in amateur groups.

**Survey**

The survey ran annually from 2014 to 2017, from late February to late March, and asked questions about readership: what the respondents read, in what format, obtained by what means, and what motivated them in their decisions between print and electronic formats.

The survey was conducted online using Opinio software. Like all web surveys, this had the obvious limitation of excluding potential respondents who do not have internet access; this may have contributed to a lower proportion of print-only readers than would be expected based on other surveys of Anglophone readers (the January 2018 Pew Internet survey, for example, found slightly more American adults reading books only in print, 39%, than reading books digitally in any form, 36%) [Perrin, 2018]). However, as the use of e-books now effectively requires internet access, online delivery was highly unlikely to exclude anyone actively reading e-books. Other potential issues with web surveys were the possibility of multiple responses from a single respondent and lower average response rate (Bryman, 2016, pp.235-6). However, the speed, low cost (using a system for which UCL has a license), accurate automatic inputting of data into the database, lack of geographical limitations, confidentiality for respondents who wanted it (not all did, given the number who volunteered their e-mail addresses), adaptable format (allowing readers who did not read e-books to save time by skipping irrelevant questions), and greater likelihood of detailed responses to open-ended
questions all favoured a web survey (Bryman, 2016, pp. 235-6). The online questionnaire (please see Appendix A for full list of questions) was dynamic, taking anyone who answered ‘no’ to the first question (‘do you read e-books?’) directly to the questions on print reading and demographics.

Running the survey annually, at the same time of year, and on the same platform allowed me to observe trends and either change or lack of change over time. The survey questions remained the same. After the first survey in 2014 two small changes were made to the instructions that framed those questions to address two specific issues.

One, I discovered that some respondents had more to say than the character limits of freetext boxes allowed, one contacting me directly via the included e-mail address to report that the response he had carefully crafted in another window would not paste in to the provided box. In response, I increased character limits to the maximum allowed by the Opinio system: 200 for radio-button options or 2,000 for all-freetext questions. To forestall frustration on the early radio-button questions I added the following text to the second page of the survey:

‘The write-in fields here are limited to 200 characters. Luckily, Question 9 has space for 2,000 characters. If you have more to add, we would love to read it and ask that it be included in Question 9.’

Two, a significant proportion of respondents (13.0%) were abandoning the survey at some point before the final button on the final screen. My hypothesis was that non-e-book-readers might be opening the survey, answering a few questions, and then leaving under the mistaken impression that I was not interested in their views. I expanded the explanatory text on the first screen to make it clearer that one did not need to read e-
books to take the survey and that the study was just as concerned with non-e-book-readers as with e-book-readers, adding:

‘If no, the survey will now take you to questions about your print reading. If yes, we’ll ask you about your digital reading as well.’

The completion rates for the later surveys were slightly higher at 90.1% (2015), 92.6% (2016), and 90.7% (2017).

At 14 questions (10 reading questions, three demographic questions, and an invitation to give an e-mail address for possible follow-up interviews) the survey was kept succinct to minimise ‘respondent fatigue’ (Bryman, 2016, p.222) and maximise participation and completion. This brevity likely assisted response rate, but a trade-off was in the comparatively limited demographic data: I collected information on only age, gender, and UK or non-UK residence. As demographics proved significant in many cases (for example, the effect of age on attitudes towards personal libraries, and of gender on bibliophilia), if I were running the survey again I would risk some respondent fatigue in order to ask further demographic questions, for example on income, level of education, and more specific place of residence. The link to the survey was shared online, via university departments and personal networks, using e-mail and social media.

The complete combined sample including all stored responses was made up of 1,007 responses (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Stored responses</th>
<th>Completed responses</th>
<th>% Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar 2014</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar 2015</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar 2016</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-Mar 2017</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Survey dates, participants and completion rates

Of these, 97 were incomplete. Two featured no completed questions and were eliminated from the sample, as they served no purpose other than artificially inflating the sample size. In 95 instances, however, a respondent had answered some but not all questions. Examining this subset of non-completers revealed that the subset differed from the rest of the sample in a few significant ways, such as higher or lower likelihood of reading non-fiction, or poetry, or on different devices, and summarily removing these cases could distort the sample. Hence, I decided to keep them in the sample and include or exclude them on a query-by-query basis, excluding whenever respondents had not completed all relevant questions. After cleaning to remove 22 obvious duplicates, where respondents supplied e-mail addresses for follow-up questions and e-mail addresses were identical, and deleting all data relating to two respondents under the age of 18, the final sample is made up of 981 individuals, of whom 888 completed all questions.

The final sample was roughly distributed across age groups and but not across gender groups: three quarters of respondents were female and only one quarter male. However, because other studies have consistently shown that women read more than men, this
was to be expected for a survey about reading. Consulting social researchers, I decided not to artificially weight the sample (e.g. making a male respondent ‘worth’ more than a female one to force the distribution to 50/50) but rather to use bivariate analysis to examine all questions for possible differences in responses between women and men and note any significant differences in the analysis.

*Analysis of survey data using IBM SPSS*

Survey results were downloaded from Opinio as SPSS databases. They were analysed separately, year by year, as the data came in, and later compared for evidence of trends and change over time and combined into the full, cleaned database. After simple frequency analysis, I used logistical regression to search for patterns of relationships between variables (Bryman, 2016, p.339), such as correlations between attitudes, book-buying habits, device use, and demographics, and used direct comparison via chi-square tests to confirm direct relationships. Direct comparisons are feasible for uncomplicated survey questions such as these, where many questions are binary, and offer simple, robust, and highly reliable measures of correlation. I used chi-square values (hereafter CS) to evaluate the strength of relationships and a probability value of p<0.05 as the threshold for significance. For selected questions, where it appeared likely that confounding variables could be producing spurious relationships or intervening variables masking the nuances of genuine relationships, I used multivariate analysis to probe further: for example, examining age, gender, and year of response together when examining bibliophilia (please see Chapter 6, pp.345-365 for results on bibliophilia.).
**Analysis of survey data using Nvivo**

In addition, long freetext responses from Questions 2, 8, 9 and 10 were coded using Nvivo software and included in the thematic analysis. No participants were obligated to volunteer any freetext input, but those who did frequently supplied detailed and nuanced responses. These coded survey responses were a rich source of data but remained separate from focus group responses, as the typed, anonymous responses of survey respondents are very different from the verbal, before-peers, contextualised responses of focus group participants in natural groups. (In chapters that quote from both, the source and type are always noted.)

**Focus groups and interviews**

For in-depth discussion with readers to investigate reasons behind patterns and relationships revealed by the survey, I ran in parallel a series of focus groups. ‘Focus groups…excel at uncovering why people think as they do’ [emphasis hers] (Barbour, 2007, p.102) and for several reasons offered a better research method than exclusively individual interviews. I was interested in readers’ individual relationships with the text, but also in their collaboration with other readers, and how they negotiated as reading communities the value and legitimacy (or lack thereof) of e-books, and influenced each others’ understanding of what an e-novel is and what roles it can play in a reader’s life. Wilkinson argues that typically during focus group discussions ‘collective sense is made, meanings negotiated, and identities elaborated through the process of social interaction between people’ (Wilkinson, 1999, p.225). Following such discussions offered opportunities to ‘unpick the process of formation of views during focus group
exchanges’ (Barbour, 2007, p.102). The disadvantages of focus groups included the fact that they typically require more time and effort to set up and run than individual interviews (Barbour, 2007, p.22), particularly using pre-acquainted groups, which are more difficult to recruit (Bryman, 2016, p.510), the greater time and difficulty in transcribing recordings (Bryman, 2016, p.503), the tendency for a dynamic group exchange to interrupt and derail individual narratives and obscure sequences of events, (Barbour, 2007, p.18) and the way in which minority views can be muted as participants work not only to express their views, but argue them: an excellent example of Puchta and Potter’s dictum that ‘attitudes are “performed” rather than being “pre-formed”’ (Puchta and Potter, 2004, p.27). An example of tempered views would be a participant being the first to answer the question ‘would you describe yourself as a bibliophile?’ firmly and confidently in the affirmative, and then, after hearing others in the group express uncertainty or concern about what ‘bibliophile’ means today, attempting to qualify that answer. An example of challenge would be a participant expressing a dislike for the smell of used books, and being isolated, upbraided, and teased for an unacceptable opinion. (Please see Chapter 6, pp.346-349 and Chapter 5, pp.309-310, for more on these two exchanges.) These instances of tempering or challenge were rare, very much outnumbered by instances where participants could comfortably disagree. However, while overt negotiations can be captured in the transcript and examined, I wanted to consider the possibility that self-censorship prevented other negotiations from ever coming to the surface, producing a false impression of consensus and leaving nothing in the transcript to be analysed. To test this, I scheduled individual interviews following the focus groups, in each case speaking to a member of a bookish group like those observed in the focus groups, but away from her or his group, to see whether responses to the same questions differed. They did not: responses in one-to-one
conversations harmonised extremely closely with those from group settings. After two interviews it was possible to conclude that there was no evidence of self-censoring as a major factor in the qualitative data. All qualitative data from focus groups and interviews was coded and analysed using Nvivo.

*Use of existing groups*

The focus groups used naturally occurring groups of ‘pre-acquainted’ (Barbour, 2007, pp.66-7) participants who gathered regularly to discuss fiction and specifically criteria for the evaluation of fiction, such as the editorial team of an anthology, a regular book group, or fellow students on a creative writing course. Each group had a history and met in a structured way. While working with existing groups added complexity, this was a welcome and productive complexity, as ‘having pre-acquainted – or even intimately acquainted – individuals within focus groups can lead to an enhanced understanding of group dynamics and how these shape the development of views and responses’ (Barbour, 2007, p.67). In Barbour’s example:

‘Crossley (2002) only found out after running a group that two of the participants were sisters. She explains that, when analyzing the data, this information helped her ‘to make sense of the frequently acrimonious nature of their disputations’, which, in turn, illuminated the ‘real-life’ context in which these two people weighed up exhortations of health promotion and made attributions about their own health status and decisions about their health-related behaviour.’ (2007, p.67)
This was the kind of ‘real-life’ context I wanted to study. Discussion of digital reading abounds with ‘exhortations’ about what is good or bad, right or wrong, and even healthy or unhealthy for a reader to do. I wanted the chance to examine how those we know and read with influence reading behaviour, reading values, and presentation of and honesty about both.

**Recruiting participants**

There are no rules regarding the best number of focus groups for a given project (Barbour, 2007, pp.59-60; Bryman, 2016, pp.503-505) other than to hold sufficient groups to have confidence in the data but not so many that additional groups are generating new transcript pages but not new ideas. Many researchers including Calder, Livingstone and Lund propose stopping at the point of saturation, where ‘the moderator reaches the point where he or she is able to anticipate fairly accurately what the next group is going to say’ (Bryman, 2016, p.505). I set a rough target of five to ten groups but resolved to continue data collection until my notes and transcripts indicated that I had achieved saturation, which took place after six groups. These were followed by the two individual interviews, where responses confirmed that a) there was no difference in frankness or in the content of answers in a one-to-one setting, and b) I had indeed reached saturation, as I could anticipate answers with considerable accuracy (Table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18.3.14</td>
<td>Focus group: UCL Publishing students (anthology team)</td>
<td>UCL</td>
<td>6 (all female)</td>
<td>All 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.3.15</td>
<td>Focus group: UCL Publishing students (anthology team)</td>
<td>UCL</td>
<td>3 (two female, one male)</td>
<td>All 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6.15</td>
<td>Focus group: ARU MA writing students (anthology team)</td>
<td>ARU</td>
<td>6 (three female, three male)</td>
<td>Ages ranging from 30s to 60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.17</td>
<td>Focus group: ARU MA Publishing students</td>
<td>ARU</td>
<td>4 (three female, one male)</td>
<td>All 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.7.17</td>
<td>Focus group: Book group (unaffiliated)</td>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>8 (all female)</td>
<td>Ages ranging from 50s to 70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.10.17</td>
<td>Focus group: Science Fiction book group (unaffiliated)</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>6 (five female, one male)</td>
<td>Ages ranging from 30s to 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.11.17</td>
<td>Interview: member of book group (unaffiliated)</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>1 (male)</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.12.17</td>
<td>Interview: member of ARU MA writing group</td>
<td>ARU</td>
<td>1 (female)</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Focus group and interview dates, locations, and participants

The mean group size was 5.5, the largest being eight and the smallest being three. I recruited groups with an aim of speaking to between four and eight people at a time (eight being in Barbour’s estimation the most a researcher can easily manage) (2007,
No-shows meant that one group had only three participants, but I ran the group and analysed data because, as Barbour points out, a discussion of three is quite possible and often desirable, and Bryman confirms that groups of three are commonplace and groups as small as two are not unknown in published qualitative studies (Barbour, 2007, p.60; Bryman, 2016, p.504). To recruit groups, I used a combination of researcher-led, institution-led, and snowballing (Bryman, 2016, p.505). I reached out to potential groups via university and department mailing lists, messages sent via the library coordinator to Cambridgeshire Public Libraries book groups, the website Meetup.com to contact unaffiliated book groups, professional networks to find independent writers’ groups, and personally via serendipitous meetings, such as with the organiser of a men’s book group I met at the used book stall of neighbourhood summer fete. I worked only with groups in either Cambridgeshire or central London, which I could reach with all of my equipment. Only a small proportion of my approaches were successful, as not all groups were interested and those that were very often could not find a mutually convenient date. To recruit individuals for interview, I used the same modes of contact, often working with individuals who had missed a previous group session, or who were members of groups that would have been suitable for focus group sessions but were not able to schedule a time when a quorum of members were interested and available.

The groups were diverse in terms of type of bookishness (e.g. writers, book group members, etc.) but not in other respects; as Barbour (2007, p.60-63) points out, in academic research focus groups provide a range of perspectives not by strictly recruiting a demographically balanced group (as is sometimes done in commercial focus groups) but by seeking some representation from subgroups likely to have unique concerns. In the focus groups there were considerably more women than men; the fact that there
were any men at all reflected strenuous efforts at recruitment, including reaching out to one all-male reading group (which agreed to take part but was in the end unable to find a suitable date) and to science fiction and apocalyptic fiction-focussed reading groups as potentially likely venues for men’s participation. While this is gender imbalance is a consequence of using natural groups, and reflects (as noted above) the higher proportion of women in the reading public, in Publishing and Creative Writing graduate programmes at both institutions, and in book groups (Driscoll, 2014, p.51), it remains an imbalance that I have taken into account in analysis. Ages were concentrated at the lower and higher ends of the adult spectrum. I also infer that level of education was likely higher than in the general population, thanks to the number of postgraduate students participating, but also to the professionals who made up the bulk of book group membership. Though I did not ask participants about income in either the survey or the focus groups, I suspect that as highly educated readers based in Cambridgeshire or London my respondents were also on average more affluent (or from more affluent families) than the general population. These factors were also taken into account during analysis of focus group data.

Discussion followed a semi-structured model (Bryman, 2016, p.466-7), allowing for considerable digression but including a number of common questions to offer some consistency between groups in coverage of essential topics. These questions were not asked in a particular order, but were introduced by the moderator as needed when the discussion offered an opportunity to inquire without abruptly changing the subject. I as moderator took a light-touch approach to guiding the discussion, allowing each group to take the conversation in directions natural to them.
The first three groups had, as a list of questions:

- do you read e-books?
- when you're choosing an e-book, what criteria do you apply?
- would you describe yourself as a bibliophile?
- there's a bit of conventional wisdom that says ‘digital is for “light” reading, genre books, but not for “serious” fiction’. Do you agree, or do you not agree?
- have you ever read a self-published book?
- what are we not asking - what else do we need to know about e-books and e-reading?

Groups 4-6 added three additional questions, included after consultation with my supervision team. These allowed for further probing on topics emerging as significant, and for which I wanted to seek more specific responses:

- Do you feel differently about novels you don’t own but borrowed from a library? Do you feel like you know them? Is there a difference between physical and digital library books that way?
- When you come across a really good novel - something truly special - what comes next? Do you do something special with it, or to it, or about it? Is this different for a print novel and a digital one?
- Do you talk about books online? Mention them in online profiles?

Interviews used the same questions and the same semi-structured approach.
Analysis of qualitative data using thematic analysis

My choice for a qualitative analytic method was thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006). I considered grounded theory, finding its inductive ethos and emphasis on allowing meaning to emerge from the data rather than imposing preconceived ideas (Bryman, 2016, p.572, pp.574-6) well-suited to a topic that touches on both very new emerging technologies and a long tradition of reading in which participants (and I) have personal histories and emotional investment. However, it was immediately obvious that some of the strict rules of classic grounded theory, especially its discouragement of recording or transcribing interviews, would be difficult to adhere to over a five year, part-time, mixed methods PhD project. Thematic analysis, (jokingly) called ‘grounded theory “lite”’ by its own creators (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81), offered the inductive ethos and data-led approach alongside transcription, and allowed me to use software to help organize my data as I synthesized survey, focus group, interview and pilot experiment findings. Thematic analysis does not have to be inductive (Braun and Clarke use ‘theoretical’ to describe thematic analysis that uses pre-determined coding frame) but I wanted mine to be, as I saw the advantages of developing a coding frame and identifying themes as I worked with the data instead of fitting them into a system I’d developed ahead of time (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp.83-4). Thematic analysis, as a less rigid methodology, is a good choice for researchers working in groups or across disciplines (very important for someone working as I do in an interdisciplinary field characterized by collaboration) and like grounded theory, thematic analysis is noted for its ability to cope with contradictions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.83-4). Its disadvantages were, to me, acceptable. I dealt with the lack of structure and rules, which Braun and Clarke warn can lead to ‘paralysis’ in the face of too many options (2006, p.97), by means of a detailed data collection and analysis plan.
that I re-evaluated at scheduled intervals with my supervision group rather than on a
daily basis. I dealt with (and continue to deal with) TA’s lack of ‘kudos’ compared to
‘branded’ forms of analysis such as grounded theory, IPA, or DA (Braun and Clarke,
2006, p.97) by accepting that TA was not going to confer legitimacy on its own and
would likely have to be explained and justified in greater detail than branded forms; in a
project studying legitimacy, this struck me as a natural and manageable task. I used
Braun and Clarke’s recursive process of coding as I worked through six stages (2006,
p.87):

1. ‘Familiarizing yourself with your data:
2. Generating initial codes:
3. Searching for themes:
4. Reviewing themes:
5. Defining and naming themes:
6. Producing the report:

This process yielded my five key themes: trust, control, pleasure, identity, and love. I
used these five themes to structure the dissertation into five core chapters.

Focus groups were combined with the pilot experiments below, with the experiment
coming first and the discussion afterwards.
Pilot reading experiments

The third source of data, pilot experiments, was intended to test out methodologies for investigating specific aspects of novel reading on screen for which there was little or no existing evidence. Paratextual theory holds that all materials that ‘surround and extend’ (Genette, 1997b, p.1) a text inevitably influence its reception, and that establishing the legitimacy and status of a given work is a central task of paratext (Genette, 1997b, p.406). To date, however, there have been only the most limited efforts to gather empirical data on how these paratextual processes function for a novel read on screen. Any research on digital paratext, as discussed in the Introduction (pp.31-33) remains scarce, and no studies I have found attempt to quantify how changing digital paratext does, or does not, change reader’s impression of a text’s legitimacy or status. I used qualitative methods to address this question in focus groups and interviews, but also wanted to experiment with possible quantitative methods: this would give indicative results that could inform the qualitative analysis, but also identify potential approaches for a larger future study (as discussed in the Conclusion, pp.378-380). I identified both viable approaches where further investigation could be fruitful and dead ends where no further study is justified. I had to keep the scale of the experiments in balance with the other aspects of my mixed methods research design, and so instead of shallow coverage of many aspects I chose detailed coverage of a small number of aspects: front matter, page design (using very similar study design) and font (using a different study design).

Phase One: front matter

I began with front matter. The initial experiment was designed to address the questions:
• Do readers, as conventional wisdom maintains, value existence in print when it comes to novels? (i.e. assigning higher value to novels with a print edition than to digital original novels?)

• Do readers give texts the benefit of the doubt, assuming that a digital novel with scanty or ambiguous paratext is ‘legitimate’? Or is it ‘illegitimate’ until proven otherwise?

• Do readers apply different attribute labels - e.g. ‘significant’, ‘fun’, ‘highbrow’, ‘escapist’, etc. depending on their understanding of its print or non-print status? (i.e. digital original fiction, digital edition of print originals, ambiguous)

Format

Participants evaluated the texts as individuals, sitting in the same room but reading the samples and completing evaluation sheets before any discussion. I as moderator kept time and informed the group when to move on to the next sample. In the first focus group, each participant had ten minutes for each sample plus five minutes in total for writing up scores, but they found this to be an excessive amount of time, exceeding what they would devote to novel when browsing in a bookshop, physical or online, and also what a busy person could spare for participation in a research project. All further groups had five minutes per sample plus five minutes for writing up scores. (Please see Appendix B for sample participant information sheets and scoring sheets.)
Selection of texts

The texts themselves were 12,000 word samples of unpublished novels, certain to be completely new to the participants. 12,000 words vastly exceeded what a participant could read in five to ten minutes, but a long sample was needed to give a convincing representation of a novel: something participants could scan, leaping forwards as they liked, as they might with a novel in a bookshop. To obtain new work of a reasonably uniform standard I sourced four recent MA in Creative Writing dissertations, all assessed, via blind double marking and validation by external examiners, in the 70-80 range of ‘distinction’ achievement. All works were presented anonymously and with the permission of the authors. All of the authors are British nationals between the ages of 20 and 50, and native speakers of English. Two authors are female and two are male.

Two of the four works are classified by their authors (in commentaries not seen by the participants) as genre: specifically, crime and historical crime. One aim of the experiment was to examine whether genre or non-genre classification affects response; for example, if crime novels might be perceived as the sort of ‘light’ reading ‘appropriate’ to e-readers.

Development of guises

I gave group participants iPads pre-loaded with four files in what was then the iBooks app (now rebranded as Apple Books) (Figure 1). I asked participants to read quickly and evaluate ruthlessly, determining genre and checking off characteristics, giving a numerical rating, and finally indicating whether they would or would not read on. (Please see Appendix B for sample response sheets.)
The first phase of the experiment, running with the first three groups, displayed the texts in different guises of fake front matter. The guises were:

A. Electronic edition of a traditionally published novel from a major commercial imprint, explicitly states that it has print counterpart (based on front matter from Kate Atkinson’s bestselling and Costa Award-winning *Life After Life* (Transworld))

B. Digital original from a Big Five imprint, explicitly has no print counterpart (based on front matter from Gary Gusick’s *The Last Clinic*, the first novel from Penguin Random House’s Alibi digital imprint)

C. Self-published e-book with Amazon CreateSpace, has no print counterpart (based on front matter from Elizabeth Naughton’s *Marked*, an Amazon Top 10 digital bestseller for 2013)

D. Ambiguous: no information
Rather than invent a publisher, or assign titles falsely to a real publisher, both of which participants may have detected, names and identifying information were replaced with XXXXXX. (Please see Appendix E for examples of Text 2 in each guise.)

Responses, as discussed further in Chapter 2 (pp.95-99) were quick and telling: there was no discernible relationship between guise and reader responses in phase 1. When participants said that they did not usually read front matter and did not believe it influenced their reading, all indications were that this was correct. Having achieved saturation on this phase after three groups (focus groups 1-3, 15 individuals), with new results simply amplifying and validating old ones, I moved on to examine a different aspect of digital peritext: page design.

*Phase Two: page design*

Using a small research fund generously provided by the department in which I work, I commissioned professional freelance book designer Lisa Kirkham to design four guises suggestive of different publication status. These could not map directly to the four guises in phase 1; the difference in page-level design between a print-first and a digital-only book from a Big Five publisher was negligible, and no page design could ever be ‘absent’ in the manner of the missing front matter of Guise D. Accordingly, I commissioned four new guises, working with Kirkham to make choices on font, title style, ornaments, line breaks and justification, etc. (please see Appendix E for examples of the four guises):

- Mainstream (M): a highly professional and contemporary design evoking a Penguin Random House edition meant for a wide
audience. This included painstaking page-by-page adjustment of spacing, justification and line breaks to remove channels through the text, orphans, and other visually intrusive elements that are routinely scoured away by professional designers but rarely addressed by amateur designers. The font was Garamond.

- Independent (I): an equally professional but less ‘corporate’ design evoking a smaller independent press, more traditional (using elements such as ornaments) than of-the-moment. This guise included the adjustments noted above. The font was Sabon.

- CreateSpace (CS): following the author presentation guidelines (as of February 2017) on Amazon’s CreateSpace site. This did not include the adjustments noted above. The font was Times New Roman.

- Word (W): presented as a standard Word document, as if prepared by a technically competent computer user with no experience of publishing industry tools or conventions. This did not include the adjustments noted above. The font was Arial.

While the Phase 1 texts were presented to the participants as .EPUB files, the Phase 2 texts were presented as PDF documents. While consistency between the two phases was desirable, the most important thing was that the experiment design allow participants to experience what I wanted them to experience, and this was the full effect of different styles of page design, including the subtle but very meaningful page-by-page adjustment that was vivid in PDF documents but potentially totally obscured by the reflow of an adjustable .EPUB file on a tablet. This phase gathered data from focus
groups 4-6, the two individual interviews, and a further group of six additional ARU Creative Writing and Publishing students (four female, two male) totalling 26 individuals. The sequence of texts was varied to avoid order effects.

Scores were analysed using SPSS software, with chi-square tests and additional ANOVA (Analysis Of Variance) tests to examine potential groupings among guises. The post-experiment discussion was recorded and transcribed, and analysed using Nvivo software.

In interpreting results I kept the limitations and assumptions of the experiment firmly in mind. Like any experiment, this one was by its nature artificial and controlled: my participants evaluated digital novels on a regular basis, but on their own devices (which they may, depending on type, use for many purposes other than book reading, with which they may have intense personal relationships) and at their own pace, not placed in a room with other readers being told when to open and close files on a strange iPad. Presenting ‘stripped’ texts with only one remaining element of paratext at a time was essential to examine each element in isolation, but was utterly unnatural for readers accustomed to encountering whole texts with layered, intact paratexts including titles, covers, identifiable authors, etc. I was able to learn a great deal from participants’ scores and further discussion of the texts, but the results can only be extrapolated so far.

My ambition is to, with my supervision team, obtain funding continue this experiment in the future in various directions, such as exploring additional aspects of paratext such as cover design, commissioning cover designers to produce professional-quality guises, exploring the contrast between print and digital evaluation processes by using Print on
Demand to produce full-length sample novels and their professional-quality design as both physical and on-screen artefacts, and expanding the pool of participants by adapting the experiment for large-scale online experiments, partnering with CS/HCI colleagues to create the online interface.

**Phase Three: font**

The third pilot experiment took a very different approach, using as its rough model one stage of an early, and controversial, example of empirical approaches to reading research. Burt, Cooper and Martin’s 1955 paper ‘A Psychological Study of Typography’ was highly influential in its time, but is today almost unknown following lead researcher Cyril Burt’s descent from high to questionable academic reputation. While Burt, Cooper and Martin’s actual findings must be treated with extreme caution, given Burt’s notoriously poor record-keeping and the credible accusations of fraud made in relation to some of his later work (Joynson, 2003, pp.409-411) the possible influence of font on reception of texts, and in particular potential emotional responses to font, merits study, and elements of the 1955 methodology (executed and documented to a suitable standard) have value.³

To draw on the most relevant elements of Burt, Cooper, and Martin’s methodology, and translate these into a digital rather than print reading environment, I designed a simple pilot using one group of participants and two texts.

³ Analysis of and commentary on ‘the Burt Affair’ is almost a field in itself. Joynson’s 2003 article ‘Selective interest and psychological practice: A new interpretation of the Burt affair’ in The British Journal of Psychology (see bibliography) offers an excellent introduction to key contributions.
Burt, Cooper, and Martin’s study was intended to ‘investigate (A) the legibility and (B) the aesthetic merits’ of typefaces ‘in more frequent use’ (1955, p. 29). The first half of the study attempted to measure reader’s speed and comprehension in reading texts in different fonts; this aspect has been repeated (under better-controlled conditions) by many research teams. The second half of the study focussed on what readers found appealing. The aim was to discover which fonts were ‘best’, but also why: to find some psychological basis for preference (1955, p.39). The latter involved using statistical analysis to determine which of the researchers classifications, below, correlated with measurable differences in score. A further level of analysis attempted to classify the participants as ‘literary’ or ‘scientific’, ‘according to their interests and previous education’ (1955, p.42), and investigate possible affinities between each group and what the researchers deemed to be ‘old’ or ‘modern’ fonts. It is unclear how the groups were recruited or constituted, and whether this classification was carried out before, during or after data gathering. The authors’ assumptions regarding factors such as education, gender, class, and the differences between ‘ordinary’ and ‘outstanding individuals’ (1955, p.44), etc. are palpable but vague, constantly present but never fully articulated; without detail, the modern reader can only guess at how prevailing psychological theories of the day (or of Burt’s passionate embrace of eugenics) influenced experiment design and data interpretation. Without turning a blind eye to this side of the experiment or to the history of the researchers, I discarded aspects related to classifying readers and considered all participants’ responses together, focussing solely on rankings of fonts and the reasons for such rankings.

The authors’ statistical approach is obscure: they performed their calculations by hand, rejecting some applicable methods as too complex, and do not clearly explain what they are doing or why. Hence, I made no attempt to reproduce their methods in this arena.

The rationale behind the classification groups is not clearly explained; design of this aspect may have been informed by prior research, or may simply have reflected the authors’ expectations or biases.
Burt, Cooper and Martin used ‘extracts cut from printers’ specimen books’ to produce ‘similar’ but not equivalent prose samples, accepting as their minimum requirement that each sample feature at the very least the complete alphabet (1955, p.39). They then asked participants to ‘arrange the specimens in order of preference’ (1955, p.39) without any guidance on criteria: ‘nothing was said about the differences being aesthetic’ (1955, p.39). Finally, participants were asked to write out ‘introspections’, short qualitative responses giving their reasons for the ranking. The researchers classified these ‘introspections’ into categories of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ reasons, with subcategories of:6

I. ‘Subjective
   o Associative
   o Emotional
   o Anthropomorphic

II. Objective
    o Intuitive
    o Rationalisation’

With the luxury of word processing and instant conversion of texts to any desired font, for this experiment I used consistent prose extracts: 1,000 words from the opening pages of two novels. I wanted one to be a classic novel, but an obscure one that 21st century students were unlikely to have read and to which they were unlikely to have any emotional attachment: for this, I chose Diana of the Crossways (1885) by George Meredith. I wanted the other to be a novel that 21st century students were likely to have read and to which they might potentially feel a strong emotional attachment: for this, J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series was the obvious choice for participants in early

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6 As with other aspects of the study, the reasons behind these categorisations remain obscure and largely unspoken: a rare hint comes from a comparison to inkblot tests (1955, p.45).

Diana of the Crossways was sourced from Project Gutenberg and Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix was typed out by hand from a print edition (please see bibliography for details of both).

For reasons of time, I limited the comparison to four fonts: Arial, Garamond, Times New Roman, and Verdana. These were not precisely the same four seen in the first two phases (Arial, Garamond, Sabon, and Times New Roman), as needs for this phase were different. Rather than four fonts chosen to suggest four publication pathways, I wanted more than one example of a sans-serif font, to better understand the role of serifs. The logical font to abandon was Sabon, as a less common font very closely based on Garamond. The logical sans-serif font to add was Verdana, as an extremely popular font commonly seen in digital publications and offered as a suggested font on Kindle and many other e-ink readers. Each 4-page PDF file displayed justified text in portrait orientation with widows and orphans removed, and identical line spacing (1.5pt), spacing after (6pt), spacing before (0pt), top and bottom margins (3.5 cm), and right and left margins (4 cm). To achieve roughly the same length of line (approximately 10-14 words per line) and roughly the same number of lines per page (26-31), serif fonts were presented in 14pt and sans serif fonts in 12pt. The results were comparable to the approximately 10-14 words per line and 37 lines per page found in the 2003 hardcover edition of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (please see Appendix F for examples).

The participants, first-year undergraduates on a Fundamentals of Publishing module at Anglia Ruskin University, were presented with eight PDF files: each text (DC and HP)
in each of the four fonts (DC_v1, DC_v2, HP_v1, etc., with the texts represented by initials and fonts designated by number and not name). These were distributed, in the seminar room, using the class Virtual Learning Environment (Canvas), and students invited to read using whatever device they preferred to use for screen reading: smartphone, tablet, personal laptop, or university-provided desktop (students could also download the PDFs to personal e-ink readers, but none chose to do so). They were given five minutes for introductions, two minutes to view the files, and ten minutes to record their rankings and reasons (the term I used in place of ‘introspections’, which now carries very different connotations). Participants recorded these on both printed response sheets (please see Appendix C for a sample sheet) and on Post-It notes they stuck to designated areas of the seminar room walls. I collected the sheets, photographed the Post-Its, and led a brief 20 minute discussion. Results were analysed using the same thematic analysis approach as other qualitative data, though the pilot experiment sample was so small that it was more efficient to code responses by hand than using Nvivo software.

**Ethics**

As in any research project involving human participants, it was essential to address ethical considerations from the start, designing responsibly and obtaining all necessary approvals. Privacy was an immediate concern: the survey was anonymous, but participants were given the option to include their e-mail addresses for possible follow up interviews and hence reveal their identities. In focus groups, all participants were identified by name on response sheets and in the recording (to allow for transcription) and many respondents were known to me through institutional connections. As a result,
anonymity to the researcher was not possible and had to be guaranteed at the level of publication and dissemination. I kept all responses anonymous in this dissertation, in conference papers and presentations and in all other published or publicly available materials. While my topic was not a sensitive one and I was not working with vulnerable groups (Barbour, 2007, p.93, pp.96-7) I was speaking in some cases to students who hoped to obtain jobs or contracts with the mainstream publishing industry, and had the subjects been identified there would have been a possible, if remote, risk of irreverent comments about the industry coming back to embarrass participants in their future careers. In each group, I advised participants that they could withdraw from the project and request that their data be removed from the sample at any time, and ensured that all participants had my contact details. (No one has to date asked to withdraw, or expressed any concerns about participation in or after the session.)

I discussed ethics with my supervision team, in support seminars and with the department ethics coordinator. I applied for an obtained ethics approval, and the project is covered by UCL Data Protection Registration, reference No Z6364106/2014/02/44, section 19, research: social research.

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology that guided my study design, data collection, and data analysis. I chose a mixed methods approach employing survey data, focus group and interview data, and pilot reading experiments, in convergent parallel form, as the best way to investigate aspects of the new phenomenon of mass e-novel reading. With this methodology, I gathered and analysed data, and organised results into chapters guided by the five key strands that emerged from the thematic
analysis: trust, control, pleasure, identity, and love. My next chapter begins with the theme of trust.
Chapter 2: Trust

In this chapter I will examine the legitimacy and reputation of electronic novels in terms of trust: how readers evaluate novels they encounter on screen, and what persuades them to invest time and sometimes money in a given novel. It examines e-book and e-novel legitimacy in terms of status as cultural products and cultural objects, applying Genette’s paratextual theory to the ‘zone of transaction’ (1997b, p.1) where various forms of status are negotiated between readers, authors and publishers. This chapter draws on, in addition to the survey, focus group and interview data present in every chapter, results from the pilot experiments on digital paratext, and will examine how readers use the altered mix of textual, paratextual and metatextual clues to judge the status, characteristics and value of a novel when read on screen.

In making a judgement as to the legitimacy and reputation of a given e-novel, prospective readers confront the lower status of digital books, a ‘format deemed lacking in cultural value’ (Westin, 2013, p.131) but also the lower status of self-publishing: separate but entwined stigmas. Examining how readers interrogate an e-book requires also examining how creators present that book, working to anticipate readers’ questions and allay their fears, and how the various parties collaborate to formulate credibility. Paratextual theory offers the tools for such investigation.
Paratext: ‘threshold of interpretation’

Paratext is ‘what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public’ (Genette, 1997b, p. 1). If there is an element of audacity in putting forward a zip file of data and describing it as a book, Genette reminds us that there is an element of audacity in putting forward any text and describing it as a book: no matter how traditional, conventional, or even derivative a text might be in some ways, without ‘productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations’ (1997b, p.1) (though paratextual elements range much further than this) it is not yet ‘endowed with significance’ (1997b, p.1) as a book. Paratext is what creators use to not only ‘present’ but ‘make present, to ensure a text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book’ (1997b, p.1). It is ‘the fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text’ (Lejeune, quoted in Genette 1997b, p. 2), embracing a wide array of elements that in some way, physically or otherwise, adjoin the text, and offer instruction and context that guide the reading of that text. Examples range from chapter titles to book titles, cover design to advertising copy, personal inscriptions to Woolf’s (initially) private reflections in her diary on the process of creating Jacob’s Room. It can convey a work’s status bluntly, via the word ‘classic’ printed above the title of a novel, or quietly, via means such as printing the same novel in a small and inexpensive format that, by its very economy and plainness, declares itself an accessible edition of a canonical text (Genette, 1997b, p.20-1). Genette developed his paratextual theory in the 1980s, exploring some aspects in Palimpsestes (1997a, first published in French in 1982)

7 Here, Genette is looking backwards to the pre-codex era, but his form of words does fortuitously welcome in examination of a future with different norms.
before a more comprehensive treatment in *Seuils (Paratexts)* (1987, translated into German in 1989 and English in 1997). He refined his ideas in a time when e-books were obscure, and almost a curiosity. The tools paratextual theory offers, however, are ideal for exploring contemporary questions of legitimacy and reputation, offering a means, comprehensible between academic disciplines, for discussion of fluid as well as fixed elements.

_E-book paratext: crossing the threshold on screen_

Paratext advances many agendas at once. For any work of literature, paratext is tasked with establishing value and worth, ‘ensur[ing] for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose’ (1997b, p. 406) by positioning it on multiple axes and anticipating the concerns of multiple audiences (for example, critics, booksellers, and educators). But paratext cannot dictate, only negotiate. It is the ‘zone of transition, but also transaction’ (1997b, p.1) where authors, publishers, and readers meet, ‘a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy’ (1997b, p. 2) and paratextual messages are not instruments of control. ‘A novel,” as Genette put it, ‘does not signify that “This book is a novel,” a defining assertion that hardly lies within anyone’s power, but rather “Please look on this book as a novel”’ (1997b, p. 11). Paratext, for any novel in any format, simultaneously labours to present the work as a novel and as a good novel, to be evaluated according to the standards of the desired genres, traditions, audiences, etc. A novel on screen must answer all the questions put to a novel in print, while also addressing concerns specific to digital novels. Foremost among these are, for participants in this study, concerns

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8 Many anglophone audiences encountered his paratextual theory for the first time after *New Literary History* published his ‘Introduction to the Paratext’, largely a translation of the introduction to *Seuils*, in 1991.
about the text’s relationship to traditional mainstream publishing: whether it bears the stamp of industry approval, and if so the degree of investment by members of that industry, as evidenced by existence in print as well as digital format. As the respondents put it, ‘if it hasn't been backed by a publisher, instantly my mind goes to, “Well, why not?”’ (FG 3 participant 5). Ultimately, the question digital novels must answer is ‘if the publisher wasn’t willing to invest in it, why should I?’ (FG 1 participant 2). How e-novels, and any e-books, respond via paratext – how authors try to encourage favourable interpretations, and how readers try to seek reliable information – reveals much about how the paratextual transaction actually functions for books on screen.

**Proximity and authority**

Genette’s grouping of elements into five key dimensions (spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and functional) bring to light patterns, commonalities in aims and tactics over time, and insights into the presentation and reception of texts in the real world. However, much (film- and other media-dominated) scholarship to date has bypassed Genette’s distinctions, implying that because his categories date from the era of print, and never had firm boundaries in the first place, engaging with them is fruitless (Birke and Christ, 2013, p.80). Birke and Christ propose retiring most if not all of Genette’s 20th-century, text-based, deliberately flexible sub-categories, arguing that ‘context (or the universe of texts) moves so close to the text that “thresholds,” paratextual elements that negotiate the space between text and context, become increasingly difficult to isolate and identify’ (2013, p.77). Simply abandoning his distinctions, however, squanders a vocabulary ideally suited to discussion of textual boundaries; a vocabulary
that is and always was open to evolution. The boundaries of ‘multiform and tentacular’ (1997b, p. 406) paratext are defined by Genette as subtle and mutable, inevitably taking different form in different contexts and at different times. McCracken’s approach of ‘augmentation and modification’ (2013, p.105) allows for nuance, and selective application of relevant subcategories, rather than a rash banishment of painstakingly constructed taxonomies that draw on centuries of book history, and frequently draw connections between contemporary paratextual strategies and related approaches from the print, and even manuscript, eras. (To do otherwise would sever e-books from the reading and publishing traditions from which they spring.)

Discarding the spatial dimension is particularly dangerous, as proximity to the text can play a critical role in conveying to readers authorial intention: the intention without which an element is not paratext at all.

‘Respectful distance’

In the spatial dimension, Genette divides paratext into two broad categories: peritext and epitext. Although both ‘surround and extend’ (1997b, p.1) the text, in a printed book peritext is ‘within the same volume’: printed and bound with the words of the text itself (1997b, pp.4-5). A typical example is a cover, but even more deeply embedded are types like illustrations, epigraphs, chapter titles, and the author’s name (and all that such a name evokes in terms of gender, race, nationality, class, etc.) Epitext, in contrast, is ‘at a more respectful (or prudent) distance...located outside the book’ (1997b, pp.4-5) An example could be a descriptive entry in a publisher’s catalogue that seeks to place the book under a science, psychology, or self-help category, or an author
biography that emphasizes credentials (academic or personal) or simply demographics such as gender and age (1997b, p. 7). But epitext could just as easily be a recording of a public talk by the author, perhaps conveying some of the same information visually or verbally. This distinction allows us to consider separately elements attached to and elements distanced from the text, and to examine the influence of elements bound in print but more loosely affiliated in digital format.

To be paratext, elements must be ‘characterized by an authorial intention and assumption of responsibility’ (1997b, p. 2), affirmed by either the author or the publisher whom she has empowered to distribute and represent the text. Hence, a book review in a broadsheet is metatext, outside the boundaries, until such time as a quote is plucked from that review and placed in a press release (epitext) or printed on the back cover of a subsequent paperback edition (peritext). That which is not authorized remains metatext: commentary about a book, potentially influential but not part of the transaction between reader and creator. Proximity matters, because classic paratextual theory comes from an era where the closer an element was to the text, the safer it was to assume that it was indeed authorised. While judgment is always needed (deceptive paratext having a long tradition in print) epitext by its distanced nature demands a greater degree of skepticism and scrutiny. Readers typically confront epitext in the rush of the outside world, encountering some elements but not all (no one but an author’s publicist or mother could realistically read every interview or attend every reading), and constantly sifting the authorised from the unauthorised. Print peritext, in contrast, comes from an object of finite size and at least some integrity, where additions may be discernible as additions (as with comments scribbled in the margin) and any bound element difficult to ignore. In effect, any print peritext element, even a decorated
endpaper, ‘cannot not’ be influential (Genette, 1997b, p.25, emphasis his). Hence, McCracken’s concern that Amazon advertisements overlaying the text will influence readers because they effectively enter the text (2013, p.116), but also her confidence that Kindle’s habit of skipping over front matter necessarily affects reading (2013, pp.112-3), because the only parts of a book that can fail to influence on some level are parts of the book that have been excised or obscured. Data from the pilot paratext experiment, examining how readers respond to front matter in an e-novel, challenges these assumptions.

Establishing legitimacy: digital elements of the peritext + epitext = paratext equation

Much epitext is now digital for books in any format, as social media, author websites, YouTube book trailers, recordings of public events and online versions of press interviews invite readers to access the author (or at least the author’s public authorial persona) digitally even if they are still accessing the text itself in print. Participants’ responses, in the focus group discussion and in the survey freetext, emphasise how integral personal research is to their book selection processes: by the time a book is in one’s hands, ‘you have an idea’ of what to expect, because ‘you’ve read about it

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9 McCracken also contends that when previously attached elements are ‘migrated outside the electronic literary texts proper’ they are ‘functioning as expanded versions of what Genette terms epitexts’ (2013, p.110), and conversely that, when switched on, non-authorised elements such as Amazon’s crowdsourced popular highlights become ‘paratextual material because it is a new part of the authorized text’ despite the fact that it is ‘clear that the author did not add the underlining’ because ‘it becomes physically part of the digital edition of the text’ (2013, p.108). This depends, however, on readers agreeing with her view that Amazon here functions as ‘the publisher, Amazon’ (2013, p.108) rather than the retailer, Amazon (as retailers do not generate true paratext on their own.) This aspect of her argument, tenuous in 2013, is even less persuasive in 2019. Changes in Amazon’s business model and public image, from a bookseller to an ‘everything store’, make it less likely that readers would mistake the bookseller for the publisher where they are not one and the same. In addition, Amazon’s move into the publishing space, offering its own products in competition with traditional publishers, foregrounds the fact that there are two categories. Findings from my survey, focus groups, and interviews indicate that readers have a strong grasp of Amazon’s position as a retailer, and do not automatically attribute to it the powers, or the wisdom and cultural authority, of a publisher.
already’ (FG 1 participant 5). Recommendations are very common, but personal investigation is even more so. But for e-books, digital epitext is in some ways at a less ‘respectful distance’ than is the case for print books. If downloading an e-book is quick and easy, Googling the author is even quicker and easier. For readers using tablets, smartphones, and personal computers the two tasks, obtaining books and researching books, take place on the same device, and even dedicated e-readers must connect with the web in some form if they are to take in new titles. ‘During the reading process one can easily tap a tablet’s touchscreen to view comments, ratings, reviews, and author information and commentary without putting the device aside’ (McCracken, 2013, p. 109). For an e-book, digital epitext is in a sense attached to the physical object, akin to precarious peritext, and potentially filling the information gap left by peritext such as front matter that readers knowingly skip. Unlike print books, which regularly come into their possession by the design of others (as with gifts, or by chance, as with books left behind in holiday cottages [FG 1 participant 4]), sources of e-books are almost invariably prominent, even obtrusive. The e-books these participants obtain come from identifiable sources: libraries, Project Gutenberg, and libraries most often, but sometimes a ‘e-mail direct from author (PDF)’ (Survey 2) or download from Pirate Bay (Surveys 1, 2, 4). Even a PDF found via Google search is downloaded from somewhere, and e-book gifts, rare as they are for these participants (only 5.2% had received one in the past 12 months) are typically ‘given’ via a link to a website from which the recipient can download her present. (It is part of what makes an e-book collection a walled garden: little enters without the owner’s permission, little is shared, and, aside from expiring loans and repossessed Orwell novels, nothing ever truly leaves.)
Proximity matters because proximity to a large extent determines what elements readers use, and what elements readers trust: what is truly from the author or publisher and not from the device, and hence meaningful, and what is not from the author or publisher (and, if genuinely objective, meaningful in a different way). The intense skepticism many of my study participants describe stems not from experience of deceptive devices, but from experience of self-publishing.

**E-novels and self-publishing**

‘The difference between the e-book and print book is that [with a] print book you have packaging, so you already have some kind of preconception of what your experience should be. Sort of...what will be coming, in a way. With an e-book...you just have the cover, and then you go through, it’s sort of **difficult to judge whether...it’s actually a book of quality**, in a way? I mean, if it’s from one of the big five, it’s probably...more reliable in a way. (FG 2, respondent 1)

‘[A recently-read self-published book] had typos, it was clearly badly edited, it **just looked like self-published, which was awful.**’ (Interview 1)

Self-publishing continues to contend with ‘this horrible stigma’ (FG 3 participant 2). ‘Vanity publishing’ (FG 3 participant 4) may predate digital, but the explosion in self-publishing facilitated by digital delivery has firmly entwined the two in the market and in readers’ minds. Participants acknowledge that quality can be found in self-published books (‘self-published...could be amazing’ [FG 6 participant 5]) and note the proud tradition of independent artists in many fields, comparing self-published fiction to avant
garde zines and punk rock (‘the Sex Pistols were far better when they were putting it out themselves’ [FG 3 participant 2]). But many still strongly associate self-publishing with low quality, with ‘amazing’ examples the exception rather than the rule. Participants discussed self-publishing in the context of the pilot experiment, but also spontaneously, raising it continually as they described their experiences of e-reading. Some are confident of their ability to identify self-published books at a glance (‘you’d know the ones that are [self-published]’ [FG 5 participant 1]), and not simply due to quality issues such as poor copy editing (though ‘thinking, they need to get a better copy editor’ [FG 1 participant 2] is a common occurrence in their experiences of self-publishing). They describe a ‘whiff’ of fan fiction (FG 3, participant 1) or a related ‘whiff’ of vanity publishing (FG 3, participant 4). Telltale signs, for these participants, include typographical errors and other editorial gaffes, but also simply ‘something about them’ (FG 5 participant 4) and the presence of the ‘odd’ (FG 5, participant 4; FG 5, participant 3): aspects that are not blatantly incorrect, but are nonetheless out of step with what experienced readers expect (a further indication that readers are not isolated from the logic of the field [Thompson, 2012, p.11] and their personal judgements are informed, though not controlled, by industry norms.)

Participants want good books, and describe themselves as open to the idea of good books coming from many sources, not only in print and from mainstream commercial publishing. A number are active, enthusiastic readers of self-published books, particularly fiction. Some report that ‘self published books are often only available as ebooks, so I buy those on ereader’ (Survey 2) or that some ‘favourite’ books are books obtained ‘for free on Amazon’ (FG 4 participant 2). A number note fan fiction as particularly important, either as the genre that attracted them to digital reading or a
genre they discovered through digital reading (Survey 3, Survey 4). Even those who do not (or do not knowingly) read self-published books cite examples of self-published works they consider to be of outstanding quality, including print bestsellers that were initially self-published such as *The Martian* (FG 6 participant 5). Many stress that they do not dismiss self-published books out of hand (e.g. ‘I’m not generally opposed to [self-published books]’ [Interview 1]) and some condemn such dismissal as snobbery (FG 1 participants 1, etc.; FG 3 participants 1, 2, 3), of a kind detrimental to book culture, an outdated and ill-informed prejudice. However, their personal experiences of self-published works are frequently of books where ‘the quality of writing and editing is not as good as traditionally published novels’ (Survey 2). Even where the ‘ideas were really interesting’ (FG 5 participant 1) or ‘content was fantastic’ (FG 5 participant 3) poor editing could render a book unreadable. Intriguingly, given the confidence many expressed (as above) that they could identify a self-published work by its general oddness, several described experiences of haphazard professionalism, as with an excellent cover but poor editing (FG 5 participant 3), or of being caught out: ‘I didn’t realise [the book] was self-published until I started reading it and I thought, “This cannot possibly have gone through a reputable publisher”’ (FG 5 participant 1). It is entirely possible that many have read high quality self-published books without realizing it. Their general impression is that quality can be found in self-published books, but that it is ‘harder to find’, especially when past encounters of ‘really awful’ self-published books have ‘put [them] off…it could be amazing, but it could be really, really dire’ (FG 6 participant 5). ‘Pleasant surprises’ (Survey 2) are, largely, surprises.

These experiences reinforce the negative perception of self-publishing as an author’s ‘last resort’ (Burokur, 2011), and the common assumption (acknowledged by
participants as typical, even if they would not want to make such an assumption themselves) that ‘this has probably been rejected by every publishing house in Britain…That’s why it’s self-published’ (FG 1 participant 1). As noted, the stamp of mainstream publishing signals to these participants investment. Gatekeeping was widely considered to guarantee a certain (if not perfect) level of ‘quality control’ (FG 6 participant 3) and to offer ‘an indication of whether it’s worth reading or not’ (Interview 1). Without such guarantees, personal recommendations are even more important, whether from friend networks for fan fiction (FG 6 participant 1) or ‘traditional mediums like newspaper columns and book reviews and things’ (FG 3 participant 4) for self-published e-books. The gatekeeper can be dispensed with, but not simply replaced in a one-to-one swap: some readers stress that for self-published works there is a ‘higher standard of recommendation’ (FG 6 participant 4), where multiple non-professional endorsements are needed to provide the same level of trust as the professional endorsement of traditional publication.

‘I think the self-published stuff, there’s just a higher standard of recommendation. So if somebody says, ‘Oh, this book’s good,’ you might get the book, but if it’s a self-published book then you have to wait for three or four people to tell you that it’s actually really good.’ (FG 6 participant 4)

This frames traditional publishing as a service to readers, with professional editors paid to ‘jump in and go find things’ (Interview 1) because ‘life’s too short’ (FG 3 participant 3) for readers to do so on their own time. This vocabulary of service may downplay an editor’s power, but only highlights the overwhelming trust placed in editors: not only will they supply the best traditionally published material, they will also find and elevate
the best self-published material. ‘So, you just think that if it is self-published, if it is good enough to be worth reading, a publisher will pick it up eventually’ (FG 6 participant 3). It leaves an uneasy balance, where the editor is an unquestioned expert, controlling what readers can see, but who is nonetheless effectively subordinate, someone to whom the reader can delegate work.

The enduring trust in professional judgment intersects with the lower perceived value of digital in the category of digital-only works that are not self-published. Digital-only releases by mainstream publishers are no longer rare or exotic. While simultaneous release in print and e-book remains the most commonplace arrangement for ‘Big Five’ commercial publishers and leading university and academic presses, all-digital imprints such as Penguin Random House’s Hydra and Alibi, ‘digital first’ series such as Ploughshares Solos (Ploughshares, n.d.), and all-Open Access publishers such as UCL Press demonstrate that digital-only is a business model of interest to established institutions as well as new entrants. Despite the fact that a digital release from any of the above receives the same editorial attention and is held to the same standard as any print release, digital-only remains as a category ‘dubious’ (FG 1 participant 3). There is a suspicion that a book released only in digital form is by definition second-best: ‘why would [the publisher] invest in print for other books but not this one?’ (FG 1 participant 1). As one participant put it, ‘e-only, in my head, I equate it with, like, films that go straight to DVD’ (FG 1 participant 4).

The question is how this perception of digital-only as a cheap option, suitable for second-rate books, plays into readers’ perception of individual books. The first step is
to determine whether readers are aware of the print status of the e-books they are currently reading.

Publication status of ‘last book read’

The survey asked e-book readers about the print status of the last e-book they read. The options were ‘Digital version of a print book (you could have chosen a printed copy)’ and ‘Digital original (there was no printed copy to choose)’, but also ‘Didn’t check’ and ‘Don’t remember’. If print status were irrelevant, one would expect a large number of answers in the latter categories. However, readers are in fact overwhelmingly aware of, and overwhelmingly remember, the print status of their e-books. Of the e-book readers who answered the question (n=669), nine out of ten (89.4%) were confident that they had this information (Figure 2). Only 7.0% ‘didn’t check’: this indicates that readers almost invariably do check at some point in the process of obtaining a digital book.

Figure 2: Publication status of last e-book downloaded
Of those who did know, the great majority, 86.2%, reported having read a ‘digital version of a print original’, where they could have chosen a print copy (77.1% of all respondents who answered the question). Only 13.7% (12.3% of all respondents who answered the question) reported having read a ‘digital original’, where there was no print copy they could have chosen. These levels were largely stable over the four years of the survey: 2015 and 2016 had slightly higher levels of digital-original reading, and slightly lower levels of forgetfulness, but these differences did not reach the level of statistical significance.

Novels were unique as the only genre tested in the survey with a significant relationship to print status of last e-book read. Respondents who had read at least one e-novel in the past 12 months were considerably less likely to have last read a digital original: 10.5%, vs 21.6% of those who had not read an e-novel, a reasonably strong and highly significant effect (CS=14.5, p=.005) (Figure 3). They were correspondingly more likely to have read a digital version of a print book (79.3% vs 62.7%) with very little difference regarding remembering status or having checked in the first place. This finding reflects the fact that while self-published novels are prominent in participants’ discussion of their digital reading, most of their novels, like most of their books, are digital versions of titles they could have accessed in print.
There was minimal variation in print status of last e-book read based on sources of e-books or on device use. Even Amazon, with its vast stock of self-published books and digital-only imprints, had no significant link. Readers who had obtained any e-book direct from the publisher in the past 12 months were slightly more likely to have most recently read a digital original (18.6% vs 11.0%, CS=9.7 p=.035), though this is a relatively weak relationship and not far over the level of statistical significance.

The only significant link in terms of device use was to laptop reading: 17.8% of those who had read an e-book on a laptop in the past 12 months had most recently read a digital original, vs 8.3% of others, a stronger (CS=14.6) and more reliably significant (p=.006) effect. This may suggest that for at least one type of digital original e-book, laptops are the device of choice: one possible category would be academic books.
accessed in digital form via university libraries; another would be fan fiction published online in .HTML form, as in some fan fiction websites. There were no significant links for tablet, smartphone, other e-ink readers, or desktop, or for Kindle: this last harmonises with the Amazon findings, and is counterintuitive for the same reasons.

This commitment to digital versions of print originals may not, however, be as powerful as it first appears. Readers’ recollection of the print status of last e-book read depends not only on their memory, but on the accuracy of their original assessment of that print status. And as focus group and pilot experiment data indicates, sources of such information can be misleading.

**Signalling status: digital-only, or also in print?**

Publishers and author/publishers who cannot answer ‘yes’ to the reader question ‘is this book in print?’ face a grave obstacle. They must respond to another question – ‘if it is not in print, why not?’ – and if this second answer is not convincing, the text will not be viewed in the same light. Epitext offers authors a chance to answer with a narrative, telling a story that defines their digital-only or self-published work in terms of its relationship to print and in the context of a larger writing career and authorial identity. Authors may make extensive use of public authorial epitext, in the form of mediated interviews and articles, unmediated social media and personal websites, actively deceptive pseudo-allographic or crypto-authorial ploys, or a coordinated campaign using a variety of such approaches. Their narratives can align them with traditional mainstream publishing as ‘proper’ print authors who happen to be releasing one-offs for artistic reasons: examples would include Richard Russo using interviews to defend use
of the now-defunct digital publisher Byliner for his novella *Nate in Venice* as the only way to publish a novella as a standalone work, and hence to realise his vision (Dietz, 2015, pp.203-4). Their narratives can also align them against traditional mainstream publishing, presenting them as artists resisting a corrupt corporate oligarchy that exploits writers and fails readers: examples would include Polly Courtney using near-identical wording in interviews, articles, social media bios, and tweets to reinforce the message that she ‘dumped’ her Big Five publishers and now self-publishes for reasons of principle (Dietz, 2015, pp.208-9). But authors can and do attempt to embed messages of legitimacy in the digital book-object, not via epitextual narrative but via what are in print peritextual elements: front matter, covers, and page design. For the former, this involves the arguably deceptive tactic (though, as noted above, paratext is often deliberately deceptive) of the single-author imprint.

*Masquerading as ‘chosen’*

Self-published authors have long been advised to evade rather than confront the self-publishing stigma by ‘choos[ing] a publishing imprint name, to make your book sound more as if it has been published by a company rather than an individual’ (Young, 2015). Blogging in 2011, author Lindsay Burokur described her choice not to conceal her status as the publisher of her own work as an iconoclastic and risky one, reporting that ‘someone more experienced (and more successful) than I said that indie authors should create an imprint because a) reviewers who say they won’t take self-published fiction might consider work from small presses and b) there are readers who refuse to try independent authors’ (2011). She concluded, however, that despite the ‘stigma associated with self-published books’ she considered such a ‘disguise’ incompatible
with her ‘embrace’ of the independent author mission and identity: ‘I’m all for trying to make the packaging of my books professional, but I don’t think it’s in me to make up a press in an attempt to look like something I’m not.’ (Buroker, 2011). (In other posts, Burokur describes being approached by publishers, including Amazon’s digital-only 47North SF/F imprint, but turning these down [Burokur, 2012], using authorial epitext to position herself as credentialed by but in principled opposition to mainstream publishing in a manner reminiscent of, though arguably less boldly confrontational than, Polly Courtney.)

For a CreateSpace author like Lindsay Burokur, visible differences between undisguised self-publishing and using a single-author imprint typically appear in only two places. One, falling outside peritext, is a ‘Publisher’ line on an Amazon sales page; this is well below the first and second screen of content and requires extensive scrolling to find. The other is the e-book front matter. Distinguishing between independent, small-press, single-author, and customers of pay-to-publish vanity publishing firms based only on a name is difficult even for industry insiders and experienced researchers, and for members of the public sometimes impossible. The AuthorEarnings project, a proudly amateur data-gathering exercise produced by a coalition of independent authors skeptical of industry and academic efforts at quantification, describes a labour-intensive process of researching each imprint individually, hunting online for any clues regarding hundreds of obscure names, and eventually giving up (AuthorEarnings, 2014). Even the layout of the front matter is less important electronically: if the typographical arrangement (at least in reflowable .EPUB files like these) appeared haphazard, only some participants highlighted this as a sign that ‘not as much care [has] gone into this as perhaps should’ (FG 2 participant 1). Others were ready to attribute mistakes to the e-
reading device or app rather than the novel itself: a sharp contrast to their lack of patience with imperfect copyediting, where details on the level of unusual hyphenation were sufficient for participants to conclude that a piece ‘wasn’t done professionally’ (FG 2 participant 3). This willingness to effectively give the novel the benefit of the doubt suggests, for this one aspect, something like a level playing field: an arena where the skill of professional book designers does not confer advantage. But in an e-novel, where the reader has little else to go on, front matter does at least promise an answer to pressing questions on relationship to traditional mainstream publishing.

To consider the effects, if any, of indications of publication status, I used a pilot reading experiment to examine specific elements of peritext and how they affected readers’ perceptions of the legitimacy and value of a novel. The first phase, examining front matter, offered compelling evidence that the front matter was largely irrelevant.

**Pilot experiment, phase one**

The pilot experiment presented readers with four 12,000 word samples of unpublished novels on an iBooks reading app on iPad. Each sample was presented in one of four guises designed to indicate publication status: in Phase 1, this took the form of fake front matter. The fake front matter imitated that of four types of e-book: a) digital edition of a traditionally published print book from a Big Five publisher, b) digital-only book from a Big Five publisher, c) digital-only book self-published, and d) ambiguous (having no front matter, as some self-published e-books do not). Participants evaluated the texts according to various criteria, such as characteristics (‘light’, ‘derivative’, ‘significant’, etc.), genre, desire to read on, and overall rating out of 10. Ratings were
tabulated and compared across the four guises, and analysed to seek any differences for the same sample presented as mainstream published (A and B) versus self-published (C) or ambiguous (D), and mainstream published in print and digital (A) versus mainstream published as digital-only (B). (For additional detail on the pilot experiment, please see Chapter 1, Methodology, pp.62-66.)

After three groups the initial results were tabulated. Different guises of fake front matter, offering clear indications of the print status of each book (i.e. digital edition of Big Five print book, Big Five digital original, self-published, or no information), had no obvious effect on reader responses. Average score by guise varied very little, from 6.0 for guise 3, self-published (which would be an unexpected leader given the well-established lower status of self-publishing) to 5.6 for guise 4, ambiguous (Figure 4).

Given the small sample, the lack of statistical significance is not surprising: rather, what is striking is the uniformity between guises.

Figure 4: Phase One: mean score by guise
At the level of individual texts, this overall similarity persists, even with the reduced sample size. There is no indication of an emerging pattern. Two of the samples, 1 and 2, had highly consistent scores across guises. Samples 3 and 4 showed slightly more variation, but not in predictable ways: for sample 3, the ‘Big 5 digital only’ guise scored low compared to others (5). But for sample 4, the ‘Big 5 digital only’ guise scored highest (7.2) (Figure 5). Together, this suggests that the variation was more likely due to random chance than to strong influence by the fake front matter.

![Figure 5: Phase One: overall score by guise](image-url)
Genre classification and characteristics were also largely stable for each text across guises: for example, sample 4 was consistently seen as literary fiction and described as ‘experimental’, ‘challenging’, ‘highbrow’ and ‘serious’, while sample 1 was consistently seen as commercial fiction and described as ‘light’, ‘escapist’, and either ‘middlebrow’ or ‘lowbrow’.

Qualitative data from the post-experiment discussion helped to contextualise the quantitative findings. Many participants described having flipped through the front matter as quickly as they could. While in real-world Kindle app use readers are often automatically jumped ahead, opening the new .AZW file to see not a cover or title page or front matter but what an algorithm deems the first ‘useful’ page (Ragan and McCracken have noted how this policy can distort novels such as with *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, where the first Kindle edition skipped the reader right over essential epigraphs [Ragen, 2008, pp.230-1; McCracken, 2013, p.113]) in this experiment readers were not jumped ahead. Instead, tablets were set up and checked to ensure that each file opened on the first page of the front matter, and participants had to physically swipe the screen to proceed past the copyright and publication information. Despite that interaction, participants reported that they ‘didn’t pay any attention to it’ (FG 1 participant 2). This is not necessarily a contrast to how they would use front matter in a print book: most participants described using printed front matter selectively if at all, potentially going back after reading the main text to check a reference (FG 1 participant 3) or ‘read a little bit about the author or the publishing history or something that’s gone along with it’ (FG 3 participant 3). What is notable is that even deprived of every other potential source of information regarding print status – a status they regard as meaningful and important to their reading choices – they still do not consult front
matter. It did not step in to serve in place of what participants described as their usual sources of information about a new book, most especially cover art and blurbs.

*Judging e-books by their detachable covers*

McCracken speculates that ‘given this expanded network of epitexts for e-books, the front cover is perhaps less important now as a marketing device than it is for print books’ (2013, p.114), but data from my study suggest that it remains an element of paramount importance. These participants describe relying on it for information about the type of book, but also for clues as to its status and trustworthiness. If anything, the cover may take on greater importance when some other signals of publisher investment, such as paper quality, are no longer available for consultation.

Covers are a reasonable place for readers to start when forming their initial assessments of how much investment and expertise have gone into a particular book: cover design from a major publishing house represents the combined, and costly, professional effort of many designers, editors, and sales and marketing specialists (Matthews, 2007, p.xi). Readers risk a bit of money and a great deal of time on their choice of book. My respondents frequently emphasised that evidence of others’ risk, what publishers have invested themselves, ranks alongside the demonstrable skill of the author and editor in determining whether a given novel is worth their money and time.10

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10 Early dominance by e-ink readers, particularly Kindle, potentially encouraged some publishers to simplify covers and reduce design vocabulary for legibility on small, non-zoomable black and white screens. If this trend had continued, readers could come to rely less heavily on covers as a significant source of data. However, advances in image rendering technology, and the move from e-ink to tablet screen, make it likely that a technologically constrained design vocabulary is a transitional problem. Similarly, professional-looking cover design is less of an indication of investment: the self-publishing author services industry, rapidly expanding, now offers a wide range of semi-custom cover design providers that more closely approximate a ‘professional’ cover for far lower prices than in the past (Holson, 2016). Finally, habits can change. Researchers studying the general information gathering tactics of students,
‘I tend to judge the book by its cover no matter if it is print or digital’ (Survey 4)

‘Because, I think, with a physical book I look at the cover and the back and the spine.’ (FG 1 participant 1)

‘The thing I found [with the e-book samples in the pilot experiment] was the covers.’ (FG 1 participant 2)

‘There used to be this perception that an e-book cover worked in a different way to a print book cover. I’m not entirely sure if that’s true.’ (Interview 1)

‘When you transfer to e-books...I think that image still plays a role and also the blurb.’ (FG 2 participant 1)

Many indicate that a ‘badly done’ or ‘unprofessional’ cover instantly destroys any possibility of trust in the book. Not only does it signal self-publication (though, as previously mentioned, some note that they have been fooled by better-than-expected covers on self-published books), it signals to them carelessness: a book where ‘the cover looked really dodgy’ (FG 1 participant 1) is expected to deliver similarly dodgy

have noted the conservatism (not to say ‘laziness’) of reliance on familiar strategies over appropriate strategies (Makri et al., 2007, p.443), clinging to old tools until the tools break. But it is also observed that when the tools do eventually break, information seekers move on. There is a danger of mistaking inertia for loyalty. Young readers reared on WattPad novels, where some of the most popular and successful entries are introduced by a proudly amateur image from WattPad’s Cover Creator, are by necessity accustomed to judging quality using criteria other than the professionalism of a cover, and may never develop either loyalty or inertia in the first place.
content. ‘Cheap or unprofessional’ covers (FG 3 participant 5) were perceived as both typical of self-published e-books and quite reasonable grounds for rejecting a title.

‘Actually I also judge the cover, even though it's not like a printed one. For example, if I'm looking for a good history book, if I see one that obviously has been badly done on Photoshop or something like that I'm going to go, “No, just no. No way. I don't trust it.”’ (FG 4 participant 2)

When participants discussed using covers as indicators of quality, it was not a matter of trusting covers but rather trusting their own experience with covers. They had faith in their ability to decode the paratextual messages authors and publishers have placed there, relying on mental models of a printed book for their information-seeking task much as experienced users of traditional libraries have been observed to apply mental models of traditional libraries to digital library searches (Makri et al., 2007, pp.436-443). Empirically testing the role of covers is a costly (requiring funding professional book designers, partnering with publishers, or both) but important future step for e-book paratext research. In the short term, with a small budget, it is possible to test aspects of another key element: page-level design.

**Pilot experiment, phase two**

The second phase, examining guises distinguished by font and typographical arrangement, did yield suggestions of influence. Here, the four guises were Mainstream and Independent, suggesting professional design in a more contemporary or more traditional mode, as well as CreateSpace and Word, suggesting non-professional layout
by an author either following Amazon guidelines or simply Microsoft Word default settings (see Chapter 1, Methodology pp.66-69 for additional details). Most participants were not conscious of any influence, reporting either that they ‘didn’t even notice’ (FG 4 participant 3) the page design, or dismissed unusual design choices as ‘just trying too hard. I assumed that it was a vaguely obnoxious literary fiction decision.’ (FG 4 participant 4). One participant reported finding the Word guise ‘blocky’ and hence difficult to read, but also reported that she was willing to persevere despite the uncongenial layout (FG 4 participant 2). Other participants were confident that their judgements were informed solely by text itself, particularly first lines (FG 4 participant 4) and the standard of editing (FG 5 participants 1, 3, 4, 5). But their scores suggest that in addition to being consciously aware of design factors, they may well have been influenced by them. Readers viewing the same texts give them higher overall ratings when the texts were presented with professional page design.

Overall scores: variation by guise

In Phase 2, the gap between guises was larger: a full point rather than 0.4 (Figure 6). Further, there is a more recognisable potential pattern. In ‘professional’ guises, Mainstream and Independent, the same body of texts was scored more highly than in the ‘amateur’ guises, CreateSpace and Word. Mainstream (mean score 6.1) and Independent (mean score 6.0) were extremely close. Word was considerably behind at 5.1. The CreateSpace guise sat roughly in the middle at 5.7.
Figure 6: Phase Two: mean score by guise

Average scores were also more variable than in Phase 1 (Figure 7).
While the gap is noticeable, and considerably greater than the gap seen in Phase 1, a larger sample size would be needed to give results statistical power.

Examining scores at the level of each text (Samples 1-4) makes the sample size smaller still, and indicative results should be approached with even greater caution. However, the differences in pattern between the four texts suggests that ‘professional’ versus ‘amateur’ presentation may matter more for some texts than for others: one possibility is variation by genre.
Sample 1 (identified by its author as general fiction) and Sample 2 (identified by its author as historical crime) share an overall shape, with the first three guises roughly level and Word (Guise 4) lagging behind. Sample 1, however, has only a small gap, not statistically significant (ANOVA significance = .477), while Sample 2’s drop is both large and significant (ANOVA significance .007). Sample 3 (identified by its author as crime) is an erratic zigzag with only a small drop in Word (Guise 4) and an intriguing peak in CreateSpace (Guise 3), but its variation is too small to be statistically significant (ANOVA significance .577).

Sample 4 (identified by its author as literary fiction) breaks the pattern. The lagging guise is not Word (4) but CreateSpace (3). As with Sample 2, the gap is both large and significant (ANOVA significance .035).

Placing the four samples in the same graph demonstrates how different the subgroup patterns are. Further investigation is needed to determine whether this is the result of meaningful differences between the samples (for example, an indication that CreateSpace is particularly unacceptable for literary fiction) or random chance. Some focus group participants shared a perception that self-publishing was more widely accepted for genres such as a science fiction and fantasy (FG 3, participants 1 and 2; FG 6, participant 4) than for literary fiction, considering it a simple fact that writers had to live with, even if they personally considered such a prejudice irrational or snobbish. While the samples used here did include two genre novels, the genre was crime, and crime was not a genre spontaneously noted by participants as friendly or unfriendly to self-publishing. If readers are in fact more receptive to the idea that quality can be found in a digital-only or self-published science fiction novel than a ‘literary’ novel.
(though the assumption that these are mutually exclusive categories is difficult to defend) would require a separate experiment, using some accepted measure of ‘literary’ and ‘science fiction’ status (such as evaluation by past judges of general and SF-specific literary prizes). These indicative results suggest that the possibility of genre difference is worthy of further study.

‘Read on’: variation by guise and sample

Participants were also more likely to say that they would continue reading samples in some guises, but here the Independent guise (48.0%) was not close to Mainstream (68.0%), but rather on a level with CreateSpace (48.0%) (Figure 8). Word lagged far behind at 36.0%.

![Figure 8: Phase Two: 'read on' by guise](image-url)
One possible explanation is that the Independent guise, while credible, does not promise as pleasant a reading experience on screen as Mainstream. Its design could suggest to readers, when viewed in PDF form, not so much a new book with an old-school sensibility but an old book cheaply and poorly digitised, of the generation ‘where it looks like they’ve just digitally scanned a print book and not bothered to check for errors’ (Survey 2) rather than produced as a digital file from the original manuscript.

As with score, the relationship between guise and ‘read on’ varied by sample. Here, however, the differences are even more drastic (Figure 9). There is no similarity in shape. Of the four samples, only Sample 4, identified as literary fiction, sees differences so drastic (from 83.3% in Mainstream guise to 0.0% in CreateSpace) that they register as statistically significant (CS=8.6 p=.036) even with such a small sample. This adds further impetus to investigation of genre effects.
There were more subtle potential patterns regarding the relationship between guise and perceptions of genre. Texts were most likely to be perceived as ‘genre fiction’ in the Independent guise, but ‘genre fiction’ was the most common designation overall (Figure 10). ‘Commercial fiction’ was nearly as commonplace, though lower in the Word guise than in others. ‘Literary fiction’ dipped in the Independent guise, but ‘literary fiction’ was the least-selected of all the guises presented, and the differences were small.

Participants were, however, more confident in their judgments when reading in the ‘professional’ guises of Mainstream and Independent. They were more likely to
commit to a category in ‘professional’, and more likely to select ‘None of the above’ when the saw a text in the ‘amateur’ guises of CreateSpace and Word.¹¹

Figures 10: Phase Two: perceived genre by guise

*Characteristics: variation by guise*

Other potential patterns emerge from the descriptors (such as ‘escapist’ or ‘significant’ or ‘middlebrow’) that readers were asked to select as terms they would associate with each text.

Most participants selected for each sample a handful of characteristics at most; hence, the overall count for many characteristics is quite low. The words participants

¹¹ Though the object of the experiment was not testing perceptions of genre, it is interesting that participants most often placed texts in the genre their authors intended: commercial fiction for Sample 1 (72.0%), genre fiction (crime) for Samples 2 (76.0%) and 3 (68.0%), and literary fiction for Sample 4 (44.0% - a minority of respondents in this case, but still the leading category). This indicates that while responses were quite varied, they were not random.
associated with each text sometimes varied noticeably between guises, but for many
there is little difference. Moreover, for those few characteristics that do show variation,
there is not necessarily uniformity between related terms: for example, ‘escapist’ was
seen most often for the Mainstream guise, while ‘relaxing’, which might be considered
to describe similar attributes, was more consistent (Figure 11). ‘Light’, which
potentially carries a more negative connotation of insignificance or frivolousness, was
more common for Word.

![Bar chart]

**Figure 11: Phase Two: 'leisure' characteristics by guise (number of responses)**

Characteristics that speak to high status, especially high literary status, were similarly
varied (Figure 12). The professional guises did not have an overwhelming advantage.
Figure 12: Phase Two: 'high status' characteristics by guise (number of responses)

Of characteristics associated with personal satisfaction, ‘fun’ was by far the most frequently cited, and in roughly equal numbers for each guise (Figure 13). ‘Rewarding’ showed a sharp downward trajectory through the professional to the amateur guises: this descriptor was cited four times as often for Mainstream than for Word. This could mean that ‘rewarding’ is more closely linked to an overall impression of quality than ‘fun’ or, interestingly, ‘worthy’.
‘Originality’ characteristics demonstrate that experimentation is not associated solely with professional status (Figure 14). Texts seen in CreateSpace were more likely to be perceived as derivative, but texts seen in Mainstream were not far behind.
Intriguingly, Mainstream and CreateSpace texts were twice as likely to be perceived as ‘middlebrow’ compared to Independent and Word (Figure 15).

![Bar chart showing responses for different guises](chart.png)

**Figure 15: Phase Two: ‘battle of the brows’ characteristics by guise (number of responses)**

‘Amateur’ guises were more likely than ‘professional’ to be tarred with the label ‘lowbrow.’ Texts were almost never considered ‘highbrow’, whatever the guise.

Participants were more likely to choose ‘none of the above’ for Independent, CreateSpace, and Word guises than for Mainstream (Figure 16).
On a humbling note, none of the respondents found any of the texts ‘important’.

These empirical data, qualitative and quantitative, on digital paratext as experienced and interpreted by readers represent an important part of the contribution of this thesis, addressing a gap in existing scholarship.

The second phase examined page design in non-reflowable PDF format to foreground the differences between professional and amateur page layout. But while these findings are directly applicable to the large proportion of the e-book market that uses non-reflowable formats, their application to the popular .EPUB, AZW and other reflowable formats is more complicated. Not only does reflow dynamically change aspects such as margins and line breaks (usually for the worse, from a design point of view) the option of customization raises issues of discerning authorial responsibility.
Discerning authority in an adaptable book object

Peritext is and always has been porous. Movement between categories of peritext, epitext, and metatext is expected and commonplace, for print as well as for digital books. A given element may move in and out, included in this edition, excluded in that, and perhaps eventually achieving its ‘ultimate destiny’: to ‘catch up with its text’ and become part of the text itself (Genette, 1997b, p. 403). The only things that are unusual about promotion or demotion of elements in e-books are a) the degree of reader involvement and b) the degree to which adaptations are reversible and sometimes invisible. (Though Galey argues that the near-infinite ‘fluidity’ imagined by some early theorists of the e-book is greatly overstated [2012, p.218].) Customisation at the point of purchase is not unknown for print. A manuscript owner in 1100 or a bookshop patron in 1720 could select his binding or indeed leave the pages in a stack held together with string. The modern reader can choose between hundreds of print editions of Pride and Prejudice, selecting paratext that emphasises the novels’s status as a classic, or its central romance, or its various film adaptations (Doll, 2013), perhaps making a conscious decision to match the edition to her conception of and/or reading strategy for the text (or perhaps picking up whatever is closest, and accepting discordant paratext as the price of convenience). But for the e-book, peritext is not only ‘flexible’ (Thomson, 2012, p.330), it is perpetually so, at the point of purchase and at almost any point beyond. ‘Fluidity marks the electronic text in contrast to the stationary nature of print on a page: adjustment of font-size, brightness, contrast, and landscape or portrait orientation’ (McCracken, 2013, p.109-10). If one is a typical reader, making use of multiple modes and platforms (in this survey, 71.4% of respondents had used two or more devices for reading in the past 12 months) one may be simultaneously using a smartphone app for one book and a desktop browser window for another, or taking
advantage of the ‘save my place’ feature on Kindle to swap between devices for the same text, and encountering it through two equally but differently personalised interfaces. There is not one personal version but the potential for a plethora of personal versions, appearing in sequence or simultaneously, optimized for different settings and situations. But assuming that customisation effectively obscures authorital intention, rendering any element useless as peritext (or even non-paratextual) is speculating ahead of the facts.

Precarious authority

Genette designated a specific category of paratextual elements distributed in or immediately around the print object but not affixed to it. A ‘precarious peritext’ is an element like a French ‘please-insert’ that, while created and authorised by the publisher, remains a slip of paper easily separated from the bound copy, unlike ‘durable peritext’ elements such as bindings and tables of contents (1997b, p.110). While it would be on one level simple to reclassify all e-book peritext as precarious, that would ignore the way peritextual content is actually stored in an e-book file, and the ways in which readers experience peritext on the level of an e-reading device.

Formatting as experienced by the reader can be highly adaptable for a reflowable e-book file, with elements such as font, margins and line spacing adjustable via device or app settings, and elements such as pagination adjusting dynamically to accommodate setting changes. But these setting changes, stored in a local file, do not change the e-

12 And in theory easily replaced, but his examples are of promotional materials of the type likely to be discarded by typical readers, and retained, or sought out and reunited with the text afterwards, only by scholars, collectors, or fans, and then only for books and authors of special literary or personal significance.
book file itself. (The settings are meant to endure over multiple reading sessions, but users of e-reading apps are all too familiar with the software crashes that return settings to default state.) Opened and read on a dozen non-synced devices, the file could be experienced in a dozen guises without leaving its original state. An e-book ‘is simply a disguised zip archive’ (Maxwell, et al., 2010), containing a series of separate files where text, images, formatting, etc. are stored discretely, to be interpreted and displayed by the interface software each time the e-book file is opened. It is a simple exercise to change file type for an unprotected .EPUB file and view or alter the constituent files, and only slightly more complicated to strip out Digital Rights Management and do the same for a protected .EPUB file (as some participants in this study do, despite the fact that this violates terms and conditions from Amazon and many other retailers. See Chapter 4, pp.240-246, for more on these participants’ e-book customisation). But such alteration would not take place by accident. The reader would need to take a series of steps, such as downloading specialist software such as Calibre (and, if a coding novice, downloading detailed instructions) to make a permanent change. In this way e-book peritext is in fact more durable than print peritext: while a file can be corrupted, it can only be intentionally, and not accidentally, dismembered or defaced.

Where e-books have conspicuously less integrity than print books is the invisibility of such permanent changes. Kirschenbaum notes how 18th century legal scholar William Blackstone argued that legal records be kept exclusively on rag linen paper rather than leather, wood or stone not because paper was durable, but because it was not durable: unlike robust surfaces that could be scoured clean, the paper document was ‘fragile enough to readily expose any attempt to tamper with or change it’ (Kirschenbaum, 2016, p.226). Many elements of print paratext can be forcibly removed, like a torn-off
paperback cover or a razored-out colour plate. But such durables of print typically leave scars: a defaced and visibly diminished text with gaps, spaces where meaning should be, that invite a frustrated reader to go looking for what’s been withheld. (The status of removable paper dust jackets, which were for much of the nineteenth century treated as disposable protective wrapping, but are today desirable elements of a new hardcover book and essential for that book’s sale as an undamaged copy, highlights the importance of context in determining what leaves a gap and what does not.) The question is whether the removal of electronic paratextual elements leaves scars and gaps, or whether, as Galey identifies in his case study of a digital edition of *The Sentimentalists* released with incorrect ContentID information, ‘readers [of the corrupted version] would have no way of knowing that they have not, in a basic sense, read the same novel as other readers’ (2012, p.236).

Short of such Calibre-enabled file-level tampering, what is mutable in the reflowable e-book is not the file but the interface: not only because it is customisable, but because it is perpetually remade. As a ‘web page in a wrapper’ (Maxwell et al., 2010) the e-book is read, much like a webpage where content and formatting instructions are distributed over a series of text .XML and image .JPG and .CSS stylesheet files, through mediating software that compiles input from various sources. Rather than storing the output each time, the software stores the data needed (including user settings and, if all goes well, the user’s progress through the text) to make it afresh in the next session. In a sense, the version a reader is actually looking at on screen, generated from the instructions in .EPUB or .AZW files and associated settings and progress files, ceases to exist when the reader looks away: not only when she ‘shuts’ the book (closing an application or opening a different book on her e-ink reader), but every time she turns the page.
(Leading to the experience that has frustrated so many readers: flipping backwards in an e-book to check something on a previous page and discovering that the pagination has changed, and the words one was looking for have moved despite no changes to font or other settings. This phenomenon of wandering text is identified in some studies as a potential barrier to reading comprehension, retention, and/or immersion, interfering with a reader’s ability to construct a cognitive map of the text [Mangen, Walgermo and Bronnick, 2013, p.66]. For more on wandering text as part of the digital reading experience, please see Chapter 4 [p.265]). Kirschenbaum, examining Max Barry’s 2011 novel *Machine Man*, where the author used a software development version control tool to both preserve all interim versions of the text and post these accumulated versions to his personal website, concludes that ‘in this model the text becomes less an object or an artifact and more like an *event*’ in a programming sense (2016, p.230). If that model can be extended to cover an .EPUB or .AZW file where the inner workings are less visible than Barry’s but no less intricate, one might consider the reflowable e-book as experienced by the reader as an event rather than an artifact. If so, it would be intriguing to investigate this as an additional category or subcategory of paratext, event paratext, that contrasts with and functions separately from artifact paratext; potentially as a paratextual equivalent of Drucker’s performative materiality, a form of materialty that ‘bears only a probabilistic relation to the event of production’ and ‘always occurs only in real time and is distinct in each instance’ (Drucker, 2013). This problematises present conceptions of digital paratext and opens the door for an expansion of paratextual theory.

If there is such a thing as event paratext, and readers are viewing and responding to a set of paratextual signals that exist but only for a single viewing, the reflowable e-book is
not real, and not real because it is a digital proxy: in this case, a digital proxy for a
digital artifact. (And if the reader is conceptualising the e-book itself as a digital proxy
for a print edition, doubly distanced.)

Proxy status, and subsequent unrealness, does not by itself stop paratext from
functioning as paratext. Genette’s categories embrace mediated categories, such as
interviews, conversations and colloquia (1997b, pp.356-367). But it does emphasise the
greatest problem with event paratext: discerning authorial intention.

Changes or additions made to a text without the author or publisher’s approval are not
paratext. The challenge facing the reader is determining which aspects of the e-book
she is viewing on screen are intended and which are accidental (for example, in the case
of a corrupted file like the edition of The Sentimentalists examined by Galey) or
imposed (for example, in an e-book that includes promotions for other books in or
overlaying the final pages, and it may be difficult to tell which were included by the
publisher and which were generated by an e-retailer’s algorithm.) Mutability does not
of itself make a particular aspect irrelevant, or even ambiguous. Font, a prime example
of a feature controllable via user settings, is nonetheless initially set by the publisher as
part of the .EPUB or other e-book file. The user may alter it, but the user must open the
file and actively change the setting to do so, as setting are typically changed on a book-
by-book basis, not as a master setting for every book opened on a given device or app.
Hence, she will encounter the font, along with other aspects such as line spacing: at the
very least in the form of a name (Lucida, Palatino, etc.) in a dropdown menu, but likely
on the page as well, particularly if she chooses to try the publisher’s suggested settings
before changing them to her own. The device focuses her attention, however briefly, on
the publisher’s original intention: the invitation to alter is also an invitation to contemplate paratextual choices, highlighting them in a different but far from trivial way. (A sobering check on this new way of communicating with readers comes in the form of limited font libraries: many e-reading devices are loaded with only a handful of popular fonts and, if presented with a file set for anything else, will default to the manufacturer’s choice: in Galey’s example replacing Joanna with Georgia (2012, pp.228-9) on Kobo, but on Amazon apps and Kindles typically reverting its own custom Bookerly font. This severely constricts publishers’ options, much in the way that production process limits on colour, size, layout, etc. would constrict other design options on a print edition.) This engagement could even, at least for some users, be considered ludic, a game-like interface where playful interaction is not a means to an end but part of the experience. Perpetual customisation in some ways exemplifies the transaction element of paratext, where authors and publishers do not and indeed cannot dictate, they can only meet readers on the threshold and make proposals, from which the negotiation may begin.

The fluidity that so alarmed early theorists of digital literature (Galey, 2012, p.218) does not in and of itself have to impact legitimacy. It is the e-novel’s problems with reputation, the suspicion and uncertainty readers feel when trying to judge whether it is

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13 And by replacing Eric Gill’s Joanna, a font that ‘signified a rejection of industrial printing and the alienation it promulgated’, with Microsoft’s Georgia, Galey finds that this supposedly trivial bit of automated revision ‘completely reverses the typographic politics of the print editions’ (2012, p.229). Not every font change is as momentous as this.

14 While it is technically possible to package a chosen font into the .EPUB file itself, guaranteeing initial display as the publisher intended, this is not in most cases legally possible for proprietary fonts, as such packaging effectively distributes that font, and hence violates typical terms of use. But an open source font or an author’s own creation could be included, as long as the e-book is not then sold on Amazon; Amazon’s terms for CreateSpace state that it will forcibly break any lock on font settings (Amazon, 2018a). While the technology is there to allow publishers to control e-book font, Amazon’s promotion of customisable settings as a Kindle product feature, and power as the dominant retailer to force vendor compliance, make such control practically impossible.
a ‘proper book’ (FG 4 participant 1) that impact its legitimacy. Results from one suite of questions from my survey, those on selection, offer further insights into ways that trust in print, and lack of trust in digital, is driven by beliefs rather than experience.

**Perceptions of selection: a matter of trust**

When it comes to one form of trust, faith in the selection of books available in a given format, print enjoys what appears to be an unearned advantage. Overall, ‘better selection’ does not emerge as a particularly important motivator: only 16.4% of all respondents choose print for this reason (Figure 17). But unlike the majority of factors, there was no significant difference between print-only and e-book reading respondents.
Figure 17: 'When you choose print, what are your reasons?' (All readers, all years) (gaps below the level of statistical significance in stripes)
Choosing print for better selection was stable across the four years of the survey, displaying minimal variation (below the level of statistical significance) and no discernible upward or downward trend. Further, there was no significant demographic difference other than for age. The youngest and oldest participants in the survey were significantly (CS=15.5 p=.008) more likely to choose print because of better selection: those under 25 were more than twice as likely to agree with the statement than those aged 35-44 (Figure 18). This U-shaped pattern defies explanation via stereotypes (e.g. older luddites, tech-savvy youngsters, etc.) but raises the possibility of a generational effects, where respondents between the ages of 35 and 55 are unusually enthusiastic about digital. (I will discuss this potential pattern further in Chapter 3, pp.160-166, looking at levels of enthusiasm for keeping print or e-books as part of a personal library.) Notably, this U-shaped pattern diverges sharply from some findings from the dawn of the mass-e-reading era: Rowlands, Nicholas, Jamali and Huntingdon, for example, analysing data collected in 2006, reported that enthusiasm for e-books dropped sharply with age, with readers between the ages of 17 and 21 most likely to read e-books and also most likely to prefer reading e-books on screen to printing e-books and reading on paper (Rowlands et al., 2007). It harmonises instead with more recent surveys and interviews such as Baron’s (2015, p.221, 226) that cast young adults as more, not less, appreciative of print.
What is interesting is the degree of disconnect from recent reading experience. Links to sources of e-books were weak and few: those who agreed were very slightly less likely to have obtained an e-book from Amazon (easily the e-book retailer with the largest selection, including many titles exclusive to Amazon) in the past 12 months (68.2% vs 77.3% of others, CS=4.1 p=.043) and very slightly more likely to have obtained an e-book from Project Gutenberg (42.1% vs 30.8, CS=5.2, p=.023). There are even fewer meaningful links to sources of print books: the only connection was having obtained a print book from a secondhand bookshop in the past 12 months (60.3% vs 47.4% of others, CS=8.1 p=.005). There were also no significant links at all to reading device use or to the print status of last e-book read.

In contrast, despite its relative unimportance as a motivator, choosing print for reasons of better selection is positively and significantly correlated with every other print
motivator, often strongly (Figure 19). Its particularly strong link to availability (CS=31.7) is unsurprising, but even stronger are links to a desire to support traditional bookshops (CS=44.5) and, intriguingly, privacy (CS=65.6). (For more on how this type of privacy is emerging as a bookish value, please see Chapter 5, pp.327-339.) Placing readers who agree vs readers who do not agree on a chart, with the strength of the correlation (CS) represented as bars measured on the other axis, makes visible the striking relationships between some values.

Figure 19: Reasons for choosing print: readers agreeing with 'better selection' vs others (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation)
I asked only e-book readers about print value, and this also correlated with selection: 30.8% of those who choose print for reasons of selection also choose print because it is ‘cheaper/better value’, compared to only 10.1% of others (CS=33.4, p=.000). In short, selection is a rare motivator, but those who perceive print to have better selection tend to consider print superior in every regard.

In a striking contrast, choosing print for better selection had no significant correlation of any kind with digital motivators. E-book readers who choose print for reasons of better selection are no more or less likely to choose e-books for any of the reasons in the survey, even availability.

*Digital selection*

With the rise of digital-original imprints, where manuscripts are selected by editors and published as part of a list though print editions may follow afterwards (as with Amazon’s crime imprint Thomas and Mercer) or not at all (as with Penguin Random House’s crime imprint Alibi), and electronic self-publishing, the amount of fiction only available in digital form has increased exponentially. At the same time, continuous digitization efforts, in the form of collection-led initiatives from individual publishers as well as libraries, archives and Google Books, and by independent actors such as Project Gutenberg, have increased the amount of older print-original material available in digital form, and where original editions are out of print all but replacing print as the readily available option. Newly published books are now released with a digital-access policy in mind: given the importance of digital sales for adult fiction, it is a conscious choice, and an unusual one, to release any novel in print without an accompanying e-
book edition. But readers in this survey are near-unanimous in their judgement that selection is not a reason to choose digital. As some qualitative responses explicitly noted, ‘better selection’ does not necessarily mean ‘wider selection’. A number of participants cited self-published books as a key source of material they wanted to read, and hence a key reason to choose digital reading (Surveys 3 and 4). Others, however, described self-publishing as the source of an oversupply of low-quality or otherwise uninteresting books that made it more difficult to find books they wanted to read digitally: ‘I don’t have the stamina’ (Interview 1) or ‘life’s too short, I’ve got 17 unread novels already on my shelves without looking for bloody self-published books’ (FG 3 participant 3).

Survey data indicate that only one e-book reader in twenty (5.1%) chooses digital for ‘better selection’. Examining this tiny group for associations reveals a similar pattern to print selection: ties to values and preferences are considerably stronger than ties to behaviour. The only link to genre of e-books read was a weak positive correlation with short fiction (73.5% vs 49.2% CS=7.6 p=.006), and the only link to device use was a very weak and barely significant correlation with tablet reading (67.6% vs 48.7% CS=4.6 p=.032). There were no links to print status of last e-book read. In terms of sources of e-books there were almost no significant ties, the only exceptions being weak and marginally significant links to direct-from-publisher (32.4% vs 16.0%, CS=6.2 p=.013) and gifts (14.7% vs 5.3%, CS=5.2 p=.023). In terms of sources of print books, there was only one significant tie, and a very intriguing one: those who choose digital for better selection were less likely to have obtained a print book from Amazon in the past 12 months (58.8% vs 82.6% of others, CS=12.1 p=.001). The explanation may be found in the sole demographic link: those who choose digital for better selection are far
less likely to reside in the UK (only 32.4%, vs 53.0% of others). While customers based in North America have an even greater range of print books available on Amazon than UK customers, the same cannot be said for customers residing in non-Anglophone countries where print books are scarce, expensive, or subject to censorship.

For digital motivators, the situation is quite different: those who choose digital for reasons of selection could be described as all-around digital enthusiasts, yet largely ordinary in their attitudes towards print. Not only are they more likely than others to choose digital for most reasons, they are considerably more likely to agree with the e-bookish values of preferring digital for personal libraries (44.1% vs 15.8%, CS=18.1 p=.000) and the very unusual value of considering an e-reading device more enjoyable to handle and use (26.5% vs 10.0%, CS=9.0 p=.003) (Figure 20).
Far from being hostile to print, these readers were unremarkable in their print reading motivations. There are only two links, both weak, to reasons for choosing print: they are slightly more likely to find that the books they want aren’t always available digitally.
(61.8% vs 40.9% of others, CS=5.8 p=.016) but less likely to choose print because it is more enjoyable to handle and use (47.1% vs 71.0%, CS=8.8 p=.003).

In short, perceptions of good selection are linked to a general preference for, and enjoyment of, a given format, but almost completely disconnected from reading habits and purchasing/borrowing experience. A belief that print has better selection appears to be just that: a belief. Further, it is a dominant belief: digital enthusiasts are also partisan, but they are outnumbered by print enthusiasts.

While selection remains a motivator for only a minority of readers, higher levels of agreement among the youngest respondents may (if this is a generational effect rather than a matter of experience or lack thereof) lead to an increase over time. And more importantly, this advantage may be unassailable. If it is not based on evidence in the form of personal experience, but rather on sentiment, there may be no improvement creators or retailers can make to change minds. The impression is entrenched, just as belief in the low quality of self-published novels (which can be in print, but are overwhelmingly released as digital-only) is entrenched: if, as evidence indicates, readers frequently mistake high-quality self-published books for traditionally published books, and only identify as self-published the poorest examples, there is little opportunity to revise judgements.

Participants in my study describe willingness to consider digital-only books as equal to also-print books, but in practice may not take in evidence that might make them reconsider their perception of e-books as a whole. In terms of trust, this suggests that e-books may be grouped together in a permanently lower category: ultimately and
irretrievably lacking. That lack speaks directly to a state of bookness that e-books cannot attain, and links to forms of unrealness distinct from digital proxyhood, event paratext, and performative materiality.

**Realness**

Rhetoric of realness pervades public discussion of e-books. Wide variation in how the term is used only serves to underscore the term’s ubiquity. Like bookness, realness is a fixture of the debate, and a fixture treated as valuable: vied for, contested and worth contesting. Realness is a form of legitimacy foregrounded by e-book distributors as they attempt to address the question (and resolve the question to their advantage) of whether an e-book counts as a real book. Drucker noted in 2003 how the most inflated millennium marketing claims promising the ‘the expanded book, the super-book, the hyper-book’ deflated along with the companies that made them, fading from use as (sometimes visionary) devices and platforms failed to win audiences or deliver on their bold promises (Drucker, 2003). Realness is now more often framed in terms of equality with, not superiority to, print. E-reading device and e-book retailers are emphatic but also careful in their use of the word ‘real’ in marketing messages and product descriptions, deploying it strategically to describe discrete aspects of e-books as well as the books themselves. For example, announcing the device launch of the second-generation Kindle, Amazon promoted its display technology as using ‘real ink’, but on an ‘electronic paper display’ that ‘looks and reads like real paper’, presenting the device as a hybrid incorporating real and facsimile elements (Amazon, 2008). In contrast, Amazon overwhelmingly frames the digital products one can read on their Kindles as ‘books’ (Amazon, 2008, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) not bracketed by professions of ‘real’ or
‘like real’, or even, in most cases, a letter ‘e’ or other indications of their digital format. Exceptions are rare and, consequently, arresting, as in a Kindle launch speech where Jeff Bezos followed numerous references to e-books as books with a boast that ‘if you want, Kindle 2 will even read to you – something new we added that a book could never do’ [emphasis mine] (Amazon, 2008) (whether this constituted a Freudian slip, revealing Bezos’s real opinion of e-books, is intriguing but ultimately beside the point, as a single line from the founder does not override the company’s almost uniformly consistent message.)

This attempted positioning of e-books as real books (even if the e-reading devices on which e-books sit are only like ink and paper) is a strategic decision. Nicholas Carr classes the Kindle’s projection of ‘bookness [as] essentially a marketing tactic, a way to make traditional book readers comfortable with e-books’ (2011), recognizably part of what Striphas earlier called the ‘ethos of bookishness’ that Amazon ‘cultivated through…paraphernalia touting the wonder of books and reading’ as part of its larger business strategy (2011, pp.101-2). E-book and e-reading skeptics are equally ready to contest realness, commandeering real as a synonym for print, and giving rise to headlines such as ‘How real books have trumped ebooks’ (Preston, 2017), ‘Real books are back. E-book sales plunge nearly 20%’ (Kottasova 2017) and ‘Rise and Fall of the Kindle: how Real Books are Fighting Back’ (Pope, 2017).

This use of real as a synonym for print is highly visible in survey and focus group data from my study. Some version of ‘I tend to prefer real books to e-books’ (Survey 3), ‘I prefer a real book’ (Survey 2), or ‘I just prefer the real thing’ (Survey 1) appeared in most years of the survey and most focus groups. References to print books as ‘actual
BOOKS’ (Survey 1), ‘(actual) books’ (Survey 2), or ‘proper, print books’ (Survey 3) contrast with references to e-books as ‘some imaginary thing on screen’ (FG 1 participant 3). Descriptions of print books as real books went unremarked upon in focus groups: these were not flashpoints for debate, or an invitation to discuss the value of e-books. They were treated as valid shorthand, a generally understood way to differentiate print from digital in a discussion of books. Of the many possible constructions participants could have used to differentiate the two, such as ‘e-book vs print book’, ‘e-book vs book’ or even ‘e-book vs BOOK-book’ (using contrastive focus reduplication to emphasise that one is referring to the ‘real’, true, or default mode rather than a variation, e.g. ‘I had a JOB-job once. [a “real” 9-to-5 office job, as opposed to an academic job]’ (Ghomeshi et al., 2004, p.312) the construction many used was, effectively, ‘e-book vs real book’.

However, this unrealness was not necessarily an insult. While many used the contrast to highlight their preference for print, even e-reading enthusiasts sometimes praised the Kindle experience as ‘it feels like I’m reading a real book’ (FG 1 participant 1) or state that e-books ‘are getting better and better’ and hence increasingly ‘resemble books’ (FG 1 participant 5). (To the latter, a more skeptical peer replied ‘why do you not just get a book then?’ [FG 1 participant 3].)

Further, this shorthand of ‘e-book vs real book’ sat alongside other uses of the word real. Realness in the sense of legitimate literature (say, in a debate on the status of science fiction, criticising ‘elitist’ views as “‘it’s sci fi, it doesn’t count as real books”’ [FG 1, participant 3] or a dismissal of ‘self-helpy type books’ as ‘while helpful and interesting, don’t feel like real books anyway’ [Survey 2]) or in the sense of mainstream
published books (FG 4 participant 1) mingles with realness in the sense of a physical object (FG 1, FG 4), and all three coexist with realness in the sense of print. It would appear that marketers are correct that realness has value to readers. But it also appears that while bookness intersects with realness, they are not the same thing. It is possible for an e-book to be well worth time, money and attention while remaining something separate that ‘resembles books’. Further, the kind of unrealness matters as much as the unrealness itself, and that readers are comfortable juggling multiple kinds of book realness, different frames of reference for evaluating the degree to which a book qualifies as a ‘proper book’, at the same time.

In terms of this form of trust, the e-book most often functions for the readers in this study as an ersatz book. It is a substitute, and potentially a good one (an excellent ersatz version is in fact the most dangerous kind of fake, as a well-executed fake coffee, or detergent, or Shakespeare play could be passed off as the real thing, scheid goods in place of bona fide.) The ersatz at best equals the original: it is does not exceed and cannot supplant, and more than likely falls short. But fundamentally it is something different. It is ‘like a book’, nearly a book, potentially valuable and worthwhile, but not fully legitimate: it is ‘just not the real thing.’ But while the ersatz book is different from a book, it is also fundamentally different from a digital proxy. These participants’ experiences of e-book legitimacy, and multiple forms of unrealness, demonstrate two things. One, that unrealness is perfectly acceptable to some readers at some times: e-book readers do not choose digital books because they fall into a camp of believers who treat e-books as real, but because they are willing to read unreal things. And two, that different forms of unrealness can coexist.
Conclusion

Trust in a book takes a long time to build but only a moment to break. Reputation and legitimacy are, for this dimension, deeply entwined, and a novel that is not available in print is, by many respondents, assumed to be of lower quality. Readers in this study demonstrate understandable caution, retaining respect, even reverence, for the traditions of print, and subjecting e-books and e-novels to stringent investigation before even considering induction into reading lives or even the designation of ‘book’. That said, ‘caution’ does not mean ‘conservatism’: these readers are in theory highly generous in their willingness to consider e-book bids for inclusion, and to learn new ways of evaluating texts in new formats even as they import old ways from their experiences with print. Readers demand professionalism but are willing to consider the possibility of excellence appearing in e-books with no industry pedigree, even if their own experience of self-published e-books has made them pessimistic. However, receptiveness in theory may not translate into receptiveness in practice, as readers’ means of determining self-publishing status are unreliable. In evaluating individual e-books, readers negotiate with authors and publishers in some new and some familiar ways, continuing to draw on what in print are peritextual elements, particularly cover images and page-level design. This defies simplistic transfers of paratextual theory to e-books: it is not possible to ignore the spatial dimension and declare that peritext no longer exists, but neither is it realistic to assume that all peritextual elements are either visible or influential.

When it comes to trust, e-novels are effectively unreal. In some ways they function as ersatz books, perceived as lacking the certifying investment of the publishing industry
or the sumptuous range of choice on offer in print (even if those judgements are not based on fact). But in in terms of paratext, e-books and e-novels function as digital proxies of stable but incomprehensible ‘disguised zip files’ of data. These forms of unrealness are at least sometimes acceptable, and multiple forms of unrealness can coexist. Identifying these conceptualisations, and moreover the coexistence of these conceptualisations, represents a significant step beyond the present state of the art. Readers demonstrate the ability to move between frames of reference regarding e-book realness, and hence between conceptions of the nature of an e-book. And as I will examine in the next chapter, on ownership and possession, this movement can be not unconscious or passive, but purposeful, and very much under the reader’s control.
Chapter 3: Control

In this chapter I will examine the legitimacy and reputation of e-novels through the lens of ownership: not incorporation into the self in the sense of personal identity (a topic for Chapter 5) but possession and control. I draw on survey, focus group, and interview results to examine how the ways in which digital novels can and can’t be kept (or discarded) interact with understanding of their status, bookness, and realness. The chapter considers aspects of the legal environment, levels of piracy and the phenomenon of principled resistance. It also investigates the current role and nature of a personal library and expands the concept of ‘digital audition’.

The legalities of e-novel ownership

Early e-books crystallised and made urgent intellectual property issues never before encountered by authors or publishers, and brought readers into areas of the law never before tested in the courts. Existing agreements between authors and publishers regarding who was licensed to reproduce, distribute, and sell works did not explicitly cover digital editions; conflict over such rights in older contracts has been the basis for numerous lawsuits and remains an area of disagreement (Owen, 2014, p.393). Existing case law regarding the rights and privileges of readers was equally inadequate to deal with the potential of digitisation, including storage and sharing of digital files and use of a given file across multiple devices (Jones and Benson, 2016, p.110-11). New frameworks were in some cases built up from a foundation of custom, using old practical arrangements as a guide. For example, to allow public libraries to loan out an
e-book to only one borrower at a time (as if it were a physical book sitting on a shelf), and to only loan out a given copy a certain number of times (as if it were a physical book that would wear out and have to be replaced) (Jones and Benson, 2016, p.90) might be nonsensical from a technical point of view, but such agreements observed prior consensus on fair compensation and reasonable use, building on terms negotiated between libraries and publishers that weighed the needs of users and institutions against the commercial needs of authors and publishers, as well as preserving trust and cooperation between parties still mutually involved in the sale and use of print books. It is notable that the pilot study on library e-lending that followed 2013 Sieghart Review, which agreed on the critical importance of compensating authors for each instance of borrowing, included as participants ‘authors, publishers, agents, libraries and booksellers’: a list more representative of the creators and distributors of books than the buyers and borrowers of books, with librarians standing alone as, if not the voice of readers, at least guardians of readers’ interests (Jones and Benson, 2016, p.90). As I will discuss later in the chapter, when readers consider rules regarding e-book use as unfair, and tilted in favour of book creators or retailers, they are less inclined to comply with those rules, and potentially less likely to use e-books at all.

The approach of Project Gutenberg and Google, however, exemplified the Silicon Valley ethos of ‘move fast and break things’ (Singer, 2018): a ‘digitise first, ask questions later’ policy familiar to other digital culture pioneers. ‘Backward-looking’, far from being an insult, is an accurate description of an approach building on tradition. ‘Forward-looking’ is not necessarily a compliment: as Google Books demonstrated in its rush to digitise over the objections of many authors and publishers (Samuelson, 2009, p.5), a forward-looking approach is just as likely to be shaped by humdrum
practicalities as a backward-looking one (as Project Gutenberg was shaped by a vision of access to literature but also the need for a value-for-money use of ‘$100,000,000 of computer time’ on a University of Illinois mainframe [Lebert, 2005, p. 9; Grimes, 2011]), and no more likely to be shaped by logic, justice, or even adherence to the law. Individual readers are similarly pulled between the past and future, informed by pre-digital practices and by emerging possibilities, and immersed a larger cultural conversation on digital-era rights and responsibilities.

Three entities that have been highly influential in shaping modern perceptions regarding ownership of e-books demonstrate the variety, and flexibility, of stances on the legitimacy of e-books. Project Gutenberg promises ‘books for all and for free’ (Lebert, 2005): not stand-ins for books, or pale imitations of books, but books. Michael Hart’s analogy of a ‘Star Trek replicator’ (Grimes, 2011) suggests copies, but wondrous copies befitting a science fiction utopia: perfect, indistinguishable from and interchangeable with the original, entirely authentic and real (however much this promise collides with what Kirschenbaum calls the ‘illusion [or call it a working model] of immaterial behaviour: identification without ambiguity, transmission without loss, repetition without originality’ [2012, p.11]). When confronted with legal barriers to distributing real books, as when the edition on which they based their painstakingly constructed files of the works of Shakespeare did not enter the public domain as expected (Schofield, 2011), the Project did not change their stance that e-books are real books but rather complied with intellectual property law and then lobbied to change it (though Hart was too much of an iconoclast to serve as planned as Lawrence Lessig’s plaintiff in the actual Supreme Court case against the Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998) (Grimes, 2011). In contrast, Google’s response to challenges to its mass digitisation project
pivoted to present e-books as sub-real: ‘snippets’ that are not books or meaningful parts of books (despite the fact that patient users can through repeated searches read large portions of a given book) but instead represent harmless indexing (Samuelson, 2009, pp.4-5). Amazon, as discussed below, sometimes describes its products to customers in ways that suggest books, real and ownable, and sometimes in ways far short of real.

By simply proceeding with what was suddenly technologically possible, and putting to one side the question of how this did or did not harmonise with existing legal frameworks and custom, these agents set an influential example of risk-taking and aggressive manoeuvring. In this period where the legal territory is broad, contested, and in flux, readers’ views are not necessarily informed by or even connected with reality. Readers’ understanding of their rights as readers or owners is highly variable, often incorrect, and influenced by contradictory messages from self-interested retailers as well as folk wisdom, both on traditional rights of authors and on philosophies of free access and exchange common to digital culture.

*Reading in context: e-books in a sea of stolen goods*

The participants in my study were not unusual in describing a digital reading landscape that extends over many territories, each with its own legal environment and accepted norms, and with few if any signposts on the borders between. E-novels do not stand alone. They are read, frequently on the same devices, alongside other types of e-book but also journalism, commentary, reference material, etc. The e-novels and other digital material come from a vast array of sources: some mainstream and some fringe; some adapted from print and some digital-original; some legal and some blatantly illegal and
many in a grey area somewhere in between, where readers may not know and may not care to inquire after status.

Much of participants’ on-screen reading consists of free-to-the-user but not necessarily legal-for-the-producer work, created and distributed either with explicit Creative Commons licensing or a less formal adherence to what Lawrence Lessig describes as ‘the ideals of the Internet and cultural freedom’ (2007). Fan fiction, cited in the survey (as a write-in category) and focus groups by a number of participants, exemplifies the latter category.15 ‘While there are some areas in which the law [regarding fan works] is unsettled, there are more in which it is settled but widely misunderstood by owners and fans alike’ (Schwabach, 2016, p.2). Fan fiction thrives in both its original non-commercial territory and increasingly, after further transformations, in commercial arenas as well. Prominent examples of fan fiction reworked to remove identifiers include Anna Todd’s After, Cassandra Clare’s The Mortal Instruments series, and of course Fifty Shades of Grey. Community standards regarding credit, attribution, and reuse, negotiated over decades in intersecting fandoms (Jenkins 1992, p.29, Humble 2012, p.96-7) are stretched to cover a vastly expanded audience, as fan fiction is both made visible and corporatised by the entrance of actors like Wattpad (Ramdarshan Bold, 2016, pp.6-9, 12-15). In my own study, participant responses highlighted the

15 Fanfic or fan fiction (both terms are in regular use by both practitioners and scholars, often interchangeably) is one branch of fan works, a broad category that can include visual art, music, performance, etc. Defined by Hellekson and Busse as ‘derivative amateur writing…texts based on another text, and not for professional publication’, the term was for a brief period in the mid-twentieth century used to describe fiction about fans, but now refers to ‘imaginative interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds’ (though much fan fiction draws on worlds originally created for film, television, comics, etc.) (2014, pp.5-6). Though legal language focussed on questions of ownership and copyright infringement may stretch to describing fan work as ‘any work by a fan, or indeed by anyone other than the content owner(s), set in a fictional world or using such pre-existing fictional characters’ (Schwabach, 2016, p.8), most definitions understand the fan to be not just ‘anyone’, but at the very least a committed and appreciative member of the audience for that fictional property, if not a member of an identifiable fandom or other fan community.
degree to which even informed, experienced users can be unclear as to the legal status of what they are reading and sharing. They also demonstrate how reliance on familiar, common-sense terminology, taking the approach of a sensible member of the public rather than a legal professional, spreads misinformation. When participants describe fan fiction as ‘not published, it’s free’ (FG 6 participant 3) or its creators as ‘writers’ outside the category of ‘actual published authors’ (FG 6 participant 2) one can see how such terms serve, in the context of the conversation, to draw important distinctions between categories of works (commercial and non-commercial, authorised and non-authorised, etc.). One can also see how easily describing published works as ‘not published’ could lead to unintentional violation of an author’s rights.

Another large portion of their on-screen reading is comprised of work that was not meant by its creators to be free, and where the legality of not just distributing but reading is in question. News, cited by many as a main type of screen reading, may be free-to-user or accessed via a valid subscription, or it may be aggregated by a third party without permission or accessed via a borrowed or faked subscription. The UK Intellectual Property Office finds that e-books, whether mainstream-published, self-published, or shared on free-to-user sites, are most often accessed legally, though piracy is commonplace. The Office’s estimated that in 2017, 17% of e-books read by Britons aged 12 and over are pirated (2017, p.40), though it also found that only 5% of e-book readers obtained all their recent books illegally, with the overwhelming majority obtaining either some (6%) or all (89%) of their recent books legally (2017, p.21). (An informal November 2017 Twitter survey reported in The Guardian raises the possibility that this legally scrupulous behaviour may be a recent development: Hank Green, influential vlogger and brother of bestselling novelist John Green, polled 35,000 readers
and found that while only 5% report that they currently pirate books, 26% have pirated books in the past [Flood, 2017]. The poll included no demographics: the Green brothers’ fame and influence with Young Adult readers and viewers would seem to favour younger respondents, but the medium of Twitter suggests an older subset of Green followers.)

‘Pirated’ or ‘piracy’ was offered in every year by my own survey respondents as a write-in source of e-books. Specific websites included the entertainment-focussed Pirate Bay (Surveys 1, 2 and 4), which offers novel downloads alongside music, games, and software, but also academic-focussed websites including AAARG, Sci Hub, and LibGen (Survey 4) that offer unauthorised copies of peer-reviewed research papers and monographs. This did not rule out selective future purchases: some explained that they would later ‘buy physical copies if book good’ (Survey 4). Survey respondents and focus group participants in my study who acknowledged reading ambiguous or openly pirated material expressed mild shame or no shame at all (though it is worth noting that they could have felt it without expressing it, and that participants who did feel conflicted may have kept quiet on the subject.)

‘So I used to copy and paste, pirating sort of thing in a weird way, which is a bit bad...’ (FG 4 participant 2)

‘Given that this is sufficiently anonymous, I tend to pirate e-books to see if it’s any good and then buy it if it’s decent in hard copy.’ (FG 4 participant 4)
‘My friend who always used to work at Smiths…she used to get a copy [of new Harry Potter books] really early…she’d photocopy bits for me…’. (FG 2 participant 3)

‘…sure, I’ll buy [e-]books. But normally if it’s hard to pirate.’ (FG 4 participant 4).

When acknowledging that they are using material in ways prohibited by the site or author, they often express irritation rather than remorse, and dismiss restrictions as both futile and an unreasonable impediment to use, as in this exchange in focus group 4:

P2: ‘Yes, I know that some websites are learning about [manual copying of files] because I know fanficition.net stopped doing that…they used to let you but now you can’t copy and paste anything, they’ve got it protected. So they’re sort of learning.’

P4: ‘They make it tricky.’

P3: ‘Isn’t it still just publicly available though, so why do they need to lock it down?’

P4: ‘It seems obnoxious given that some people want to read stuff offline.’

The right for authors to control how their work is downloaded is here regarded as less important than the right of readers to access the material on their own terms, in the formats most convenient and comfortable for them. Authors such as fantasy novelists Maggie Steifvater, Samantha Shannon, Tom Pollock and Laura Lam describe a painful bind where online piracy, sufficiently widespread to devastate sales, is often carried out by devoted fans who consider downloading an illegal PDF harmless, or even ‘free advertising’ and a compliment to favourite authors (Flood, 2017). Though there was
some censure of the ‘grey area’ or open piracy behaviour of other readers, such as family members or nameless hypothetical strangers (as with ‘my brother is Torrenting books’ [FG 1 participant 2], greeted by the group with a general sigh of dismay) there was little open scolding or judgement of pirates in their midst (notable, as there was at times scolding and judgement on other topics such as appreciation of book materiality, see Chapter 5, pp.308-310) no matter how explicit the discussion of illegal use. The single instance in any focus group of censure directed at a person present was in focus group 1.

P3: *I think pretty much everything I have on my Kindle I’ve just borrowed.*

*Books that someone else downloaded and just gave me...’*

P1: ‘*You can’t download books illegally.*’

P3: ‘*I didn’t. I got it from someone else. I never touched the internet, from my point of view!*’

This saw the censure laughed off, and the subject immediately dropped as the group moved on. It is notable that, while joking, the participant’s rationalisation of illegal downloads as a form of ‘borrowing’ didn’t argue that the theft was trivial, but rather that the theft wasn’t real theft.
Books bought but not owned

Despite the prevalence of piracy and artful manual downloads, most of these participants’ digital reading consisted of e-books bought or borrowed from libraries or major retailers. The terms for these providers further shape readers’ understanding of what they should and should not do with a book (and, as I will discuss below, misconceptions regarding terms may mean that self-reported levels of unauthorised use underestimate the true scale). Amazon was by far the most important source: 75.9% of e-book readers had obtained an e-book from Amazon in the past 12 months, more than twice the level for Project Gutenberg (32.6%), and more than three times that of libraries (23.8%) (Figure 21). Non-Amazon commercial sources lag behind.
Figure 21: Sources of e-books (all readers)

But Amazon users’ understanding of terms is based more on their experience of the site and its front-end messaging than the fine print of the terms and conditions pages, and the two differ.

Amazon’s terms are confusing. The conditional use licenses that Amazon actually sells are not unusual for digital book retailers, or sellers of digital goods in general. Its tight restrictions on what a user can do with an e-book (e.g. banning resale, but also such actions as conversion to another file format) and reservation of the retailer’s right to revoke access at any time are in many ways industry standard. But customers can be
‘misled by the apparent disconnect between the message communicated by the Buy Now button and the limited set of rights contemplated by EULAs and terms of service’ (Perzanowski and Hoofnagle, 2016, p.7) as Amazon, like other e-retailers, knowingly ‘leverages the common understanding’ of the purchase of goods (Perzanowski and Hoofnagle, 2016, p.8). Such leveraging includes use of the same front-end terminology for physical and digital goods (like a physical book and an e-book) when the actual terms are quite different. Perzanowski and Hoofnagle’s 2016 survey of digital consumers revealed that large majorities believed that clicking a Buy Now button confers ownership of an e-book (86%), the right to keep an e-book (87%) and the right to read an e-book on other personal devices (81%), and significant minorities believed that it conferred the right to lend (48%), gift (38%), or bequeath (26%) e-books (2016, p.22). Whether or not e-retailers can be proven to be actively and intentionally misleading consumers for the sake of profit (as Perzanowski and Hoofnagle posit), e-retailers benefit from the confusion when customers think they are getting more for their money than they actually are, and in that sense have little incentive to clarify their terms or correct misconceptions. Perhaps the most influential signal given by libraries and other providers is ‘automaticness’: with ‘1 click’ the reader takes possession, when a loan is expired the book simply disappears from her virtual shelf. The ground rules are relegated to ‘terms and conditions’ areas: separate zones of small-print legal terminology, framed not as reasonable arguments that a rational person can and should master, but as baffling and impenetrable collections of words, useless for the purposes of communication and utterly inaccessible to the non-professional. This infantilisation of the e-book reader – choice removed, details unknowable – sends a message that there is no point in engaging with the existing terms: ‘you won’t be able to understand them, and even if you did you have no power to negotiate’. The result is an idea that the only
way to effectively navigate a transaction is by trial and error, proceeding when permitted and stopping only when blocked, treating anything that is technically possible as permissible: ‘if I wasn’t allowed to do it, they would have stopped me.’ In choosing obscurity, Amazon and other retailers have effectively released users from any feeling of obligation to consider what is permissible and why, or what might be the correct way to approach a PDF of unknown provenance sitting on a dubious file sharing website; arguably, from any feeling of responsibility, to authors as well as retailers, in the ongoing formation of ethics regarding e-book ownership and use. This atmosphere of passivity, an idea that the law is irrelevant and the ethics are someone else’s problem, is a recurring theme in participants’ responses.

In my own study, survey data and, particularly, focus group and interview data underscore the degree to which e-book readers are unsure about ownership. While some participants were well-informed about Amazon’s terms and what they meant for readers, many others were not. Some were aware that they did not have the information (often expressing irritation at arcane or counterintuitive terms) while others were misinformed, holding incorrect information and sharing it with peers, in the focus group room and likely in other settings as well (as above, regarding the publication status of fan fiction). But whether or not they have accurate knowledge of conditional use licenses, participants were as a group dissatisfied with the forms of ownership offered, in the current environment, by e-books. What was on offer was not enough. Some informed participants singled out objectionable terms and conditions, particularly that when retailers ‘can take it away at any time’ exchanging money for an e-book is ‘like renting it’ (FG 1 participant 6), noting that they ‘disagree with e-publishers’ policies that restrict sharing of e-books / inheritance of e-books’ (Survey 1) or chose digital in a
specific incidence only because there ‘was a special deal for e-books that I’d get to keep a PDF version of. Not rent a license to’ (Survey 2).

Whether the limitations were legal or practical, the fault of the terms or the fault of a counterintuitive interface (for example, even participants who though they could legally loan an e-book file did not necessarily know how to go about the awkward process of extracting and transferring the file), the limitations were deemed not just burdensome, but unacceptably so: offensive and unjust. What makes them unacceptable is comparison to print books. Perzanowski and Hoofnagle argue that ‘buyer’s “default behaviour” is based on the experience of buying physical media, and the assumptions from that context have carried over into the digital domain’ (2016, p.7). My findings strongly support the idea that readers believe firmly, and feel deeply, that the affordances of print constitute their rights as book-readers: if one can do it with a print book, one should be entitled to do it with an e-book. This speaks to a fundamental belief that on at least one level e-books have bookness: the rights of a book-reader apply. Very significantly, Perzanowski and Hoofnagle found that ‘respondents in [their] study indicated that they would turn to streaming services and BitTorrent if they were unable to engage in the uses typically associated with personal property ownership.’ (2016, p.8). My study’s participants, in openly discussing their own book piracy, and not judging themselves or others for such breaches, indicate that this prediction is accurate.
Principled resistance

Widespread and unrepentant piracy is not necessarily an indication that participants consider e-books to be unreal. Such a viewpoint would be one way to ease qualms about piracy (there is no crime in stealing something that is not real) but not the only way. Another response to the disconnect between what feels right and what is legal – the powerful shared conviction that readers should be allowed enjoy the same rights of ownership with e-books as they do with print books – is to recast non-compliance as principled resistance. Many participants expressed a sense that breaking bad rules is often justified and sometimes admirable, particularly when the actor or institution making the bad rules is not respected or liked. Amazon, accused by Perzanowski and Hoofnagle of manipulation and fraud, is singled out among retailers by a number of my participants. (And acceptance of Amazon’s terms was sometimes expressed in emotionally freighted terms such as ‘gullible’ [FG 3 participant 2] or ‘sucker’ [FG 3 participant 1; FG 6 participant 6].) For more on the emotional side of attitudes towards Amazon, please see Chapter 6, pp.366-369.) For such readers, violating Amazon’s terms can be cast as standing up to a bully: something done for self-respect as much as for any material gain. But even beyond a self-respecting citizen’s response to unfair demands, indifference to terms can be cast as romantic: an expression of a more ardent readerly identity. If in nineteenth century British novels ‘the vulgar owning without reading epitomized by sofa-table books and dummy spines finds its antithesis in reading without buying…and even reading without owning (remember the hero of Ranthorpe freeloading at a bookstall)’ (Price, 2013, p.84) then the bookstall-loafing and reading-room-raiding hero of the Victorian period can perhaps find a counterpart in the PDF-ripping reader of today: similarly so enamoured of the text that obsession with ownership seems petty by comparison. (The theft of a treasure beyond price does at
least demonstrate taste.) De Certeau was referring to defiance of a very different sort of authority when he described powerless-but-free readers as ‘travellers’ who ‘move across lands that belong to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it for themselves’ (1984, p.136): he spoke of resisting pressure to conform to official, sanctioned reading practices, not official, sanctioned file sharing regulations. But readers can locate similar honour and dignity in poaching of the two separate kinds. Reading without owning can be righteous, and even demonstrate a deeper, more principled commitment to books and reading. This offers a new perspective on digital book piracy, validating earlier findings, including Perzanowski and Hoofnagle’s, on the scale of the phenomenon, but challenging conclusions as to the motivations behind it, a finding with major implications for authors and publishers seeking to curb illegal book downloads. This central role of affect, of feeling (connected, or righteous, or respected, or conversely feeling disconnected and disdained) further underscores the degree to which book ownership, for these participants, is bound up not only with practicalities but also with emotion. Acceptable levels of control are here subjective and personal, successful to the degree that they give the individual a sense of meaningful ownership, and overwhelmingly framed in relation to print books.

**Print vs digital: different tactics in the pursuit of control**

Survey data confirm that ownership matters, but is more important to some subgroups of readers than to others. When asked ‘when you choose print, what are your reasons?’ motivators linked to control are among the most important motivators in my survey: keeping and collecting, but also borrowing and accessing (on one’s own terms), as well
as giving and passing on. There were differences between demographic groups, but sharper contrasts based on book acquisition and access: between those who borrow books and those who do not, between those who buy from various locations, between those who read different categories of books, and those who read on different platforms. There are particularly sharp differences between those who read e-books and those who do not (Figure 22).

![Figure 22: Reasons for choosing print: 'Print is better for...'

'Better for borrowing or buying secondhand']

Half of respondents, (49.3%) choose print because it is better for borrowing or buying secondhand, a proportion that remained steady across the four years of the survey.

Intriguingly, this figure is (like gift, and very much unlike personal library) approximately the same for print-only readers (50.4%) and e-book-readers (49.0%).

The only sizeable demographic difference is between genders: 57.5% of women agreed,
versus 45.3% of men, a moderately strong and highly significant effect (CS=11.6 p=.001). This gender gap was not significantly wider for print-only readers (59.0% of women vs 42.5% of men) than for e-book readers (57.9% of women vs 44.5% of men).

I asked about ‘when you choose digital’ and ‘when you choose print’, leaving open the possibility that each format will be best for different reasons at different times. (As with all questions about why they choose print over digital, for print-only readers the answers are about why they always choose print. It describes a blanket policy, even, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, pp.283-289, a statement about personal identity. It is also informed by experience with print but not necessarily experience with digital: when someone who does not read e-books states that print is better for borrowing, her understanding of how a digital book loan works in practice may be theoretical at best. In contrast, when hybrid readers, who make up the overwhelming majority of e-book readers in my study, state that print or digital is better, they are both comparing categories they know, though not necessarily specific options, as is the case for digital library loans, and describing not a policy but a specific choice.). This is emphatically the case when it comes to ownership, collecting, and control. As discussed in Chapter 4, pp.220-223, participants frequently explained that preference depends on context: what text, where, for what purpose, etc. (e.g. ‘if I am travelling, it's easier to have it on my kindle [sic]’ [Survey 2], or ‘[digital] easier for travel or in hospital’ [Survey 1]). For example, of the group of readers who choose digital because it is better for keeping as part of a personal library (a small group, as discussed below), more than one out of five (21.2%) also choose print because it’s better for keeping as part of a personal library. This indication that sometimes cloud storage is better than a shelf, and sometimes a shelf is better than cloud storage, harmonises with Buchanan, McKay, and Levitt’s
findings on how university users (academics and students) pragmatically select digital or print access depending on when and where they intend to use books (2015, pp.5-7) and resonates strongly with responses from focus groups and interviews.

For all readers, choosing print because it is better for borrowing or secondhand purchase was, unsurprisingly, very highly correlated with recent history of borrowing and secondhand purchase. Those who agreed were vastly more likely to have obtained a print book in the past 12 months from a secondhand bookshop (64.6% vs 32.4%, CS=91.6 p=.000) and much more likely to have obtained one from a library (59.9% vs 44.9%, CS=19.9 p=.000), and also to have received a print book as a gift, another route that requires decoupling the owner and the original purchaser (55.3% vs 37.7%, CS=27.5 p=.000) (Figure 23).
Figure 23: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for borrowing or buying secondhand' by source of print books

Half of e-book reading respondents (51.8%) had borrowed a print book from a library in the past 12 months, but less than a quarter (23.8%) had borrowed an e-book from a library (Figure 24). The e-book borrowers were effectively a subset of print borrowers. Using the library solely for digital is quite unusual: only 20 individuals, or 4.0% of my sample of e-book readers, borrowed digitally from libraries but not in print.
Figure 24: Library borrowing in the past 12 months (e-book reading respondents only)

Digital loans via Amazon were introduced after my survey was launched, and in these survey results Amazon loans are grouped along with Amazon purchases. Amazon loans are in any case quite different from library loans, as they are part of a subscription service: the standalone Kindle Unlimited, launched in summer 2014, and offering access to ‘over one million’ titles (Amazon, 2018a) for a monthly fee, and Prime Reading, a new feature presented for no additional cost to Amazon Prime subscribers in 2017, which gives instead access to a comparatively tiny core library of ‘more than one thousand’ (Amazon, 2018a) magazines and comics as well as e-books. Functioning as both a Prime perk and an advertisement for Kindle Unlimited, as of 2019 Prime Reading showcases prominent bestsellers: some are Amazon-produced, such as Elizabeth Edmondson’s *A Very English Mystery* and other series from its Thomas &

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16 Many of these are self-published or released by Amazon imprints, only available via Amazon and often only available as e-books.
17 As they read their Prime loans users are continually confronted with a parade of titles only available on Kindle Unlimited, and exhorted to buy an Unlimited subscription.
Mercer imprint, but many are linked to major transmedia properties such as Harry Potter and Marvel Comics superheroes. While the loans themselves are free, the subscription is purchased, putting what are effectively rented books in a grey area between borrowed and bought. Through these two avenues Amazon now dominates the commercial e-book loan market, with (as of April 2018) over 100 million subscribers worldwide from Prime alone (Kelly, 2018) compared with roughly 700,000 subscribers for leading competitor Scribd (Reid, 2018). (After three years as a limited service that allowed only three e-books and one audiobook per month, in April 2018 Scribd relaunched itself as an ‘unlimited’ service [Reid, 2018], but with new terms and conditions that sharply curtail what ‘unlimited’ means for customers. Scribd reserves the right to identify ‘users who consume an unusual volume of materials’ and cut off their access to additional titles at any time and ‘for any reason’ [Scribd, 2018]. However rarely Scribd may choose to exercise that right, readers are left not reliably owning even their subscriptions to borrow books.) Few other major competitors have survived: once-promising entrants such as Oyster (described as ‘Netflix for books’) have been driven out of business entirely (Liptak, 2018).

Recent experience of book-borrowing was strongly correlated with choosing print for this purpose. Among all readers, 60.4% of those who had borrowed a print book from a library in the past 12 months agreed, vs 45.5% of others, a fairly strong and highly significant effect (CS=19.9 p=.000). There was virtually no difference between all readers and e-book readers: for the latter group the figures were 61.2% vs 45.4% (CS=16.9 p=.000). Those who had borrowed an *e-book* from a library in the past 12 months were also more likely to agree that print is better for borrowing (60.6% vs 51.4%), a weaker but still significant effect (CS=4.2 p=.040), keeping in mind that
virtually all of these e-book borrowers are also print borrowers. (The 20 individuals in my survey who only borrowed library books digitally represent too small a group for meaningful analysis, but they do not differ greatly in this respect from their print-library-using peers: 55.0% still believe that print is better for borrowing or buying secondhand.)

Focus group participants echoed this: experience with digital loans was often aggravating, leaving readers feeling controlled rather than in control, and, implicitly, of having a technologically simple process artificially complicated to serve the commercial needs of publishers and/or retailers, as when ‘you used to be able to do some kind of jiggery-pokery [to load a public library e-book onto a Kindle in the UK] but they stopped it and you can’t do it now’ (FG 5 participant 5). Some noted the ease of returning an e-book (Surveys 1, 2), but checking that book out in the first place was often exasperating.

‘Borrowing e-books is a real pain as well. I went through a phase of trying to do that, because I thought it was going to save me so much money. But it was really annoying to download them and get them on there. And when they disappear after the loaning period is gone, they leave behind a little notify [sic], “You used to have a book here but now you can’t open it.”’ (FG 6 participant 5).

Unsurprisingly, choosing print because it is better for borrowing or buying secondhand also correlates very strongly with recent purchase of a print book from a secondhand bookshop: 64.6% of those who agree have bought a print book from a secondhand
bookshop in the past 12 months, versus 34.3% of those who have not (an extremely strong effect at CS=91.9 p=.000). Agreement also correlates with obtaining print books from independent bookshops (56.1% vs 43.0% CS=15.3 p=.000) non-Amazon online retailers (27.4% vs 19.9%, CS=6.9 p=.009) and direct purchase from publishers (19.2% vs 13.6%, CS=5.0 p=.025), as well as library use (55.9% vs 44.9% CS=19.9 p=.000) and gifts (55.3% vs 37.9% CS=26.8 p=.000), all indicating that those who agree may be more active consumers of print overall. However, the two most popular sources of print books, chain bookshops and Amazon, had no significant links; this is particularly intriguing given Amazon’s active marketplace for secondhand book sales. This could indicate that valuing borrowing and secondhand purchase (and sale) is linked to aversion to corporate retailers, or simply to certain corporate retailers; this theory as to the prominent role of sentiment finds support in the generally high correlations between agreements with ‘better for borrowing and buying secondhand’ and almost every other motivator in the survey (Figure 25).
Even the weakest links (with privacy, print being easier to read, etc.) are statistically significant. The strongest correlations, with choosing print because it is easier to share (42.4% vs 14.0% of others, CS=86.2 p=.000) and better for giving as a gift (65.8% vs 37.0%, CS=73.2 p=.000) speak to the importance to these readers of book exchange, but other sentiments, such as print books being more enjoyable to handle and use (CS=36.1 p=.000) and bibliophilia (CS=52.9 p=.000) are more about preference than practicality.

Figure 25: Reasons for choosing print: readers agreeing with 'better for borrowing or buying secondhand' vs others (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation)
a grouping (which I will discuss again in later chapters) of bookish values. This in itself aligns ‘better for borrowing or buying secondhand’ as a distinctly bookish value.

Conferring ownership: gifts

The kinds of ownership these participants valued included control over not only a book’s present but its future: the ability to sell, to loan, to give as a gift, to bequeath. Ownership of a physical book includes the ability to determine the fate of one’s own personal copy, and many respondents in my own study consider this affordance of print important. (And given Perzanowski and Hoofnagle’s data about the significant minorities of customers who overestimate their rights to lend, gift and bequeath e-books, this is likely an underestimate.)

‘I’m a serial recommender as well. So when I recommend things, I like, want to be able to give them a copy.’ (FG 2 participant 3)

‘When I read fiction, I buy a print book, and most times I resell/swap or give them away after reading.’ (Survey 3)

‘[If a novel is truly exceptional] I might buy a copy for someone [as a gift].’ (Interview 2)

‘[Despite having become] a consumer of mostly digital media...I enjoy receiving (and giving) print books as gifts, and treasure them when they arrive.’ (Survey 4)
The importance of gift-giving to the book industry, and to book culture, is difficult to overstate. From a business perspective, the months leading up to Christmas account for an outsized proportion of annual sales and are vital for survival (Clark and Phillips, 2014, p.74) as publishers and retailers market books not to readers but to customers who are buying for other readers in their lives. The historian Stephen Nissenbaum goes so far as to credit, or blame, book gifts as the foundation of modern Christmas traditions, calling booksellers and publishers the ‘shock troops’ on the ‘cutting edge of a new commercial Christmas,’ with books (including ‘Gift Book’ anthologies tailored towards specific recipients, based on their demographics or interests) ‘making up more than half of the earliest items advertised as Christmas gifts’ in nineteenth century America (1997, pp.132,134). Though Amazon launched its first Kindle model in 2007, it was the ‘Kindle Christmas’ of 2010 when e-book sales expanded from a fraction of the book market to a major force: the gifts were not the books but the devices, and while print book sales peaked as was typical in the weeks leading up to Christmas, e-book sales peaked the week after, as Kindle recipients bought to stock their gifts (Groksop, 2011).

Books are culturally important objects that can, at least if the book is sufficiently highbrow, confer cultural capital on both giver and recipient, and they are available for, as Bourdieu reminds us, a strikingly lower price than many other forms of art (1993, p.49) (for more on books and cultural capital, please see Chapter 5, pp.277-280). But even the humblest literature has powers beyond its value in terms of capital, cultural or financial: the book as not just a ‘commodity’ but as ‘bearer of benefits and duties’ (Davis, 1983, p.69). Giving books fuses gift exchange with knowledge exchange, strengthening social bonds whether the present is in the form of priceless incunabula or ‘vernacular literature’ such as personal recipes (Carruth and Tigner, 2018, p.74), and
recognising ‘the powerful tradition for understanding what a book was and what it embodied…a privileged object that resisted permanent appropriation’ (Davis, 1983, p.87), something larger than one person, made to be shared and never fully relinquished even when given away. Book gifts were even centuries ago a perfect example of ‘objects [that] carried with them something from their givers—Mauss called it a spirit animating the gift’ (Davis, 1983, p.70) and retain a special ability to serve as ‘a physical token of the emotional bond shared by the giver and recipient’ (Bourne, 2015; Nissenbaum puts ‘the “commercialisation of sincerity”’ (1997, p.150), in a distancing extra set of quotes, but the publishing industry’s success in promoting books as always-appropriate gifts, harnessing existing and authentic aspects of book exchange, is exactly that. Few if any other gift options offer such a combination of meaning, connection, high status, low cost, and, not at all trivially, ease of wrapping.¹⁸ This last affordance of print books was a key factor in the rise of Amazon: according to his biographer, Bezos selected books as his initial product in part because books were simple to package (Coll, 2014).

In my own survey, half of respondents chose print because it is better for giving as a gift: 48.3%, identical for print-only and e-book readers. This is less an indication that they prefer print for this purpose than an indication that they give books as gifts at all. Giving a specific e-book as a gift, as opposed to giving a generic gift voucher, remains awkward or impossible on many platforms: Amazon does not offer it as an option outside the U.S.

¹⁸ Nissenbaum also links book gifts and gift wrapping, arguing that ‘Christmas presents had to obfuscate their commercial origins’, and that books as sold in nineteenth century America were effectively pre-obfuscated, perfect for placing under the tree in haste (1997, p.173).
Those who value print for gift-giving are particularly active consumers of print in general. They are more likely to have obtained print books from every source in this survey, but demonstrate a marked preference for obtaining their print books from venues with a physical, in-person option: the strongest effects are for secondhand bookshops (58.2% vs 40.0%, CS=29.1 p=.000) and chain bookshops (72.8% vs 55.0%, CS=28.5 p=.000), with the most closely linked online option being Amazon (84.1% vs 74.2%, CS=13.2 p=.000) (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for giving as a gift' by source of print books
While I did not ask whether respondents had recently given a book as a gift, I did ask whether they had received one, and the answers are revealing. Those who had received a print book as a gift in the past 12 months (41.6% of respondents) were almost twice as likely to themselves choose print because it is better for giving as a gift (66.8% vs 35.2%). Predictably, given the difficulty of the process, receiving an e-book as a gift is rare (only 5.2% of respondents in this survey had received one in the past 12 months). But even with that tiny group there was a statistically significant difference, where 64.1% believed that print is better for giving as a gift compared with 47.5% of those who had not received an e-book as a gift: an informed indictment of the shortcomings of the e-book gift experience.

*Sharing books via exchange of copies*

Sharing books in the sense of loaning, giving, or bequeathing one’s personal copy to a friend is a key consideration for ownership: not just ‘ability to lend’ (Survey 4) but ability to ‘share with children, family and friends’ (Survey 1), with the loan, gift or bequest of a book serving as a means of underscoring a book’s importance to the giver. The exchange creates or strengthens a connection between giver and recipient, and can foster a special connection between book and recipient as well: ‘I feel connected to books, and sometimes to the people who gave them to me.’ (Survey 3). But it always also affirms the connection between book and giver (Davis, 1983, p.73). This connection may or may not be public (and, if inscribed in a physical copy by the author herself, becomes part of the book’s peritext (Genette, 1997b, p.136-7). If the gift is anonymous the recipient might never know who bestowed that book. But the giver always knows, and respondents describe the gift of a book as deeply meaningful. (For
more on presentation and display of books as an expression of bookish identity, please see Chapter 5, pp.317-322.)

E-book loans between individuals are often technically impossible (one respondent lamented the retrenchment of schemes like Lendle [FG 5 participant 5] and many criticized Amazon for impeding or blocking peer-to-peer loans) and are often described as, like e-book gifts, less meaningful or satisfying: the experience, like the book itself, missing some pieces. As respondents noted, 'you lend out physical books. it's satisfying/enjoyable to share your reads in person with friends’ (Survey 2) and they specifically buy not only print copies but where possible durable hardcover copies for some books ‘so that [they] can then pass them on when [they’re] done’ (FG 6 participant 1). Some noted the physical act of pressing a book into a friend’s hands as a key element of the exchange, as with ‘I like passing books on as well. I will be, like, [mimes handing a book to fellow participant with both hands, as if in a ceremony] ‘take this!’’ (FG 1 respondent 5). They described the experience as either diminished by digital exchange, when a ‘beamed’ (FG 1 respondent 5) loan feels impersonal.

'[with a print loan one could say] I got this from my friend...but this [digital loan] is like, well this just got beamed to me, and it’s from...somebody. (FG 1 respondent 5)

'[loaning a print book is] like more of a social thing... I suppose you could be like... (laughing) ‘here’s a USB!’ (FG 2 respondent 3)
But more often the experience is simply missed, when they identify a text they want to share but cannot, because they read it digitally in a format they cannot easily ‘beam’, pull down from a shelf and make the connection then and there: ‘you’re having conversations [about good books you want to loan], and you’re like, oh, it’s on my Kindle’ (FG 1 respondent 6). To diminish or lose such an opportunity for connection can be seen as not just a personal issue, but a ‘cultural’ one that leaves society impoverished, as in this exchange in focus group 5:

P5: ‘The crap thing is that you can’t hand on a new book to friends.’ ['yes’ – sounds of agreement]

P1: ‘Yes, that’s the biggest downside.’

P5: ‘I think this is an enormous sadness really.’

P7: ‘Yes, it’s huge.’

P5: ‘It’s a kind of cultural and social sadness because handing on a book is a pleasure.’

**Impersonal library? Defining a digital collection**

Participants placed enormous importance on personal libraries: 66.3% of all respondents who answered all relevant questions choose print because it is ‘better for keeping as part of a personal library’, making it the second-most important motivator in the survey, behind finding a print book ‘more enjoyable to handle and use’ (at 73.3%) (Figure 27).
While only 13.1% choose digital for the same reason (Figure 28), between the two preferences over three quarters of respondents (76.7%) choose format with their personal libraries in mind. These data sharply contradict earlier theoretical conclusions that in an era of widespread digital reading the concept of a personal library might not remain relevant.
Despite the flexibility users demonstrate in choosing print or digital based on when and where they intend to read the book, indicating an acceptance that ‘better’ often depends on context, personal library preferences are nearly mutually exclusive: only 4.1% of respondents agreed with both statements (an overwhelmingly strong negative correlation, CS=124.4). But participants diverged sharply in their description of their own personal libraries and what role, if any, digital could play. Some explicitly link
‘personal library’ or ‘home library’ to print, e.g. ‘I also lean towards digital for books I don’t require in my home library, such as a guidebook for a specific trip’ (Survey 1) or ‘older books, hard to find books I have in book form for personal library’ (Survey 2). The latter is a fascinating division between print books as books ‘in book form’ and e-books as books in some unspecified non-book form. The way that a set of e-books can have the function but lack the feeling of a personal library was highlighted in several groups, as in this exchange from focus group 4:

*Facilitator*: ‘Does your digital book collection feel like a collection? Does it feel like a personal library or is it something short of that?’

*P4*: Short of that, definitely.

*P1*: Yes.’

Others, however, will readily apply the term ‘library’ when describing digital books. A number of survey respondents wrote in as reasons for choosing digital variations on ‘portable library’ (Survey 2), ‘carry my entire library wherever I go’ (Survey 2), ‘more portable (whole library in my bag)’ (Survey 4) or ‘I can carry a huge library in my handbag’ (Survey 2). This sense of a portable personal library can be powerful enough to by itself make the entire e-reading experience worthwhile: ‘the ability to carry a huge library in a small space makes e-books wonderful’ (Survey 4).

E-book readers are less likely than print-only readers to choose print because it is better for keeping as part of a personal library (62.8%, vs 77.6% of print-only readers, a significant gap at CS=15.9 p=.000). Among e-book readers, print being better for keeping as part of a personal library varied by gender: 66.0% of women vs. 56.8% of men agreed (the relationship is not a strong one, but it is statistically significant: CS=5.3
Responses show a general upward trend, but not a steady increase, rising only slightly from 2014 to 2015 and then peaking in 2016 (Figure 29).

![Figure 29: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for keeping as part of a personal library', by year](image)

The 2016 peak is largely due to a sharp increase in agreement among male respondents: 7 out of 10 men in that year (69.8%) agreed, compared to roughly half in other years (Figure 30). Women’s agreement increased only very slightly over the same period (from 64.9% in 2014 to 70.7% in 2017).
The truly striking demographic factor is age.\textsuperscript{19} The younger the respondent, the more likely they were to agree (Figure 31).

\textsuperscript{19} Although age did not vary significantly year by year, some years had larger overall groups of young respondents than others. While in 2014 only a quarter of respondents (25.8\%) were under 35, in 2015 this rose to 40.0\%, peaking at 44.7\% in 2016, and then falling back to 35.5\% in 2017.
This intriguing finding initially appears to defy conventional wisdom that youthful digital natives are more comfortable than their elders with cloud storage and digital longevity. But greater confidence with digital may be outweighed by greater attraction to the physical: David Sax argues that younger people are more drawn to ‘analog’, more appreciative of its aura as well as its affordances (2017, p.xi-xii). If the readers most enthusiastic about physical personal libraries are young, this could point to a coming resurgence in interest in print. However, another potential explanation is that the appeal of a print library is most powerful when book collections are likely to be small, theoretical, or (as was the case for a number of younger focus group participants) stored entirely in one’s parents’ house.
‘I keep them, even really bad books…I send them all home. I send them all home to my family, because I’m not chucking them.’ (FG 1 participant 3)

‘[at parents’ house] I have, like, eight boxes. And I was like, please keep these and don’t throw them.’ (FG 1 participant 2)

For print-lovers whose collections are of any size, and who have to shelve and dust the volumes themselves, the great problem is domestic storage space. Responses noting that ‘ebooks take up much less space in the house’ (Survey 2) or ‘I only have so much shelf space’ (Survey 3) were very frequent. Storage efficiency was noted in positive terms, as an affordance of digital (e.g. ‘I love that I can keep reading new titles [digitally] without completely cluttering up my house’ [Survey 3]) but also negative terms, as an example of regret and capitulation (e.g. ‘like paper books better, but I have no more room to store them!’ [Survey 2]). When available storage space shrinks, or the book collection continues to expand, the only option is a collection cull (an exercise many collectors find difficult, unpleasant, or actually traumatic [Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, p.29]):

‘I find it really hard to get rid of books’ (FG 1 participant 4)

‘I’ve got boxes in the attic and bookcases in every room and it’s just, “I cannot live like this, I need to start getting rid of the ones I’ve tried and disliked…”’ (FG 6 participant 3)
For print-only readers, there were not significant differences based on age or gender (in part due to smaller sample size), though UK readers were more likely to value print for personal libraries: 67.3% of UK residents agreed, vs. 57.5% of others.

Those who choose print for this reason are print enthusiasts in another way: they are more likely to agree with almost every other print reason in the survey, sometimes dramatically so. The correlation with ‘a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use’ is most striking (CS=99.7) but correlations to bibliophilia (CS=89.1), a desire to support traditional bookshops (CS=69.4), and print being better for giving as a gift (CS=64.7) are not far behind (Figure 32). Even print privacy (no one is tracking what I buy or when I read), one of the least important motivators in the survey, is strongly linked (CS=32.8). In contrast, considerations such as selection and availability are weakly or even negatively correlated (though for availability, the only negatively correlated value, the effect is below the level of statistical significance.)
This confirms the intuitive connection where ‘print personal library’ sits alongside bibliophilia, book-gifting, support for traditional bookshops and other values (including, intriguingly, privacy, a link I will discuss further in Chapter 5) in a constellation of bookish values.
Roles of e-books in personal libraries

Attitudes towards personal libraries were dramatically different when it comes to e-books. Only 15.8% of e-book readers agreed that when they choose digital, one of their reasons is ‘better for keeping as part of a personal library.’ Gender is not a significant factor. UK residents were significantly less likely to agree (14.3% vs 20.8% of non-UK residents, CS=4.8 p=.029), harmonising with UK residents’ greater enthusiasm for print personal libraries. This suggests that remote access, and being able to get to one’s collection from a distance, does potentially matter more in other countries, or at least to English-speakers captured in my English-language survey. Expatriates in my focus groups (such as Irish and Canadian citizens in the UK for graduate study or Americans in the UK for work), like self-described expatriates in the survey, were vocal in their description of the challenges of international moves for a book-collector. While expatriate experiences were not a focus of this study, their experiences have emerged as distinctive and striking. Like readers who have moved frequently (Baverstock [2016, p.37] has noted the effects of regular relocations on reading for families in the armed forces) or have lost book collections to forced relocations, natural disasters or personal tragedies (like the participant later in the chapter re-purchasing Updike novels after a house fire), expatriate book collectors are called upon to re-inaugurate their book collections, and at least sometimes re-evaluate their own beliefs regarding what it means to own and know books. The reading and book-collecting stories of expatriates would be a fascinating topic for further study.

While variation on age looks striking, with respondents in the middle years more than twice as likely as the youngest respondents to agree (22.8% of respondents aged 45-54, compared to 8.9% of respondents aged 18-25), this correlation is under the level of
statistical significance (p=.068) (Figure 33). Further investigation is needed to confirm whether this is a real effect. The shape is not the inverse of the print chart: enthusiasm for digital libraries, in addition to being mild compared to enthusiasm for print, does not climb with age but rather peaks in the middle years. If real, this effect could indicate that enthusiasm for digital is associated with a specific generation, one digitally informed but not digitally jaded (and also for the most part post-education and in their working lives by the 2004-2008 time frame where Jones locates his eversive ‘shift in the collective understanding of the network: from a world apart to a part of the world’ [Jones, 2016, p.3]). Alternatively, it could indicate that continuing to expand a personal library in any form could be less of a priority for the very oldest individuals in the survey. Or, it might simply mean that respondents in the middle age bracket are so burdened with storing their children’s book collections they must turn to digital to maintain their own.

Figure 33: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for keeping as part of a personal library', by age (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)
Differences based on reading habits were as important as demographics. There was effectively no difference between those who read e-novels and those who did not.\textsuperscript{20} Those who had read non-fiction in digital form in the past 12 months, however, were considerably more likely to agree: 21.9\% vs 9.3\% of others (CS=17.6 p=.000). Differences were as dramatic for e-reference readers (27.2\% vs 13.5\%, CS=17.4 p=.000) and nearly so for e-short-fiction readers (21.8\% vs 12.6\%, CS=10.0 p=.002). For e-poetry readers, however, there was no difference whatsoever. While the preference many (though not all) readers hold for viewing only shorter texts on screen, avoiding novels and other long-form prose, is quite real (‘I can see maybe short stories [for reading on screen]. Very, very short stories, and that’s it. I’m talking three pages short stories.’ [FG 1 participant 3]), if this agreement were entirely down to preference for smaller units of literary material, one would expect to see poetry alongside e-reference and short stories, and book-length non-fiction alongside novels. Another possible reason for this split lies in the unique role novels play in reading lives. This role links novels to different reading strategies and settings, and certainly to distinctive device usage. How a personal digital library functions in practice depends very much on the device (or, for many readers, suite of devices) and text source (e.g. how Amazon allows access compared to Barnes & Noble, or a university library, or a web-accessible server loaded with Project Gutenberg texts ready to read on screen at any time without signing in.)

\textsuperscript{20} Fascinatingly, however, those who only read novels digitally, who had read an e-novel but no other kind of e-book in the past 12 months, were far less likely to agree: only 9.4\% of that (small) group chose digital because it was better for keeping as part of a personal library.
Respondents who had read an e-book on a smartphone in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to agree that digital is better for keeping as part of a personal library: 24.2% vs 11.6% of non-users (CS=18.3 p=.000) (Figure 34).

![Figure 34: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for keeping as part of a personal library', by device usage (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)](image)

Tablet users were almost as likely: 22.5% vs 12.1% of non-tablet-users (CS=12.5 p=.000). For laptop (20.3% vs 15.2%), desktop (22.0% vs 16.3%), and other e-ink reader (23.3% vs 16.4%) users the gaps were not significant (though laptop came close with p=.083). For Kindle users, however, there was effectively no difference (17.1% vs 17.4%). As noted above, Amazon advertises its e-books and e-readers with a message of a personal library at one’s fingertips, using the term for both one’s cloud-stored cluster of purchases and one’s device-based history of files, including expired loans (a practice singled out as ‘annoying’ [FG 6 participant 5]). And as noted above, a number of participants have adopted this terminology, describing their e-reading devices as a
‘huge library in my handbag’ (Survey 2), a ‘whole library in my bag’ (Survey 4) etc. But while use of e-books on tablets and smartphones correlates significantly with an appreciation of the value of a digital library, use of a Kindle does not.

Sources of e-books, however, mattered less: only two sources showed any correlation, and only one, direct from publisher, a correlation of any size (Figure 35).

![Figure 35: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for keeping as part of a personal library', by source of e-books (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)](image)

Obtaining e-books from almost any source correlated positively, strongly or weakly, with appreciation for digital libraries. The conspicuous exception was actual libraries. Respondents who had obtained an e-book from a library were *less* likely to agree,
though by a small and not statistically significant margin: 15.6% vs 17.8%. It is perhaps unsurprising that borrowed e-books do not enhance one’s appreciation for the value of a personal library in digital form, and this is a possible reason why Amazon lags behind other e-retailers: respondents who obtained one or more e-books from Amazon could have done so via Kindle Unlimited or Prime Reading. The overall pattern is that while digital reading is considered better for keeping as part of a personal library by only a few, the sentiment is clearly linked to recent e-book purchase (and not e-book loan). This connection could represent a cause or an effect: those who value digital for a personal library could logically be receptive to spending on e-books that can become part of their digital collections. But it is also possible that the very act of purchase changes readers’ feelings towards a given book; if so, the shift from buying individual e-novels to borrowing e-novels via Kindle Unlimited would have enormous implications for readers’ relationships to novels as a genre.

This possible connection between purchase and feeling makes the link between obtaining e-books directly from the publisher and a greater likelihood of valuing digital libraries is an especially interesting one. These e-books were not necessarily purchases: a number of respondents wrote in options such as ‘Netgalley or publisher’, ‘publisher provided pre publication [sic] pages’ (Survey 4), ‘review copies from publisher/author’ and ‘received for review’ (Survey 3). But whether it is purchase or a relationship with the publisher (for example, as a reviewer, member of a readers’ panel like the Penguin Random House Consumer Insights team Bookmarks scheme, book blogger, etc.) it links strongly to a sense that personal digital libraries are (and by extension digital ownership is) real, meaningful and desirable. It could be that the hand of the publisher changes the way the e-book file is perceived, and how it feels to have it on one’s device: that the
sense of a direct relationship or personal touch may transform the previously impersonal, generic file into something unique. It is also possible that the files themselves are unlike e-book files obtained via other channels: the respondents who read galleys and other pre-release materials are confronted on a page-by-page basis with the fact that theirs is not an ordinary commercial product but something special, reserved for those with connections to and relationships with book creators. This could make them, in a sense, digital collectables, for which enduring digital status is authentic and desirable, and for which digital could be more easily experienced as satisfyingly real.

This relationship with purchasing habits extended to some purchasing habits for print. E-book readers who had bought a print book from an independent bookshop (14.2% vs 20.1%, though this is a weak effect at CS=4.1 p=.042), or secondhand bookshop (13.5% vs 20.4%, CS=5.5 p=.018) in the past 12 months were slightly less likely to agree that digital is better for keeping as part of a personal library. (Chain bookshops also saw a gap, and in the same direction, but too small a gap to be statistically significant.) Secondhand physical bookbuyers are, of course, exercising a right unavailable to e-bookbuyers; whether the activity activates the sentiment or the sentiment inspires the activity, there is a clear link.

In terms of relationships to other reasons for choosing digital, ‘digital personal library’ is positively correlated with every other reason in the survey (though digital privacy and availability fall below the level of statistical significance), but these correlations are modest compared to those between ‘print personal library’ and other print reasons (Figure 36). While convenience motivators such as value, selection, and digital being
easier to read are prominent, the largest correlations are with technophilia and digital enjoyability: other reasons chosen by only a very small proportion of respondents overall, but sharing a clear orientation towards digital reading as genuinely superior, not a thing to be done when print is inconvenient or expensive, but something to choose as the preferred option whenever possible. This group may be small, but it is distinctive and important, suggesting a (much smaller) parallel constellation of ‘e-bookish’ values, and perhaps corresponding e-bookish behaviours and identities, though unlike bookish values the constellation is not effectively separate from convenience and cost considerations.
E-books do offer kinds of ownership not possible with physical copies, such as access from a distance or (in some cases) use on multiple personal devices. But these extra affordances were not discussed by focus group participants as an acceptable trade-off. Many described not a sense that e-books are owned differently, but that e-books are not properly owned. Participants particularly fear losing digital books: not misplacing
them, but watching helplessly as tech giants like Apple, Google, or Amazon abuse their trust.

‘I always worry that Amazon will go out of business and my eBook purchases from them will dissolve in the digital wind.’ (Survey 2).

‘If something goes wrong with your e-book collection, it’s gone forever. I know you’ve got iCloud and things, so you can store it somewhere but it’s just the sense that you might lose it all, for me. So the special books that I’d like to keep referring to, I’d like on my bookshelf as a hard copy.’ (FG 3 participant 4)

‘I have a minor concern about [digital books] being under the control [emphasis mine] of someone else (amazon, google) who could at any point change their rules of access. But then, I remind myself that I could lose all my physical books in a fire/flood/etc and they’re pretty replaceable’ (Survey 3)

‘Control’ is the key word: the promise of future access appears to mean little when the access is (as terms and conditions invariably emphasise) entirely at the discretion of a distant mega-corporation.

Shaping a personal library requires multiple kinds of control: the power to securely and meaningfully hold, but also to bar or remove.21 ‘Keeping as part of a personal library’

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21 One form of keeping and permanence of remarkably little concern to these survey participants is the permanence of one’s reading history. Only 11.3% ever choose print because ‘no one is tracking what I buy or when I read’, a figure that drops to 7.9% for those who read e-books as well as print. Like other aspects of privacy, this will be discussed further in Chapter 5.
is far from synonymous with ‘keeping’, just as ‘building a personal library’ is far from ‘accumulating the greatest possible number of books’. The possibilities of e-books for sampling, trying out, and effortlessly discarding open up new possibilities for finding the ideal level of ‘keeping’: to read without owning, to access without owning, to license without owning, and ultimately to use many books but own only a special few.

‘Digital audition’ allows readers to use an e-book to sample a title and, if it proves itself worthy of inclusion in the permanent collection, upgrade to print (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, p.30). Although digital reading makes audition in many cases simple and near-effortless (as with ‘public domain books I read online first to see if I want a copy’ [Survey 1]) auditioning books is nothing new: many readers describe sampling books via library or personal loans and upgrading not from digital to print but from borrowed (or shabby, or cheaply-produced) print to other print, e.g. ‘if I borrowed [a novel] from the library and I really liked it I would go out and buy one’, (FG 5 participant 8), ‘in the past, if I’ve really enjoyed a book that I’ve got from the library I’ll buy one’ (FG 5 participant 4) or ‘there are books that I’ve got out of the library and then gone and bought afterwards’ (FG 6, participant 1).’ Reading a print copy borrowed from the library understandably does not offer the same feeling of ownership as reading a personal print copy (FG 4, 5, 6). But unlike .EPUB files, which might seem to belong to no one, these auditioned print books often do have owners, and readers can feel obligation towards the book owners as well as the books themselves. As one focus group participant put it, a print library copy imposed a special burden of responsibility: the borrowed book as ‘someone’s pet’, precious to others, demanding special care but conferring no special value in return for that care. To ‘do something with it’ will only lead to ‘trouble’.
‘No [I don’t feel a sense of ownership for a physical library book]. If anything it feels like I’m looking after someone’s pet and then I’m going to get in trouble if I do something with it. [entire group laughs].’ (FG 4 participant 2)

The emotional dimension of a personal library could suggest that how readers use and conceptualise them is somehow beyond conscious control: that one ‘feels it’ or one does not. However, respondents in this study sometimes describe conscious reconceptualisation: a decision to think of one’s collection differently. This is most prominent when a change of circumstances puts a large physical book collection out of reach. Sometimes, as previously quoted, this is for the length of a train commute, but sometimes the separation is prolonged or permanent, particularly after moving house or moving to a new country. Some tell, in the space of a few lines, a complete story: one of finding a way, in the face of adverse conditions, to remain a book collector and someone for whom a growing, current personal library is important and meaningful.

‘Advantage to digital: easier to transport/move personal library. I'm in a mobile profession, and I have to limit the physical books to take with me to professional references (almost universally unavailable in digital) only - no room for (physical) ‘personal’ books.’ (Survey 2)

‘I switched from mostly print to mostly digital some years ago for my personal library because I move frequently and a large collection of print books is physically cumbersome: it takes up a lot of space, is tedious to pack and unpack,
is backbreaking to cart about, and is tiresome to dust. So now I limit the number of print books I keep to less than a hundred.’ (Survey 4).

‘I dramatically increased e-book purchases over printed books when I made a transatlantic move. I had to get rid of much of my print library as transporting it was prohibitively expensive, and I wanted to retain access to books I purchase from now on if I move again.’ (Survey 4)

Readers do discard some books: painfully for owned print copies, effortlessly for loans and digital files. What makes them want to keep a given book is different for a novel. Novels occupy a unique place in personal libraries. Their ‘default audition’ status (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, pp.31), where readers are more likely to sample before they commit to a print purchase, is not solely due to the fact that conveying subject matter and style is a more involved paratextual exercise for novels than for non-fiction books (Genette, 1997b, pp.95-98). Novels represent both the most disposable and the most collectible: ephemera and ‘read once’ (Survey 1) passing fancies, but also lifelong favourites, ‘reread novels’ (Survey 1) adored and remembered, worthy of purchase in multiple editions (including multiple print editions). (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, pp.32). Though they may ‘tend to buy [novels they] won’t likely reread in ebook form’ (Survey 2), it is very much a case of ‘likely’: if the novel ‘captures’ them, it will find a place in their memories and hearts, and quite probably in their personal library.

In promoting any book to the personal library, respondents cite feeling: something more than admiration.
‘I have been known to buy a book after reading it on my e reader and loving it.’
(Survey 1)

‘My physical library has started to get too large so I’ve mainly switched to e-books when I read something new. If I really like it, I buy a physical copy.’
(Survey 3)

‘I frequently have digital and print copies of the same book...this is especially the case with favorite books.’ (Survey 3)

‘for [digital] books I really like I’ll probably buy a physical copy as well (FG 1 participant 2)

‘I’m sort of a sole e-book reader these days; that’s all I read. But if I do come across a book that I absolutely have read and love, then I’ll go out and buy the hardback....I read [a particular biography] on e-book and I thought, “I must have a big, thumping 600 page hardback on my shelf”.’ (FG 3 participant 2)

In fact, admiration alone is not enough to qualify a book for the permanent collection. Agreement was often uniform, as in this exchange from focus group 6:

Facilitator: Are there books you thought well of but just didn’t care about? They didn’t make the collection?

P2: Sure.
The need to include a book in a personal library can come from a sense of importance and personal meaning inseparable from emotion: the signal that a book must be included is described as not only an intellectual one, but also as something that comes from the gut, as in this revealing exchange from focus group 5:

P5: 'I had a copy of [A Prayer for Owen Meany] I’d had for a long time, and then [a friend] was reading A Prayer for Owen Meany on holiday, and I went “aaah! I love that!” He finished the book whilst we were on holiday and he gave me his with as little inscription on it. [sounds of approval from group]. So I have two copies, one I’d read four times anyway and the other was this lovely thing I have. I can’t find either of them. I don’t know if they were lost in the fire we had last October… I’ve bought another copy. I didn’t buy it in electronic form, which I might’ve done and it would’ve been more logical to, because I really feel I needed to have a copy in the house, [emphasis mine] but actually, because it’s so big and thick…

P6: You won’t read it!

P5: I won’t read it.

P8: So, you need to get it in electronic form as well so that you can read it in bed at night!

P2: Absolutely!

For collectors, digital offers a means of obtaining new titles with no trade-offs regarding the existing collection and of reading without risking the agony of a physical collection cull. And for book-lovers, adding a new zone to the edges of a book collection, a buffer of demi-owned digital files, offers the opportunity to effectively hang a velvet rope
around the core collection, creating a VIP area where books can be treated with even greater solicitude. An example of this is the ‘digital reading copy’ some participants describe using or, pining after bundling (FG 1 participant 1), wishing they could use. While there are many reasons to employ a digital reading copy, such as sparing tired wrists (‘carpal tunnel makes it hard to hold books’ [Survey 2] and reading conveniently backlit versions at night (‘Read at night without disturbing my husband’ [Survey 3]), this usage is also a means of reading the text without sullying the pristine physical object. The more loved the print book, the more important digital can be for preventing wear and tear: ‘I love print books, but I love to keep them in good condition, so I will often get the e-book as well’ (Survey 3), a second purchase that means one ‘can read it without bending the spine’ (Interview 1). These ‘copies [they] don’t particularly want to damage’ (Interview 1) may be signed copies or first editions, and may simultaneously be the kind of long or physically bulky books for which they want e-book affordances such as light weight and searchability: reasons for keeping a digital reading copy can be layered. The empirical data collected in this study make visible the subtleties of readers’ relationships to their personal libraries, and provide evidence for future scholars of digital and print media usage.

This is especially relevant for comic book readers, where the community values both deep, detail-oriented repeat readings (FG 4 participant 3) and the preservation of poly-bagged mint-condition archives for investment purposes. Digital can allow one to have it both ways. But for a reading copy to be meaningful, for it to represent time spent
with the original rather than with some impostor, it must be a digital proxy,\textsuperscript{22} not a real or \textit{ersatz book} in itself.

Readers feel deep responsibility to their physical book collections (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, p.31) but little or none to their virtual, indestructible digital book collections. Fear of personal failure in losing or neglecting a physical collection (including ‘someone’s pet’ in the form of a print library book) is replaced by fear of institutional failure in the sense of a tech giant bungling its cloud storage; loss in either case, but in the latter instance the individual is spared blame. The smaller and safer the physical collection, the less one needs it for daily use, the more special and separate it can become, and potentially the more sidelined and irrelevant. ‘Personal library’ and ‘book collection’ are linked but separate terms. Though each term means different things to different people (as exemplified by my groups, where many used the terms interchangeably) the latter does not as directly imply personal use. An eighteenth century bibliophile’s priceless rare volumes, or a contemporary comic book investor’s bagged and sealed first-print-run issues, can confidently be called collections whether or not they are ever read. The use of digital as a means to spare (some) physical books the strains and risks of being read, replacing in many cases earlier use of cheaper, more disposable paper reading copies, could lead to ever-higher standards for preservation, an ever-higher standard for what it means to cherish a deserving book. In the example above, a book-lover bought her new copy of \textit{A Prayer for Owen Meany} because she ‘needed to have a copy in the house’, but also bought a ‘big and thick’ edition unsuitable for reading, for which she will then need an electronic version if she means

\textsuperscript{22} Although thinking of the e-book file as a part of a book could potentially serve the same purpose, as in the manner of a weight-conscious long distance hiker ripping out chapters as they are finished, and carrying only what is needed for the remainder of the journey.
to actually access the text. This in turn could lead to a situation where the most ardent print-lover could no longer be as regular a print-user, and for the most beloved personal library to be less a used, lived-in, occupied space than a safe-deposit box – not Price’s ‘vulgar owning without reading’, but reading without touching – or a shrine.

**Conclusion**

Readers describe meaningful book ownership as complex, but ultimately inseparable from a sense of control. Dominion over one’s own books is essential, while suffering anyone else to control one’s books (or worse, to be personally controlled through one’s books, like a buyer manipulated by Amazon) is intolerable. The threat of books being lost, deleted, or taken back is felt deeply and taken seriously: a fear of such actions is enough to drive many readers away from digital, as a blanket policy or as the format for a given book. The idea, widely shared and deeply felt, that readers have a natural right to own, keep, and give away e-books in the same way they do print books indicates a sense on a profound level that e-books are books, enjoying realness and bookness. However, viewing e-book legitimacy through the lens of ownership reveals the ways that readers not only hold seemingly contradictory senses of e-book realness, but move actively and pragmatically between them as the situation demands. A sense of meaningful ownership can be seized and re-appropriated, via principled resistance, digital audition, or a conscious decision to change one’s concept of what an e-book can be and accept a digital book collection as a personal library. An idea of e-books as real is of clear benefit to the expat book collector who has consciously transitioned to a digital collection. It is also of value to the proud pirate, the one for whom defiance of Amazon is a matter of self-respect. The ashamed pirate, however, would benefit from
seeing e-books as *ersatz books*, as would the disposal-averse book collector who deletes an unwanted e-novel: both are treating ‘files’ in ways they would not wish to treat a proper book. The *Owen Meany* owner needs a digital reading copy to spare both her print copy and her overtaxed wrists; a digital proxy can give her the sense that she is connecting with her personal copy of her treasured novel. This recasts e-books as an integral part of building a personal library: sometimes as components, but sometimes just as tools. This fascinating and nuanced usage, combining conceptions of e-novels as real books, *ersatz books*, and digital proxies, further demonstrates how readers are able to move flexibly between visions of what an e-book is – a flexibility I will continue to explore in the next chapters, on trust and pleasure.
Chapter 4: Pleasure

In this chapter I will examine the legitimacy and reputation of electronic novels in terms of pleasure: that which results from physical and tactile elements of interaction with a text through the medium of an e-reading device, but also from less tangible but equally significant sources of enjoyment and satisfaction. I consider elements such as convenience and ease, recollection and sense of achievement, and immersion in and ‘transportation’ (Mangen, 2016, p.242) by an e-book in terms of pleasure, and examine implications for novels and novel readers.

To the degree that scholarship can reach consensus on any point in the interdisciplinary field of reading studies, there is consensus that print remains the medium of choice for the majority of readers. This overwhelming preference is not the result of any overwhelming advantage in terms of comprehension. Summarising decades of screen-reading research, Baron concludes that despite ‘nearly all recent investigations are reporting essentially no differences’ in terms of comprehension and speed, ‘the majority [of readers]—sometimes the vast majority—say they prefer reading in print’ (2015, p.12). Pre-1990 studies using first-generation screens did find large differences (Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017, p.84) but experiments using modern screens generally do not (Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017, p.85), and potential advantages specific to particular groups (for example, that older readers may read fractionally more quickly on tablet, or that readers with ‘poor vision’ may benefit from the high contrast of a backlit screen) do not alter the fact that most people, at most times, ‘prefer print’ (Phillips, 2014, pp.37-38). (Subtle differences can still be very important, as I will discuss later in the chapter.) This recognises the existence, and importance, of the minority who prefer
digital. The question is what widespread and enduring enjoyment of the material print object means for readers’ experiences of the bookness and realness of e-book objects.

**Enjoyment of the material print object**

In my own study, asking survey respondents ‘when you choose print, what are your reasons?’ elicited many responses, but among them impassioned and eloquent odes to the print book. As noted in the Introduction (p.28), though materiality is not synonymous with realness, digital materiality offers powerful support for arguments regarding the realness of a digital object. Responses were varied and often poetic in their expression of enthusiasm for various aspects of the material object and the multisensory experience of interacting with it. (Not every respondent used the freetext boxes to employ emotive language, but many did.) Common references to touch and smell emphasised what Mangen describes as ‘embodied’ experience inseparable from the ‘physicality of reading’ (2016, p.245).

‘tactile – the touch, the feel, the smell... ’ (Survey 1)

’Smiell’ (Survey 1)

‘I like the tactile feedback first from turning pages, from dog-earring the corner to mark my place, and taking note of my progress through the book’ (Survey 1)

‘It’s a tactile thing’ (Survey 1)
‘Books being tactile’ (Survey 1)

The smell and feel of a new and used book—yum!!’ (Survey 3)

‘I like the way they smell.’ (Survey 3)

‘“New book smell” never gets old; (Survey 3)

Many responses foregrounded the specific pleasure of lifting and holding a print book, as with ‘I feel more satisfied when holding a print book’ (Survey 1), ‘the feeling and weight of paper in my hands feels good’ (Survey 2) and ‘nothing for me will replace holding and reading a traditional book!’ (Survey 1). Respondents frequently used the words ‘hands’ and ‘hand’, but with a notable difference depending on medium. They conspicuously link the plural to print reading, as with the feeling of a book in one’s hands, or measuring progress through a book by the weight in the left hand versus the right, while linking the singular to digital reading, as with holding an e-reader in one hand on the beach (FG 1 participant 4), while distracted by children, or standing on a crowded Underground train.

One aspect of pleasure frequently cited in relation to print, but not raised in relation to digital in this study, is aesthetic pleasure derived from the material object. Respondent found value in beauty (‘collector’s editions of print books have more aesthetic value than pixels’ [Survey 2]) and even requirement for beauty, as in ‘certain books are aesthetically necessary to me on paper—children’s picture books, art books, etc.’ (Survey 2). While some respondents noted that certain texts can be more beautiful and
more artistically successful on screen, such as born-digital works like Emily Carroll’s graphic novel story *Into the Woods* (Interview 1), no one spoke of an e-reading device in terms approaching ‘printed books are a thing of beauty’ (Survey 3) or ‘[hardcover books] are so pretty!’ (FG 4 participant 2). Some noted particular pleasure in craftsmanship and artistry; the enjoyment was not only from the object itself, but from appreciation of the effort and skill that its creation required. While a parallel argument could be made for appreciation of the design of an electronic device, such as an iPhone, no one in this study made it (despite the intense emotions many readers feel for their phones (Hungerford, 2016, pp.29-30).23

‘*Print feels more indulgent, a luxury, particularly when reading well-produced hard backs – like sitting in a well crafted chair or wearing well tailored clothes* – you feel the difference’ (Survey 1)

Some responses framed digital as an enemy of aesthetics, an assault on print, as with ‘digital alternatives ruin and take away the art of reading and the beauty of books’ (Survey 1). But questions of aesthetics apply to print vs other print as much as to print vs digital, and others noted that a print book can fail as an object: ‘small font size / tight layout / smudgy print on poor quality paper puts me off buying some print books’ (Survey 1). Though several noted typographical errors as a profound annoyance in e-books or print books, this was expressed as a failure of editing (and lack of

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23 Perhaps indicating that the attention to detail invested in iPhones and Samsung Galaxy devices by industrial design teams is not matched by Kindle developers or reading app software engineers. Alternatively, it could be that Amazon’s decision to split its Kindle range into exquisitely optimized high-end models such as the Oasis and basic models with few features means that the image of Kindle is set by its cheapest, simplest examples, not the most expensive and best-designed.
professionalism on the part of authors) rather than a problem inherent to digital as a medium.

Some aspects of print books were noted as sometimes inconvenient, but this did not necessarily detract from their desirability: physical weight, particularly of hardcovers, was simultaneously a cherished feature of print books and a primary reason to read digital instead. Few participants expressed any negative impressions of the sensory experience of reading print. Even if they considered aspects such as beautiful endpapers (FG 4, participant 2) as items they were willing to forego as a trade-off with other affordances, or genuinely unimportant to them, participants were overwhelmingly likely to speak of such aspects in positive or at least neutral terms. When ‘materiality scepticism’ was aired in the focus groups, it often became one of the rare flashpoints of heated disagreement: disliking the smell of a new book, or the feeling of holding a hardcover edition, invited rebuke and scolding. Participants in my study are readers (as noted, nearly all survey respondents and all focus group and interview participants are regular readers of print books) and as readers are heirs to the traditions of print culture, including relationships to print as a material object. While they are not required to share the sentiments of ardent print admirers, they are inevitably in contact with discourse on the subject. The formation and expression of bookish identity, of which acknowledgement and display of one’s appreciation for the material object is a part, is a thread I will continue explore in Chapters 5 and 6.
Preference in practice: influence of enjoyment of print on reading choices

Taken on their own, however, these paeans to print could be dismissed as lip service: mere words, not necessarily linked to concrete actions. But survey results indicate that this appreciation for the physical object of the book is not a distant abstraction but a primary consideration in their reading choices: it is the single most important factor captured in the survey. Among respondents who completed all relevant questions, 73.3% choose print because a print book is ‘more enjoyable to handle and use.’ Choice of print for reasons of pure enjoyment varied significantly according to only one demographic captured in the survey: women were significantly more likely choose print for this reason (76.8%, versus 66.7% of men). Age, in contrast, was not a significant factor (Figure 37).

![Figure 37: Reasons for choosing print: 'a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use', by age (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)](image)
Readers over the age of 25 had virtually identical levels of agreement. The single peak, for readers 18-25, was only slightly higher than the average (81.2%), a weak and not statistically significant effect. This hint of a possible, even if weak, link between youth and enjoyment of print books is plausible, given younger respondents’ greater interest in print as a component of personal libraries (see Chapter 3, pp.174-176) and the continued dominance of print for children’s books (Beldham, 2018), and is an important topic for further study. The slight peak is in fact less interesting than the length of the plateau: no age groups are indifferent, and no age groups conspicuously lag behind. Enjoyment varied somewhat by residence, with 76.1% of UK respondents agreeing versus 69.8% of non-UK respondents, a weak (CS=4.8) but statistically significant (p=.028) effect.

Enjoyment was extremely stable year to year, showing no significant change over the period of the survey. While James Daunt, CEO of Waterstones, speculated that the e-book option has forced publishers to stop ‘cutting back on production values’ and produce instead ‘proper books with decent paper and decent design’ (Preston, 2017), there is not yet evidence of overall increase, though the greater enthusiasm of young readers for print could signal a coming wave. That said, enjoyment of print books is already so widespread that there is limited opportunity for further increase.

Enjoyment correlated strongly with print-only reading: 84.6% of print-only readers agreed, versus 69.8% of e-book readers, a reasonably strong (CS=18.1) and highly significant (p=.000) effect. These two links to gender and to print-only reading mean that print-only women approach universal agreement: 91.8%, versus 72.5% of print-only men. The gender gap is much greater for print-only readers, however: considering
e-book readers alone, where 72.2% of women and 64.5% of men agree, the difference is not statistically significant (Figure 38).

![Graph showing reasons for choosing print](image.png)

**Figure 38: Reasons for choosing print: ‘a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use’, print-only vs e-book readers (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)**

Seven out of ten e-book readers is still a large majority: most e-book readers still enjoy print, and choose print (when they do choose it) for the pleasure. Though the group of e-only readers is, at 16 individuals, too small for meaningful comparisons, it is interesting to note that a quarter (25.0%) still report choosing print because it is more enjoyable to handle and use. This may refer to obtaining print books for others, as in buying a gift for a print-loving friend, or it could indicate enjoyment so strong they will sometimes obtain print they do not intend to read purely to ‘handle and use’ in other ways (as the uses of a print book stretch far beyond its utility as a readable text [Price,
This underscores the fact that avoidance does not necessarily mean dislike, or even indifference, as even the most devoted digital readers can still value the pleasures of print. It also underscores the fact that enjoyment of the material object of a print book is not enough to make someone a print-only reader.

**Enjoyment and book-buying**

Examining all respondents (print-only and e-book readers who completed all relevant questions) choosing print because a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use correlates strongly with obtaining print books from many sources (Figure 39).
Figure 39: Reasons for choosing print: ‘a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use’, by source of print books (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

The strongest correlations are with obtaining books from secondhand bookshops (55.1% vs 34.3% of those who do not agree, CS=29.8 p=.000), chain bookshops (69.7% vs 50.8%, CS=26.9 p=.000), independent bookshops (54.5% vs 37.3%, CS=20.8 p=.000), Amazon (82.8% vs 69.9%, CS=17.5 p=.000), and gifts (51.4% vs 35.6%, CS=17.3 p=.000). There were no significant links to non-Amazon online retailers or publishers, which are also the least frequently used sources of print books in the survey.
The reverse, however, was not true: print enthusiasts were exceptional in their consumption of print, but for the most part ordinary in their consumption of digital. There were links in some cases with choice of e-book genre and platform, but not with sources of e-books.

Those who agree that print is more enjoyable to handle and use were no more or less likely to have used any of the e-book sources in the survey other than non-Amazon online retailers (20.0% vs 28.1%, CS=5.2 p=.022) and publishers (14.9% vs 21.2% CS=4.0 p=.046), and these relationships are very weak and, in the case of publishers, barely statistically significant. Those who enjoy print are neither attached to any particular e-book retailer or free source nor unusual in their e-book consumption: while they obtain more print, they do not obtain any less digital.

Differences in device use were small. Those who choose print for enjoyment of the physical object were slightly more likely to have read on laptop computers (44.3% vs 33.5%), and very slightly less likely to have read on smartphones (41.8% vs 52.2%) and non-Kindle e-ink readers (9.6% vs 18.2%) but the effects are not particularly strong (Figure 40).
There was no significant difference for tablet (48.5% vs 52.2%), Kindle (53.9% vs 53.7%) or desktop (14.9% vs 19.2%). The gender divide on enjoyment of print is not likely to be a factor: while there are significant gender differences on overall device usage, with men being slightly more likely to use tablets and desktop computers and women being slightly more likely to use Kindles, there are no significant differences overall for smartphone, non-Kindle e-ink reader, or laptop use. Nor is there an obvious link to genre, as laptop and smartphone reading have opposing relationships to novel reading. As discussed below, the link between laptop computers and off-site work reading could be a key factor. Follow-up interviews with print-enjoying hybrid readers may be necessary to fully understand this finding, particularly in light of the relationship (or rather, lack of relationship) between reading-device enjoyment and device choice, discussed below.
Print enjoyment as a factor in avoidance of non-fiction e-books

Enjoyment of print had one interesting effect on e-book genre. Those who choose print books because they are more enjoyable to handle and use are much less likely to have read a non-fiction e-book (58.0% vs 74.9%, CS=17.3 p=.000) (Figure 41). There is no significant effect for reading of e-novels, or for short fiction, reference, or poetry e-books.

![Figure 41: Reasons for choosing print: 'a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use', by e-book genre (relationships below the level of statistical significance in stripes)](image)

This avoidance of non-fiction aligns with data from surveys focus groups, where some book components typical of non-fiction but not poetry or fiction, such as charts, tables, and footnotes, were frequently described as awkward or non-functional on screens, and
cited as reasons to read particular book in print. Participants found that ‘the footnotes get annoying [in e-books], because you always end up trying to find where the footnote’s ended up’ (FG 6 participant 3), ‘some layout-heavy reference books aren’t as useful as reflowable ebooks’ (Survey 3) and ‘diagrams are not really usable in current state of e-books’ (Survey 1). The end result is that, as one respondent put it, ‘print reading is much more usable for dipping in, skipping around, browsing etc. so I often prefer print books for non-fiction (Survey 2)’. This preference for print for ‘browse reading’ appears to undermine one of the primary attractions of e-books, and stands in contrast to scholarly use as studied earlier in the 21st century, where large-scale surveys such as Nicholas, Rowlands, Clark, Huntington, Jamali and Ollé’s (2008) found that dipping in and out was far more prevalent than reading full e-books, or even full chapters of e-books. The effect is not a function of gender differences: though women are more likely to choose print for reasons of enjoyment, and men are more likely to read non-fiction, the link is strong and significant for print-enjoying women (56.1% vs 71.9%) and for print-enjoying men (61.3% vs 79.5%). This correlation could mean that those who choose print for enjoyment of the physical object are less committed readers of non-fiction in any format, but may also mean that the hybrid readers who make up nearly all of the e-book readers in this study are more likely to actively choose to read non-fiction in print purely to avoid the pleasure-sapping disappointment of badly presented charts, graphs, and referencing. (The near-perfect equivalency for e-book reference potentially undermines that theory, though reference e-books are far less commonly read than general non-fiction in this study.) Some features described as awkward on screen, such as maps (FG 4 participant 2, FG 5 participant 5, Survey 1) were noted as items occasionally found in novels, but sufficiently rarely that they did not constitute a reason to avoid novels on screen. Though the link to short fiction is
weak compared to that of non-fiction, and below the level of statistical significance, any potential separation between long-form and short-form fiction is interesting and worthy of further investigation. One avenue to explore is whether the importance of literary magazines to the short story form (Hunter, 2007, p.8; Boddy, 2010, p.104), and the ‘little magazine’ tradition of artisan publishing and close attention to design, could make short fiction readers more attentive to matters of typography and layout. However, this weakness of digital non-fiction may not be the only factor: as I will discuss later, there is evidence that genre may affect immersion and transportation.

*Print enjoyment and availability: e-books as a last resort*

There was a revealing link with ‘last e-book read’: those who choose print for reasons of enjoyment were twice as likely to have just read a digital original (14.1% vs 7.9%), and less likely to have just read a digital version of a print book (73.6% vs 84.2%) (Figure 42). The effect is only moderately strong (CS = 9.884) but it is a significant and striking result suggesting that those who very much enjoy the tactile aspect of print are more likely to use e-books when they cannot find a print alternative.
Figure 42: Reasons for choosing print: 'a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use', by publication status of last e-book read

Enjoyment of print is linked to some aspects of reading behaviour, but is extremely closely linked to some other reading preferences and values (though not always the preferences and values one would expect) (Figure 43).
Unsurprisingly, choosing print books because of enjoyment correlates very strongly with choosing print books because they are easier to read (58.1% vs 24.9% CS=76.5), but it is not the most striking correlation: that is with better for keeping as part of a personal library (75.9% vs 40.1%) (CS= 99.7) followed by a desire to support traditional bookshops (49.5% vs 15.2%) (CS = 84.8). Other significant correlations, in descending order or strength, are with choosing print because of identification as a bibliophile (42.7% vs 13.5%) (CS = 65.2), because print books are better for giving as...
gifts (59.6% vs 32.5%) (CS = 51.2), because print is better for borrowing or buying secondhand (59.4% vs 36.7%) (CS = 36.1) and because print is better for privacy (15.5% vs 3.0%) (CS= 25.7), and to a far lesser degree because of print being better for selection (19.0% vs 9.3%) (CS= 12.1) and print being easier to share (32.3% vs 20.7%) (CS = 11.3). There is actually an inverse relationship with ‘the books I want aren’t always available electronically’ (34.4% vs 41.8%), though this is a weak effect (CS = 4.071, p=.044) and barely statistically significant (all other effects were highly statistically significant).24 The survey asked only e-book readers about choosing print because it was ‘cheaper/better value’, and for that group found no relationship between the two preferences. (The strong, significant and wholly unsurprising relationship between enjoyment of print and bibliophilia will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.)

This further emphasises a cluster of linked priorities. Placing a different variable in the centre offers a glimpse of a subtly different web of relationships, and examining print as enjoyable highlights particular closeness to what could be described as ‘book experiences’, but not all book experiences (for example, gift-giving but not sharing.). The most highly correlated values include some of the most subjective and personal measures, such as identification as a bibliophile, while comparatively objective, fact-based measures such as availability and selection are among the least strongly, or even negatively, correlated. Another way to consider the cluster of less-correlated values is in terms of their practicality: how much does a book cost, how useful is it in terms of loaning or privacy? Practical reasons are not in opposition to ‘experience’ reasons, but

24 Looking only at e-book readers, who are the readers likely to actively checking e-book availability, this effect disappears (CS=1.8 p=.184).
present another axis for decision-making: rational (in the sense of weighing up evidence) and emotive (in the sense of responding to personal, subjective, non-quantifiable agendas).

‘Materiality’ of e-books: the physical object trapped in scare quotes

The material object of an e-reader was, in comparison to print, profoundly uninspiring. To participants in my study, the material object of an e-reader was not just an inferior object; in many exchanges, it barely registered its existence as an object. Study participants were not in any way confused about the fact that users only encounter e-books via some physical interface. It is self-evident, even too obvious for them to mention, that while ‘texts displayed on screens’ can be described as ‘intangible and virtual’ and ‘are physically separable from their display medium’ (Mangen, 2016, p.244), this means that e-books can be moved between physical display media and stored apart from them, not that e-books could ever be read intangibly. Participants are never unaware that the texts can only ever be read on a screen, and that this screen will exist in physical space. But much of the vocabulary of digital reading – virtual, cloud, file, download, etc. – foregrounds the untouchable storage or transfer stage rather than the reading stage, and in my focus groups and interviews e-books are often referred to in terms of their untouchable states as ‘data’ (FG 1 respondent 6) or a ‘document’ (FG 1 respondent 5), or with characteristics like ‘tangibility’ linked with a definition of ‘book’ that excludes digital.

‘On a screen ... it feels less tangible, like it's not really there.’ (FG 4 participant 3)
'There is something wonderful about the tangibility of a book. I just don't see myself switching to digital.' (Survey 3)

'[an e-book is] just all, like...data' (FG 1 participant 6)

'It's like [an e-book] is just a...Word document.' (FG 1 participant 5)

While print enjoyed its own rich vocabulary of sensory pleasures, the physical interface with digital was not often praised, and compared to that of print not often mentioned: very few comments touched in any way on the physical characteristics of the e-readers. An exception, of course, is ‘screen’: this term carries enormous weight in discussions of e-reading, in part because it is almost the only term that has meaning across all devices (in contrast to words like ‘e-ink’ or ‘app’ or ‘keyboard’ or ‘touchscreen’ that apply to some but not all common devices.) While there is no reason why an e-reading interface need be touched (the technology to, for example, project text onto a surface viewed but not held, and for actions such as turning pages, ‘flipping’ back to a previous passage, or annotation to be handled by voice commands, is long since in the mainstream, and if one conceptualises audiobook listening as reading [see Rubery, 2016] this hands-free interaction with a text is already commonplace) the reading interfaces common to the market and described by study participants are touched, and largely (excepting laptop and desktop computers) hand-held.25 Exchanges in my focus groups and interviews demonstrate how discussion of e-reading and pleasure can flow around issues of e-book

25 This, of course, is no accident: e-reading interface designers are concerned with how to present texts legibly and attractively to current customers, and readers’ near-universal experience with paper reading makes it pragmatic to ‘aspire to reproduce the visual experience of conventional printed media’ (Heikenfeld et al., 2011, p.133) rather than pioneer new styles.
materiality, as participants respond to questions about the e-reading object by describing instead what they like, or do not like, about the book object it is not. E-books are sometimes ‘light’ (Survey 2) but more often ‘lighter’ (Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4); sometimes ‘easy’ but more often ‘easier’. (To describe new reading technologies in terms of its similarity to and differences from an ancient reading technology is logical and unsurprising, and the questions, asking about print and digital separately but side by side, were always likely to elicit direct comparisons, but the asymmetry is striking.) Discussion of the materiality in relation to e-books is primitive, constrained by a self-evidently false yet highly persistent conception of e-books and other digital texts as bodiless: it was in 2006 that Gitelman wrote that, ‘even the most astute and exacting critics of cyberculture tend to signal a certain ambivalence about the bodies that electronic texts have, judging at least from the frequency with which the word ‘material’ appears between scare quotes…logic is logic, but material is “material”’ (2006, p.96) but the discourse on e-book materiality remains thin and barren compared to the vivid complexity and sensory richness of discourse on print book materiality. (The study of textual materiality enjoys its own academic discipline, and as a theme in fiction and belles lettres it is a genre in itself.) E-books, like all electronic texts, have physical form whether the form is as readable as projection of letter forms on a backlit screen or as unreadable as binary data inscribed on a hard drive (Kirschenbaum, 2012, pp.74) but electronic texts remain ‘elusive as physical objects’ and can hence ‘digital texts can seem to have no body’ even if on an intellectual level the reader knows that that this can’t be true (Gitelman, 2006, p.95). For participants in my study, personal accounts abound with descriptions of the tactile dimension of book appreciation, Dibdin’s

26 For more on narratives of revolution vs narratives of conservatism and continuity in technology adoption, please see Chapter 5, pp.303-307.
‘pleasures of sensual gratifications’ (Dibdin, 1811, p.133) in the look, feel, smell, and sound of pages, while e-books frequently ‘seem to have no body’, even among those who enjoy digital reading and reading devices. Placed alongside the print book, the sometimes-disembodied e-book is experienced as less present: not entirely there, and in that sense not entirely real.

**Enjoyment of e-reading devices**

Enjoyment of e-reading devices is a minority taste. Asked about their reasons for choosing digital, ‘an e-reading device is more enjoyable to handle and use’ was cited by only 10.9% of e-book readers. Unlike enjoyment of print, this did not vary significantly by gender or country of residence. Variation by age was also below the level of statistical significance, but nonetheless presents a near-mirror of the enjoyment of print profile, which also saw a general plateau with the youngest respondents as the exception to the rule (Figure 44). The difference here is that the oldest respondents are also an exception, though in the opposite direction: respondents aged 65 and older are nearly twice as likely to enjoy the tactile element of an e-reading device.

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27 Even the most enthusiastic admirers of print in my study drew the line at taste, rolling their eyes at a record collector’s belief that vinyl has a ‘flavor’ (FG 4 participant 4, 2) and dismissing concerns about used books and germs with, ‘it’s not like you’re licking it’ (FG 1 participant 5).
Further investigation is needed to determine whether this is a real effect. However, if it is genuine, the exceptional nature of the youngest respondents is likely to reflect of their greater enthusiasm for the tactile dimension of print books, and again harmonizes with their greater enthusiasm for print personal libraries (and lesser interest in digital personal libraries). For the oldest respondents, reasons may be more practical. Survey and focus group respondents specifically linked the (very commonly cited) affordance of adjustable font size to age (‘I think digital books are very good for people with poor eyesight such as mature people’ [Survey 2]), as well as lighter weight and one-handed page turns; ‘Kindle works best when mobility is an issue because arthritis’ (Survey 2). As I will discuss in greater detail below, in relation to convenience as a form of pleasure, older respondents were dramatically more likely to choose digital because it is
‘easier to read’ (44.0% of respondents 65 and older, compared with roughly a quarter of those 26-64 and only 11.8% of those 18-25).

For the small minority that finds e-readers more enjoyable, one values correlation dwarfs all others: fully 69.9% also find digital easier to read, compared with only 14.2% of others (CS =124.9) (Figure 45). If enjoyment of e-reading devices were strictly a matter of convenience, one might expect to see equally strong correlations with other ‘convenience factors’. However, ease and speed of obtaining e-books appear far further down the list (keeping in mind that most other correlations are of a lower order than correlations with enjoyment of print).
Figure 45: Reasons for choosing digital: ‘a reading device is more enjoyable to handle and use’, correlation with other digital motivators (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Moderate relationships are seen with digital being better for keeping as part of a personal library (37.0% vs 14.9% CS= 22.3) and technophilia (20.5% vs 8.3%, CS=11.086 p=.001), and weaker relationships with digital having better selection (12.3% vs 4.2% CS=9.00), being faster to obtain (75.3% vs 61.4%, CS=5.395 p=.020) and easier to obtain (56.2% vs 42.9%, CS=4.635 p=.031). This is only a partial parallel
to enjoyment of print: the convenience factors grouped with enjoyment (ease of reading, followed by personal library and technophilia, followed by a weakly associated lowest tier of selection, and ease of speed of obtaining books) are linked with an experience of books, but one factor, ease of reading, is drastically more prominent. But again, factors like price and availability, comparatively more objective, lag behind.

Those who found e-readers more enjoyable to handle and use were not for the most part distinctive in their e-book genre choices or sources of e-books. Such readers were slightly more likely to have read a non-fiction e-book (75.3% vs 61.1% CS=5.2 p=.022) or short fiction (65.8% vs 48.6%, CS=7.6 p=.006), though effects were not strong. The single hint of a connection with sources of e-books was with non-Amazon online retailers (17.9% vs 8.8%). This is not a particularly strong effect, but it is highly significant (CS=9.9 p=.002). Sources of print books were in fact more revealing than sources of e-books. Those who enjoy e-reading devices are significantly less likely to have obtained print books from chain bookshops (46.6% vs 64.1%, CS=8.5 p=.004) or secondhand bookshops (30.1% vs 48.1%, CS=-8.4 p=.004), and slightly less likely to have received print books as gifts (32.9% vs 46.7%, though this last is a weaker effect at CS=5.1 p=.025). This indication that those who enjoy e-reading devices are less frequent consumers of print books, but very ordinary consumers of digital books, is the reverse of print enthusiasts (who are more active consumers of print but ordinary consumers of digital) is potentially quite telling: these enthusiasts may be not reading digital instead of print but reading less overall. But far more interesting was their lack of variation regarding device choice.
Lack of relationship between enjoyment of e-readers and type of device

Remarkably, enjoyment of an e-reader does not depend on which e-reader(s) a respondent uses. There was virtually no difference in recent device usage: other than a weak correlation with use of non-Kindle e-ink readers (20.5% vs 11.2%, CS=5.3 p=.021), there were no significant gaps (Figure 46).

Figure 46: Reasons for choosing digital: 'a reading device is more enjoyable to handle and use', by device usage (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

This is a fascinatingly counterintuitive finding that challenges current thinking: as the interfaces and affordances of various e-reading devices are so different, it is unexpected to find that the minority of readers who hold this view are so normally distributed. This finding suggests something that what readers are responding to, what actually gives pleasure as they ‘handle and use’, is not something physically bound up in the reading
device such as size of screen, location of buttons, or system of navigation, or even e-ink versus backlit screen (a very surprising result given that readers consistently find e-ink less fatiguing [Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017, p.84; Heikenfeld et al., 2011, p.137]). (It is important to keep in mind that these populations of device users are not separate but overlapping: over two-thirds of e-book readers in my survey, 71.4%, used more than one reading device over the past 12 months.28 Hence, their feelings about device usage are informed by experience with more than one interface, and their response to the question may refer to aspects of one interface or multiple interfaces.) It is an overstatement to suggest that what gives them enjoyment when they handle and use a device is not affected by which object they are touching; it is more accurate to say (and more reasonable to investigate) that enjoyment is not linked to any one device, and perhaps that enjoyment of e-reading devices does not lead them to gravitate towards one device over another. This could mean that readers are responding to some aspect common to different e-reading devices. Another possibility, however, is that the appeal lies in a mode of reading where the physical object is temporarily forgotten. This possibility is one I will explore in greater detail later in the chapter, as I consider e-reading and immersion.

There are interesting patterns in their attitudes towards print. While there is a very small population of respondents who choose print because a print book is more enjoyable to handle and use and choose digital because it is more enjoyable to handle and use (15.1% of those who find e-readers more enjoyable, already a small population, or a tiny 2.3% of those who find print more enjoyable) the negative correlation is

28 Among single-device users, Kindle is the most popular choice, accounting for over half of single-device users and 15.6% of e-book readers overall. Tablet-only readers make up 7.0% of e-book readers, and for other devices exclusive use is rare or non-existent: smartphone-only 3.1%, laptop-only 2.6%, desktop-only 0.1% and non-Kindle e-ink reader-only 0.0%.
overwhelmingly strong (CS = 116.3) and for the most part these are incompatible preferences (Figure 47).

Figure 47: Reasons for choosing digital: ‘a reading device is more enjoyable to handle and use’, correlation with print motivators (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)
There is also a strong negative correlation with choosing print because it is easier to read (12.3% vs 45.6%), and nearly as strong a negative correlation with a desire to support for traditional bookshops (8.2% vs 38.9%) (one respondent used the freetext box to give, as a reason for not choosing print, ‘bookstore staff are useless’ [Survey 3]). There are milder negative correlations with bibliophilia (12.3% vs 39.4%), print as better for keeping as part of a personal library (43.8% vs 65.1%), with print being better for borrowing or buying secondhand (38.4% vs 55.4%) and print as better for giving gifts (41.1% vs 54.1%). There is a positive correlation for only one element: the books one wants only being available in print (58.9% vs 39.9%), and unsurprising link that corresponds with the finding that print enthusiasts also resort to the less-favoured format when they must.

**The rise of enjoyment of e-reading devices**

Enjoyment of e-reading devices did vary significantly by year: while remaining very low compared to enjoyment of print, enjoyment of e-reading devices doubled over the four years of the survey, leaping upwards between 2015 and 2016 (Figure 48).
Given the lack of relationship to most demographics, most sources of e-books, most genres of e-books, and choice of device, it is reasonable to conjecture that this is a genuine increase. (Overall usage of specific e-reading devices was in most cases stable: tablet, Kindle, laptop, and desktop use did not vary significantly by year. Smartphone use increased to a degree that was on the cusp of significance \( p=.058 \), from 35.7\% in 2014 to 50.4\% in 2017. Non-Kindle e-ink reader use varied tremendously, climbing from 8.7\% in 2014 to 20.7\% in 2016 before declining sharply to 5.0\% in 2017, but this was a rarely-used device overall). Since February 2014 e-reading technologies have developed considerably, and Amazon, the primary source for e-books in my survey, has introduced new functionality for both Kindle devices and Kindle apps. Pew Research Centre estimates that although Americans’ laptop/desktop computer ownership was approximately stable (at roughly three quarters of adults) between 2014 and 2017, smartphone (just over one half in late 2013 to just over three quarters in early 2018) and tablet (from one third in late 2013 to over one half in early 2018) ownership increased.
(Pew Internet has not asked about e-ink reader ownership since 2016, but it is interesting to note that the last data, collected in November 2016, found that ownership had rebounded from 17% in Spring 2016 to 22% in Autumn 2016, calling into question the dominant story of plummeting e-ink reader ownership) (Pew Internet, 2018).

Further iterations of the Kindle have introduced new features, some of which address (or are meant to address) kinesthetic dimensions of interaction with the text. The PagePress haptics of the Kindle Voyage offer tactile feedback in the form of a very slight press back on the reader’s fingertips when transferring to a new page (Amazon, 2018b). This feedback is very different from the tactile experience of turning a page, but is timed to offer some sensory input that coincides with the same action, punctuating the reading experience at a similar pace, and presumably to give readers some of the ‘whole process of turning the page’ (FG 3 participant 6) that many in my own study value highly. Wired described PagePress to its audience of technology enthusiasts as, alongside the ‘grit’ of the very slightly textured screen, ‘tactile qualities that approach actual paper’ (Moynihan, 2014). However, other new Kindle features are not designed to emulate paper but to introduce enhancements impossible in a traditional print book. The Kindle Oasis, the model following the haptic-feedback Voyage, abandoned PagePress and added instead additional ways to navigate, interrogate and share the text. These include image-navigation systems, links to Goodreads, features such as Timeline, which promises a new way to keep track of and navigate between key points in a narrative, and X-ray, which promises the chance to ‘see all the passages across a book that mention relevant ideas, fictional characters, historical figures, and places or topics of interest’ (Amazon, 2018c). In a non-fiction book the X-ray feature might offer no more utility than a traditional index, but in a novel any indexing offers novelty. Some focus group respondents had tried X-ray, and reported that it ‘tells you about the
characters’ (FG 5 participant 7) in a way not generally offered in previous formats, offering a sometimes primitive (‘quite often it’s just a few sentences from when they first appeared’ [FG 5 participant 3], but sometimes detailed (‘in some books, you get a huge amount of information’ [FG 5 participant 7]) new resource. This opening-up of the text to elements from outside, institutional or crowdsourced, are the kinds of ‘word-based enhancements’ that McCracken considers to be ‘centripetal trajectories’, forces drawing the reader more deeply into the text (McCracken, 2013, p.117) but into the text via avenues impossible for print. And perhaps most significantly, the Voyage presents a key affordance that has been the dream of beach- and bath-readers for generations if not centuries: it is (at least to a depth of two meters) waterproof. (Though no study participants mentioned this Kindle feature, their enthusiasm for beach reading and avoidance of digital near water, e.g. ‘read in the bath – don’t want to drop electronic devices in the water!’ [Survey 2] suggest that such a feature would be popular.) As the Voyage remains on sale alongside the Oasis (though the latter costs more and is, via comparison charts of features, presented as the top of the range [Amazon, 2018b]) this does not represent a rejection of the bookness strategy in favour of some ‘post-book’ strategy, but does present the least-printlike enhanced version as the newest, costliest, most advanced, and by implication best.

This rich experience of materiality for print books, and thin, oblique, elusive experience of materiality for e-books, means that when it comes to enjoyment of the physical object e-books do not function as real: a piece is effectively missing (at least part of the time) leaving a void in its place. This is a form of unrealness very different from the unrealness of a digital proxy or ersatz book. The incomplete book is not so easy to present as a deceitful impostor, a fake being passed off as real; it is only a real book
chopped (by no fault of its own) into pieces, to be pitied more than feared. And the metaphor of the incomplete book suggests at least the theoretical possibility of ascension to realness: if it could by some means be reunited with the rest of itself, it would become a real book, in a way that an *ersatz book* or proxy could not.

**Convenience as pleasure**

Convenience is its own form of pleasure. To participants in this study, it is more than removal of barriers to enjoyment; they ‘enjoy the convenience’ (Survey 1) itself. Noted explicitly by a great many participants as a reason for choosing digital, the term embraces a wide range of practical concerns and emotional responses, from the brisk ‘it saves me having to drive all over town’ (Survey 2) to the emotive ‘love the accessibility and convenience of digital’ (Survey 2) and ‘embrace’ (Survey 1) of certain conveniences as ‘godsends’ (Survey 4). Convenience can mean luxury, but also freedom, equal access, intimacy, and power. The beneficiary, however, is not always the reader.

*Relative value of ‘ease’: more important for obtaining e-books than reading e-books*

Half (49.2%) of all survey respondents choose print because it is easier to read. For e-book readers, only 42.0% choose print because it is easier to read, but this is still double the figure for the same group when asked about digital: only 20.2% choose digital because it is easier to read (Figure 49). While much higher than ‘more enjoyable’ (10.9%) this figure of one in five might on the face of it seem low, considering the appeal of convenience for digital readers. But the convenience factors of obtaining
books are important to a greater proportion of readers. More than twice as many (44.3%), choose digital because it is easier to obtain, and three times as many (62.9%) choose print because it is faster to obtain: one 2015 survey respondent spoke for many in choosing digital because it is ‘faster to buy e-books’ (Survey 2).

![Figure 49: Reasons for choosing digital: 'convenience' factors (e-book readers only)](image)

‘Faster to obtain’ and ‘easier to obtain’ were extremely closely correlated (CS = 73.8) but still separate. Fewer respondents were motivated by ease than speed, perhaps in part because some found e-book purchasing and borrowing to be a finicky and irritating process (see Chapter 3, p.160).

The appeal of speed is widely shared and highly stable: agreement with ‘faster to obtain’ did not vary significantly by year or according to any demographic measure. It also varied little by genre choice: respondents who had read an e-novel (65.4% vs 49.0 CS=10.0 p=.002) or a non-fiction e-book (67.0% vs 56.0% CS=8.02 p=.005) in the past 12 months were moderately more likely to agree, but there was no difference for poetry,
short fiction, or reference. It also varied little by device usage: laptop users (69.9% vs 58.1% CS=9.79, p=.002) were somewhat more likely to agree, and smartphone users (67.5% vs 59.2% CS=4.99 p=.026) slightly more likely, but for other devices there was no significant effect. An explanation for both could be the importance of speed for work reading: Buchanan, McKay and Levitt’s 2015 study of academic e-book usage indicated that even where print was preferred, digital was often the choice for speed, and that while academics in the study tended to use laptop computers for quick reference when off campus, students often turned to smartphones for academic purposes ‘when the phone is the “to-hand” device’ (2015, p.8-9). A number of survey respondents noted that work reading was often particularly time-sensitive (and in fact, the connection for laptop but not desktop computers may indicate that it is working outside the office, for example on business trips, research days or out-of-hours work, when print copies are not always to hand, that speed is a higher priority). The key word is ‘sometimes’: they frame it as a strictly emergency measure. ‘Sometimes, if I need to start something quickly as research, getting [e-books] is immediate’ (Survey 2), or ‘sometimes, I need a play script for use at an audition...when that's the case, I tend to need it quickly (no time to wait for shipping)’ (Survey 2), or ‘sometimes, when I need to read something quickly for learning, I opt for the ebook’ (Survey 2). To take advantage of such an affordance is not described as luxury so much as failure; admission of guilt for having been caught short.

‘I have my paper to write, and there was this one book that I needed. They didn’t have it in the library. I needed it quite urgently, ‘cause it was a bit late? I was procrastinating a bit....that’s why I bought it. From Amazon.’ (FG 2 participant 1)
For speed, there are no significant differences based on using specific retailers (chain bookshops, independent bookshops, Amazon, other online retailers, or publishers) or gifts, but there are mild correlations for free sources: those who obtained e-books in the past 12 months from Project Gutenberg (70.8% vs 59.2%, CS=8.54 p=.003) were slightly more likely to agree, and from a library (70.0% vs 60.7%, CS=4.48 p=.034) very slightly more likely. While these effects are quite weak, there is a possible link between the professional use above, connecting need for speed to laptops, linking need for speed to library use as well. For academics and students (well-represented in my focus groups and interviews and, judging by circulation via university networks and freetext comments about academic environments, my survey as well) free classics via Project Gutenberg could be relevant to work needs, and library access to academic books and journals highly relevant. But it is important not to overstate the importance of such a weak link, particularly as academics and students, like the student quoted above, often buy research- and course-related texts as well. The overall picture is one where, as with demographics, genre, and device, source of e-books has only limited effect on valuing speed of obtaining e-books.

But as my focus groups and interviews confirm, obtaining books quickly and easily offers its own kind of satisfaction:

‘I also enjoy the instant gratification of buying and downloading a books any time I want.’ (Survey 2)
‘The portability and instant gratification of e-reading is increasingly appealing.’

(Survey 3)

‘Easier to obtain’ was also stable over time, but unlike speed did see some significant demographic differences. Men valued this affordance slightly more (50.5%, vs 41.1% of women CS=5.1 p=.024). Non-UK residents valued it somewhat more highly (50.5%, vs 38.7% of UK residents CS=9.3 p=.002); this group included a number of expats, some of whom used freetext comments to underscore how e-books are the ‘only cost-effective’ (Survey 1) means of obtaining desired English-language titles in some parts of the world. While it might be reasonable to guess that ‘easier to obtain’ would vary according to source of e-books, with some sources being considerably more convenient that others, this is not the case: there is no significant variation. Those who choose digital because digital is easier to obtain were slightly more likely to have obtained e-books from libraries (29.2% vs 19.5%, CS=8.5 p=.003) and from Project Gutenberg (36.6% vs 29.4% CS=3.8 p=.049), though the latter is a weak effect and barely statistically significant (Figure 50). The library advantage could be due less to some special convenience of library online interfaces than to a comparison to physical libraries, particularly e-books being ‘easier to quickly borrow from the library without attending’ (Survey 2) as well as ‘easier to return to the library’ (Survey 1). It does, however, vary somewhat according to device.
Figure 50: Reasons for choosing digital: 'easier to obtain', by source of e-books

Those who choose digital because it is easier to obtain are significantly more likely to have read on tablets (55.0% vs 45.5%), smartphones (51.3% vs 39.8%), laptops (47.3% vs 36.1%), and desktop computers (19.5% vs 13.6%); there was no significant gap for e-ink readers. This conspicuous singling-out of e-ink readers may suggest that e-ink readers are particularly user-unfriendly in this regard; their tendency to tie readers to a single retailer (though the Kobo and Sony are not so bound, the Nook and Kindle are) is cited as a particular annoyance (‘I don't use kindle as a matter of principal [sic] -- I don't want to be tied to a specific platform’ [Survey 2]). There was no significant variation by genre.
The portable text and the flexible reader

The portability of e-books is perhaps the most frequently-mentioned affordance in the freetext boxes of my survey. Movement between devices is a predictably common theme, with respondents appreciative of the ability to ‘change between [their] devices for e-reading, my kindle, laptop and mobile and read the same book and be bookmarked at the same place’ (Survey 2) and ‘you can read it on multiple devices and it always takes you to where you were in the book’ (FG 5 participant 8). But even more important is the role of e-reading in travel and the reader’s movement between spaces. A tremendous number of participants, across all surveys and focus groups, emphasised the value of e-books as a way to be sure of access to chosen reading material when away from one’s home or personal print library, either for daily travel like a work commute, occasional holiday travel, or rare and disruptive changes of residence. In addition to the frequent theme of access to a book (and sometimes to the ease of reading the book on a device rather than on paper on a crowded train, ‘digital reading makes good use of the hours standing on crowded trains during a commute’ (Survey 2), a related but separate affordance), there is a powerful sub-theme of access not to a book but many books: ‘one kindle vs a number of books’ (Survey 2) or ‘easy to carry more than 1 book with me’ (Survey 2).

This goes beyond the direct replacement of several physical items in a suitcase, where one device can take the place of ‘taking multiple books on holiday’ (Survey 4). This replaces a single item of commute reading in a briefcase or handbag with multiple locally-stored (if not connected to a network) or near-infinite numbers of cloud-stored books.
‘If I’m on the subway and the book I’m reading gets dull, I can switch to a short story, or comic, or completely different book without adding any extra weight to my commute!’ (Survey 4)

It is the ability to bring enough reading, but also to bring far more than enough reading: choice but also plenty. It is ‘not running out of book while travelling’ (Survey 2) and enjoying the fact that ‘tablet with a dozen books = no finishing book on bus and not having another’ (Survey 2). The result is a luxurious surfeit, and freedom from the fear of ‘running out of book’ (Survey 2) or being trapped with nothing to read but an inferior book.

‘Plus you can take [an e-reading device] anywhere, and you always have a new book. So if you go on a train journey with a book you’re really excited about and it’s crap, you’ll probably be able to find another one.’ (FG 1 participant 4)

‘Gone are the days when I felt the need to carry two enormous hardcovers because I was almost done with my book - now I can just slip the kobo in my bag and have a backup that way. Abibliophobia begone!’ (Survey 3)

There is a specific kind of safety that comes from carrying, in addition to any books one might be reading, the books one is not reading, and are not likely to read. Some respondents very rarely use their device as an e-reader, but value having the reading there in case they ever needed it: ‘I bought a smart phone so I always have a book with me but I rarely use it for reading.’ (Survey 2). This language of ‘backups’ where ‘you always have a new book’ speaks to a conception of the e-book as real book. It recalls
iron rations and emergency supplies: hardy, spartan versions never used if there is a more luxurious alternative, but still capable of serving the purpose. A spare tyre is smaller and less durable and only used for short distances, but it is still a tyre, not a part of a tyre or a representation of a tyre or a tyre-shaped fake. The e-book as spare book may be reserved for emergencies, but it still rolls down the road.

This kind of safety, and closeness, also represents a new kind of intimacy with books; as I will discuss in Chapter 6, on love, this offers a new way to be tied to one’s books and inseparable from one’s reading.

The safety of e-books is, of course, undercut by the vulnerability of a device to theft, breakage, loss, or simply loss of power. While the need for meaningful ownership of e-books focussed on long-term threats such as changes to terms and conditions, retailers going out of business, and problems with inheritance and with download to generations of personal devices, the need for constant and reliable access to one’s reading material leads to concern over short-term threats. Respondents noted that ‘[print] removes dependence on power chargers’ (Survey 2), that there is ‘no electricity required’ (Survey 2) and asked ‘why use expensive electronic technology which requires power to operate, can fail or break?’ (Survey 1). Readers place value on a feeling that e-books are always there when wanted, ‘I always have my smartphone with me (no need to carry the book)’ (Survey 1). Few gave stories of specific instances where an e-book was unavailable; more commonly, they described hypothetical situations where an electronic device could fail them, which speaks less to the experience of unreliable technology than to the fear of it (though that fear can be authentic, and a genuine motivation for choosing print as a ‘more reliable technology’ [Survey 1]). Some readers, however,
find that carrying books one does not intend to read interferes with enjoyment of the book one is reading, preventing ‘commitment’ (FG 2 participant 3) to one book. In this sense, e-books can be less intimate than print, or at least less monogamous (a young woman in a focus group was joking when she declared later, as part of a more general conversation on e-books, that ‘print is the wife and digital is the mistress!’ [FG 2 respondent 3] but the comparison does speak to the way in which a primary relationship is affected by the flagrant presence of a ‘backup option’). This added burden of a task, the need to select a book and ‘commit’ to that book, requires self-discipline and, for at least some readers, stands in the way of pleasure. (I will discuss the issue of choosing between books an aspect of digital distraction later in the chapter.)

*The accommodating book*

But a profound source of intimacy with texts is the way in which digital access allows some readers to integrate reading into settings, physical and social, previously incompatible with reading. The most common story is that of night-time reading. The ability to read in the dark is a frequently cited affordance for participants in this study. Sometimes this is for the convenience of an individual, ‘don’t have to wake myself up to turn off a light, even a book light’ (Survey 3) or ‘if reading at night I don’t have to have light on’ (Survey 1) (or indeed ‘bedtime reading when I might want to switch books without getting up’ [Survey 4]) but often the light-equipped e-ink reader, or backlit tablet or smartphone, enables reading ‘without having to keep the light on and disturb my partner’ (Survey 1). The e-book does not bring books into a previously bookless space – the shared bed, where they have long existed – but merely eliminates the need for the exceedingly familiar technology of the bedside lamp or book light. The
person being accommodated is not so much the reader as the reader’s partner. In other stories, the person being accommodated is not an equal but a customer, boss, or a beloved dependent. E-books are ‘easier to read between customers at work’ (Survey 1) and ‘easier to wrangle while travelling…work travel is becoming quite difficult with print’ (Survey 2). Nursing infants are particularly prominent as people whose needs can be more easily reconciled with e-reading than print reading: e-books are ‘easier to read during specific situations (when I wouldn’t be able to read a print book, e.g. breastfeeding in funny positions!)’ (Survey 2) and ‘[e-books make it] easier to multitask, only needs one hand (for example, can breastfeed)’ (Survey 3). Baby and toddler care makes the one-handed reading affordance particularly useful: ‘I was not expecting this, but with small children, I find [an e-book] easier to pick up and put down and read when I have limited use of hands’ (Survey 2). But e-books are also invaluable for reading around childcare when the children are old enough to be taking solo train journeys.

‘I know what I loved when the children were at school was I could be reading a book at home, I could leave it by my bed on the iPad and if they were late out of school I could carry on reading it on my phone, or whilst I was waiting for them to get off a train or something.’ (FG 5 participant 8)

Here, integrating a digital book with a previously bookless setting is not only a matter of taking advantage of a compact or backlit or portable interface: all of these stories are examples of a reader whose personal control has been in a sense reclaimed. Constraints imposed by the wishes or needs other people – a supervisor, or a child being cared for – can be circumvented by putting the book in a different container, using a platform that
is either physically convenient for the ‘funny positions’ of breastfeeding, physically durable and hence usable around small children, or unobtrusive (and possibly furtive) and able to evade notice. This use of protean reading to evade demands placed on the reader by other obligations and relationships, with its dimensions of gender and class, suggests that digital reading could amplify an existing ‘post-Romantic paradigm that makes reading the recourse of the poor, the lonely, the marginalised, the physically or socially powerless’ (Price, 2013, p.83): those with power shape their environments to suit their needs, while those without power use reading to escape their environments. In contexts where e-books and e-reading devices are costly luxuries (as in 2007, when the first generation Kindle cost over $400 [Clark et al., 2008, p.127]) this would represent a means of escape only for the ‘powerless affluent’, those who enjoy some economic advantage but not necessarily control of their personal circumstances. But as reading-ready devices become less costly and more commonplace (as noted above, 77% of American adults, and 94% of American adults under the age of 30, now own smartphones [Pew Internet, 2018]) contexts where e-books become the ‘cheap’ (Survey 2) option, particularly for academics and students at institutions where ‘electronic resources have grown as a cost-effective alternative to print resources’ (Walsh, 2016, p.163), offer a more direct parallel to the falling price of print and transformation of reading in general from ‘a sign of economic power’ to ‘the province of those whose time lacks market value’ (Price, 2013, p.57). The prominence of caring responsibilities, and possibility of a gendered aspect to this protean reading, also recalls enduring anxieties about women’s reading (especially ‘absorptive’ novel reading [Price, 2013, p.72]) as a strategy for escape from domestic duty. Devotion to reading has been depicted as a signal of insufficient devotion elsewhere, including outright neglect of children (Price, 2013, p.51-53). Hence, admonitions that women treat reading as an
indulgence that should wait until work (including emotional work) was done, or even limit reading as a practice of healthy self-denial (Flint, 1993, p.93).

Digital reading could in this context be seen as even more disempowered: while a reader with relatively more power may shape her or his environment to enable the preferred print reading, the reader with relatively less may be forced to resort to digital or face the possibility of no reading at all. As with the backlit screen for reading in bed, the text is accommodating, but the reader is not necessarily the one being accommodated. It can be seen in one light as ingeniously outwitting external control, and in another as avoiding confrontation with external control, and potentially prolonging the dynamic. These findings problematise ideas of digital reading as appealing specifically because it pampers a reader with personalisation: ‘read books your way’ (Amazon, 2018c) would be better described, for many, as ‘read books that get out of other people’s way’.

The e-book as accommodating book is in a curious position with regards to realness. Like the backup book, it does its job: the squeezed reading is still reading. But here, the e-book functions more as incomplete book: it is less the non-perishable, freeze-dried version for consumption in a blizzard than a portable slice, the smallest and least troublesome section taken along for some enjoyment even as all that is obtrusive, anything that might inconvenience others, is left behind.

**Ease of reading**

The importance of ease of reading was stable: neither print nor digital for varied significantly by year. This stability, in the face of advances in reading device
technology and the increase in usage of tablets and smartphones over the period, suggest that, like enjoyment of an e-reading device, ease of reading digitally is not simply a matter of features on a particular device.

Ease of reading had intriguing relationships with age. Examining all respondents together, print-only and e-book reading, choosing print because it is easier to read dropped sharply with age, a moderately strong and highly significant effect (CS=17.5, p=.007) (Figure 51).

Figure 51: Reasons for choosing print: 'easier to read', by age

However, this trajectory was due to e-book reading respondents. Separating e-book readers from print-only readers, the contrast is sharp. For e-book readers, the decline according to age is not a straight line – there is a sudden dip for readers 35-44 – but it is a significant correlation, and sees the youngest respondents twice as likely as the oldest
respondents to agree. For print-only readers agreement does not vary significantly by age, and there is no trajectory other than decreased agreement among the oldest respondents (Figure 52).

Figure 52: Reasons for choosing print: 'easier to read', by age, print-only readers vs e-book readers (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Choosing digital because it is easier to read increased sharply with age, an equally strong and significant result (CS=15.2 p=.009) (Figure 53).
Figure 53: Reasons for choosing digital: 'easier to read', by age (e-book readers only)

Gender was irrelevant for both print and digital ease of reading, for both subgroups (print-only and e-reading).

In one study cited by Phillips, participants with good vision preferred print for reading, but participants with impaired vision preferred screen reading (2014, p.37-38). It was hypothesized that this was because they found it easier to read on a backlit tablet because of the higher level of contrast between text and ‘page’, but resizable text is another obvious advantage. It is important not to overstate this effect, as even among the oldest respondents only a minority agree, and conditions such as visual impairment are of course neither limited to nor universal in the oldest group. Such affordances could be easy to dismiss as belonging to a lower category of precursors to pleasure: the means of overcoming a barrier to enjoyment rather than necessarily a source of enjoyment on their own. However, it is difficult to overstate how important overcoming
such a barrier can be to the individual, or how satisfying the experience can be, adding a dimension of agency and empowerment. As one respondent put it: ‘I have a visual impairment, so the ability to enhance font size etc in Ebooks is a real godsend’ (Survey 4). Though the removal of difficulty may seem a tepid reward, ‘pleasure as less pain’ inspired emphatic and often emotional responses.

A case in point would be the experiences of readers who use their chosen technology to overcome barriers presented by dyslexia. Dyslexia was cited as both a reason to use e-books instead of print (‘dyslexia’ [Survey 3], ‘due to having both Dyslexia and ADHD…I have trouble reading hardback book due to the font’ [Survey 3]) and a reason to use print instead of e-books. (‘I believe my mild dyslexia also impacts on how much easier I find it to read hard copy text’ [Survey 3]). Studies of dyslexia and screen reading have found that there are aspects that may hinder as well as aspects that may help, indicating that two individuals, even two individuals with the same form of dyslexia, could have drastically different screen reading experiences depending on device and device settings. For example, glare from a backlit screen (British Dyslexia Association, n.d.) may exacerbate fatigue and reduce speed and comfort, but adjustable text and shorter line length (Schneps et al., 2013) and larger characters and more space between characters (Rello et al., 2017) have been demonstrated to increase comprehension and comfort. Commercial screen reading products promise benefits, but these promises are not always supported by evidence: Amazon offers ‘Open Dyslexia’ font as an option for its Kindle app, though recent studies have found no benefit from either Open Dyslexia (Wery and Diliberto, 2017) or proprietary versions such as Dyslexie (Kuster et al., 2017). What the respondents in this study have in common is
that medium matters for their reading experiences, and choosing print or choosing
digital is part of individual dyslexia management strategies.

No source of e-books varied significantly in relation to ease of digital reading. Only
two sources of print (receiving a print book as a gift (36.8% vs 47.4%, CS=4.9 p=.026)
and via libraries (40.4% vs 54.7%), CS=8.7 p=.003, both negative correlations) varied
significantly, and those effects are not particularly strong.

Sources of print books mattered more. Ease of reading in print is, like enjoyment of
print, linked with obtaining print books from most sources, including chain bookshops
(70.9% vs 58.8% CS=14.4 p=.000), independent bookshops (54.7% vs 45.5%, CS=7.5
p=.006), secondhand shops (54.7% vs 44.6%, CS=9.09 p=.003), Amazon (83.5% vs
75.2%, CS=9.44 p=.002), via gift (54.2% vs 40.1%, CS=17.7 p=.000), and libraries
(60.0% vs 46.1%, CS=17.05 p=.000) in the past 12 months.\footnote{E-book readers [n=672] who choose print because it is easier to read have effectively the same pattern as all readers. Print-only readers show generally the same pattern, with some curious differences – they are no more likely to use libraries, and in fact less likely to use independent and secondhand bookshops – though many gaps are smaller and many relationships are below the level of statistical significance due to the smaller sample size as much as sometimes smaller gaps.}

Choosing print because it is easier to read varied slightly by country of residence, with
52.1% of UK residents agreeing versus 45.1% of non-UK residents, though this is a
weak effect (CS=4.3 p=.037). This is due to e-book reading respondents (for whom the
gap is 45.3% vs 37.7%) rather than print-only readers, for whom there is no significant
gap. Choosing digital because it is easier to read did not vary by country of residence.
Ease of reading, in print and digitally, had few links to device choice. When they do read on screen, those who choose print for ease of reading gravitate towards laptop computers: they are considerably more likely to have read an e-book on laptop (51.4% vs 33.6% CS=21.4 p=.000) and slightly less likely to have read an e-book on smartphone (30.9% vs 49.2% CS=6.9 p=.009), very slightly less likely to have read an e-book on Kindle (48.9% vs 57.4% CS=4.7 p=.029). (Tablets, non-Kindle e-ink readers and desktops saw no significant effect.) (This could indicate that they are slightly less likely to be using dedicated e-reading platforms, either in the form of a smartphone e-reading app or a Kindle; the effect could be that people who read on laptops are frustrated by the interface and hence are more likely to prefer print, or it could be that people who prefer print are less likely to bother with dedicated devices or even dedicated apps, and make do with browser windows.) Strikingly, like enjoyment of digital, choosing digital for ease of reading is not linked to device use. This represents further evidence that readers are responding to an aspect of digital reading common to various products or transcending the physical object altogether.

‘Easy’ novels? *Ease of reading linked to reading fiction digitally*

E-book genre, however, reveals an interesting pattern. E-book readers who choose print because it is easier to read are less likely to read fiction digitally, either e-novels (80.1% vs 88.2%, CS=8.2 p=.004) or short fiction (43.6% vs 55.4%, CS=9.1 p=.003). They are slightly more likely to have read a reference e-book (32.6% vs 23.6%, CS=6.7 p=.010). (There is no effect, however, for non-fiction or poetry.) E-books readers who choose digital because it is easier to read are more likely to have read e-book fiction in the past 12 months, both in the form of e-novels (91.2% vs 83.2%, CS=5.3 p=.021) and short
fiction (64.0% vs 47.0%, CS=12.5 p=.000). There is more than one possible explanation for these links: readers could be particularly committed to reading fiction on the ‘easiest’ interface, or those who prefer print could be less enthusiastic readers of novels in general (though there is no demographic link to support this). Either way, this represents additional evidence that novels are not interchangeable with other genres on screen.

‘Read books your way’: convenience as power and agency

The pleasure of convenience is not only luxuriating in the absence of delay, effort, or pain; it is also in exercising agency and demanding that one’s needs be recognised. Amazon sells Kindles with the promise that you as the customer may ‘read books your way’ (Amazon, 2018c).30 While e-book retailers (as discussed in Chapter 3) may at times be unacceptably controlling, e-books themselves are accommodating. They change their shape when readers ask it, altering font, text size, page turns, colour scheme, lighting, etc.31 Many respondents noted ‘e-book adjustability functions re: serif/non-serif and font size’ (Survey 1) and the ‘search function…for long/complex texts’ (Survey 1) as exceptionally useful, ‘attractive’ (Survey 1) and ‘really nice’ (FG 5 participant 8).

30 An intriguing counterpoint to Amazon’s policy of selling not e-books, but conditional licenses to read books, and selling Kindle Unlimited or Amazon Prime memberships with which one can read certain books, for certain periods of time, under certain conditions; the Kindle itself may be accommodating, but Amazon is not. The divide between an e-reader that one can hold and control versus e-reader content that one cannot recalls themes from Chapter 3, on ownership and control.

31 Many dissatisfactions of e-books that participants raise, such as inconsistent pagination and unwanted advertisements and comments, are ways in which an e-book changed when they did not want it to: the pliability of e-books is a benefit when the reader is in control, but a liability when the reader is not. This, again, recalls the central role of control in relationships with e-books and e-novels.
Responses in this vein were particularly powerful when this affordance is linked to disability or age-related impairments: ‘convenience’ in this sense is nothing less than equal access to books. The customisation affordances of digital are seen, at least by some, in contrast to diminishing accommodation by mainstream print publishing:

‘As an avid reader with a visual impairment, eBooks have become increasingly valuable to me as print standards decline. Mass-market paperbacks are often badly printed and use a too-small font size’ (Survey 4)

‘When it comes to magazines and newspapers they are making the print smaller (odd given the aging audience)’ (Survey 1)

Customisation: comfort at the cost of ceremony

E-books offer tremendous opportunities for customisation. Some readers take full advantage of this affordance by personalising in ways reminiscent of commissioned binding:

‘I tend to specifically organise and convert [e-books] into the right file formats and procure the covers I like. Like fan-made alternative Game of Thrones covers and things because that’s much more fun, and the Penguin-style Harry Potter covers are great. [note: participant showed samples on her personal iPad, reproduced below in Figure 54]’ (FG 4 participant 4)
Figure 54: Fan-made Harry Potter covers, as shown in focus group 4 (Corley, 2009)

But this flexibility is, to others, unsettling: one respondent found that ‘changing titles is a bit disrespectful of other people’s books, so I’m not quite sure’ (Interview 1). Flexibility can be irritating, as when readers are confronted with disliked generic covers, or find that a book has become detached from a cover without their permission:

‘When I’m looking at my e-reader I really dislike it when I get a book down and they haven’t included the front cover [murmurs of agreement]…you’ve just got this Penguin logo or something and they haven’t put the front cover on.’ (FG 6 participant 3)

This interference with what is perceived as the normal and expected situation as defined by print (where ‘the physical book…means that each book has a different cover’ [Survey 1], unique and appropriate to that book even if elements of design are dictated by publisher or series) speaks further to a conception of e-book as incomplete book.
Aspects such as Kindle popular highlights can be switched on and off by the reader, though in practice the means of doing do can be obscure, leaving readers the choice of either investing time in mastering the intricacies of Kindle settings or acquiescing to Amazon’s default choice.

Customisation helps to combat what some readers describe as an inherent weakness of e-books: an ‘impersonalness’ (Survey 2) as generic items, ‘something that all looks the same’ (FG 5 participant 5), lacking the distinctive annotations and even distinctive damage (‘I even like the occasional chocolate, bath water or similar stains on books’ [Survey 2]) , where ‘there’s nothing different between your copy of [the book] and mine’ (FG 1 participant 5).

The pleasure of a compliant book is countered by a loss of pleasure if aspects of the traditional book experience functioned, for an individual, not as chores but as rituals. Some readers celebrate and enjoy the e-book’s transformation according to their needs, but others lament the loss of a ‘sense of ceremony’, either in purchasing a book, pre-ordering one, or settling down in a favoured reading spot to enjoy a book.

‘It’s not as...special? You know when you go into a bookshop and buy and book, and you get it home and you’re really excited? [‘yes’, murmurs of agreement from group]...when you get a book though the post, that’s exciting?
Whereas downloading a book is just like ‘eh.’ (FG 1 participant 1)
'The books I would hope for a sense of ceremony wouldn’t be the ones I’d be buying [in digital form] anyway.' (FG 2 participant 1)

'[Before e-books] I had the pre-order form... “I want my Harry Potter book”...and then you would go in and queue up and the counter and get your book. In a nice little envelope.’ (FG 2 participant 3)

‘There's something extremely soothing and wonderfully visceral about settling down with a physical book that I don't think e-books will ever be able to emulate’ (Survey 2)

‘Love the way a [print] book feels. Snuggled up with tea and a blanket!’ (Survey 4)

With e-books readers do not have to approach literature; the literature comes to them, figuratively and literally. Not only do they no longer have to journey to bookshops, they no longer have to set aside a specific time for reading, or to return home, sit in a suitable chair, set down their coffee, or wait until the baby is asleep. Reading ‘when lying on the sofa or in bed’ (Survey 2), buying or borrowing books while on a moving train to ‘get a book whenever I want’ (Survey 2), and being able to ‘switch books without having to get up’ (Survey 4) is a reading experience unrecognizable to even the most affluent or servant-enabled reader from an earlier era. The question is in how this affects their perception and experience of the literature. If the reader no longer has to meet a text on its terms, but may expect it to adapt and meet her on hers, does the reader’s relationship to a text fundamentally change? If an accommodating text grants
new power to the reader, that could suggest a smaller power differential between the reader and the publishers and authors who produce the work, and potential reduction of reverence and deference, or indeed of esteem and respect. However, fan studies considers the effects of hierarchy on properties (textual and otherwise) where readers and other cultural consumers appropriate and remix; this kind of customisation facilitates intimacy and affect (Hellekson and Busse, 2014, p.133) but does not necessarily disrupt hierarchy or diminish the distance between creators and fans (Jenkins, 1992, p.20). Choosing to access a book in print is often linked to esteem: most participants in this study find print better for collecting and better for giving, and some (as I will discuss later in the chapter) find it better suited for sustained concentration, and print books are hence often the ‘good books’ (FG 3 participant 6) they honour with special attention and dedicated space. However, the link between esteem and print does not automatically translate into the reverse, a link between digital and disdain. I asked focus group and interview participants whether they agreed with the statement that digital is for “light” reading,’ but serious reading requires print (FG 1-6, Interviews 1-2). They were unanimous in considering that as a sweeping statement this was ‘rubbish’ (FG 1 participant 5). They noted that while there were many instances where they and people they knew used digital for ‘light’ reading (including ‘beach read’ novels (FG 5 participant 2) and ‘airport novels’ [FG 3 participant 2]), there were also many instances where they chose digital for ‘serious’ reading, especially when the book to which they needed quick or on-the-go access was not light entertainment to help pass the time on a commute (as much of their digital reading is)

32 In discussion of light reading, it is worth remembering that if much digital reading, especially of novels, is ‘light’, so is much print reading. In a recent large-scale face-to-face survey of book purchasers in UK high street bookshops, Frost found that most buyers had chosen their print novels to gain ‘entertainment, escape, and relaxation’, with very few seeking ‘an intellectual challenge or for an aesthetic experience’ (2017, p.32). As one respondent put it, in contextualising the idea of a digital beach read, ‘the choice of [print] novels in the supermarket, they’re really all beach reads or best sellers (FG 5 participant 8).
but an essential work of such importance that they could not be without it. This could be the ‘handapparat’ (Buchanan, McKay and Levitt, 2015, p.6) of a scholar who keeps her core texts to hand on a tablet or laptop at all times, but also a great work of literature that they could, or already do, own in print, but download in digital form because easy access will help them pursue reading they consider important (FG 2, participant 3; FG 3, participants 5 and 6). It can even be the Bible (Survey 1), where it is ‘easier to take an electronic bible [sic] along to meetings’ (Survey 2). Hutchings’s fascinating work on digital reading of devotional texts confirms that while some scholars express concern that digital access will change the nature of reading scripture (2015, p.425-6), they are not concerned that digital access equates with disrespect. For the vast body of Bible publishers (frequently distributing e-book and app versions at no cost) and readers that have made the Bible so successful on e-reading platforms (Hutchings, 2015, p.424) all access is good access: according to Bible app developers YouVersion, ‘a striking 77% of users in a recent survey claim to “turn to the bible more” because it’s available on their mobile device’ (Hutchings, 2015, p.424). If they considered digital formats in any way diminishing, they would probably not have chosen digital for their sacred text. Accessing a book in digital form is not in itself an expression of contempt for that book. Further, there is not compelling evidence in these data for a link between an accommodating text and reduced reverence, deference or respect: though one participant described someone else’s cover-altering customisation as potentially ‘disrespectful’, no one characterised his or her own customisation as in any way disrespectful, or as action that either generated or expressed contempt. This aspect of intimacy and potential effect on the reputation, of a specific work or of entire genres of books frequently accessed digitally like novels, is an important topic for future research.
These ‘convenience’ pleasures are real pleasures, even if they are not universally shared; for some readers, the part of the book that is left is still capable of offering genuine enjoyment. A further question is in how the unreal-because-incomplete e-book – flexible and accommodating, instantly available, spoken of as immaterial even when its materiality is beyond question – can or cannot offer a particularly treasured form of pleasure: the feeling of being ‘lost in a book’ (Nell, 1998).

‘Lost in a book’: distraction, immersion and narrative engagement

Deep engagement with a text requires not only overcoming external distractions, but achieving a state of focus, concentration, and connection. For some, but not all, participants in this study, digital reading presents considerable, even insurmountable, barriers to both.

Viewed through the lens of pleasure, distraction is not necessarily a problem. Though the possibility that the internet era presents critical threats to the concentration required for certain cognitively demanding reading practices (Baron, 2015, pp.88-92), to ‘literary reading’ (Mangen, 2016, pp. 248-257) or to coherent thought (Birkerts, 2006, pp.1-5) makes many commentators examine distraction as a danger to literature or literary culture,33 an individual reader might find distraction perfectly enjoyable.34 For at least some readers, especially those who enjoy switching between books and between reading and other tasks during travel, movement between media may be part of the fun,

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33 More often via theoretical than empirical means, or, in Birkert’s case, via ‘extrapolat[ion] from [his] own experience as a reader’ (Birkerts 1994, p. 2).
34 For more on fears regarding digital as a threat to literature and literary culture, please see Chapter 5, pp.303-307.
and books can be the thing that distracts as easily as the thing distracted from. But for many in my study, distraction was unpleasant, a thing that interfered with their enjoyment of books, and a reason to avoid digital reading.

For some, part of the pleasure of reading was to offer escape from the ubiquity of screens and digital interaction in daily life: an opportunity to ‘unplug’ (Surveys 1, 2) after ‘spend[ing] all day staring at computer screens’ (Survey 2). For others, however, it was not the device but the unwanted opportunity to access alternative content, and the constant temptation to engage in ‘literary multitasking’ (Survey 2). This could be in the form of competition from other books (a flip side to the pleasure of choice discussed earlier):

‘Bringing ONE physical book to the coffee shop to read with my latte prevents literary multitasking: skipping from e-book to e-book on my Kindle.’ (Survey 2)

‘I think with e-books…you can switch between them really, really quickly. Whereas if you’re out and about on a train, with a print book, you’re stuck with a print book, so you might get over the hill with the text.’ (FG 2 participant 1)

‘I agree with [the problems of e-book switching]. I think I have more of a commitment to a print book than an e-book.’ (FG 2 participant 2)

Or, it could be a broader form of multitasking: competition from non-book reading or non-textual digital entertainment:
'I can’t read on my computer...I’ve tried, and I have the attention span of a newt... [general chuckles, agreement] Even if I like it, I struggle? To concentrate? [agreement] There’s just too much else to do, there’s too many tabs open, flashing at you. [agreement, ‘yeah, that’s true’] ’ (FG 1 participant 3)

Devising an e-reading interface to combat such distraction could, in theory, be as simple as altering device settings: as the ‘slow reading’ movement manifesto would have it, turning off the wifi is enough to meaningfully change the e-reading experience (though using a dedicated e-ink reader whenever possible also helps) (Tombolini, n.d.). But other research investigates the possibility that the screen itself presents serious barriers to concentration and engagement. This explores distraction in the sense of the reader/viewer/listener’s ‘mind wandering’, the competing demands on attention not as alternative information or entertainment options on a multi-use or network-connected device, but as ‘thinking about other things’, with distraction defined as ‘the presence of thoughts that are unrelated to the narrative’ (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, pp.330, 326). Empirical studies of the experience of reading immersion are, like reading research in general, carried out in a wide range of fields. Some current enquiries into potential differences between print and digital reading (of which e-book reading is a subset) build on studies of reading speed and comprehension, and consider immersion largely from a perspective of minimising barriers such as physical demands imposed by an interface (e.g. eyestrain from backlit screens or delays in transfer between pages) or cognitive demands imposed by an interface (e.g. keeping track of one’s place in a text

35 A distraction scenario most obviously relevant to one of Busselle and Bilandzie’s undergraduates watching American television shows in a lecture hall, where a wandering mind means missing potentially crucial elements of the plot; the reader staring into space between pages may take a long time to finish a book, but the plot will be waiting for her when she returns to it.
presented on a scrolling page, or managing non-intuitive navigation) or by the text itself (e.g. hyperlinks, ‘enhanced’ text features [McCracken, 2013, p.118; Phillips, 2014, p.xiii] such as sound or embedded video, Amazon features options such as popular highlights or X-ray, etc.), often considering e-book reading in terms of general internet use, with its preponderance of factual and short-form information and material framed as ‘journalism’ rather than ‘books’. Others draw on studies of narrative engagement, considering e-books in terms of stories told via film, television, text and more recently interactive media. This perspective groups many forms of non-fiction with novels and short fiction, approaching story as ‘a mental representation…not tied to any particular medium and is independent of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction’ (Ryan, 2007, p.26, quoted in Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, p.323). This grouping excludes many examples of e-books, including non-narrative poetry, many forms of reference, and some books under a general ‘non-fiction’ umbrella (though the role of narrative in books such as academic monographs is debatable).

Hou, drawing on her own past work on gaming and on Wittmer and Singer’s work (1998) on virtual environments, defines immersion as ‘a sense of engagement or a sense of losing oneself in an environment’ (Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017, p.88). Busselle and Bilandzic also evoke the sense of being lost in an environment, but theirs is ‘transportation into a story world’ building not on human-computer interaction but media, film and literary studies and ‘the literature on narrative experiences’ (following theorists such as Green and Brock) and connecting explicitly with Csikszentmihalyi’s conception of flow as ‘a complete focus on an activity accompanied by a loss of conscious awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings’ (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, p.324). For all, achieving the desired state requires not gain but loss, a situation where
the reader may ‘lose track of time, fail to observe events going on around them’ (Green, 2004, p. 247, quoted in Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, p.324), to be temporarily free of self-awareness and rid of unrelated thoughts. Pleasure is described as an ‘outcome’ of engagement (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009, p.326), and not necessarily an important outcome.

Unlike empirical studies of reading comprehension and speed in print versus on screen, which are numerous and, as Baron puts it, broadly in agreement, empirical studies of print versus screen reading in terms of immersion or engagement are recent and few (Mangen, 2016, p.257, Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017 p.85). (It is also important to note that while any study finding no difference between screen and print reading in terms of immersion would be very valuable, negative results are not always published or reported widely.) The studies that do exist can offer contradictory conclusions regarding the meaning of their results. There are competing models to explain effects like the dislocation felt by some readers when reading a reflowable e-book, as where they report that they ‘don’t like not having a physical eye-view of where [they are] in the book’ (Survey 2) and miss turning pages when ‘turning pages tells you where you are in the story – part of the reading experience – knowing that the climax is coming etc’ (Survey 3). Mangen and Kuiken (2014) present a medium materiality model in which the haptics of turning the page, feeling the weight of completed pages in the left hand, etc. are indispensable to grasping ones place in the text, which in turn is indispensable to remembering, understanding, and engaging with a text. A number of respondents in this study experience print as more engrossing, engaging, or personal:

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36 Scholars also order the terms differently, with some, like Hou, describing engagement as a component of immersion, and others, like Busselle, Bilandzic and Green, describing immersion as a component of engagement.
‘When you’re reading on a Kindle, or whatever [the reading device]…they’re not as attached to the author or something?’ (FG 1 participant 5)

‘Some of the ones I’ve read on Kindle only so far, I really enjoyed them, I liked them a lot…but I feel like I don’t know them fully?’ (FG 1 participant 3)

‘’Cause I feel like [with an e-book] I’m not engaging with the text?’ [FG 2 participant 1)"

‘I find it very difficult to engage with a text that is on screen’ (Survey 2)

‘I also feel I comprehend a text better when in print form.’ (Survey 3)

‘Anything that requires serious attention I prefer paper’ (Survey 4)

A number of my study’s respondents specifically note retention and memory. Though, as noted, most studies of reading comprehension find little overall difference between print and screen, some have found advantages to print for intensive reading of highly complex texts such as academic documents (Noyes and Garland, 2003, Stoop et al., 2013; cited in Walsh, 2016, p.169), suggesting that some forms of learning are more sensitive to platform than others. Following Noyes and Garland (2003), Mangen, Walgermo and Bronnick’s use Tulving’s Remember-Know paradigm (1985) to distinguish between information recollected and information applied, and conclude from their experiments that paper reading is more conducive to the deeper and more
lasting applied knowledge (2013, p.62, p.65-67). (However, evidence that digital reading comprehension depends in part on experience with digital reading technology, with comprehension gaps greatest among novice users and small to negligible among experienced users [Chen et al., 2014] reminds us not to assume that any gap is either natural or permanent.) In discussing their experiences of e-reading as less memorable, some of respondents in my study noted that the different materiality of the e-book – while it is not ‘non-physical’ as the respondent below calls it, it is telling that its plastic and non-distinctive materiality is described as such – lacks elements that make print superior for recall:

‘I still retain print information better’ (Survey 3)

‘Absorb/remember what is in a printed book better’ (Survey 4)

‘I tend to enjoy reading physical books rather than a digital/electronic book because I can remember the information or the stories I have read.’ (Survey 4)

‘When I need to read something carefully and to remember it well, I go for printed matter’ (Survey 3)

Several specifically note the ‘physicality’ of a print book as crucial, as where print is described as ‘better for remembering / more of a physical memory aspect’ (Survey 3). This potentially supports Mangen and Kuiken’s medium materiality model. However, one draws attention to the fact that the physical object only really matters when ‘the content is not all that engaging’:
‘I find the non-physicality of e-books less compelling than print, they are easier to forget about if the content is not that engaging’ (Survey 3)

This suggests that even in a medium materiality model there is content sufficiently engrossing, sufficiently powerful, that it can overcome the shortcomings of a digital medium. That power may be narrative power, and the crucial distinction may be (in defiance of Green, who stipulates that story is story regardless of genre) fiction versus non-fiction. Mangen and Kuiken’s experiments demonstrating lesser engagement with digital reading arguably strain to avoid finding such a difference. In a 2x2 study giving participants the same text as a ‘booklet’ of ‘letter-sized pages stapled in the upper left corner’ (Mangen and Kuiken, 2014, p.157) and on iPad, and introduced as fiction or non-fiction, they found a statistically significant reduction of narrative engagement when the material was presented as non-fiction, but not when presented as fiction; in fact, for the fiction condition measures such as ‘perceived narrative coherence’ actually increased, though not at levels that reach statistical significance (Mangen and Kuiken, 2014, pp.162, 167). Mangen and Kuiken found it ‘difficult to explain’ why fiction was not affected; their speculation that the booklet was a ‘rough assemblage of stapled pages’ rather than ‘a more congenial configuration comparable to a book or magazine’, and that this arrangement was in itself distracting, relies on an assumption that the stapled booklet format was simultaneously interfering with narrative engagement in the fiction condition, and to precisely the same degree, while not affecting narrative engagement in the non-fiction condition (Mangen and Kuiken, 2014, p.167).37 Their

37 In a later paper summarizing the 2014 findings, Mangen argued that the booklet format was not a ‘typical literary interface’ (though it is clearly not a typical news interface either) and that it ‘can be assumed to be more reminiscent of, say, article reading’ (2016, p.254), but this is a very bold assumption
conclusion is that screen reading interferes with readers’ engagement, and that this is because without ‘physical, tactile, and spatiotemporally fixed cues’ as to progress through the text (as with turning pages and feeling a weight of completed pages in one’s left hand) specific to paper, ‘overview of the text’s organization and structure…may be diminished’ (2014, p.152). If this is the case, then no existing e-reader can offer an experience equal to print. Hou, however, challenges this conclusion, finding instead, by comparing readers’ engagement with a Marvel Comics graphic novel when read in print form, fixed-layout PDF form on iPad, and in a dynamic panel-by-panel presentation on iPad, that print and PDF were entirely equal, with reduced engagement for the dynamic presentation only (Hou, Rashid and Lee, 2017). Their conclusion is that barriers to engagement in screen reading are real, but due to page reflow and the resulting difficulty in forming a cognitive map of the text. The solution to this barrier is as simple as reading e-books in PDF rather than reflowable .EPUB form. (Hou, Rashid and Lee did not compare fiction with non-fiction, or work with purely textual material; further experiments are needed to determine whether the same principles apply to all-text novels or to non-fiction of any kind.)

Participants in these Mangen, Kuiken, Hou, Rashid and Lee’s studies, like my own participants, tend to describe digital as at best equal to print in terms of immersion. Many are confident that digital is ‘as good’: that for them platform is irrelevant and the reading experience is the same: ‘I have no particular favourite medium’ (Survey 1), ‘I don’t really have a preference’ (Survey 3) or ‘I really don’t care if it’s print or electronic

in the absence of data and in the face of contemporary short story publishing, where publication in book-length print format is not the only or even the most typical presentation.

38 Hou, Rashid and Lee sometimes sound as though they are introducing the cognitive map concept to the discussion, but it features prominently in earlier work by the same on other aspects of screen reading, such as Mangen, Walgermo and Bronnick’s paper on reading comprehension (2013, p.66).
most of the time’ (Survey 2) (keeping open the option of caring some of the time). E-books are, for these readers, just another format among many: ‘I read in all formats: hard copy, paperback/hardback, audiobook, e-audiobook, ebook, mp3, manuscript, advanced readers, flipster…the format is unimportant’ (Survey 2). Separating work and leisure reading was a common theme, but there was no consistent connection between work and print or leisure and print: this depended on the individual. Some report that ‘most of reading for leisure I do in print. Professional reading almost entirely digital if possible’ (Survey 2) while others say that ‘I use e-books when reading for pleasure, when I study I use printed books’ (Survey 2).

The instant when awareness of the physical interface falls away is both the moment of immersion and the moment when the e-reading device becomes as good as (but not better than) print; there is no barrier between the reader and the story or ‘world of stories’.

‘Reading on a Kindle I forget I’m reading on a Kindle. It feels like I’m reading. Apart from the fact that it’s not as heavy, it feels like I’m reading a real book.’ (FG 1 participant 1)

‘For me [the Kindle]’s this whole world of stories that you can dive into when you’re bored.’ (FG 1 participant 3)

This finding, that transportation is impeded or impossible for some e-book readers, but perfectly possible for others (either minimally impeded, not impeded, or possibly assisted), has echoes in even the earliest Kindle reading research. Clark, Goodwin,
Samuelson and Coker’s 2008 qualitative study of 36 university employees, examining their experiences of using first-generation Kindles for one year immediately after the device’s 2007 release, revealed that for about half of their respondents the Kindle remained a ‘noticeable, obtrusive device’ with which ‘they were not fully engaged with the text as they would be if reading a traditional book’ (Clark et al., 2008, p.125). However,

‘…the other half said they did become accustomed to the Kindle as a reading device, and that it did eventually fade into the background. “At some point it felt like I was reading a book and not a Kindle anymore.” For some this happened quickly, while for others it required a longer adjustment period. “If you stay reading on it long enough you forget it’s a Kindle.” One participant remarked that the transition was almost immediate, taking only “five seconds”.’ (2008, p.125)

Crucially, transition was partially dependent on genre: ‘many agreed that immersion was less difficult when reading fiction’ (2008, p.126). This idea of an unobtrusive ideal interface echoes Beatrice Warde’s analogy (specific to typography, but applicable to any other design choice in a printed book) of a ‘crystal goblet’, ‘invisible’ and the only suitable choice for the ‘connoisseur’ (Warde 1930, quoted in Armstrong, 2009, p.40). My findings challenge the Mangen and Kuiken’s conclusions, suggesting that the lower barriers to immersion for fiction they observed were not the result of an experiment design problem but rather reflected meaningful differences between fiction reading and non-fiction reading on screen.
One participant’s description of a Kindle as a ‘world of stories’ (FG 1 participant 3) both supports and challenges the idea of digital as an obstacle to overcome. The moment of transportation is not described by these participants as different from print, or the immersion in the narrative any less (or any more) satisfying, even if the journey to that moment was less satisfying in terms of the tactile experience. The question is whether the convenience, customisation, and intimacy of e-books, confirmed advantages for some participants, can hasten that moment. An argument could be made that the uninviting, functional interface of an e-reader could hasten transportation, as there is no reason to linger; this would present the beauty of and pleasure in handling a material book as a distraction in itself. However, no participants made that argument. Rather, those who described easy transportation with an e-reading device (when they achieved it at all) framed it as being as good for the purpose as print, not better. In 2008 very early Kindle users were (in Clark’s focus groups) ‘united in their opinion that…the print book functions as an inconspicuous container once the participant began reading’ (Clark et al., 2008, p.125) and Amazon’s publicly stated goal for Kindle design was to match, not exceed, print’s capacity to ‘disappear’, and for the Kindle to ‘get out of the way, just like a physical book, so readers could become engrossed in the words’ (Amazon, 2008, p.1). (If there is a wave of young readers growing up without skills for and experience with print, they have not yet arrived, and if my data on the greater enjoyment of and ease of reading in print among young adults is any indication, digital natives are perfectly capable users of print.) It is possible that transportation via digital reading is a skill, one acquired via practice; if so, this could explain the recent doubling of enjoyment of digital, and points to potential further increases as experience with e-reading (and exposure to a greater range of e-reading platforms, each with their own
advantages) takes more readers towards the ‘inconspicuous container’ stage. As one survey respondent put it, in 2017:

‘Digital reading is very much something people need to get used too, need to learn and familiarise themselves with, just as print reading is. Often people expect the experience to be the same as print and hence they reject digital reading. We need to remember that it took us years as kids how to learn to read print. We need to expect to also have to learn how to read digitally.’ (Survey 4)

States of immersion are described, by researchers and sometimes readers, as something to be achieved, but this is not the only form of achievement readers pursue or enjoy.

**Sense of achievement as pleasure**

Some respondents noted having a greater feeling of accomplishment from reading in print,39 like the previously quoted Survey 1 respondent who enjoyed the tactile ‘feedback’ of print for its value in ‘taking note of [her] progress through the book’ (Survey 1) (the sort of feedback Kindle designers pursued with Oasis haptics). For some, print makes it ‘easier to feel like you are making progress through weighty books’ (Survey 2), and fascinatingly, ‘printed books urge you to complete them’ (Survey 4), another instance of print as demanding in positive as well as negative ways. Often (and unfortunately for Kindle designers, as they have not yet devised a way to mimic this sensation in an e-reader) this feedback takes the form of the physical sensation of completed pages amassed on the left side of the book, or to the sight of

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39 Very much the kind of subjective measure of reading performance that Mangen, Walgermo and Bronnick (2013, p.66) propose for consideration alongside objective measures such as speed.
completed volumes on one’s physical bookshelf (though this of course depends on owning and keeping the finished book, which so many respondents due to loans, house moves or collection culls, could not do).

‘But I hate having this one thing, the whole time, that weighs the same, the whole time in both hands….I like having “I’ve read this much, I’ve read this much…”’ (murmurs of agreement from group)’ (FG 1 participant 6)

Print was noted by some as easier to recall, either in terms of content or simply in terms of having read a particular book. Much of this struggle to recall was linked, as with feeling of accomplishment, to being able to see a particular title on the shelf. Some respondents report that ‘with e-books, I sometimes not only don’t know the cover art, I can’t even recall title’ (Survey 2) or that ‘I would remember it more if I’d seen the physical copy’ (FG 1 participant 1). For others, however, digital was a better way to remember: ‘[e-reading] helps me keep track of what I’ve read/bought’ (Survey 2) or ‘I track my reading (title and format) and in 2015, I read 55 books, of which 32 were e-books’ (Survey 3).

But a number noted that they were completing books more quickly on screen: this was either a subjective feeling (‘I seem to get through books more quickly when reading digitally’ [Survey 2]) or, thanks to active tracking, a quantifiable difference. Faster reading could be for some an achievement in itself. But reading more books was expressed as both a goal and an unqualified achievement:
‘I must admit that since getting a Kindle as an unasked for birthday present, I’ve increased the number of books I complete per year by at *least* five times.’
(Survey 2)

‘I can read more often digitally’ (Survey 1)

‘I've read three e-novels and four e-plays in the two months since I received the iPad...that's a huge increase compared to my previous digital reading habits.’
(Survey 3)

This impression of more reading is supported by general surveys: people who read e-books also read more overall (Pew Internet, 2015; Perrin, 2016; McCracken, 2013, p.114). This could, as the respondents above suggest, be because they are reading faster on screen, or it could be as much or more a function of ‘never being without a book’ the way e-reading has brought books into previously bookless spaces.

Importantly, many of these experiences of connection, or lack of it, were described as different for fiction and non-fiction books.

‘I tend to prefer digital for fiction, but long-form academic books I actually find easier to read and engage with in print.’ (Survey 2)

‘When finding books for academic purposes I am more likely to choose a printed book, but for fiction I prefer e-books.’ (Survey 2)
'I tend to buy digital copies of books that I need to search easily for research purposes. I tend to buy hard copies of novels that I want to savour.' (Survey 3)

'Novels and interesting non-fiction on kindle [sic] as entertainment' (Survey 3)

'[Unlike non-fiction books] Novels – entirely print/digital agnostic – no noticeable difference to me – it is about the reading.' (Survey 1)

'I read fiction on Kindle. I read non-fiction on paper. It would seem wrong to do anything else.' (Survey 3)

A dimension of immersion not specifically cited by respondents – tellingly so – is empathy. While some (but not all) describe a lack of connection to a text, or to an author (as in FG 1), none mentioned a lack of connection to characters, or difficulty in empathizing with the people or situations depicted. This kind of immersion, studied by researchers like Anne Mangen and Adriaan van der Weel, relies heavily on definitions of ‘literary reading’ (Mangen, 2016, p.248) as a unique activity with a unique utility in developing an individual’s capacity for understanding of and sympathy with other points of view. Quantification of potential benefits has proven challenging: enthusiasm for the widely-cited Kidd and Castano study (2013) where experimental psychologists tested participants on their ability to identify emotional states based on expression in a series of photographs of faces, and found a statistically significant improvement after participants had read a sample of ‘literary’ fiction, and no such improvement after reading a sample of ‘commercial’ fiction, was sharply checked when these results could not be reproduced (Panero, et al., 2016; Camerer et al., 2018). However, Dodell-Feder
and Tamir’s meta-analysis of studies does identify a significant, though small, positive correlation between fiction reading and performance on certain social cognition tests (Dodell-Feder and Tamir, 2018). This idea of engagement, where the reader is measurably elevated and improved by the experience, touches on both conceptions of reading as a means of self-improvement, and ‘intellectually stimulating’ pursuit (Landy, 2012, quoted in Weber, 2015, p.87), and fiction as a means to this end, with ‘literary’ fiction providing a cognitive service that makes it measurably different from less serviceable ‘non-literary’ fiction.

**Conclusion**

These layered, varied, and often contradictory experiences of pleasure cast e-books as, for this purpose, predominantly unreal things that nonetheless give real pleasure. The experience of pleasure is of course subjective: individuals feel or do not feel a particular form of enjoyment, and if they do feel it they are free to pursue or ignore it as they like. They are under no obligation to feel pleasure consistently, or ‘logically’, and owe no explanations as they make their own trade-offs between forms of pleasure and between pleasure and other affordances. Aesthetic pleasure in the material object is, for these participants, something effectively exclusive to print, and tactile and sensory pleasure in handling the material object nearly so, with the great majority preferring print and only a small minority preferring e-reading devices. This lack alone denies e-books realness in this dimension. However, other forms of pleasure are preserved or even heightened. The ‘backup book’ relieves ‘abibliophobia’ and easies fears of being caught bookless precisely because, in this light, the e-book is a book: potentially an austere and unluxurious book, the literary equivalent of freeze-dried emergency rations, but still a
nourishing and capable of sustaining (reading) life. While ceremonies of approaching literature on its terms (going to libraries and traditional bookstores, setting aside times and places for reading in print, etc.) are often lost, interacting with literature on one’s own terms, choosing the available, adaptable, accommodating book (overcoming limitations imposed by disability, summoning reading to oneself instantly and without travel, reshaping reading technologies to avoid conflict with work and caring commitments) fosters a new kind of intimacy, and carves new spaces for reading in participants’ lives (those who enjoy high status and wide resources and those who do not). The alignment of pleasure in the material object with ‘experience’ values in the case of print and a more complex mix of ‘convenience’ and ‘experience’ values in the case of digital underscores the fact that print and digital pleasure are not mirror images, and the degree to which ‘convenience’ is not a trivial consideration but a pleasure in its own right, embracing satisfactions that include those of agency and self-determination. Ultimately, pleasures such as immersion and sense of achievement appear to be impeded by digital for some readers but not others, and for some even facilitated. There is some evidence that enjoyment from novels and other forms of fiction is less likely to be impeded than with other types of e-book. This frames the unreality of e-books as most often incompleteness, casting the e-book as part of a book, but specifically the most important part: as the text or content or story. For some participants, this part is something that cannot thrive on its own, and the text/content/story is less satisfying or effectively inaccessible when separated from the physical print object. For others, it is something that can stand alone, meaning that the incomplete book can deliver important, perhaps the most important, reading pleasures just as well as print. This vision of the e-book as an incomplete book sits alongside other visions (of the e-book as
Chapter 5: Identity

In this chapter I will examine the legitimacy and reputation of digital novels through the lens of identity: what role digital novels play in the formation and expression of readers’ self-image and public image, and how a reader’s self-image and public image can shape her use of and attitudes towards digital novels. Previous chapters have examined the ways in which e-books and e-novels are real or unreal, and useful or not useful, in terms of ownership, trust, and pleasure; these roles of e-books as real books, ersatz books, digital proxies for books and incomplete books come together as I consider how readers reconcile bookishness with near-books, non-books, or dismembered parts of books. I will consider aspects of display, cultural capital, and sharing (both conscious and ‘frictionless’ [Richards, 2013, p.712]) in forms specific to digital and forms specific to print. I will investigate how stereotypes (of some readers as unqualified and some reading practices and communities as inferior) and assumptions (regarding the reading behaviour of low-status audiences and e-book readers as a whole) can interact with and further entrench existing narratives, including narratives of literary decline, technology as a threat to culture, and women as incompetent readers in need of professional and/or masculine guidance. I will further examine how the bookish groups taking part in this study policed or did not police orthodoxy on bookish positions (such as pleasure in the material object of the print book) and consider how changing attitudes towards print privacy signal the emergence of concern for intellectual privacy as a bookish value in its own right.
As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, from a consumer perspective e-books do not at present share equal status with print books. While there is no certainty that this will remain the case, for the moment the separate but entwined stigmas of digital publication (or rather, digital-only or digital-first, as digital publication alongside or after print publication is acceptable) and self-publishing casts e-books as lower-investment products that may or may not have been approved by gatekeepers. The large proportion of book-readers who read digitally are hence aligned at least some of the time with lower-status books (not always by choice, as in the case of students or academics using course or library materials in digital form because that is what their institution provides). They must incorporate readership of lower-status or ambiguous-status books into their public and private reading personas and contend with entrenched narratives of ‘print vs digital’ as they negotiate their readerly identity. The lower status of digital, however, is also due to its association with lower-status audiences.

Books, like other artistic works, are defined not only by the intentions (or background [Bourdieu, 1993, p. 20]) of their creators, but by their audiences (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 35, 45–48). Bourdieu finds that ‘there are few fields (other than the field of power itself) in which the antagonism between the occupants of the polar positions is more total’ than for literature (1993, p. 46), amplifying the impact of association with an ‘intellectual’, ‘bourgeois’ or ‘mass’ audience (1993, p. 49). The ‘negative relationship…established between symbolic and economic profit, whereby discred it [emphasis his] increases as
the audience grows and its specific competence declines, together with the value of the recognition implied in the act of consumption’ (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 48) devalues any work appreciated by a mass audience. Damage caused by their appreciation can be to a degree counterbalanced by critical approval and simultaneous attention from high-status ‘intellectual’ audiences, but not cancelled out.

Within this exceptionally polarized literary field the novel ranges across a wider territory than drama or poetry, offering a great number of possible locations along axes of size of audience and degree of consecration (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 48-49). With many consumers, but also many producers (not limited as, say, late 20th century French drama was limited by the number of Parisian theatres) and low unit price (compared with, say, paintings), and much profit and critical attention to distribute between works, the outcomes for any particular novel are volatile; identification with a particular audience has the power to move that work nearly to the poles of either axis (and hence to any corner of a legitimacy grid). Digital-era measures of esteem can make the relationship between wider audience and lower prestige even more visible, and to the general public as well as literary insiders: for example, Kovács and Sharkey’s analysis of Goodreads star ratings of novels before and after major awards found that winners tended to experience, in addition to the expected spike in sales, a drop in average star rating, while shortlisted books saw a more modest increase in sales and no obvious drop in star rating (2014, pp.1-5).
Bourdieu presents this as an essentially irreducible problem: the novelist needs a mass readership if there is to be any possibility of making a living wage,\textsuperscript{40} but growth of an audience lacking in ‘competence’ leads to increase of discredit. Later theorists have noted how problematic a binary opposition between prestige and wide readership can be for interpreting contemporary literary fields, proposing a more nuanced approach that recognises the critical role of audience while respecting the significance of other factors. Squires notes that ‘the value-laden nature of this principle too quickly suggests a delineation of the field into markets for mass and elite audiences, as Q.R. Leavis’s does’ (2007, p.57) and goes on to demonstrate in *Marketing Literature* (2007) how factors including literary awards make it impossible to so directly couple status with audience size in 21\textsuperscript{st} century Britain. English performs similar work on the American literary field in *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), emphasising the role of ‘journalistic capital’ (2005, p.208) as a third force interacting with economic and cultural capital and challenging the idea of a direct trade-off between the economic and cultural. But any increase in discredit due to changing readership depends on the visibility of the ‘competent’ portion of the audience in proportion to the ‘incompetent’ portion: if the incompetent, low-status readers were somehow concealed, the author could in theory accumulate economic profit without risking discredit. (Raising the possibility that authors such as Jonathan Franzen, eager for an Oprah’s Book Club sales boost but frightened that association with female readers and feminised reading institutions will drive away male readers [Driscoll, 2014, p.67; Humble, 2012, p.93] can now enjoy income from female readers without being seen with those readers in public: digital concealment of a different kind. For further discussion of Oprah’s Book Club please

\textsuperscript{40} Unless she or he makes a living via ‘odd jobs’ in journalism, publishing or academia, which can confer a quasi-bohemian status unavailable to the ‘bourgeois’ popular novelist supported by sales (Bourdieu, 1993, p.59).
see Chapter 6, p.366.) This concealment of audience is in fact underway. The generic exterior of the e-book is not so much a veil of discretion as a blank canvas, a space onto which observers can project their ideas of what ‘that kind of person’ (FG 3 participant 1) would be reading. In the absence of data, stereotypes can rush in to any gap, and, as I will discuss below, lower-status readers contend with automatic assumptions that they are reading lower-status books.

**E-book privacy: reading a book without showing its cover**

With highbrow material a source of cultural capital, and low- or middlebrow material a source of discredit, readers are justifiably concerned about what image their reading choices might project. A Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) survey from 2013 (based on responses from general readers, not only readers with sight loss) found that almost two thirds of respondents, 64%, ‘admitted feeling embarrassed about reading certain types of books’ (RNIB, 2013, p.1). The question is whether this feeling affects reading choices, and if so what role digital reading might play.

The perception that individuals choose e-books for furtive reading is widespread and longstanding; an ‘opinion piece cliché’ (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, p.27). Data on furtive reading, however, is almost absent. The RNIB survey noted above is an incredibly rare instance of an actual survey on ‘embarrassing’ screen reading (even if a brief and rather playful one, disseminated via press release) and even there the key question is framed as a hypothetical. The 2013 RNIB survey reported that ‘less than one quarter of e-book readers (23%) said that they were more likely to read an “embarrassing” book electronically as no one would know about it’ (RNIB 2013, p.1).
My survey asked about actual, not hypothetical, reading choices and found an even smaller proportion in agreement. ‘Better for privacy – no one can see what I’m reading’ is a real but rare motivator, a factor for only a very small fraction of e-book readers: 8.3% of e-book readers who completed all relevant questions choose digital for this reason. Agreement did not vary significantly by year and showed no upward or downward trend. It also did not vary significantly by residence. It did, however, vary by gender and by age.

Women were more likely to agree: 10.8% vs 3.6% of men (Figure 55). The effect is not strong (CS=9.7) but it is highly significant (p=.002).

![Figure 55: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for privacy - no one can see what I'm reading', by gender](image)

Even more important than gender is age. Respondents under 45 were approximately three times as likely to agree as respondents 45 and older, with the highest level of concern among those 26-34 (13.0%) and the lowest among those 55-64 (0.0%) (Figure 56).
**Figure 56: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for privacy - no one can see what I'm reading', by age**

This was a reasonably strong (CS=16.5) and highly significant (p=.006) effect; a much stronger effect than the link to gender. (The link to age, however, can only be confirmed for privacy-valuing women: though privacy-valuing men showed a more muted version of a similar overall pattern, with fewer men in the survey, and fewer men agreeing with the statement, the difference fell below the level of statistical significance.)

When respondents are grouped into ‘under 45’ and ’45 and older’ categories, there is no significant difference between men (2.2%) and women (3.1%) in the older group (while the sample size is smaller at n=224, the differences are so modest, at CS=0.2 p=.892, that a large sample size is not needed to confirm the insignificance) (Figure 57).
Figure 57: Reasons for choosing digital: 'better for privacy - no one can see what I'm reading', by age and gender (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

In contrast, respondents under 45 had a significant overall gender gap, with 14.1% of women and only 4.7% of men agreeing (n=433 CS=8.0 p=.005) (Figure 58). Only one (young and female) survey respondent used the freetext boxes to describe secretive reading, and that individual did not mention genre: ‘plus I don’t want people to see what I am reading’ (Survey 1).
A desire for this form of privacy emerges as a rare concern, and one disproportionately shared by young women. In gathering empirical data on a widely-shared but previously untested perception, this study emphatically challenges conventional wisdom on the topic and calls into question theories based on an assumption of widespread furtive reading (and assumptions as to who those furtive readers might be.) The reasons why young women might be especially sensitive to scrutiny of their reading have roots in the long history of anxiety over private reading and focus of that anxiety on women’s reading.
Enduring stigmas: women as ‘incompetent’ readers

The strong connection between e-reading and novel-reading (as discussed in Chapter 2) by itself would link e-books to women readers. The novel has been associated with women readers since its inception: not only as a genre shaped to accommodate the requirements (or what were assumed to be the requirements) of female customers (Flynn, 2012, pp. 97-112), but also one that developed in tandem with mass female readership and conceptions of female readership (Sodeman, 2014, p.3), and even tasked, to a greater degree than other literary forms, with defining what a modern woman could and should be (Armstrong, 1987, p. 104-110). ‘By the middle of the 19th century…the novel was already known as a female form of writing’ (Armstrong, 1987, p. 105) and ‘throughout the [Victorian and Edwardian] period novels were at the centre of discussions concerning women and reading’ (Flint, 1993, p. 73) But e-books, associated with lower-status texts, are also associated with female readership because of the persistently lower status of women readers, ‘women’s genres’, and women’s reading practices.

Most readers are women, and women on average read more books than men (Nielsen 2016, Pew Internet 2015; Perrin 2018; Cain 2015), but women do not enjoy equal status as readers or occupy most positions of power and influence in the literary world. The ‘woman reader’ is a figure both identified as different (an essential point in separating out women’s reading as both atypical and in need of anxious examination [Flint, 1993, p. 10]) and inferior for millennia (Jack 2012, p. 39, 43). ‘Men have historically been associated with elite culture, while women have been linked with more commercial forms’ (Huysen, 1986, cited by Driscoll, 2014, p. 29) and women’s mass participation, with reading and with the novel in particular, has led not to full participation in the elite
but rather a sectioning-off of literary culture, where women (and the books they read, the books they write, the literary institutions they patronise, etc.) are corralled into lower-status zones. Though the majority of publishing professionals are women, the majority of senior positions are held by men (Flood, 2018; Kean, 2017) and the majority, sometimes the overwhelming majority, of both book reviewers and authors reviewed in elite literary magazines and journals are male (King and Clark, 2017). In library and records management, the UK workforce is approximately gender-balanced (in contrast to the global workforce, were four out of five librarians are women), but men have higher average pay and are nearly twice as likely to hold senior management positions (CILIP/ARA, 2015, p.1). Today, ‘the literary field that fosters modernist fiction gendered male has its related mother-field, the field of mass-market books, in which middlebrow women readers exert power’ (Hungerford, 2016, p. 68). Driscoll defines the literary middlebrow as ‘a broad phenomenon…allowing for different registers and formations’ that nonetheless can be tracked by a ‘family resemblance’ where all middlebrow institutions share most of a set of eight features: middle class, reverential, entrepreneurial, mediated, emotional, recreational and, crucially for digital reading, feminized (Driscoll, 2014, p. 6). ‘Texts move in and out of bounds [of the middlebrow] depending on who is perceived to be reading them’, and popular success demotes a book down the highbrow-middlebrow-lowbrow axis, the more dramatic the success and the more populist the venue, the more severe the damage; ‘selection as a “Book of the Month” by a newspaper would inevitably push a book into the middlebrow category, as, often, would “bestseller” status…indeed, there is much

41 The gender disparities in publishing sit alongside a general lack of diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, class, and, in particular, chronic underrepresentation of BAME professionals. While my focus in this discussion is gender rather than intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, income, or level of education completed (none of which were tracked in the survey), other dimensions inform this discussion and are incredibly important subjects for further data-gathering. For more on lack of diversity in publishing, see Claire Squires’s Publishing’s Diversity Deficit (2017).
evidence to suggest that...a predominantly female readership very often automatically consigned a text to the category of middlebrow’ (Humble, 2012, p.92-93).

Women and self-publishing

E-books are also associated with women because of the position of women as creators in modern self-publishing. Though there are far fewer reliable statistics for self-publishing than for traditional paths, several studies indicate that the majority of self-published authors, both for Amazon CreateSpace and similar models and for free sources like Wattpad, are likely female (Brown, M., 2014; Flood, 2015). Just as the texts they produce are held at arm’s length, only sporadically granted the designation of ‘book’, the writers are frequently fenced off from the designation of ‘author’ (Murray, 2016, pp.17-18; Dietz, 2015, pp.197-201). Sometimes they are denied even the status of writers. When Sven Birkerts describes media coverage of author Anna Todd, whose bestselling novels, published (in print) with Simon & Schuster, began life as fan fiction on Wattpad, he resorts to the construction ‘a woman named Anna Todd, who uses Wattpad to post episodes of a saga called “After”’ (Birkerts, 2016). She is a ‘woman’ who ‘posts’.42 Wattpad executives and users, and the New York Times coverage Birkerts quotes, all use the terms writer, novel, and chapter, but Birkerts downgrades these to ‘episodes’ of a ‘saga’.43 In Birkerts’ formulation, this is fiction that has readers but no writer. Like a diplomat refusing to officially recognise a country, Birkerts

42 The ‘named’ is a further diminishment; as Jon Ronson points out, ‘called’ or ‘named’ can serve as a signal to the reader that the journalist or author under discussion is obscure, lacking in stature, or a pretender to status as a member of the profession (2016, p.46).
43 It is worth noting that the journalist Birkerts quotes, David Streitfeld, in one instance uses the word ‘episode’ as well, but interchangeably with ‘chapter’ to describe a section of Todd’s serialised work (2014b).
elaborately excludes Todd and authors like her from any category that could suggest an earned place in the worlds of literature or books.

Aside from demographics, these digital privacy-valuing readers, disproportionately young and female, appear ordinary in their reading behavior. Those who choose digital for reasons of privacy were slightly more likely to have read on a smartphone (58.9% vs 43.7% CS=4.8 p=.028) but there was no other significant correlation with reading device (including Kindle and other e-ink readers, the devices confidently cited by journalists as the devices of choice for furtive reading [Donnelly, 2009; Catone, 2013; Singh, 2015; Levy, 2013; McGrath and Parker, 2015]). There were no significant correlations to sources of print books and (perhaps surprisingly) almost no significant correlations to sources of e-books. They are very slightly more likely to have obtained an e-book from a chain bookshop in the past 12 months (10.7% vs 4.5%, CS=4.1 p=.044), though this is a weak correlation and not far above the level of statistical significance, and there are no other correlations. As above with the lack of any connection to the Kindle, a lack of any connection to Amazon as a source of e-books calls into question the idea that these might be the romance or other genre superreaders that Kindle Unlimited seeks to serve with its large selection of self- or Amazon-published novels (a category that does seem to exist, based on the experiences of self-published romance authors who have seen their sales drop dramatically since Kindle Unlimited was launched [Streitfeld, 2014a]).
Isolation of ‘no one can see what I’m reading’ as a motivator

Correlations to other digital motivators are few but extremely revealing. The two links of any magnitude are to ‘the books I want aren’t always available in print’ (50.0% of those who choose digital for reasons of privacy, vs 26.5% of others, CS=14.0 p=.000) and ‘better selection’ (14.3% vs 4.2%, CS=10.8 p=.001) (Figure 59). Very weak correlations to ‘cheaper/better value’ (62.5% vs 47.2%, CS=4.7 p=.029) and digital being ‘easier to read’ (30.4% vs 19.3% CS=3.9 p=.049), the latter being on the cusp of statistical significance, indicate some potential connection to price sensitivity and reading experience, but at a comparatively low level.
Figure 59: Reasons for choosing digital: ‘better for privacy – no one can see what I’m reading’, correlation with other digital motivators (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

While it is important to note that these are still not major motivators (valued by half of respondents in one case, by a mere one in seven in the other) the strength of the connection suggests that there is, for some, a link between a need for this form of privacy and need for books that they cannot easily obtain in print form in physical bookshops, physical libraries, or on Amazon (a limitation that would not apply to
mainstream romance or even mainstream erotica of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* moiety, these genres being widely stocked in bookshops, supermarkets, and public libraries) or for digital-original or digital-only content (romance is an exceptionally successful genre in digital format [Romance Writers of America, n.d.]). It does not, however, automatically follow that the books they obtain are self-published books. There were no significant links to publication status of the last e-book read (e.g. digital version of a print book vs digital original). Similarly, there were no significant links to having read e-fiction (novel or short story) in the past 12 months. Those who valued this type of privacy were less likely to have read a poetry e-book in the past 12 months (1.8%, vs 12.0% of those who did not choose e-books for reasons of privacy, CS=5.4 p=.020) but had no other significant connections to genre choice. This indicates that privacy-valuing readers do not voraciously consume self-published fiction, or any fiction, to the exclusion of all other kinds of reading. It is also worth noting the lack of a connection to speed and ease of obtaining books. Obtaining books for chain reading, where after finishing one book in a series one immediately starts the next, was noted by several participants (for example, focus group 2, participants NH and ES) as a reason to read digital, and one theory as to the success of romance fiction in digital form has been that romance novels lend themselves to this kind of one-after-another ‘binge reading’ (Armstrong, 2014).44 If these privacy-valuing readers are indeed romance readers, they are no more drawn to digital for binge-enabling instant access than anyone else.

Even more strikingly, there was no significant correlation with any of the print motivators: choosing digital for reasons of privacy had *no link to any other reason*, even

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44 While ‘binge’ is a term now closely associated with streaming television services, this and other forms of concentrated media consumption are increasingly examined as phenomena related to existing fiction reading practices: Jenner notes the ‘consistent parallel to novels’ in media theory surrounding Netflix (2018, p.169.).
print privacy. This complete isolation from print values, with no negative or positive correlations, is highly unusual.

Together, these print- and e-book-obtaining values and habits paint a picture of very typical readers and do not offer evidence supporting stereotypes of voracious and exclusive romance (or other genre) readers, the kind of reader of popular fiction caricatured as ‘undiscriminating, without judgement, a passive consumer gulping down rubbish by the gallon’ (Humble, 2012, p. 86) while ignoring more nutritious fare,\(^{45}\) though it does not rule out the possibility that they are unusual in ways my data do not capture, for example in obtaining books from a balanced range of sources but in far higher quantities. In this survey I did not ask about every source of print books (leaving out supermarkets, for example) or about the number of print or e-books they obtained from a given source or read over the course of a year.

‘GUILTY PLEASURES’

A major factor in perceptions of women’s digital reading as furtive consumption of ‘guilty pleasures’ (Singh, 2015; FG 2 participant 3; Archer and Jockers, 2016, p.83) is the status of romance fiction. Romance is a major category in both print and digital formats (RWA, date unknown) and a genre with a unique publication history (Radway, 1991, pp.19-20); its complexities make it a zone of disagreement and debate among literary scholars (Glover and McCracken, 2012, p.8) but its importance to the publishing industry, association with female readers, and low status as a literary category are three

\(^{45}\) For an excellent discussion of the ubiquity of food metaphors in 18th to early 20th century discussions of reading, with novels in particular likened to sugar and fancies dangerous when consumed immoderately, and the special concern for women as both more vulnerable to literary gluttony and more unsightly when succumbing, see Flint, 1993, pp.50-52 and Armstrong, 1987, pp.109-10.
points of agreement. While the idea that this one genre is somehow uniquely lacking in worth, inherently less valuable than any other form of popular fiction, is ludicrous, this is a charge levelled at romance and an image with which readers must contend. While it is reasonable to investigate whether privacy (rather than, say, lower price, speed of access, or availability of digital-original titles) is a primary reason for the genre’s success on screen, it is not reasonable to skip the investigation and assume that correlation is causation: ‘train commuters reading spicy novels on iPhone but crime stories in paperback’ (Archer and Jockers, 2016, p.40). This assumption was visible in focus groups: privacy of this kind was rarely mentioned, but when it was the furtive reading was associated with ‘women’s genres’ of erotica and romance. One participant, a Publishing MA student (who did not read romance herself or choose digital for reasons of privacy), knew about digital romance sales figures and leapt to the conclusion that the cause was romance readers’ desire for privacy.

‘The success of Mills and Boon in digital form, certainly [comes from the choice to access ‘light reading’ digitally] particularly if people are embarrassed to read it. People no longer have to buy book covers, which was a thing that they would use that was actually sold because you can just hide whatever dodgy novel you’re reading by reading on a Kindle.’ (FG 4 participant 4)

Only one (female) individual in any focus group or interview described privacy of this kind as important to her personally; she was one of only two respondents who spoke about reading romance novels. She was teased by a (male) fellow participant.

P1: ‘And then there are some books I might not necessarily want people to see that I’m reading. For example, some romance books. There’s an author I quite
like called Shelley Lawrence; she writes kind of like the romance thing and the covers are always quite sort of, of, like, I don’t know…”

P2: ‘[laughing] Do they have shirtless men?’

P1: ‘[sounding nettled] No, not necessarily. [laughter from other participants] Well, it depends, because they have different versions, now, of [covers]. It’s just, you can more easily hide what you’re reading on a Kindle.’ (All FG 2)

Later, when the same respondent (P1) was discussing the experience of strangers striking up a conversation with her regarding the print copy an Orwell classic she was reading in public, the other participant (P2) continued to tease her: ‘secretly, you had the romance tucked under it!’ (FG 2), making it clear that her earlier statement had been noted as a meaningful admission (or confession) and was neither forgotten nor forgiven.

This display of teasing (in this instance it was between classmates and appeared to be done, and accepted, in a generally good-natured spirit) also demonstrates the next step of the assumption that women habitually conceal taboo reading: that whenever a woman’s reading can’t be seen or verified, it is reasonable to assume that the reading is taboo. This assumption is prominent in the discussion even in the face of immediate reminders (including, in this case, shortly beforehand in the same conversation, ‘I read a lot of classics on the Kindle, ‘cause you can get them for free’ [FG 2 participant 3]) that female as well as male e-book readers frequently choose classics, in part because so many are available for ‘free of charge’ (Survey 1) on Amazon and via Project Gutenberg. There is explicit recognition that because anonymous e-book reading means sacrificing social capital attached to public reading of prestigious titles, readers are discouraged from accessing such titles on screen.
‘...a lot of it is genre and romance that people don’t necessarily want to be seen reading on the Tube [exasperated, sarcastic ‘yeah’ in background, from ES, the previously teased romance-reading participant]. I also think there’s a kind of corollary to that, which is that if it’s literary fiction or a classic, everyone almost does deliberately want to be seen reading it.’ (FG 2 respondent 2)

Romance was unique in these focus groups as the only genre singled out for ridicule and derision. The respondent teased above for her romance reading had elsewhere in the conversation noted that she reads (in addition to high-status classics and literary fiction) fan fiction, YA, science fiction, and fantasy. None of this reading attracted jeering. (In focus group 1, one participant [L] was tentative and apologetic in discussing Harry Potter fan fiction that she had read, but no one in the group picked up on this as embarrassing or even noteworthy.)46 In focus group 6, another respondent (N), the only other participant who openly discussed reading romance, did not wait for it to be criticised by the group but instead criticised it herself: ‘don’t [read romance, as she does]. You shouldn’t, it’s all garbage. [General laughter]’ (FG 6 participant 4)

46 The lack of such censure on YA reading underscores the degree to which this form of digital reading privacy is distinct from the early 21st century fashion for simultaneously releasing children’s and YA books with a significant adult readership (or books to which publishers hope to attract a significant adult readership) with ‘child’ and ‘adult’ covers. While sometimes attributed to adults feeling embarrassment over ‘childish’ covers (Reynolds 2007), this trend never concealed the title or author, it merely altered paratext to present that visible title and author in a different light, as material targeted towards to a different audience. The double-cover fashion is an element of a fascinating, and wholly separate, topic of the role of paratext in the Harry Potter phenomenon and the wider growth of adult readership of YA.
The centrality of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon to debates on digital reading privacy can scarcely be overstated: I, in studying commentary on the topic, have encountered virtually no journalism published since 2012 on the trope of Kindles used for furtive reading that did not mention this series (indeed, journalism on any aspect of digital reading is very likely to mention it). There are reasons for its prominence in these debates. It is unquestionably a publishing phenomenon: even the least prominent books in the series are bestsellers (Onwuemeze, 2017) and the series as a whole is a fixture (not to say fixation) of the recent cultural conversation, invoked in discussions that range far beyond books and publishing. Its colourful origin story (e.g. a work of fanfiction that stunned industry insiders and made its author fabulously wealthy) is exciting and widely known, and easily invoked by commentators to support a wide variety of arguments, from women’s empowerment to women’s triviality to a new cultural frankness to imminent cultural collapse. And the theory that its success is bound up with secretive digital reading was raised early by a woman with an insider’s knowledge and perspective: James’ agent, Valerie Hoskins, told *The New York Times* in 2012 that ‘one of the things about this is that in the 21st century, women have the ability to read this kind of material without anybody knowing what they’re reading, because they can read them on their iPads and Kindles’ (Boseman, 2012). Nicolas Carr goes further, concluding that benevolent supervision had, pre-Kindle, protected the publishing industry and the culture from the likes of *Fifty Shades of Grey*: ‘we may even be a little embarrassed to be seen reading them, which makes anonymous digital versions all the more appealing. The ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ phenomenon probably
wouldn’t have happened if e-books didn’t exist’ (Carr, 2013).47 The series’ overwhelming presence dominates and skews discussion of digital reading, but most particularly women’s digital reading, and similarly skews perceptions of what is ‘typical’ screen reading and what the motivations of a typical e-novel reader (at least a female e-novel reader) might be.

Fifty Shades of Grey bears almost every possible stigma in terms of literary legitimacy. It is genre fiction, and a hybrid of two of the most derided forms, erotica and romance. It began as a piece of fan fiction. It was originally self-published, and in digital-original form. It was written by a woman for a female audience. It is not generally regarded as well-written (Boseman, 2012; Brockes, 2013; McGrath and Parker, 2015). (In its defense, Archer and Jockers marshal machine learning data to argue that while the line by line prose may be awkward, the first novel in the series is in fact superbly paced [2016, pp.89-90]). And, as noted above, it is a bestseller of historic proportions, which according to Bourdieu would by itself accrue historic levels of discredit.

No one in the interviews or the freetext boxes of the survey mentioned Fifty Shades of Grey, but it was mentioned (not raised by the facilitator, but by participants) in half of the focus groups. Focus group participants were aware of the Fifty Shades of Grey assumptions as something widely shared in the media, but notably did not express agreement: it was couched as something ‘they’ said and thought.

47 Carr speaks long after Hoskins but does not refer to her earlier insight.
‘That’s one of the things they said Fifty Shades benefitted from, wasn’t it? That people could read it without anyone knowing they were reading it. (Laughs)’.  
(FG 3 participant 3)

‘It’s one of the reasons they thought so many copies of Fifty Shades of Grey was sold, because people could read it anonymously and no one would know.’ (FG 5 participant 5)

It is interesting that both participants quoted above (one male and one female) said ‘people’ rather than ‘women’, whereas James’ agent spoke specifically of women.

While the success of the series is attributed to (and resulting damage to literature blamed on) women, it is acknowledged that men do sometimes read it; to avoid censure they must ensure that their interest is perceived as critical or academic, not personal. (Charles McGrath, author, past New Yorker fiction editor and New York Times book review editor and confirmed member of the literary establishment, laughed at himself for hiding his childhood copy of Little Women behind a homemade brown paper wrapper, but still takes pains to make clear that his and his friends’ Kindle reading of Fifty Shades of Grey was for professional reasons [McGrath and Parker, 2015]). If they are suspected of enjoying such books, sharing such tastes (feminine, juvenile, or both), judgement can be harsh:

‘He’s got the taste of a teenage girl. He actually, like, legitimately likes ‘Twilight’ and I’m still judging him for it many years later.’ (FG 4 participant 4)
While journalism on ‘Kindle smut’ frequently features headlines about guilt and shame (e.g. ‘A cover-up! Guilty secret we hide in our Kindles’ [Levy, 2013] or ‘Ebook readers’ guilty pleasures revealed’ [Singh, 2015]) interviewees the articles quote often tell more complex stories about public mockery and the variety of possible responses to it. Sarah Wendell, author and co-creator of the romance website Smart Bitches, Trashy Books (www.smartbitchestrashybooks.com) agrees that concealment is a major factor for digital sales of romance and erotica because ‘women get enough commentary when they check out at a bookstore with romance novels. The commentary when you go to buy an erotic novel is even worse, so if you have the safety of doing it anonymously online, you take it’, but she herself ‘no longer cares what people think of her reading habits’ and fellow commuters pester her at their own risk (‘I’ve totally had strangers comment on what I’m reading in the morning on the subway, and you’d think that people in New York City would have better senses of self-preservation than to mock the reading material of an uncaffeinated morning commuter’) (Donnelly 2009). An anonymous reader in the same article recounted a story of moving to digital reading after being teased on a plane: ‘but I was like, gosh, never again can I be out in public with these books with questionable titles and creepy people on the front all draped over each other’ (Donnelly 2009). These are not stories of ‘guilty secrets’ or ‘guilty pleasures’ so much as stories of anticipation of and pragmatic response to public shaming. In general, what readers are describing as their own experience of furtive reading is embarrassment, with shame reserved for other book-related transgressions I will discuss below.
**Embarrassment versus shame**

Any specific mention of shame by participants is noteworthy, all the more so as shame is a current cultural preoccupation and fixture of the bestseller lists,\(^{48}\) filed in the Self-Help section with John Bradshaw or Humour with Jon Ronson. While older participants in this study may have come of age in a time when, in America and the UK, shame was discussed as a valuable means of managing behaviour,\(^{49}\) current debates are shaped more by Gilligan’s hugely influential theories of shame as unproductive and profoundly damaging to the individual and society (Gilligan, 1997). Philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians of emotion, and researchers and clinicians from other disciplines distinguish between embarrassment, guilt and shame in different ways (some describe embarrassment as a lesser version of shame, some as a distinct but related emotion), but there are areas of intersection. One is that they are not equally painful: embarrassment is less intense, an emotion suited to a relatively minor transgression, or simply to being caught doing in public something normally done in private (it is not for nothing that the reader of popular fiction is ‘imagined as…virtually masturbatory’ [Humble, 2012, p.86]). Another is that they have different relationships to outside judgment: while shame may be either public or private, embarrassment typically requires an audience. Shame researcher Brené Brown (whose bestselling popular books and famous TED talk, at 34 million views (TED, date unknown b) one of the most-watched in the organization’s history (TED, date unknown a), have made her

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\(^{48}\) Quite like E.L. James and her imitators in this respect.

\(^{49}\) Still very much in circulation, though some influential theories from the early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, such as Benedict’s division between guilt as distress after having fallen short of one’s personal standards and shame as distress after having violated societal norms, have been sharply critiqued; as Doi lays out in his analysis of Benedict’s framework of Western ‘guilt cultures’ and Eastern ‘shame cultures’ (Benedict, 1946), this assigns higher value to both guilt and to the Westerners who supposedly hold a monopoly on guilt (Doi, 1976).
an extraordinarily prominent academic)\textsuperscript{50} has popularised a definition of shame as ‘an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance or belonging’, quite distinct from guilt, ‘a feeling that results from behaving in a flawed or bad way rather than flawed or bad self’ (Brown, 2006, p.45).

Participants rarely use the words shame, guilt and embarrassment. Quantifying the mentions reveals how infrequently they appear in these readers’ conversations about e-reading, in sharp contrast to the frequency with which they appear in journalists’ coverage of e-reading. A case-by-case examination of these rare appearances reveals that while readers rarely discuss any reading in terms of shame, instances where they do suggest that they do in fact subscribe to the above concepts of shame hierarchy (where shame is more serious than embarrassment) and the importance of observation. In this set of qualitative data, personal shame is mentioned only twice: one participant described ‘shamefully’ buying high-quality books but giving them as gifts instead of reading them herself (FG 6 participant 4),\textsuperscript{51} and another reported that she ‘dropped Salman Rushdie in the bath and I’ve never been so ashamed in my life’ (FG 4 participant 4) (this experience of shame, interestingly, came from the same participant who described romance novels as merely ‘embarrassing’). There were two mentions of guilt: avoiding it by buying books one wanted to annotate electronically, as one can mark up an e-book ‘without guilt’ (Survey 2) (this relates, like one shame example, to remorse over mistreating a print book) and of lowbrow reading as ‘guilty pleasures’ (FG 2 participant 3). Embarrassment is also mentioned twice: once, as above, in describing

\textsuperscript{50} Reportage on Brown, a female academic whose massive popular audience is largely female, is fascinating in itself, and her authorial persona would be a brilliant topic for further research on authorial epitext.

\textsuperscript{51} Also underscoring that the gift of a book is different when one has read the book.
romance novels as embarrassing books, and second, in describing Amazon’s dynamic estimated reading time, where glancing away from the page means being branded a slow reader, an ‘embarrassing’ identity imposed (unfairly) by a ‘judgmental’ Amazon (FG 5 participants 1, 5, 8) (this instance of resented surveillance, and the problem of Amazon, is one I will discuss further below in the context of intellectual privacy). These six are the only examples, but they do together suggest meaningful distinctions. Shame was experienced, and came from ruining a print book and from failing to read a book one has bought, but was not attributed to others. Guilt was experienced, from marking up a print book (or rather, avoided by not marking up a print book), and was attributed to others for ‘guilty pleasure’ reading. Embarrassment was experienced, from being labelled a slow reader by Amazon, and attributed to others for being seen to read a romance novel in public (not, notably, for reading romance, but for being seen with it; readers do not have to agree that their reading is shameful to know that they are likely to be attacked for it, and to either avoid confrontation by means of concealment or steel themselves against attacks). Shame was reserved for damaging or neglecting books. Embarrassment was reserved for being caught looking unbookish in public.

E-books and e-novels in this way function as parts of books: the text without publicly visible paratext. E-novels are in that sense precisely what the book-shamed reader quoted above wanted: the romance novels she liked to read without the lurid, ‘creepy’ covers she neither liked nor wanted to be seen with, and indeed the reading experience without the public shaming experience. This represents in one sense freedom: the ability to read in public without being confronted and harangued by strangers. In

52 It is important not to conflate, as some focus group participants appeared to, enjoyment of romance literature with enjoyment of romance cover art. Above, the focus group 2 respondent (ES) and the interviewee (Donnelly 2009) describe old-fashioned or actively ‘creepy’ titles and covers as tiresome, and romance reading as something they enjoy in spite of certain unwanted paratextual elements.
theory, this might also, should the reading be low-status, evade discredit. However, stereotypes and tropes of Kindle reading as a tool for furtive readers may invite observers to assume that all her anonymous reading is low-status: that she only reads digitally because her reading is ‘embarrassing’. If so, her choice to read digitally does not evade discredit, it invites it; the price of digital reading is not only opportunity cost, cultural capital lost when her high-status reading (as with free classics) is concealed, but a default assumption that any e-book – if it is read by a woman – is Fifty Shades of Grey or something like it.

**Narrative of literature in opposition to technology**

Statements about the virtues or dangers of screen reading are ‘position-takings’, statements that may express liking or dislike but also declare alliance (with a philosophy, group of actors, etc.) in the struggle to define a cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30). Position-taking on the issue of digital reading began long before mass e-reading, and, in the form of suspicion regarding technology, before the emergence of the e-book as a form.

Narratives of technology as the enemy of literature, or of reading, predate e-books and take a variety of forms. (Flint notes that Victorians also considered themselves time-poor and bedeviled by technology, distracted from reading by ‘loosely defined “tendencies of the age”’ [1993, p. 72].) Bob Brown’s The Readies, expanding on ideas first explored in a modernist literary magazine in 1930, described print reading as ‘old-

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33 Activating 18th and 19th century ideas of private reading as dangerous, with female readers in particular restrained only by fear of censure, and reaching for the trash and smut the moment their benevolent supervisors’ backs are turned.
fashioned, frumpish, beskirted’, and promised that his new machine would free writing ‘bottled up in books’ and allow literature to advance into the 20th century (Brown, 1930, p.28). Birkerts’ Gutenberg Elegies, has proven an extremely influential text in the late 20th/early 21st century debates on screen reading, widely reviewed on its release and cited by hundreds of scholars and commentators from almost the moment of its publication (see Duguid, 1996) to the present day (admiringly, see Baron, 2015, and less so, see Striphas, 2011 and Kirschenbaum, 2016). First published in 1994, it predates even the earliest mass-market e-reading devices and refers to digital reading, when it does refer to it, in the sense of hypertext fiction that must be ‘booted up’ on a ‘terminal’ in the writing room of a friend who is ‘a convert to the sorcery of the microchip’ (2006, p. 151). It is rooted in 20th century debates on competition between media and situates reading in opposition to an ‘electronic culture’ (2006, p.20) where the anti-literary distractions come from ‘music, TV, and videos’ emerging from radios, Sony Walkmans and television sets, not the Internet (which was not yet mainstream) or digital culture as fostered by the Web (which had been invented only five years before). It presents technology in any form more modern than movable type as antagonistic to ‘slowing down enough to concentrate on prose of any density’ (2006, p.19) or literary production;54 even composing on an IBM Selectric electric typewriter instead of a personal computer is seen as a (deeply contradictory) statement of alliance to heritage forms (2006, p.28).

Technology companies’ statements about how their products and services would disrupt information exchange landed on fertile ground. The territory was primed by extensive

54 Birkerts’ confident but unsupported assertion that ‘a change in procedure [of writing, to composition on screen] must be at least subtly reflected in the result. How could it not?’ is ably interrogated by Kirschenbaum in Track Changes: a literary history of word processing (2016).
debate in literary circles on the potential effect of technology on reading and literature and the ‘either/or logic [that] has plagued discussion of all things digital and literary since the early 1990s “death of the book” debates began’ (Murray, 2016, p.12). Colourful insults reducing print books to squid remnants defacing tree and cow remnants (Price, 2013, p.5; Buderi, 2000, p.360; Duguid, 1996) may have been intended as playful or provocative (the tendency to absurd overstatement certainly suggests that the goal was attention, not sober debate), but such insults were quoted and requoted and requoted again, helping to shape an idea of debates on e-reading as a battle between ‘gloomy bibliophiles and triumphant technophiles’ (Duguid, 1996, p.63). As historian of technology Mar Hicks points out, ‘narratives focussed on progress or “revolution”’, while not necessarily accurate or offering much explanatory value, are ubiquitous in computing (2016). Any romantic attachment on the part of gloomy bibliophiles to heritage, to preservation-heroes and narratives of decline and loss, has a counterpart in romantic attachment on the part of triumphant technophiles to innovation, to disruption-heroes and ‘sociotechnical progress narratives’ (Hicks 2016), and all of these narratives rely on conflict, villains, and the drawing of sides. Jeff Bezos did in 2007 assure shareholders of Amazon’s essential bookishness (Striphas, 2011, pp.109-10), citing as evidence those aspects of Kindle design that emulated print reading (Amazon, 2008). But by the time of the Kindle launch, the idea of opposing teams, like the frequently ‘hyperbolic’ (Gooding, Terras and Warwick, 2013, p.4-5) tone of the discussion, was already well established. In my own focus groups, there are instances where readers are, in establishing their own credentials as readers and bookish people, acknowledging the existence of ‘sides’, before beginning the slow and difficult process of determining

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55 This was so extensive by the early 1990s that Birkerts had to start a special file for newspaper clippings and notes, which he titled ‘the Reading Wars’ (Birkerts, 2006, p. 32).
56 And Amazon’s initial e-book products competed more on price than on the promise of a revolutionary interface for accessing texts (Coll, 2014).
which side they are on. Participants were often exasperated by what they described as excessive attention to a narrative of ‘sides’, of print in opposition to digital, and the importance of moving on.57

‘I wish there were fewer value judgements about the whole thing. I mean, fewer people saying... “I don’t ever want to use e-books, I hope they plateau and die.”’

Or people on the other side saying things like “oh, within ten years it’s all going to go, all the print is going to go.”’ (FG 2 participant 2)

‘We’ve got to get away from this idea that one [print or digital reading] is better than another...I think the important things is to encourage the reading, and that’s an end to it.’ (Interview 2).

The question facing this group of committed readers is where a bookish person should sit: what attitudes towards digital reading are appropriate. It is fair to say that all would, if they were given the choice, be on the side of books; but they are not given that choice, the sides are not defined in that way. Instead, they are left to work out, on a purchase-by-purchase, conversation-by-conversation level, what opinions are approved (winning them inclusion in circles of other bookish people) and what choices are positive (supporting rather than harming books, reading, and literature). ‘In our book-centered societies, the craft of reading signals our entrance into the ways of the tribe, with its particular codes and demands’ (Manguel, 2010, p.6) and as exasperated as they might

57 Not ignoring the fact that in studying digital reading I am myself drawing attention to differences between print and digital reading and helping reinforce the idea of them as opposing forces; part of their exasperation is very justly with me.
be with the idea of sides, awareness that there are sides is in itself a sign of sensitivity to the logic of the field and hence inclusion in the bookish group.

Choosing sides

On many dimensions reading participants were prepared to disagree without rancour. On aspects such as genre choice, evaluation of specific titles (such as A Long Way to a Small and Angry Planet, which some members of focus group 6 loved and others despised), importance of ownership, attitudes towards book piracy, etc. it proved possible to air conflicting opinions without heated debate. An exception was appreciation of the material qualities of a print book. Groups could comfortably accommodate observations that hardcover books were in some cases too expensive for purchase, too bulky for storage or too heavy for comfortable reading, as in this exchange in focus group 6:

P5: ‘Oh, I dislike hardbacks.’

P1: ‘I never buy hardback.’

P3: ‘I love them.’

P5: ‘I actively dislike hardback. I wish things came out in paperback first, I would buy them.’

P1: ‘Me too.’

P3: ‘I like the hardbacks, for the good ones. You know they last longer.’

P1: ‘They’re too big.’

P5: ‘They’re unwieldy.’

P3: ‘I’ve destroyed... ’
P1: ‘Big and heavy, compared to many paperbacks.’

P5: ‘They’re like heavy and uncomfortable to hold.’

P4: ‘It really depends.’

P4: ‘That’s why I like my Kindle.’

This exchange is typical in the sense that reading is held up as the ultimate good, and ‘materiality scepticism’ (and even expressing a liking for Kindles) is acceptable when avoidance of hardcovers is presented as a trade-off in pursuit of even more important bookish goal. The hardcover enthusiasts may even come in for some gentle teasing over the lengths to which they will go to read heavy hardcover books in bed, propping themselves and their reading matter on carefully constructed edifices of pillows (FG 6 participant 5), or rolling over after each page to keep resting a book on its side (FG 6 participant 3). Groups were less tolerant of any suggestion that hardcover books were not beautiful, or did not sit at a pinnacle of desirability such that any other choice of format must be guided by practical considerations, as in this exchange from focus group 4. When one member of the group (CA) says that she dislikes hardcover books, she is challenged and her experiences are questioned, and she is corrected, and told that if her personal reading habits make hardcover books inconvenient, they are her ‘own fault’ (FG 4 participant 2), and the solution is to change how she reads (by holding books differently and removing dust covers rather than not buying books with dust covers in the first place):

P4: ‘Also, I don’t buy hardbacks ever.’

P2: ‘Really?’
P3: ‘Really? ...why?’

P4: ‘I hate hardbacks! Because you drop them on your face and it hurts.’

(laughter)

... 

P2: ‘No, I don’t.’

P3: ‘I have never done that.’

P4: ‘I have dropped them on my face and that is painful.’

P3: ‘Well, that’s your own fault more than the book’s.’

... 

P2: ‘Then don’t read like that.’

P4: ‘They are bulkier and they just don’t feel as nice to me.’

P2: ‘They’re so pretty!’

P4: ‘I hate dust covers. Dust covers are the worst thing.’

P3: ‘I take the dust cover off...’

Opinions about the smell of books were policed as fiercely. Declarations of love for this smell are a familiar means of expressing personal bookishness (Driscoll and Squires, 2018, p.64). When, in focus group 1, a participant admitted to disliking the smell of new books (‘they keep talking about smelling books and things, and I have never done that in my life’, participant H) the group reacted with incredulous disbelief, shouting ‘what?!’ and ‘you haven’t done that?’ When the errant participant persisted, she was firmly corrected: told that her facts are wrong (that books do not have a ‘strong, unpleasant smell of glue’ [respondent H] as she believes) and commanded to educate herself: ‘you should go into a bookshop!’ (FG 1 participant 5). This last is an extreme and telling rebuke, insisting that disagreement with the group can only a sign of ignorance of and inexperience with books; in a stroke undercutting the dissenter’s
bookish credentials and entire bookish identity. Later, a different participant is taken to task for not agreeing that old books smell nice and are pleasant to hold. When she explains that she doesn’t enjoy old books because ‘you have no idea whose germs are on it!’ (FG 1 participant 2) she is laughed at, and instructed to stop being so silly: ‘it’s not like you’re licking it’ (FG 1 participant 5).

Again, the reader is instructed to adapt to accommodate the physical book: in this case not just to hold it differently, but to change her own tastes and beliefs. If she dislikes an approved smell, she should make herself love it instead. If she avoids ‘germs’ in every other instance, she should nonetheless make herself indifferent to germs when they appear on books. The rigidity on display here helps explain why for many readers time spent with an e-book that is expected to change itself to suit her, not vice versa, is so appealing. (For more on enjoyment of the accommodating book, please see Chapter 4, pp.240-243.) When readers choose digital to escape such strictures – or judgement for non-compliance – they are treating e-books as part of books, specifically the parts of books that don’t come with responsibilities and burdens.

Sharing reading with unshareable e-books

Word-of-mouth recommendations remain highly important, and unless the book is only available in one format, there is nothing to stop a reader acting on a recommendation by obtaining a book in whatever format she or he prefers. Acting on a recommendation by obtaining an e-book can be considerably faster. As one respondent put it: ‘I have had people message me on Facebook, “I’ve just read this, it’s great” and I’m messaging
back, “I’m reading it now, yes”, and I’ll buy before I know I’ve done it’ (FG 3 participant 2).

One form of sharing that combines elements of connection with elements of display is the spontaneous public-transport book conversation (similar to the exchange mentioned previously, with the romance-reading respondent approached on the Tube about her Orwell book):

‘I was on a train reading a book, about three months ago, it was a brilliant book, I was just reaching the end and getting excited, and then this woman suddenly said to me, “It’s great, isn’t it?” I said, “Yes, it’s just so wonderful. I can’t believe I didn’t read it 30 years ago”’ and then we had a discussion about it. [comments from other participants: ‘great!’ ‘that’s wonderful!’] If I hadn’t had been reading the real thing [in the form of a print book] I wouldn’t have had that connection with her, and it was really nice and special.’ (FG 5 respondent 4)

Qualitative data highlights the degree to which the two sides of the book recommendation equation – serving as the giver and serving as the recipient – are not symmetrical; while both are important, they are driven by very different motivations and satisfy different needs. As discussed in Chapter 2, seeking out or acting on recommendations is most often noted in the context of trust, in finding good books and having the confidence to invest time and/or money in a given title. While this does clearly represent accepting something from the recommender, feelings of connection and strengthening of relationships are not emphasized the way they are when the
information is imparted in the other direction. Richards draws a critical distinction between conscious recommendations, valuable because chosen and selectively passed on, and the ‘data exhaust pipe of personal information devoid of context or real content’ that is Facebook-style ‘frictionless sharing’ (Richards, 2013, p.714, 715). Offering recommendations is instead noted in the context of sharing or giving, incorporating elements of ownership, identity, and (as I will discuss in Chapter 6) love.

While ‘sharing books’ has multiple meanings, taking different forms for print and digital books and incorporating elements of gift, loaning (and hence ownership), discussion, social connection, image and display, it was not a particularly important motivator for choosing print or digital formats. Only 29.2% of all survey respondents choose print because it is ‘easier to share.’ There was no significant difference between print-only and e-book readers, a sharp contrast to values such as enjoyment of print and ease of reading in print. Choosing print because it is easier to share was stable over the four years of the survey, showing no increase or decrease. There was no significant variation due to age or residence in the UK. Women were slightly more likely to agree (31.3% vs 24.7% CS=4.1 p=.041) but this is a very weak effect and not far above the level of statistical significance (Figure 60). (Intriguingly, the gender gap is more pronounced among digital readers: there, 32.4% of women agree, vs 19.1% of men, a larger (CS=12.9) and more significant (p=.000) effect.)
Figure 60: Reasons for choosing print: 'easier to share', print-only readers vs e-book readers (by gender) (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Sharing does have significant correlations with other print values. The most prominent by far is ‘better for borrowing or buying secondhand’: 77.6% of those who choose print because it is easier to share agree, versus 43.4% of others (CS=86.2 p=.000) followed by choosing print because it is easier to read (67.2% vs 41.8% CS=47.2 p=.000), and better for giving as a gift (68.7% vs 45.6% CS=39.2 p=.000) (Figure 61).
Figure 61: Reasons for choosing print: ‘easier to share’, correlation with other print motivators (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Print sharing is also correlated, though less strongly, with valuing print selection (24.7% vs 13.0%, CS=18.2 p=.000), print personal library (76.1% vs 62.3% CS=15.5 p=.000), bibliophilia (44.0% vs 31.2% CS=13.3 p=.000), print privacy (18.1% vs 9.7%, CS=12.2 p=.000), a desire to support traditional bookshops (49.0% vs 36.7% CS=11.6 p=.001) and print being more enjoyable to handle and use (81.1% vs 70.1% CS=11.3 p=.001).

There are signs of an extremely weak correlation with print availability (41.3% vs 34.3% CS=3.8 p=.050) but this is on the cusp of statistical significance.
I asked only e-book readers about value, and did find a correlation: 21.7% of those who choose print because it is easier to share also choose print for better value, compared with only 10.0% of others, a moderately large and highly significant effect (CS=15.6, p=.000). Because choosing print for reasons of value is relatively rare (only 13.4% of all e-book readers agree) this link is noteworthy, but it remains a small proportion: less than a quarter of even those who value print for sharing agree. While print may have greater monetary value for those who resell books, and lower cost for those who buy secondhand, this remains a minor consideration to readers (if not minor to secondhand booksellers).

Print sharers were, perhaps predictably, more likely to obtain print books from sources predicated on sharing and exchange. But they were also more like to take advantage of some other sources. They were more likely to use secondhand bookshops (59.5% vs 45.5% of others, CS=14.4 p=.000) and libraries (62.9% vs 48.8% CS=14.7 p=.000), but also independent bookshops (59.1% vs 46.3%, CS=12.0 p=.001), and even more likely to receive books as gifts (57.9% vs 42.6% CS=17.3 p=.000) (Figure 62). (It is frivolous but tempting to speculate that friends and family might like to give them books as gifts because they will then share the books.)
While the appeal to book-sharers of secondhand bookshops and libraries is obvious (they are sources of shared and pre-owned books, as well as places to bring books they are ready to donate or sell in turn) the appeal of the independent bookshop is more subtle: half of print-sharers do choose print to support independent bookshops (as noted above) and are more likely to do so than those who do not value print sharing. This may speak to bookish values as part of a bookish self-image, as discussed below.
Those who value print for sharing have virtually no distinctive features in their motivations for choosing digital or in their sources of e-books or e-book genre choices. Those who value print sharing are slightly more likely to choose digital because the books they want are only available digitally (36.0% vs 25.5%, CS=7.3 p=.007) or when they find digital to be better value (56.6% vs 45.3%, CS=6.9 p=.009) but these are not strong effects. They are also very slightly less likely to choose digital because it is easier to read (15.3% vs 22.2%, but this is an extremely weak negative correlation (CS=3.9) and barely statistically significant (p=.048). They were no more or less likely to use any source of e-books other than libraries, where there was a slight positive correlation (30.7% vs 21.1% of others, CS=6.9 p=.009). They were very slightly more likely to read reference e-books (32.8% vs 25.3%, CS=3.9 p=.049) but this was an extremely weak effect and barely statistically significant. Notably, there were no links to the print publication status (e.g. digital version of print book, print original, didn’t check or don’t remember) of the last e-book they read, or to e-reading device usage.

_Elusive display_

Reading on screen means sacrificing the cultural capital that comes from public display of high-status literature. When one is reading on a non-dedicated device like a smartphone, one may sacrifice not only display of a given book but display of reading at all: ‘I’d have books on my phone and I’d read them while my wife was in the changing room at the mall or whatever. People think I’m texting but I’m just reading.’ (FG 3 participant 5).
One of the advantages conferred by personal print libraries and not matched by digital personal libraries is of course display of one’s collection. Reading is, to participants in my study and to the bookish circles they inhabit, both the foundation of and the window unto character: ‘tell me what you read and I’ll tell you who you are’. (Such quotes are, for people who linger in bookshops and book sites, beyond truisms and into the realm of mental furniture and even domestic furnishings: Heidegger’s version, like Ruskin’s precursor and Mauriac’s development, adorns countless posters, wall stickers, screen backgrounds, mugs, scatter cushions, etc.) As U.S. lawmakers put it in Senate Report stressing the importance of reading and viewing privacy (a report inspired, pragmatically, by a burst of press interest in the library loan and video rental records of politicians), ‘the selection of books that we choose to read’ is ‘at the core of any definition of personhood. They reveal our likes and dislikes, our interests and our whims. They say a great deal about our dreams and ambitions, our fears and our hopes. They reflect our individuality, and they describe us as people’ (Richards, 2013, p.695).

But ‘reflect’ and ‘describe’ are some distance from ‘define’. The observation that readers enjoy looking at each other’s bookshelves, and wish there were an equivalent activity for e-books, is almost as omnipresent as the observation that readers enjoy the smell of books. Qualitative data from this project confirms that to this group of readers, display of books is taken for granted, simply part of life, but as a representation of one’s reading invariably suspect: when curated too calculated (and pretentious) to be truly revealing, when not curated too raw to judge. Physical shelves can prompt ‘discussion’ (FG 2 participant 2), inspiring a social connection not about a single book, as in serendipitous public transport book conversations, but about one’s entire collection (and, potentially, one’s more rounded and complete book identity). As one put it, ‘you have people over and they like, look at your bookshelf and they ask you about stuff.'
Whereas ... I guess unless they’re like looking at your Kindle or whatever that really can’t come out’ (FG 2 participant 2).

The people I spoke to for this study overwhelmingly value books and reading, and display of books in any form – physical or digital, personal or public-facing – is something that tends to please them. As one put it, ‘I like books. I’m suspicious of places without books in them’ (Interview 1). But participants in this study actually spoke much more often of a personal than a public view: how bookshelves (physical or virtual) looked to themselves as the owners, rather than how they might impress visitors. Many descriptions of books that ‘look nice on the shelf’ (FG 1 participant 1) and ‘make shelves look good’ (Survey 2) don’t specify who is looking, the owner or a suitably impressed guest. The physical shelf was specifically noted as a better way to access one’s personal reading history, describing the visual review of a physical shelf as effective in a way that a digital search was not.

'Browsing a bookshelf is very different to browsing a screen. Owning a book allows you to browse your personal bookshelf easily letting the mood you are in select the book you wish to read.’ (Survey 2)

'[physical books] are also easier to organize as you can put them on shelf and see very clearly’ (Survey 1)

'It’s random, but I find it harder to remember what books I have in e-book form. Like with my physical books, not only do I know all the books that I own, but I know them almost because of where they are....Like if I want to read Lord of the
Rings again I know it’s on that shelf over there somewhere.’ (FG 6 participant 4)

Digital displays were singled out by several as poorly designed and ineffective for finding the book one wanted, sometimes requiring shifts between different e-reading apps and devices simply to find a book even if one has no intention of reading it on that device.

‘I also really don’t like the way the library is organised on my e-reader, because I feel like I have to flip through multiple pages in order to find the book I’m looking for. And I’m like, “Is it even in this category? Maybe I didn’t file it in this one. I don’t know.”’ (FG 6 participant 1)

‘I have all the e-reader apps on my phone, because I find it much easier to search on the phone, “Oh, yes, I have got that one. It’s that one.” And then I can get the e-reader out and find it on that, because the e-reader is a little more fiddly to use and type on.’ (FG 6 participant 3)

Such displays can be equally inadequate for giving an overview of one’s full collection and/or recent reading. Though some reported ‘[digital] helps me keep track of what I've read/bought’ (Survey 2), with file lists an aid to quantifying their reading, others found that the screen display made it more difficult to recall what they had read recently. Small cover images, or cover images detached from the e-book file, were a particular issue, with covers forgotten (and missed) and books then forgotten because without the identifying covers they were neither findable nor memorable.
P2: ‘In a physical copy because you see [the cover] every time you pick it up.’

P4: ‘Yes, absolutely, whereas I couldn’t tell you on the Kindle.’

P3: ‘Quite often with an eBook, with the Kindle, I don’t even know, can you see the cover?’ (FG 5)

‘I think the cover thing with that as well, in that I recognise the visual, what a book looks like, because of its cover, and I don’t, I just have the title. It’s harder to browse.’ (FG 6 participant 5)

‘What I do find difficult sometimes is to keep track of what I’ve actually got’

(Interview 2)

This leads to what was recognized as a common and vexing e-book problem: repurchasing. Interfaces were seen as working so poorly for recollection and display that many respondents recalled buying, or having gone to a sale page to buy, an e-book they had already bought and read. Without reminders from Amazon about past purchases, some readers might not realise it was a repurchase: ‘I’ll sometimes be on Amazon looking at something that’ll be recommended and I’ll be like, “I think I’ve read that”’ (FG 6 participant 4) or ‘I often get it when you get reviews, and say Amazon is giving this special offer and I’ll be, “Oh, that looks like an interesting book, but, oh, it says I purchased this six months ago”’ (FG 6 participant 3).

P7: ‘Yes, or you can go back and add it. You know when you buy the same book and it says...’
But visual access to a personal reading history is not only a matter of organisational practicality: digital shelves, while they have their uses, do not offer the same utility in terms of commemorating and celebrating one’s reading history and reading self. Several noted physical shelves as important for the sense of achievement they enjoy in recalling their reading, citing experiences of ‘looking at the shelf and saying [ticks finger against imaginary bookshelf] ‘I’ve read that one, I’ve read that one...’ (FG 1 participant 5) and ‘having it all on your shelf...and you can say, ‘I read that!’ (FG 2 participant 3).

‘I think it is partly to see. Because the ones that you have on your Kindle, it’s sort of like they exist in imaginary space [murmurs of agreement]. If you bother to scroll through the whole contents list you’ll see it again, but you normally don’t. Whereas if you have it, then it’s on a shelf, and you read it, even if you don’t read it you’ll see the spine occasionally and sort of remember.’ (FG 1 participant 3)

The personal digital shelf is not the only setting where display matters intensely even when the display is to oneself. Amazon recommendations are to some worse than a nuisance: disliked for their uselessness, but loathed for their inaccuracy, for the false image they project of one’s reading self. One participant found Amazon’s mistaken impression of him as a drug dealer amusing, but others found unsuitable book

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58 He had purchased a highly sensitive digital scale to weigh small amounts of artificial sweetener for sugar-free baking, and then found that Amazon was recommending paraphernalia such as 100-packs of tiny resealable plastic bags.
recommendations insulting, or actively offensive. Some found Amazon’s
‘bombard[ment]’ an irritant: excessive and not always relevant, as in this exchange in
focus group 5:

P7: ‘I go onto the Goodreads site. Again, Amazon do bombard you with...’

P5: ‘[exaggerated sing-song voice:] “If you’ve read this you might also like to
read this”, but that’s not always the case.’ (FG 5)

Some participants liked Amazon recommendations (FG 3 participant 6) or avoided them
because ‘they’re too tempting’ (FG 3 participant 4), an indication that they are well-
targeted at least some of the time. For others, however, irrelevant recommendations
provoked ‘hate’ (FG 3 participants 2, 1), largely because they were seen as a symptom
of a much larger problem: that Amazon thinks it knows its customers, but doesn’t.
Amazon was seen as using ‘obvious’ (FG 3 participant 2) and ‘corrupt[ed]’ metrics,
such as recent browsing or the time one takes to turn a page, to make broad assumptions
about its users: one’s taste, one’s reading speed, what ‘kind of person’ (FG 3 participant
1) one is. This offered constant reminders of how they were perceived by an
unaccountable, uncorrectable corporation that observes a fraction of their book-buying
and book-reading behavior and draws the wrong conclusions from what it sees.

P1: ‘I hate [Amazon recommendations].’

P2: ‘I hate them because they're so wrong most of the time.’

P6: ‘Really?’

P2: ‘Oh, yes. They’re terrible. They’re so obvious. Because sometimes – to do
something, some research, and it’s nothing to do with anything I’ll read
Industrial Tractor Farming or something, some character I needed to know.’
P5: ‘Yes; “You looked at Industrial Tractor Farming, now we have these for you”’.

P2: ‘And then, “Amazon recommends great tractors”’.

... 

P5: ‘Yes. They should look at the majority of what you’re browsing rather than a one-off which corrupts every recommendation they’re after.’

P1: ‘And sometimes it’s so insulting, isn’t it? You turn it off. It’s like, “Really? You think I’m that kind of person? That’s it, go on”.’ (FG 3)

To be subjected to constant scrutiny and evaluated by such crude means could be ‘embarrassing’ (FG 5 participant 5) because ‘they’re judging you’ (FG 5 participant 1):

P5: ‘The other thing I notice is that quite often I read in bed so I might read and fall asleep, the thing’s still on so it thinks you’ve taken an hour to read that page [laughter, agreement] and then it says you’ve got 17 hours left of the book. It turns out there is only 20 minutes...’ [lively laughter]

P8: ‘But it’s got you down as a slow reader!’

P1: ‘They’re judgmental aren’t they, they’re judging you.’

P8: ‘It is.’

P1: ‘It’s very judgmental.’

P5: ‘It’s embarrassing then.’ (FG 5)

It is notable how often participants refer to the Amazon recommendation algorithm as if it were a person: a ‘they’ or ‘you’ that can judge or insult, and inflict pain as though it were another human dismissing or disrespecting them. An image of the algorithm as a hostile intelligence may be invented, but the pain is real. The practical problems that could stem from the existence, on some distant server, of a false image of oneself, a false image that could be used against one not only in terms of reading
recommendations but in other aspects of life, is a concern confronted in attitudes towards print reading privacy.

**Print book privacy: reading without page-by-page tracking**

Like digital privacy, print privacy is at present a concern for only a small minority of readers. That, however, is where similarity between the two motivations ends. When asked their reasons for choosing print, only 12.2% of all readers agreed with ‘better for privacy – no one is tracking what I buy or when I read.’ Concern about this type of privacy did climb over the course of the four years of the survey, rising from 8.9% in 2014 to 13.9% in 2017, but not to a statistically significant degree (it remains to be seen whether high-profile digital privacy cases, such as the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica scandal, will lead to increased concern; this would be an exceedingly important topic for additional study or follow-up surveys) (Figure 63).
Figure 63: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', by year (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Concern over this type of privacy also did not vary significantly by country of residence, age or gender (the latter a sharp contrast with digital privacy). The lack of connection to age again defies ideas of digital natives as complacent about (or conversely, highly sensitized to) data sharing and online profiling compared to their digital immigrant elders.

What does correlate with desire for this kind of privacy is print-only reading. Nearly a quarter (23.6%) of print-only readers choose print for this reason, compared with only 8.5% of e-book readers, a very strong (CS=35.0) and highly significant (p=.000) effect (Figure 64).
Figure 64: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', print-only readers vs e-book readers

The strength of this relationship suggests that valuing this kind of privacy may be enough to drive readers away from e-books entirely; this is a possibility that could be explained through further focus groups and interviews with print-only readers or with readers who value this kind of privacy (while there were print-only readers in the focus groups and interviews in this study, they were few).

Resistance to surveillance and use of Amazon

However, for all their interest in freedom from monitoring of ‘what I buy’, those who choose print for reasons of privacy were no less likely to buy print books from Amazon. They are actually more likely to obtain print books from other online retailers (35.2% vs 22.3%, CS=8.7 p=.003) which can track purchases as well, though perhaps not comprehensively cross-referenced with non-book purchases to the same degree as Amazon (Figure 65). They are considerably more likely to take advantage of the decidedly un-tracked options of secondhand bookshops (72.2% vs 46.4%, CS=25.3 p=.000), a very strong correlation, somewhat more likely to take advantage of
independent bookshops (64.8% vs 47.9%, CS=10.8 p=.001), and slightly more likely to have received a print book as a gift (57.4% vs 45.6% CS=5.2 p=.022) (a very public alliance with a book, but one that has no tinge of corporate surveillance). There was no significant effect for chain bookshops, direct from publisher, or library.

Figure 65: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', by source of print books (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

In sharp contrast to digital privacy, which was an isolated value, print privacy is extremely strongly correlated with many other motivators. Very strong relationships
are seen with print having better selection (43.5% of print privacy-valuers agree, vs 12.7% of others, CS=65.6 p=.000), support for traditional bookshops (73.1% vs 35.8% CS=55.1 p=.000), print being easier to read (75.9% vs 45.5%, CS=35.1 p=.000), print being better for keeping as part of a personal library (90.7% vs 62.9% CS=32.8 p=.000), a print book being more enjoyable to handle and use (93.5% – near universal agreement – vs 70.5% CS=25.7 p=.000), print being better for gifts (72.2% vs 49.6% CS=19.4 p=.000) and fairly strong relationships with bibliophilia (52.8% vs 32.4% CS=17.3 p=.000), print being better for borrowing or buying secondhand (69.4% vs 51.2% CS=12.8 p=.000), and print being easier to share (43.7% vs 27.2% CS=12.3 p=.000) (Figure 66). This pattern aligns a desire for this kind of privacy with core ‘book experience’ values, including support for traditional bookshops, valuing a physical personal library, giving gifts, and bibliophilia, but also with a peak in ‘selection’ not seen in clusters around motivators like enjoyment of the physical book object. The magnified perception that print has a better selection of books may be linked to print privacy-valuers choice of retailers: if they use Amazon for e-book purchases even slightly less than their counterparts, they are spending less time with the largest and most comprehensive online retail shop.
Figure 66: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', correlation with other print motivators (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

The fact that these print privacy-valuers still buy print from Amazon, and in great numbers, but are much more likely to be print-only readers and eschew digital reading altogether, suggests that the freedom from monitoring ‘what I buy’ is less important than freedom from monitoring ‘when I read’: that distaste for Amazon’s and other e-book retailers individualized reader metrics is the real issue.
The strength of the correlations to bookish values is not simply due to the high proportion of print-only readers in the print privacy-valuing group. Looking only at e-book readers, every connection is still visible. Many effects are muted (by lower enthusiasm or simply the smaller sample size) but some, like borrowing/buying secondhand, are actually amplified (Figure 67).
Figure 67: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', correlation with other print motivators, e-book readers only (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

A further correlation that applies only to e-book readers is value: 28.1% of e-book readers who choose print for reasons of privacy also choose print because it is ‘cheaper/better value’, compared to 12.0% of others (CS=11.6 p=.001), a fairly strong and highly significant effect.
Links to digital reading values are less dramatic. Aside from fairly weak negative correlations with digital being easier to read (only 7.0% of print privacy-valuers agree, compared with 21.5% of other e-books readers, CS=6.7 p=.009) and digital being better for keeping as part of a personal library (7.0% vs 18.2%, CS=4.6 p=.032), there are no significant relationships (Figure 68).

Figure 68: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', correlation with digital motivators (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)
Print privacy-valuing e-book readers were slightly more likely to have read a reference e-book in the past 12 months (42.1% vs 26.0% CS=6.8 p=.009) but there were no other correlations with e-book genre choice.

There is only one correlation between valuing this form of privacy and device choice, and it is a very telling one: they are slightly less likely to have used a Kindle. Only four in ten e-book readers who value print privacy read on a Kindle in the past 12 months (40.4%) vs over half (55.1%) of other e-book readers (Figure 69). This is a weak effect (CS=4.5 p=.032) but revealing, adding as it does evidence that readers are more concerned with a corporate entity (as opposed to, say, a library) monitoring their reading than with a corporate entity monitoring their purchases. The fact that there is no link for non-Amazon e-ink readers, such as the (in the U.S.) corporate-linked Nook, further suggests that it may be Amazon, over and above other corporations, that readers are concerned about.
Figure 69: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', by device usage (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

This hypothesis is further supported by patterns in print privacy-valuing readers’ sources of e-books. The only significant correlations are with Amazon (which not only tracks page-level reading but as a major general retailer and tech company has the ability to link reading data to a broad purchasing/reading/viewing/Alexa-using profiles), and Project Gutenberg (which famously requires no sign-in to download books or read online, though the Project does of course have the usual ability of any website to track by IP address). These e-book readers are significantly less likely to have obtained an e-book from Amazon in the past 12 months (61.4% vs 77.2% of others, CS=7.1 p=.008) and more likely to have obtained an e-book from Project Gutenberg (47.4% vs 32.2% CS=6.2 p=.013) (Figure 70). These are not large effects, and it is important to keep in mind that a solid majority of privacy-minded e-book readers still use Amazon. But there are no effects for other sources that can track purchases, such as bookshops and
publishers, or for sources that can track loans and could track some usage (at least in theory, though they may not take advantage of the opportunity) such as libraries. This again isolates Amazon as a source of concern.

Figure 70: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', by source of e-books (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

Finally, e-book readers who value this type of privacy may, like e-book readers who enjoy the material object of a print book (a group with whom there is considerable overlap), be more likely to choose digital as a medium of last resort. Print privacy-valuing e-book readers were more likely to have read as their last e-book a digital original (22.8% vs 11.2% of others) and less likely to have read a digital version of a
print original (68.4% vs 77.6%. CS=9.8 p=.044 for both), a moderate but not especially significant effect (Figure 71).

Figure 71: Reasons for choosing print: 'better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read', by publication status of last e-book read

These factors – the singling-out of Amazon, the aversion to Kindle and Kindle app reading but not Amazon print buying, the correlation between concern for print privacy and other motivations, and the signs of an increase in concern about large corporations watching ‘what I buy’ but most especially ‘when I read’ – suggest that concern for intellectual privacy (Richards, 2015), may be emerging as a bookish trait in its own right. Though rooted in practical protections for individual records of viewing, borrowing, browsing, and web searching, and employed by law scholars such as Julie Cohen, Pauline Kim and William Geveran in arguments for expanding and updating a
wide range of privacy laws to address the disclosure risks presented by new
 technologies, Neil Richards notes that the concept has ‘special applicability to reading
 in general and social reading in particular’ (2013, p.691,704) because the freedom to
 read is inseparable from freedom of thought. Richards argues that intellectual privacy
 ‘protects our ability to think for ourselves, without worrying that other people might
 judge us based on what we read’ (2013, p.693) and ‘rests on the idea that new ideas
 often develop best away from the intense scrutiny of public exposure’ (2013, p.704).
 He enshrines books and reading as essential to democracy, and ‘free minds [as] the
 foundation of a free society’ and issues a stirring call to action in asking anyone who
 agrees on books’ importance to fight for reading privacy, because ‘surveillance of the
 activities of belief formation and idea generation can affect those activities profoundly
 and for the worse’ (2013, p.704) (noting, as he should, that librarians have defended this
 position for generations [2013, p.712]). While his argument for urgent changes in
 privacy law is not directed solely at bookish people, his arguments are predicated on the
 importance of books to society and hence are calculated to appeal to bookish listeners.
 My data support Richards’ arguments as to the special applicability of intellectual
 privacy theories to reading, but in identifying line-by-line tracking as an issue of greater
 concern to readers, my findings complicate his theories of private purchasing as always-
 better purchasing. Turow, Hennessy, Draper, Akanbi, and Virgilio have demonstrated
 that ‘party affiliation and political ideology impact how Americans feel about [everyday
 institutional surveillance] far more than do income, age, gender, and race/ethnicity’
 (2018, p.3) and in my own study demographics are also less significant than sentiments:
 beliefs and values around books, bookshops, and personal libraries are excellent
 predictors of a desire for print privacy, while age, gender have no predictive power at
 all. Tracking not only the level of interest in reading privacy, but the association
between interest in reading privacy and in bookish motivations, will be an essential area for continued research.

**Conclusion:**

In terms of image, public and self, the e-book functions primarily as an incomplete book. It cannot contribute to readerly identity as fully as can a print book because its own identity is in part obscured: not only to the subway ‘spy’ (Crown, 2011) but to the reader herself, as her reading history may be less visible and accessible to her, and her reading choices more difficult to meaningfully and intentionally share. At the same time, the granular experience of reading, from annotations to reading speed, is unprecedentedly visible to retailers. While most readers appear for now sanguine about print reading privacy, there are signs that concern has been rising between 2014 and 2017, and following the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data scandals of 2018 it is reasonable to ask whether it will rise further. Readers who object to this form of reading surveillance demonstrate particular concern about Amazon, singling it out as both especially crude and overt in its profiling (which some respondents find not only inconvenient but insulting, as if the company were a person being personally disrespectful). In a sense, in objecting to being defined as people by a subset of their purchases, they object to being reduced to part of a reader: incomplete people, judged according to their use of incomplete books. This makes Amazon for them a retailer to be avoided for digital (but not print) books. The desire for print privacy has no link to age or gender, but correlates strongly with other bookish values such as a desire to support traditional bookshops; the latter constellation of links underscores the degree to which a desire for this kind of privacy is itself a bookish value. The appeal to bookish
readers to resist tracking for the sake of the intellectual privacy of future generations may, if the proportion of readers concerned with this form of privacy continues to rise and continues to correlate with bookish values, add an additional reason to hew to print. The freedom that obscured paratext may present, allowing readers to access their books of choice in public without fear of teasing or embarrassment, comes at a high price, as anonymous reading denies readers the cultural capital their reading might accrue if it were in print and, for women in particular, invites observers to impose their own ideas of what a typical e-book is likely to be. The lower status of digital books can cost readers social capital simply for being seen with a dedicated device, and a non-dedicated device may hide book-reading altogether. Despite the image of e-reading devices as vital tools for furtive reading, perfect for guilty pleasures and naughty books, the actual importance of furtive reading as a motivator for choosing digital appears very low. The exaggerated image of the furtive reader, however, threatens to further perpetuate gendered stereotypes and distort not only understanding of digital reading but understanding of the audiences for specific books and of women’s reading in general. The empty space where some elements of the book’s paratext would be in a print edition can be filled, and not by the reader. It can serve as one kind of screen facing outward, where observers can project their ideas of what any particular ‘kind of person’ (a Kindle owner, a young woman, etc.) would read, and another kind facing inwards, projecting a stream of data towards retailers, who will continue to stockpile such data to profile and target individual readers, and will, unless restrained by refinements to the law, retain it indefinitely for future uses not yet imagined. How to tolerate that empty space is what bookish people must negotiate in order use e-books while maintaining an identity as a bookish person. Creating and maintaining an identity
as a book-lover – claiming or rejecting the mantle of ‘bibliophile’ – as a topic of the next chapter, on e-books and book-love.
Chapter 6: Love

In this final chapter I will examine the legitimacy and reputation of electronic novels though the lens of love. I will investigate readers’ experiences of powerful emotion and digital reading, considering how previously discussed dimensions of control, trust, pleasure and identity intersect for those novels that attain special status and with which a given reader establishes a meaningful and lasting relationship. I will explore love for reading devices as well as love for print, examine how love for books and book-related activity does and does not equate with identity as a bibliophile (or as a technophile), and consider what it means to feel real emotions for an e-novel that is only sometimes real.

The long history of book-love includes a long history of complicated emotional relationships with book technologies: reverence for a material object vying with a ‘language of insides and outsides’ that ‘makes any consciousness of the book’s material qualities signify moral shallowness’ (Price, 2013, p.3), and persistent anxiety about the ‘proper’ relationship with the ‘outsides’ of books (Ferris, 2004). Twenty first century readers are as active and innovative as their predecessors, and use the rapidly evolving menu of interlocking digital and print reading options for more than just access. New book technologies that ‘augment...and offer alternatives’ (McKitterick, 2003, p.20) provide new ways to read, and also new ways to form, deepen, and express relationships to the text. As discussed in Chapter 4 (pp.240-251) for some (but not all) readers digital interfaces present barriers to immersion and a sense of connection. But my study finds readers seeking ways to keep and memorialize books as ‘peculiarly interiorized objects that stray outside the metonymic logic of the souvenir’ (Ferris, 2004) and harness the menu of options to construct their own desired relationships with a given novel. This
section will examine emerging reader strategies, such as layering the affordances of print with those of an array of e-reading interfaces, and how readers strive to perform an ‘act of reading’ that ‘establishes an intimate, physical relationship in which all the senses have a part’ (Manguel, 1997, p.244). The key word, however, is ‘desired.’ Not every book demands a close relationship: distant, impersonal and transitory may perfectly describe what a reader wants from a given book, particularly if that book is a novel.

As noted in Chapter 3 (pp.174-181), conceptualising digital ownership as demi-ownership allows book collectors to control their level of obligation to a given text, keeping some accessible for reading but without requiring storage or special treatment. Novels are frequently given as an example of the kind of ‘throwaway’ (Chen and Granitz, 2012, p. 1224) reading that does not merit a place in permanent book collections. But novels are also very frequently given as examples of the kind of deeply beloved, personally meaningful texts that form the heart of a book collection, and that readers seek to access in multiple editions and formats. These ‘reread novels’ (Survey 1) are sometimes canonical (as with Don Quixote, FG 3 participant 5) or recently acclaimed (as with The Luminaries, FG 1 participant 3) texts, but sometimes childhood favourites, a ‘comfort thing’ where with a given novel ‘you just feel like dipping back into the old friend’ (FG 1 respondent 3). One respondent compared comfort reading to ‘comfort food, like macaroni cheese books’ (FG 4 respondent 2), inspiring raucous laughter and nods of recognition from the book-lovers sitting beside her in the group.
**Love and screens: readers’ account of emotions related to digital reading**

Digital reading can inspire powerful emotions. While a few respondents described e-books as ‘sterile’ (Survey 2) or ‘impersonal’ (Survey 2), implying that e-books are incapable of moving us deeply, participants’ accounts are in fact rich with emotional language, positive and negative. Many expressions of love, hate, ‘LIKE’ (Survey 1), etc. were attached to specific elements of what could be termed ‘the whole book experience’ (FG 4 participant 3). Examples include loving the action of handling a physical book, (Survey 1), seeing print books on a bookshelf (Survey 2), collecting signed editions (Survey 2), browsing in and buying from physical bookshops (Survey 1), or conversely ‘very much liking’ (Survey 4) the experience of reading on Kindle. Others, however, were instances where respondents discuss ‘lov[ing] the object for itself’ (FG 6 participant 4), in codex or e-reading device form. A tremendous number of respondents ‘love print books’ (Surveys 2, 4), ‘buy a lot of print books because [they] love them’ (Survey 2) and ‘appreciate both [print and digital] but [their] first love is the printed book’ (Survey 3).

A smaller but still significant population loves reading devices. This select group used equally ardent language, as with ‘I love my Kindle’ (Survey 2) or ‘my husband has become a convert and loves his e-reader’ (Survey 1). It was more common for respondents to express love for their own, individual devices – love for ‘mine’ or ‘his’ – but some were willing to extend their feelings to embrace the entire category, saying ‘I just love Kindles’ (FG 1 participant 1) the way that other respondents will say ‘I love printed media’ (Survey 1) or ‘I love print’ (Survey 3).
The reverse, expressing blanket loathing for an entire format, was highly unusual. The great majority of statements were positive, either in favour of (more often) print or (less often) digital, or neutral, insisting that ‘format is unimportant’ (Survey 2) or that they are ‘entirely print/digital agnostic’ (Survey 1). But when it did appear, hatred was exclusively for digital.

‘I think E-Books are horrible.’ (Survey 2)

‘e-books suck’ (Survey 3)

‘I hate ebooks :D’ (Survey 4) [emoticon hers]

Even when expressing strong dislike for certain aspects of print books, such as ‘strong, unpleasant smell of glue’ (FG 1 participant 3) or weight so excessive it caused pain for the reader (FG 4 participant 4),\(^59\) no one expressed a view that print books suck.

**Bibliophilia**

There is nothing unexpected, or even particularly modern, about the fact that not every person who loves books is ready to call herself a bibliophile. Since its origins in the 18\(^{th}\) century and rise to prominence in the first decades of the 19\(^{th}\) (Ferris, 2004) the label has bound together the best and the worst of relationships to the book. Modern definitions contrast the two: ‘a lover of books; a book-fancier’ (OED, 2018) or ‘having

\(^{59}\) Both inflammatory statements that drew censure from other participants; please see Chapter 5 for more on policing attitudes towards the material object of the print book.
a great or excessive love of books’ (Merriam-Webster, 2018). For every refined, cultivated, sensitive, cerebral individual with a great love, there sits beside a mirror image, the snobbish, ignorant, sentimental or mindlessly acquisitive individual made ridiculous by an excessive love: a ‘bibliomaniac’ (Dibdin, 1811, p.3) or ‘book fool’ (Ferris, 2004). While the term was originally applied to a small population of dedicated collectors, at a time of pre-industrial book production when high costs made all books, not just rare collectables, luxury items (Raven, 2014, p.154), its connotations changed and diversified as the price of books fell and more book-lovers (including more women) could define themselves as collectors without necessarily being part of a closely acquainted community of gentleman enthusiasts.

Many readers in this study held bookish values without wishing to share the bibliophile label. In addition to questions on bookish motivations (both intuitively obvious ones like enjoyment of print book objects and less obvious ones like privacy) my survey asked specifically about bibliophilia. Just over one third (35.0%) of respondents gave, as a reason for choosing print, ‘I would describe myself as a bibliophile’. Compared to other named factors, bookish and not, agreement with bibliophilia is low: out of eleven options given, it ranks eighth, between ‘the books I want aren’t always available electronically’ and print books being ‘easier to share’.

Focus group and interview contributions highlighted both the level of uncertainty regarding the meaning of the term and the resulting level of anxiety about alliance with it. Some simply embraced the term, wholeheartedly, without hesitation or qualification, saying ‘oh, yeah’ (Interview 2) or (following a unanimous round of ‘yes’) ‘I’d be interested to find a book group where they didn’t [call themselves bibliophiles]. It
would be a bit weird, wouldn’t it?’ (FG 5 participant 3). Others, however, were more cautious, responding with ‘probably’ (FG 2, participant 3), or protesting ‘I don’t even know if I know what [bibliophile] means’ (FG 2 participant 1) and requiring definitions before committing themselves.

‘Well, I don't know. [I hesitated] just because everyone hesitated. (Laughter) I was like, “Does ‘bibliophile’ mean something that I don’t know?” (Laughter) Is it something creepy?’ (FG 4 participant 3)

One participant, in the face of such uncertainty, backtracked from a confident ‘yes, definitely’ to a more timid ‘I mean, I would say I was, but like, express slight misgivings about, like… [trails off]’ (FG 2 participant 2). Some initial impressions were distinctly negative, e.g. ‘It’s so creepy, isn’t it? It’s a weird word’ (FG 1 respondent 3) or ‘I think it describes me, but I think it sounds a bit pretentious’ (FG 2 participant 2). But most were generally positive, aligning the term with bookish priorities participants could understand even when they did not share those priorities. Initial definitions varied widely. Some emphasized enjoyment of the physical object, while others emphasized owning and collecting books in any category ‘regardless of content’ (FG 6 participant 2). One participant narrowed this to collecting books ‘beyond novels’ (FG 3 participant 3), but most considered any kind of book collecting bibliophilic, as long as it involved suitably enormous quantities of books.

‘There’s a big ‘to be read’ pile that qualifies me, I think.’ (FG 4 participant 1)

An intriguing distinction, as it implies that novels are a special kind of book that even non-bookish people collect.
‘If you define a bibliophile as buried very deep under books that you’ve bought and then you’re struggling to keep up with all the books that you’ve bought that you need to finish reading, yes.’ (FG 4 participant 2)

‘You’ve built a pile and you sit on top of them like a dragon!’ (Laughter) (FG 4 participant 4)

Only one participant cited public image as a component, explaining that ‘I’m pretty sure I have somewhere a couple of reserve Twitter handles and things for Bitchy Bibliophile, so yes [I am a bibliophile]’ (FG 4 participant 4). But most defined it in terms of behaviour or beliefs, not outward-facing statements. Only one participant equated bibliophilia with antipathy for digital reading, stating that ‘I guess the very fact that I can’t bear to read e-books instead of actual books means yes’ (FG 3 participant 3). However, in this context ‘can’t bear’ actually meant ‘can and do bear, but prefer print’: she clarified later in the session that she did read e-books and while also identifying as a bibliophile.

Each group in turn effectively embarked on a negotiation, sometimes brief but sometimes protracted, about what ‘bibliophile’ meant. The result was generally an expansion of the definition: narrower individual contributions (e.g. that bibliophilia was about collecting art books rather than novels [FG 3 participant 3] or about smelling books [FG 1 participant 3]) combining to extend the term until it could cover some aspect of relationships with books that resonated with everyone in the group. Hence, while the majority of respondents could initially identity with the term, by the end of a
given session even groups where one or more individuals disagreed (e.g. ‘No, I wouldn’t use the term “bibliophile”.’ [FG 3 participant 2]) could come to a point of consensus (‘I think we all just went, “Yes”.’ [FG 3]).

Many focus group respondents took pains to make clear (which, in person, they could, qualifying and adding nuance in a way the survey respondents could not) that they were not the kind of bibliophiles ‘rather seduced by the exterior than interior’ (Dibdin, 1809, p.44).

‘...it’s love of stories, for me, more than the books themselves.’ (FG 1 respondent 3)

‘I love the stories and the objects.’ (FG 1 respondent 6)

‘I also love the stories more than the objects, but...different levels of love. You still love the object. I’m a bibliophile, but I’m more a - whatever the equivalent for stories is.’ (FG 1 respondent 1)

‘[I am] a “reading-ophile”.’ (FG 6 participant 5)

‘[I am] a readingophile!’ (Laughter) (FG 6 participant 4)

‘It’s the words, like the content, the information that’s in the book, rather than the book itself, I think.’ (FG 6 participant 2)
Such definitions split decisively from any narrow definition of a bibliophile as someone who collects rather than reads, and re-aligns the term with someone who loves the experience of reading a book as much or more than the experience of holding or admiring a book. Such a definition, privileging the ‘readingophile’ over the bibliophile, is not only sympathetic to e-book reading, it opens the door to use e-book reading to distance oneself from some of least attractive connotations of the bibliophilic image.

_E-books as ‘insides’ of books_

The signal quality of the ‘book-fool’, the book-fancier who loves books in the wrong way, has long been exemplified by someone who fixates on the ‘outsides of books’ (Ferris, 2004) when ‘due attention to the inside of books, and due contempt for the outside, is the proper relation between a man of sense and his books’ (Chesterfield, quoted in Price, 2013. p. 3). The trope of a book-lover as irrational in the face of a good binding is both a standing joke, a subject for ‘bantering’ and friendly teasing, and a grave accusation of improper relations. The (lightly) fictionalized characters in Dibdin’s expanded version of _Bibliomania_ (1811) are swift to defend themselves.

“‘I will frankly confess,” rejoined Lysander, “that I am an arrant BIBLIOMANIAC —that I love books dearly — that the very sight, touch, and, more, the perusal—”

“Hold, my friend,” again exclaimed Philemon, “you have renounced your profession — you talk of reading books — do BIBLIOMANIACS ever read books?”
... “Forgive,” rejoined Philemon, “my bantering strain. You know that, with yourself, I heartily love books; more from their content than their appearance.” (Dibdin, 1811, p. 3-4)

Price finds evidence of Victorian near-consensus that ‘not content to ignore the outsides of books, a good reader actively scorns them’ (2013, p.3). Ferris, however, qualifies that, noting the number of passionate readers who maintained that while the ‘inside’ was of course more important, only a philistine would deny the beauty of a good binding and the emotional connection of a reader to his personal, physical copy of a book that moved him: for ‘a real man of letters, the most fanciful bindings are often the emblems of his taste and feelings’ (D’Israeli, quoted in Ferris, 2004) (though this was in the days of commissioned binding, when such ‘emblems’ were not just choices between different editions but often bespoke tailoring for one’s books.) Bibliophiles have always in a sense walked a tightrope, wanting to care for ‘outsides’, but not too much; to show oneself to be a ‘man of sense’ (and it is a man, as discussed below), but also a man of taste and of feeling. Digital reading offers an opportunity to align oneself with the ‘proper’ sort of book-love. If a reader chooses to think of an e-book as part of a book, specifically the all-important ‘inside’, reading even one makes a statement. Just as the presence of some (but not too many) lowbrow books alongside the highbrow in an eclectic book collection allows her to demonstrate that she is a cultural omnivore (Peterson and Kern, 1996, pp. 905-6), not a snob (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015, p. 28), enjoyment of some (but not too many) digital books allows her to prove that she has the knowledge and taste to appreciate a print book’s material qualities without being
dependent on those qualities: she can appreciate a fine ‘inside’ whatever the presentation.

**Compatibility of bibliophilia with e-reading**

Bibliophilia is not the sole province of print-only readers. E-book readers are in fact slightly more likely to identify with the term than print-only readers (36.5% vs 30.4%), though the correlation is quite mild (CS=2.6) and for a sample of this size does not reach the level of statistical significance (p=.104). This is doubly striking as a number of bookish values, including enjoyment of the physical object and preference for print as better for keeping as part of a personal library, have strong positive correlations with print-only reading (please see Chapter 4, pp.204, and Chapter 3, pp.172, for more on these correlations.)

This raises the question of whether e-reading attracts those who already identify as bibliophiles, or whether e-reading may amplify, or even activate, such identification. Evidence suggests that the answer is both. Digital readers are, above all else, readers: numerous surveys have confirmed that the great majority of e-book readers are also print readers, and that who read in both formats read more books overall (Pew Internet, 2018; Perrin, 2016; Nielsen, 2016). Even if digital is not her preferred format, format flexibility can allow a keen reader can fit more books into her day: filling those last, frustratingly bookless minutes of a life with reading. However, as discussed in Chapter 5 (p.285) ‘“death of the book” debates’ (Murray, 2016, p.12) have for generations framed digital reading as the enemy of print reading, and called for e-book readers to explain themselves and their ‘disloyalty’ towards print culture. Such calls may drive
otherwise indifferent e-book readers towards a label that both proclaims their loyalty to print culture. These findings demonstrate how unrepresentative opinions like those of the focus group participant who equated bibliophilia with being unable to bear e-books actually are (FG 3 participant 3) and provides a sharp riposte to arguments that e-reading and bibliophilia are incompatible.

Identification as a bibliophile increased over the four years of the survey, rising from 26.9% in 2014 to a peak of 40.0% in 2016, before sinking to 37.1% in 2017 (Figure 72). This effect, however, fell just below the level of statistical significance (CS=7.4 p=.06), and would need a slightly larger sample size to confirm.

![Figure 72](image)

**Figure 72: Reasons for choosing print: 'I would describe myself as a bibliophile', by year (relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)**

Much of this increase, however, was due to the sharp increase in agreement by men. Women’s responses were highly stable across the four years (CS=.59 p=.898) while men’s levels of agreement nearly tripled between 2014 (13.2%) and 2016 (38.6%),
before falling to 31.5% in 2017 (still almost two and a half times greater than the 2014 figure) (Figure 73). The effect is reasonably strong (CS=11.8) and highly significant (p=.008).

Figure 73: Reasons for choosing print: 'I would describe myself as a bibliophile', by year and by gender

Across all years, women were significantly more likely to identify as bibliophiles than men (39.3% vs 26.1%, CS=15.0 p=.000). But viewing each year individually, in 2016 the gap had almost vanished (40.7% vs 38.6%, a statistically insignificant difference). Though it widened again in 2017 (41.2% vs 31.5%), it remains small compared to the gap seen in 2014. (Looking only at 2017, the 9.7% gap is too small to be statistically significant, with p=.179, but this is a much smaller group at n=192).
Any sign of reduction in gender differences on bibliophilic identity are highly intriguing. As Lisa Otty has explained, the positive and negative sides of bibliophilia have been presented, particularly in the early 20th century, as gendered: ‘bibliomania’ as feminine, or effeminate, and true connoisseurship as masculine (2014). This separation of the male ‘book-lover’ and the female ‘book-fool’ makes the early over-representation amongst avowed bibliophiles, and more recent near-parity, all the more interesting. It could be a point of honour for some female respondents to reclaim the term. Alternatively, it could be that the word ‘bibliophile’, and all the risk it brings, has been less frightening for women in the early years of mass e-reading: female readers are accustomed, and perhaps resigned, to ridicule and scolding (please see Chapter 5, pp.285-287, for further discussion of the lower status of women readers and texts and reading practices associated with women.) But another possible reason for a gap between women’s and men’s identification with the word ‘bibliophile’ is that its meaning in the digital reading era has been debated in highly gendered reading spaces, such as the book groups, online forums like Goodreads, and festival audiences that are typically dominated by women (Driscoll, 2014, p.29). (Emerging forums where analogue-lovers, especially the young, celebrate print books alongside vinyl records, typewriters, etc. could represent a male-dominated counterweight; the role of gender in bookish discourse in such forums would be a fascinating further area of research.)

There was no significant variation between UK and non-UK residents. Identification as a bibliophile varied significantly by age (CS=11.7 p=.039), but not in the inverted U-shape seen for some values such as choosing print for reasons of better selection (see Chapter 2, pp.122-123). Levels varied only slightly for readers under the age of 65, with a noticeable but not statistically significant dip (CS=5.6 p=.231 when looking only
at under 65s, n=842) between the ages of 35 and 54 (notably, the same generation that shows less enthusiasm for values such as choosing print as better for keeping as part of a personal library, and more faith in digital selection) and an average of 36.0% (Figure 74). Over the age of 65, however, they plummet to 16.2%, less than half of the levels for younger respondents. It is entirely possible that this is the effect of random chance, as the p value (.039) is not overwhelming. Further research, such as additional surveys or interviews with readers in the oldest age group, would be needed to a) confirm this unexpected effect and b) understand the reasons for it.

![Figure 74: Reasons for choosing print: 'I would describe myself as a bibliophile', by age](image)

Identification as a bibliophile correlated positively with almost every source of print books in the survey. Most correlations were strong, some extremely so: the strongest effect was for secondhand bookshops (65.2% vs 41.1% CS=46.5, p=.000) followed by gifts (61.3% vs 39.6% CS=38.1 p=.000) and independent bookshops (62.6% vs 43.2%
CS=30.2, p=.000) (Figure 75). (The strong correlation with gifts indicates that bibliophila is not just a matter of personal identity, but also public identity: friends know, and buy accordingly.) The exception was libraries. Avowed bibliophiles were only very slightly more likely than others to have obtained a print book from a library in the past 12 months (56.8% vs 50.9%, CS=2.8 p=.093) a weak effect below the level of statistical significance. While this is a slightly counterintuitive result, it could simply be the result of the vastly higher level of book consumption from every other print source, including gift. These avowed bibliophiles, who also highly value print for keeping as part of a personal library (see below), may be such active book collectors that book borrowing is less important, and even less feasible. Bibliophiles may commit to much time to their larger collections of owned books that they have little time left for borrowed ones. Even so, avowed bibliophiles’ levels of library use are average, not low (or only low compared to their heroic levels of bookshop, online bookshop, and gift use).
Figure 75: Reasons for choosing print: 'I would describe myself as a bibliophile’, by source of print books

Among e-book readers, avowed bibliophiles were not unusual in their choice of e-book genres or types. They were slightly more likely to have read a poetry e-book in the past 12 months (15.1% vs 8.9%, CS=6.0 p=.014) but this effect is not a strong one. There was no significant link with the print status of last e-book read. They were also extremely typical in their device use: other than a weak (CS=3.9) and barely significant (p=.047) link with using a non-Kindle e-ink reader in the past 12 months (15.5% of avowed bibliophiles did so, compared with 10.3% of others), there were no significant correlations. E-book reading avowed bibliophiles were also extremely typical when it came to sources of e-books: there were no significant links other than a slightly greater
likelihood of having obtained an e-book from Project Gutenberg in the past 12 months (38.4% of avowed bibliophiles vs 29.3% of others, CS=5.9 p=.015).

Avowed bibliophiles are very ordinary in terms of their e-book use, and only slightly more distinctive when it comes to attitudes towards e-books. While they are no different in views on digital as better value, being easier to obtain, being faster to obtain, having better selection, and being better for privacy, they stand out on some key bookish values. E-book reading avowed bibliophiles were somewhat less likely to choose digital because e-books are easier to read (13.1% vs 24.4% of others, CS=12.3 p=.000), or more enjoyable (3.7% vs 15.0%, CS=20.5 p=.000), and slightly less likely to choose digital as better for keeping as part of a personal library (12.7% vs 19.9%, CS=5.7 p=.017) (Figure 76).
Figure 76: Reasons for choosing print: ‘I would describe myself as a bibliophile’, correlation with digital motivators (column representing magnitude of +/- correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

They were slightly more likely, however, to choose digital for reasons of availability, or ‘the books I want aren’t always available in print’ (35.1% vs 24.6%, CS=8.4 p=.004); a hallmark of being driven to digital rather than drawn to digital. Fascinatingly, they were also more likely than others to identify as technophiles (12.2% vs 8.2%) though
this was a weak effect and slightly under the level of statistical significance (p=.087).
In contrast to attitudes such as finding print or digital better for keeping as part of a personal library, where the two preferences are almost mutually exclusive, it is not only possible but likely to be both a bibliophile and a technophile. This further challenges enduring ideas of e-reading as in opposition to print reading.

In sum, e-book reading avowed bibliophiles were mostly ordinary in their attitudes towards e-books, and where they differed the gaps were mild to moderate. In contrast, their attitudes towards print are highly divergent: positive in the extreme. Identifying as a bibliophile correlates positively with every other print value. It is the strength of the relationship that demonstrates what other values are the most bibliophilic. While links to choosing print because print books are more enjoyable to handle and use (CS=64.9) and because print is better for keeping as part of a personal library (CS=89.0) are extremely strong, the most ‘bibliophilic’ value is choosing print to support traditional bookshops (an overwhelming CS=100.2) (Figure 77).
Figure 77: Reasons for choosing print: ‘I would describe myself as a bibliophile’, correlation with other print motivators (column representing magnitude of +/-correlation, relationships below level of statistical significance in stripes)

‘Love’ and ‘LIKE’ were words many participants used in conjunction with bookshops, and many described the pleasure of browsing alongside the satisfaction of supporting a traditional physical shop.
'I LIKE to support bookshops’ (Survey 1)

‘While I embrace e-books as convenient and an inevitable advance, I lament the demise of print books and of bookstores.’ (Survey 1)

‘I love to support independent booksellers where possible’ (Survey 1)

‘There's a thrill of browsing in a second-hand bookshop and finding something you've never heard of before that I don't get from e-books.’ (Survey 3)

‘I love to browse!’ (Survey 4)

E-book reading avowed bibliophiles are for some aspects more ardent than print-only avowed bibliophiles. They are even more likely to choose print because it is better for borrowing or buying secondhand, better for giving as a gift, easier to share, and has better selection (a particularly telling measure, given the subjectivity of this view, as discussed in Chapter 2, p.119, has better selection) (Figure 78). Print-only bibliophiles, however, exceed e-book reading bibliophiles in their enthusiasm for the leading bookish values of print being more enjoyable, better for a personal library, and choosing print because they want to support traditional bookshops, as well as the emerging bookish value of privacy.
The single focus group participant who defined bibliophilia in terms of antipathy for digital reading did not speak for the majority. For most readers, loving print does not mean hating e-books. The special relationship avowed bibliophiles have with print (they are more likely to obtain print books from every source, they have drastically
amplified bookish values, etc.) is paired with a very unspecial relationship with digital: ordinary in their usage, mild in their opinions. Declaring love for print books, outsides and insides, is compatible with e-book reading. However, declaring love the insides of books carries its own kind of risk, especially for female readers, given the negative image of affective reading.

\textit{Emotional reading and ‘untrained’ readers}

Novels that inspire empathy and emotional connection may enjoy greater commercial success (Kean, 2007, p.x; Archer and Jockers, 2016, pp.52-55), ‘have a unique role to play in promoting and nurturing pro-social abilities’ (Mangen et al., 2018, p.2), and further the agendas of policy makers who hope that literary empathy will foster real-world altruism (Kean, 2007, p.vii-iii), but ‘disdain for the preferences of feeling readers pervades literary criticism’ (Kean, 2007, p.x). Despite the work of generations of scholars of reading, including Radway’s analysis of romance readership (1991), in questioning such a simple dichotomy, it remains easy to find examples where empathetic reading is casually set up as the antagonistic opposite of analytical reading (Kean, 2007, p.x), as in Jonathan Franzen’s account of rewriting the \textit{The Corrections} for the ‘open-minded but essentially untrained fiction reader’ (Studer and Takayoshi, 2013). In the absence of critical apparatus, and unable to cope with ‘difficulty’ (Studer and Takayoshi, 2013), Franzen’s untrained reader supposedly relies on lesser measures of a work’s quality, most especially emotional connection: feeling for the story and the story-world, and ‘empathy, sympathy, identification, and the reader’s “care” for fictional characters’ (Studer and Takayoshi, 2013). This confidence that emotional response is a separate and distinctly lower form of response to literature, and that the
unskilled reader does not without help ascend past this lower rung, is also gendered. As Studer and Takayoshi point out, the conflict between trained and untrained reading is dramatised in *The Corrections* in a showdown between a male literature professor, Chip Lambert, and a female student, Melissa; Franzen’s pivot to the mainstream was in essence a decision to ‘turn his back on readers like Chip Lambert and court readers like Melissa’ (2013). Longstanding stereotypes of women as emotional, and by definition irrational, beings incapable of analysis (of novels or anything else) (Flint, 1993, pp.30-31) live on in feminised middlebrow literary culture where modes of ‘sentimentality, empathy and therapy’ (Driscoll, 2016) characterise and stigmatise both emotional reading and the female readers associated with it. Jonathan Franzen’s feud with Oprah’s Book Club is so often mentioned as an example of literary elitism, and sexism in the ‘high-art literary tradition’ Franzen defined as his natural home, that it is possible to overlook the role that book-love played in making the Oprah audience, out of all possible mainstream audiences, so threatening to him. It was not just the gender of her studio audience, it was the genderedness of the studio discussion: its earnestness, its affect, its extension of the ‘sentimentality, empathy and therapy’ modes of daytime television to the discussion of books. The ‘readingophile’ who describes her own bibliophilia in terms of ‘love of stories [even] more than the books themselves’ is using the language of affect to define her relationship to the inside of a book, and this makes it easier for a critic (at least one who accepts a binary division) to consign her to the lower rung of untrained, non-analytical readers. For women readers, taking hold of the label of ‘bibliophile’ requires a measure of defiance in reclaiming it from its history of sexist use. It may also offer a counterweight: balancing the outside against the inside of a
book, the caricature of the book-fool against the caricature of the ‘open-minded but essentially untrained reader’.\textsuperscript{62}

\textit{Bibliophilia and Amazon}

Feeling for a text in digital form is further complicated by feeling for the device on which it is displayed, which can be intense (Hungerford, 2016, pp.30-31). This does not, however, map neatly to a strength of feeling based on device choice, or indeed, to device choice based on strength of feeling, or an easy equation by which novels on beloved iPhones are more treasured than novels on work laptops. This is in part because texts are not fixed to one device. As previously noted, most respondents in my survey (71.4\%) used two or more reading devices in the past 12 months, and regularly switch between devices based on location and intended use (for example, reading on a smartphone while standing for a train commute but switching to tablet or print on the sofa at home. Please see Chapter 4, pp.240-243, for more on accommodating digital reading.) But is also due in part to the fact that some beloved devices are linked to retailers, and these retailers may be distinctly unloved.

\textsuperscript{62} These excessively, incorrectly emotional readers invite further ridicule when they broadcast unseemly feelings for a novel or novelist. Public dislike is harmless to an author’s standing: as discussed in Chapter 5, the right enemies can be as important as the right friends, and the disapprobation of outsiders with low levels of cultural capital can elevate a work’s prestige, underscoring how its virtues are beyond the capacities of the uninitiated. But public affection presents risk, and online reading forums can emphasise affect over analysis. The ‘essentially untrained reader,’ working with social media designed for networking and connection where the currency is ‘likes’ (it is only very recently that social media has introduced ways to draw attention to a person or event without the visual of a thumbs-up or heart) is caught between ratings in stars and ratings in hearts.
While, as discussed, a number of readers love their Kindles, no one described love, or even mild liking, for Amazon. Rather, the reverse was true. While respondents use Amazon extensively and its lead over other sources of e-books remains overwhelming, their feelings for Amazon range from indifference to mild distaste to active loathing. (This stands in stark contrast to the love many respondents expressed for physical bookshops. While the occasional participant expressed dislike for aspects of traditional bookshops, such as ‘bookstore staff are useless’ [Survey 3], no one hated bookshops as a category the way some hate Amazon as a company.)

‘I hoped Amazon would lose money....I am now boycotting Amazon for print too. I am a writer and if Amazon keeps growing I will not be able to make a living’
(Survey 1)

‘Hate Amazon and avoid them religiously for all book purchases, print and electronic.’ (Survey 1)

Some express strongly negative feelings about themselves when they buy from Amazon:

‘I am a sucker when Amazon recommends something to me...’ (FG 3 respondent 1)

‘Well, I am Amazon’s dream customer because I read a review...on Amazon and, “okay, I’ll have that.”... So yes, [I’m] gullible, stupid...’ (FG 3 respondent 2)
I don’t like buying things from Amazon…. But I just get suckered in anyway, because I’m like, “Oh, look, £0.99.” (FG 6 participant 5)

Among respondents who dislike and disapprove of Amazon, buying on its terms can leave them feeling like a ‘sucker’, a ‘gullible’ chump. Aversion to Amazon does not lead readers as a whole to avoid Amazon: it is too ubiquitous, typically the most convenient and often (especially in the case of digital-only books from CreateSpace or an Amazon imprint) the only way of obtaining a given book. But respondents sometimes described themselves as something akin to accomplices in an assault on print culture: unprincipled and cheaply-bought, even weak. This intriguingly recalls accusations of disloyalty levelled at all e-book readers during the ‘e-book wars’: while no one in this study described her own e-book reading as contrary to the best interests of print or print culture, in this one specific way a few participants describe their own e-book purchasing as contrary to such interests. As alternatives to Amazon become more convenient, these participants will increasingly be able, should they wish, to boycott Amazon with minimal disruption to their reading lives.

Not only are Kindles linked to a widely disliked retailer, they do not appear to qualify as ‘technology’, if technology is defined as something that attracts technophiles.

Technophilia

Technophilia is a factor for almost one in ten (9.7%) survey respondents. Agreement was highly stable, showing no overall significant variation of over the four years of the survey, and did not vary by age (Figure 79). Men were moderately more likely to
identify as technophiles than women (14.5% of men vs 6.9% of women, CS=10.0 p=.002, a significant though not particularly strong effect) though this diverged intriguingly over the four years of the survey. Though, as noted, the overall level of agreement remained stable, this was due to rising levels of agreement by men and falling levels of agreement by women: in 2014, levels were virtually identical (8.1% of women and 8.0% of men), while by 2017 men were almost three times as likely to agree (4.9% of women vs 14.0% of men).

Figure 79: Reasons for choosing digital: 'I would describe myself as a technophile', by year and by gender

This result could be due to an overall increase in book-related enthusiasm among men, with the linked values of bibliophilia and technophilia rising in spite of a general trend away from technophilia; this general trend could be due the evolving image of Kindle and other e-ink readers as everyday tools rather than exciting and desirable technology
enticing to technophiles. (In this survey, women were significantly more likely than men to have read on a Kindle in the past 12 months, though it is a fairly weak effect: 58.2% of women vs 46.8% of men, CS=7.6 p=.006.) As discussed in Chapter 4, pp.212-14, since 2010 Amazon has split its Kindle range, selling feature-laden premium models such as the Voyage and Oasis alongside basic versions where advertising-free interfaces and even chargers are optional extras. But marginal advances such as improved waterproofing and Bluetooth connectivity for headphones are not breakthroughs on the level of e-ink: *Wired*, the technology magazine that enthusiastically reviewed prior models (Moynihan, 2014) described the 2017 Oasis as ‘just not different enough to justify the £229 starting price’ (Reynolds, 2017). Across all years, technophiles are more likely to use every form of reading device except e-ink readers. Technophilia correlates negatively with Kindle use (43.1% vs 55.0%, though this falls just under the level of statistical significance at CS=3.4 p=.066) (Figure 80). The link to non-Kindle e-ink readers (15.4% vs 11.9%) is positive but so small as to be effectively negligible (CS=0.7 p=.410). This contrasts with fairly strong links to tablet (78.5% vs 46.6% CS=23.8 p=.000) and smartphone (69.2% vs 42.3% CS=17.2 p=.000) reading, and a weaker link to desktop (27.7% vs 15.0% CS=7.0 p=.008) reading. While the links to laptop reading (52.3% vs 39.9%) is weak, it is only just under the level of statistical significance (CS=3.8 p=.053) and is a positive correlation. This leaves all e-ink readers, but especially the Kindle, isolated as uniquely unattractive to technophiles.
Figure 80: Reasons for choosing digital: ‘I would describe myself as a technophile’, by device use

The image of Kindle may also be a factor for the gap between UK and non-UK residents. Non-UK respondents were also significantly more likely to identify as technophiles (13.7% vs 6.3% of UK respondents, CS=10.3 p=.001). It is possible that where e-ink readers are less commonplace and/or more expensive, they may retain (slightly) more of an aura of exciting and desirable technology. This would require significant country-by-country research but would be a fascinating topic for further study.
There was no link between technophilia and print status of last e-book read. There were few links to e-book genres: other than a somewhat greater likelihood of having read a short fiction e-book in the past 12 months (66.2% of technophiles vs 48.8% of others, CS=7.1 p=.008), there were no significant correlations to e-book genres.

There was one notable link to source of e-books. Technophiles were slightly more likely to have obtained an e-book from Project Gutenberg (44.6% vs 31.1% of others, CS=4.7 p=.030), very slightly more likely to have obtained one from a non-Amazon online retailer (32.3% vs 21.4%, CS=4.0 p=.046), but, intriguingly, much more likely to have obtained one direct from the publisher (38.5% vs 14.5%, CS=24.1 p=.000). This could be an indication of greater tolerance for the often-protracted process of obtaining e-book files from publisher websites, where an exchange is rarely as smooth as an iTunes or Amazon one-click. But as technophiles are also significantly more likely to obtain print books direct from publishers (29.2% vs 16.1%, CS=7.0 p=.008) it is possible that technophiles have exceptionally strong relationships with at least some publishers. This intriguing link demands closer examination via further research with e-reading technophiles. Other than the connection to publishers, however, technophiles are less active consumers of print books. They are significantly less likely to have obtained a print book from a secondhand bookshop (30.8% vs 47.8% of others, CS=6.8 p=.009) or library (36.9% vs 53.4%, CS=6.4 p=.012) and appear less likely (though these correlations fall below the level of statistical significance) to have received print books as gifts or purchased print books from chain or independent bookshops. No technophiles, however, fell into the (small) category of e-book readers who read no e-books in the past 12 months.
Aside from instances where an avowed bibliophile may choose to think of an e-book as part of a book, in terms of legitimacy, a loved e-book is functioning for these respondents as real. The emotions inspired are real emotions. Print may be loved by a larger overall population, but the digital love is no less strong for being less commonplace. The powerful dislike a few respondents feel for e-books, or for e-book retailers, may prevent them ever encountering enough e-novels to fall in love with a novel read in that format (if they are boycotting Amazon, they are unlikely ever to fall in love with a novel presented as an .AZW file). The problems some respondents report in becoming immersed in an e-book may also stand in the way of a close relationship, though further research is needed before such an effect can be confirmed. But when participants report that ‘one of my favourite books I actually got for free on Amazon’ (FG 4 participant 2) or that that are ‘as likely to read or reread a favourite ‘amateur’ story/novel length work as a published pro work these days’ (Survey 4) it is clearly possible for not only an e-book, but a digital-only book to ascend to the status of a favourite ‘reread’ book.

Some of the actions readers identify as special, reserved for books that warrant close attention and ongoing connection, are difficult or impossible for digital-only books. To own, give, or handle and use in codex form a given novel, a reader may use digital audition to layer on the affordances of print, if that novel is available in a print edition. (This may entail paying twice for the same book, but paying twice has its own benefits, as I will discuss below in considering e-book patronage.) Without the option of print, however, there is still the valued option of personalisation. One such form of
personalisation is through annotation. For my participants, the idea of writing in books was contentious, as in these two exchanges from focus group 4.

P4: *Yes. Let me show you the book that I have with me today. This was one that I used at university and I’ve got over half the pages turned down at the corners. The highlighting wasn't me but the pencil notes were me. The highlighting doesn't bother me.*

...  

P2: *‘Oh, goodness. No.’*  

P4: *‘Look!’* [directing another participant’s attention to the annotated page]

P2: *‘No. Oh my God. I only did that to books I hated.’* (Laughter)

P4: *‘No, I love this one. I'd do it because even if you pass it onto someone else it's nice to see what they've enjoyed.’*  

P3: *‘Yes. I lend books to my mum and she finds it interesting because I write little notes sometimes. Not in all of my books but in some of them and she's like, “Oh, that's interesting. I wouldn't have thought of that.”’*  

...  

Moderator: *‘If you put notes down in a book like that, is it a sign that the book was especially good? It moved you to say something?’* (From FG 4)

P4: *‘Or especially bad.’*  

P3: *‘Yes, hopefully it’s not the other.’*  

P4: *‘I distinctly remember underlining something and just writing ‘no’ in the margin.’*  

For some, writing in print books is ‘definitely’ (FG 4) a sign of esteem, something they do to books they love and something they welcome from past readers. For others, it is taboo, and something they personally only do to books they despise. But in both cases it is a sign of strong feeling, even when the annotation involved ‘typ[ing] notes [on a
first generation keyboard Kindle] painstakingly!’ (FG 2 participant 3) rather than taking a pencil or pen to paper. In some cases it is a bridge to other readers, ‘the notes in the margins written by my great great grandfather or complete strangers’ (Survey 1) or Kindle Popular Highlights ‘where you can see other notes of people who wrote in it?...I loved that!’ (FG 2 participant 3). But annotation can as easily serve as a bridge to themselves in another time (Spacks, 2013, p.9).63

‘I write by hand on them, take notes of passages to re-read , they are memories attached to the object called book “where I bought it in which mood, at what moment of my life, they are a personal image of my evaluating centre of interest”. ’ (Survey 1)

‘a physical book can become an old friend. You see the places you’ve dogeared in the past, pages you marked as meaningful, your maiden name in the front cover because you’ve had it that long…’ (Survey 4)

Marking up books is an important action for readers to take for books that matter to them. But readers are split on whether annotation is facilitated by print. In just one year group, Survey 4, multiple write-in responses gave ease of annotation as a reason to choose print (e.g. ‘easier to highlight and take notes’ and ‘easier to take notes on them’) and as a reason to choose digital (e.g. ‘annotations and copy paste, especially for scholarly works easier to go digital’, ‘I like being able to search, add notes’ and ‘useful

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63 Given the extreme youth of the mass e-reading era, at present the notes some participants describe (annotations by great grandparents, what Spacks refers to as messages from one’s younger self, etc.) have no direct counterpart in e-books. But the stunning durability of personal information online, and determination of tech companies to monetise memories (as with Facebook or Google Photos pushing algorithm-generated ‘remember this day’ albums to users) indicate how easily a digital notation could be saved, repurposed, and inserted into an individual’s digital future.
to search and highlight’). No one expressed hesitation about writing in digital books (one cannot, when notes and comments are held in a separate file from the text, truly deface an e-book) but forms of annotation like Amazon Kindle highlights cross a line between writing in books and writing about books.

Amazon has pushed its ‘highlights’ feature aggressively, but emphasised its use as a connection between readers: ‘popular highlights’ making everyone’s copies more like, not allowing one reader to make her copy distinctive and personal to her. But if the purpose of this type of marginalia is in fact to broadcast one’s opinions, broadcasting one’s opinions is another key strategy for getting closer to a novel.

Talking about a book, in person or on social media, is ostensibly a format-neutral strategy: unless one is in a book group where audiobooks are taboo, it is no one’s business whether the book is encountered on paper, on screen or via headphones. That said, the attachment and recollection gap noted in Chapter 4 (pp.244-5) where some (but not all) readers reported that they did not feel they ‘know…fully’ (FG 1 participant 5) or completely ‘absorb/remember’ (Survey 4) e-books, may make it that much more difficult for a digital-only book to move them the way they need to be moved before they write a book review (another sign of strong feeling, good or bad, according to my respondents), blog post, Goodreads comment, or tweet. But once over that obstacle, one can write oneself closer to a novel whatever its format.64

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64 The ultimate in writing out of feeling is perhaps fan fiction, but much more research is needed to understand how feeling for a particular fandom interacts with feeling for print, and whether anything like the same rules apply to transmedia fandoms.
One potential strategy for building a closer relationship to a digital novel through customisation may be completely futile: altering the font. Results from the pilot font experiment suggest that readers responses to font are highly pragmatic and almost devoid of emotional response.

**Pilot font experiment**

As discussed in the Methodology (see Chapter 1, pp.69-73) the pilot font experiment put to the test theories that font itself might inspire strong emotional response for reading on screen. ‘It is an intuitive maxim in advertising that typefaces have personas and can manipulate word meaning’ (Juni and Gross, 2008, p.35) but research on emotional response to on-screen fonts is at the earliest stages. As Lucida designer Charles Bigelow points out, the great majority of typography research is based on print; this is due in part to the notorious difficulty of studying e-reading device font effects (Wilson, 2016) and in part to a fear that examining digital typeface is futile when e-book readers can customise fonts. But if pre-Kindle indications are correct and typeface ‘personality’ is meaningful in e-reading (Shaikh, Chaparro, and Fox, 2006), font customisation might give readers extraordinary power to customise their own emotional responses – and potentially to overcome suspected barriers to engagement for texts read on screen (Mangen, 2016; Mangen and Kuiken, 2014). This pilot experiment resurrects aspects of a largely forgotten print-era experiment on typeface and emotional response, adapting them for 21st century applications.

In the pilot font experiment a group of students viewed 1,000 word novel excerpts on screen. The fiction was presented as eight non-reflowable PDF files: two novels, each
presented in four fonts (For further detail on the experiment, please see Chapter 1, Methodology, pp.69-73).65

While participants ranked the fonts in order of preference, saying which was best for *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and for *Diana of the Crossways*, what was most revealing was the reasons participants gave for their rankings. Burt, Cooper and Martin used such reasons (which they termed ‘introspections’) in 1955 to distinguish between ‘emotional’ and other rationales. They categorised their participants’ reasons as ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’. ‘Objective’ reasons focussed on physical characteristics of the font, i.e. ‘the S and J are far too narrow’ (Burt, Cooper and Martin, 1955, p.40). (Confusingly, Burt, Cooper and Martin include as ‘objective’ reasons that are plainly stated as personal preference or ‘my own ideal’, as with ‘every letter strikes you as well-proportioned’ [1955, p.40]. But although it is difficult to imagine a modern researcher titling categories in quite that way, it is still possible to use the categories in grouping responses in my own pilot experiment.) ‘Subjective’ reasons were split into ‘associative’, ‘anthropomorphic’, and ‘emotional’ subcategories. The associative category is defined by ‘aptness’ (1955, p.40) and perceived suitability for a particular kind of text (for example, ‘mathematical work’ [1955, p.39]), typically drawing on personal experience and knowledge of customs and norms. The anthropomorphic category held reasons that ascribed to a given font ‘personality’ characteristics such as ‘whimsical’, ‘genteel’, ‘intellectual’ or ‘cold’ (1955, p.40). Finally, the emotional category was reserved for fonts that inspired emotions in the reader: not which emotions (which could be positive or negative) or whether the emotions were considered

65 The results presented here are those most relevant to this dissertation chapter. A comprehensive presentation of results will follow in a separate conference paper in 2019.
appropriate to the text, but whether they inspired emotions at all. Burt, Cooper and Martin gave as examples of emotional reasons ‘restful and soothing’, ‘irritating!’ and ‘it makes me giddy to read it’ (1955, p.40).

The vast majority of responses in my own experiment were what Burt, Cooper and Martin would have classed as ‘objective’: judgments regarding observable characteristics of the font, and how these characteristics made a given font best or worst for either novel. ‘Clear’ was by far the most common praise, followed by ‘easy to read’; however, different participants awarded the honours of ‘clear’ and ‘easy to read’ to different fonts. (These ‘objective’ measures are still personal, and what is clear and easy for one person is not necessarily so for another.) Some comments gave specifics, noting spacing between letters (e.g. ‘the way in which letters are merging’ given as a reason to rank Garamond in last place), thickness of line (e.g. ‘bold enough to see easily’ [Verdana] or ‘faded, wispy’ [Garamond]), etc. as reasons for clarity or for lack of clarity.

Only a minority of responses from my pilot experiment could be placed in Burt, Cooper and Martin’s ‘subjective’ category, and there almost entirely in the associative category. Two participants described fonts as wrong for both novels because they were ‘more like a website font’ (Verdana) or ‘better for blog’ (Garamond) (it is extremely interesting that the same criticism was made of sans serif and serif fonts by different individuals). Another described the Times New Roman sample as ‘like a novel’, and stated that ‘Times feels right for a book’. One participant went further and rated the fonts according to their suitability for Harry Potter, rating Arial in last place because it was ‘clinical and unpleasant to read’ and ‘does not suit HP atmosphere’. A very few could
be classed in the anthropomorphic category. Examples from my own experiment would be participants ranking a font high because it was ‘less pretentious’ (Verdana), ‘scholarly’ (Verdana) (though this could also be classed as an associative reason) or (as noted above) ‘clinical’ (Arial). The sole example in my experiment of anything that could potentially be classed as an ‘emotional’ reason was a single description of Times New Roman as ‘stimulating’: more a sensation than an emotion, and not, it would seem, an especially positive one, as that participant only ranked Times New Roman as second best.

There was also minimal variation, in terms of what was appropriate or why, for a novel to which they had no emotional attachment and a novel to which they have much. The Harry Potter novel proved, as predicted, a suitable text for investigating beloved novels. The Harry Potter series was mentioned frequently in focus groups as an example of books that mattered deeply and stood out in respondents’ reading histories, e.g. continuing to read Harry Potter fan fiction (FG 1 participant 2) and fondly recalling staying up all night to read new novels in the series the moment they were available (FG 2 participant 1), sometimes in the form of an illegally photocopied pre-release copy (FG 2 participant 3). In this pilot font experiment, 12.5% of participants (who had not been forewarned about the experiment) arrived on site in Harry Potter t-shirts. Participants were universally aware of the novel: all had read it, several cited it as a favourite in discussion or on the forms, and all identified it effortlessly. When I asked at what point they had identified it as a Harry Potter novel (after the first page, after the first paragraph, etc.) I discovered that many of them had identified it before opening the file: the PDF file name included the initials ‘HP’. As one respondent put it, ‘it said HP…what else could it be?’. But this depth of existing relationship did not yield
rankings, or reasons, unlike those applied to the obscure Victorian novel. The majority of participants (9 out of 16) gave identical rankings for the two novels. Those who did have any difference in ranking between the two novels typically transposed one pair, often one serif font for the other or one sans serif font for the other. The single participant, noted above, who ranked Arial in last place because it did not ‘suit’ Harry Potter also ranked Arial last for Diana of the Crossways, describing Arial as ‘out of place for a novel’.

The single mention of love in the font experiment was not about love for a font, or love inspired by a font, but love for a novel. One participant was forgiving of the shortcomings of the lowest-ranked Harry Potter font (Garamond), deeming it ‘still alright [sic]. Most likely because I love the book.’ It was feeling for a book that affected response to the font, not the other way around.

Burt and his co-authors were seeking potential effects of typeface on reception of a text. However, applying aspects of their research methodology to this pilot experiment on digital reading provides initial evidence that effects are few and, where present, more pragmatic than emotional, focussed on clarity and ease of reading rather than enhancing or directing emotional response to the text. While as a pilot this can only provide indicative results, it does not suggest that font customisation is a likely tool for readers seeing to customise their own emotional responses or overcome barriers to engagement for texts read on screen.
\textit{Patronage}

But if novel readers can own themselves closer, customise themselves closer (though not by changing font settings), and write themselves closer to a given novel, there is one way of deepening a relationship that can be quite different for a novel on screen: spending oneself closer, but not in the manner of a typical product purchase. What readers receive in exchange for financial investment in book relationships is less of the privileges and satisfactions of a customer and more of the privileges and satisfactions of a patron.

Buying an e-book is not pleasant. It may be quick and easy, but it is unsatisfying.

\begin{quote}
\textit{‘It’s not as...special? You know when you go into a bookshop and buy a book, and you get it home and you’re really excited (agreement)... [and] when you get a book through the post, that’s really exciting? Whereas downloading a book is just like...mmmmmmugh.’} (FG 1 respondent 1)
\end{quote}

Buying is often unnecessary, if one does not mind piracy. (And, as discussed in Chapter 2, pp.129-134, many respondents in my study do not.) And buying is, in many ways, futile. Conditional use licenses do not confer either the same rights or the same feeling as print ownership (see Chapter 2, pp.150-151). The feeling of being taken advantage of as a customer makes readers describe themselves as ‘sucker[s]’ (FG 3 participant 1), ‘gullible’ (FG 3 participant 2) and outsmarted (‘book-fools’ of a very different kind).

Readers can instead reframe their e-book payments as effectively ‘donation’ (Hyde, 1983, p.xiv), reciprocal offerings for an artist’s gift, and the transaction as a gift.
exchange rather than a commercial arrangement. Freely-given support for art and for artists establishes a profound but very different relationship between creator and reader (Hyde, 1983, p.xiv-xv). (Thinking of book transactions in this way brings to book buying some of the feeling of book giving, and the connection it forges between two readers. Please see Chapter 3, pp.163-167, for more on book gifts.)

P2: [Do I see payment for an e-book as patronage] ‘Yes.’

P4: ‘Yes, definitely.’

P3: ‘Yes, definitely.’ (FG 4)

This idea of spending one’s way closer to a text also helps explain digital audition: not so much buying twice as contributing twice.

Savvy authors and publishers are very explicitly tapping into this sentiment, and not just via non-book-specific creator sponsorship platforms such as Kickstarter (which uses an online system to allow members of the public to commit to pre-funding individual projects such as games, music, or films, which are only made, and the patrons only charged, if a funding goal is met) or Patreon (which uses a similar online system but takes pledges to an individual creator rather than a creative project). Unbound’s business model allows reader/patrons to take part, via pre-publication commitments of support, from the point of commissioning, and offers levels of involvement. Early commitment allows select patrons to literally write themselves into the book, listed in the first edition (Unbound, 2018) like eighteenth century subscribers. The range of pledge options typically includes print editions (as well as premium packages that bundle hardcover print copies with collectables and experiences such as signed
bookplates, sets of bookmarks, enamel pins, or lunch with the author) but also e-book, with one’s name included in only the digital edition. Sellers like Humble Bundle (noted by several survey respondents as a source of their e-books), a company that began sharing indie games but expanded into e-books and digital comics, invite users to ‘pay what you want’ (Humble Bundle, 2018), share the proceeds with charity, and post constantly updated leader boards of top contributors. But other authors are finding ingenious ways to bend existing commercial frameworks to address readers as potential patrons rather than potential customers. Hugh Howey, a self-publishing breakout star, hijacks the product description of a Kindle Singles e-book to directly address the reader/buyer and explain his creative aims, apologise for Amazon’s commercial ones, and to say ‘thank you’ (not ‘readers’, but ‘you’) ‘for all your support’ (Howey, 2014).

Despite its length, the passage is worth reproducing in full because what makes it notable is not its content but its context. The direct appeal is not before or after or tucked inside the product description, it is the product description, in its entirety: the connection between reader and author is what the supporter (not customer) gets for her money. Even within the ‘everything store’, authors and readers can replace the language of commercial exchange with the language of gift exchange.

‘This is a short story about a man seeking closure. It can be read in ten minutes. Please don’t purchase this expecting a novel for your dollar.

This story was written in a small cafe on the corner of Bleeker and Grove in New York City on Tuesday, May 27th. The idea came to me yesterday while walking across the Brooklyn Bridge. I saw the locks on several of the small cables on the bridge. I remembered my time in both London and Paris, taking pictures of all the love locks on bridges there. And I thought about all the couples those locks represent. I wondered how many are still together.
Maybe this story isn’t worth your dollar. If I could price a work on Amazon for less, I would. It is what it is. I hope this will be the first of many short pieces that I write and publish in a single day while recording what I’m thinking and where I am when I write them. For those who take the plunge, I hope you get your money’s worth. Thank you for all of your support.’ (Howey, 2014)

This form of direct bid for connection demonstrates not only how retail venues can be effectively hijacked by authors to further a patronage rather than a commercial relationship, but also how such patronage does not require a physical print object to build a reader-author relationship of this type. Support for a self-published, digital-only work, and indeed for a self-published, digital-first author, can use the same economic and emotive apparatus. When readers choose to become patrons of an e-story or e-novel on the same terms as they would a print novel, to accept that they are getting their ‘money’s worth’ in terms of relationships and emotional reward, the e-book is functioning as real.

**Conclusion**

Viewed through the lens of love, e-books and e-novels can function as parts of books, but also as real books. Print inspires deep feelings and passionate loyalty for many readers. Digital inspires these for fewer, but their love is no less real for being somewhat unusual. While aspects of print books and print book culture, such as the smell of a book or the staff of bookshops, may be disliked, no respondents in this study expressed hate for print books or print culture. Some respondents do hate e-books, as well as e-book retailers such as Amazon. That said, loathing of e-books is rare (much more rare than love of e-books and e-reading devices) and the most common stance
towards e-books among book lovers is tepid appreciation. Notably, e-reading is wholly compatible with a love of books: e-readers are in fact more likely to identify as bibliophiles than those who read books only in print (though this difference is small and below the level of statistical significance). Love for books and book culture is widespread, but embrace of the label bibliophile is not: only a third of participants in this study choose print because they identify as bibliophiles, in contrast with large majorities who choose print because they enjoy the material object, find print better for keeping as part of a personal library, and/or wish to support traditional bookshops.

What it means to be a bibliophile in the modern day is a matter for debate, though in the focus groups virtually all respondents were willing, after discussion, to subscribe to a term that was agreed to embrace aspects of collecting, ownership and enjoyment of the material print object. Many qualified the bibliophile definition to stress that while they loved the material object, they loved the contents of books more, describing themselves as ‘reading-ophile’s (FG 6 participants 5, 4) or ‘whatever the equivalent for stories is’ (FG 1 participant 1). Technophilia motivates only a small fraction of readers to choose digital. Technophiles are not for the most part distinctive in their reading and book-obtaining behaviour, but are especially drawn to only some reading technologies: they are much more likely to read on tablets and smartphones and slightly more likely to read on laptops and tablets, but are not drawn to Kindles and other e-ink readers. In having no claim on the affections of technophiles, it would appear that Kindles do not qualify as ‘technology’; they are perhaps now so humble and ubiquitous that a gadget-lover finds little that is exciting, compelling or new to tempt her. While further research is needed to confirm the effect (or lack of effect) of font on emotional responses to a digital novel, pilot experiment results suggest that font preferences are highly pragmatic and not due to feelings inspired by typeface. Book-lovers, whether or not they embrace
the label of bibliophile, can love e-reading devices, can love books they encounter on screen, and can, through avenues including digital audition, annotation and other forms of customization, and patronage, deepen their relationships with beloved e-novels. These strategies suggest ways in which the image and status of e-novels can be further shaped by bibliophiles’ needs, reverse engineering a role that continues to complement rather than undermine print culture. E-novels, like all e-books, are only sometimes real, but it is their very flexibility that makes them so valuable to book-lovers. They can be public or private, permanent or ephemeral, valuable or valueless, intimate or distant, depending on one’s usage and settings but also on one’s idea of what an e-book is; and, as demonstrated, that idea is highly adaptable and at least sometimes under one’s conscious control. And in those instances where digital simply cannot provide the same experience as print, as with feeling paper under one’s fingers or lifting a volume from a physical bookshop shelf, digital can be augmented with print, layering formats and forms of use. Shifting one’s conception of the nature of an e-book to suit one’s intended use, willing it to be the thing one desires (and then willing it to be something else when one’s desires change), goes to the heart of how readers integrate e-books into their broader reading lives, as I shall discuss in the next section, the dissertation conclusion.
Conclusion

In this dissertation I have examined e-book and e-novel value in terms of legitimacy. Focussing on novels, I pursued a primary research question on how an e-novel’s legitimacy is constituted by readers, as well as secondary research questions on whether bookness is a form of legitimacy that matters to e-novel readers, whether e-book bookness and e-book realness are stable concepts or different for different readers and/or in different contexts, and whether readers have different standards of bookness for novels compared with other categories of e-book. My findings demonstrate that e-novels are in fact a distinctive category within e-books where legitimacy is concerned, and that e-novel legitimacy is complex and unstable. Bookness is a form of legitimacy that matters to at least some readers at least some of the time, but neither bookness nor realness is essential in every circumstance. Moreover, readers move between ideas of what an e-book is, typically conceptualising their e-novels and e-books as real when realness is an asset, and unreal (fake, representative, or incomplete) when any particular form of unreality best suits their needs.

Summary of findings

In Chapter 2, on the theme of trust, I conclude that for this dimension e-novels function as unreal. They often function for readers as ersatz books, perceived as lacking certification by the publishing industry (whether or not these perceptions are accurate). From a paratextual theory perspective, however, they can alternatively function as digital proxies. Readers demanding professionalism are ostensibly willing to consider the possibility of excellence appearing in e-books, but receptiveness in theory may not
translate into receptiveness in practice. In evaluating individual e-books, readers transact with authors and publishers in some new and some familiar ways, continuing to draw on both peritextual and epitextual elements, demonstrating that the spatial dimension of paratext still exists for e-novels even if it functions very differently than for novels in print.

In Chapter 3, on the theme of control, I conclude that e-novels can in fact function for this dimension as real books, but alternatively as *ersatz* books or digital proxies. The deep-seated conviction, shared by many readers, that they have a natural right to own, keep, and give away e-books in the same way they do print books indicates a sense on a profound level that e-books are books. A sense of meaningful ownership can be seized, and re-appropriated, via principled resistance, digital audition, or a conscious decision to change one’s idea of what an e-book can be and accept a digital book collection as a personal library. However, pain-free book disposal and some forms of piracy favour instead a conception of the e-book as *ersatz* book, while the use of digital reading copies to meaningfully spend time with a distant or sacrosanct book collection calls for a digital proxy. This recasts e-books as integral to building a personal library, but not necessarily as components of that library. When an e-novel is used as a digital proxy, it operates more as a tool for reaching a book than as a book in its own right. The links between age and preferences for personal libraries, where interest in digital peaks among middle-aged respondents but interest in print peaks with the youngest respondents, suggest generational effects and potential future increases in preference for print.
In Chapter 4, on the theme of pleasure, I find that in terms of enjoyment e-novels function sometimes as real, but more often as incomplete books. Aesthetic pleasure in the material object emerges as something effectively exclusive to print, and tactile and sensory pleasure in handling the material object nearly so, with almost three quarters of survey respondents choosing print because they find print books more enjoyable to handle and use, and only one in ten choosing digital reading because they find an e-reading device more enjoyable in this regard. However, other forms of pleasure are preserved or even heightened. Many respondents describe reading as such a valued and integral part of their daily lives that it is essential to them to have a book, ready for reading, at every moment: the fear of being caught bookless is so real that having e-books available as emergency reading relieves anxiety as well as providing enjoyment. The ‘backup book’ eases painful ‘abibliophobia’ precisely because, in this light, the e-book is real: potentially an austere or unlovely book, but still a book. As with personal libraries, enjoyment of print versus enjoyment of digital is linked to age, and here the youngest respondents are the least enamoured of digital. While some ceremonies of reading such as physical bookshop browsing and putting aside time to relax on the sofa with a fat hardcover may be muted or even lost, interacting with literature on one’s own terms, choosing the available, adaptable, accommodating book, fosters a new kind of intimacy, and opens up new spaces for reading in participants’ lives. Qualitative findings demonstrate that a vocal minority of readers described digital interfaces as presenting a barrier that impedes immersion and sense of achievement. However, most respondents did not describe such a barrier, and follow-on surveys, or other quantitative research, would be needed to determine whether experiences of such barriers are rare or commonplace. There is some evidence that enjoyment of novels is less likely to be impeded than enjoyment of other types of e-book. For some participants, the
incomplete book is something that cannot thrive on its own, but for others, it can deliver key reading pleasures just as well as print.

In Chapter 5, on identity, I find that the e-novel is again sometimes real, but more often unreal because incomplete. It cannot contribute to readerly identity as fully as can a print novel because its own identity is obscured: it is less visible to friends and to observers in the reader’s physical environment, but also less visible to the reader herself. While her e-novels are to retailers uncomfortably and unprecedentedly visible, readers consider data gathered by retailers to be unrepresentative and misleading. Readers who object to retailer surveillance demonstrate particular concern about Amazon; the evidence that they avoid Amazon for e-book purchases but still use Amazon for print book purchases underscores the degree to which it is surveillance of page-by-page reading, not tracking of books purchased, that troubles them most intensely. Any freedom from peer scrutiny that coverless e-books may present comes at a high price, as anonymous reading denies readers the cultural capital their reading might accrue if it were in print and, for women in particular, invites observers to impose their own ideas of what a typical e-book is likely to be. Despite the image of e-reading devices as vital tools for furtive reading, the actual importance of furtive reading as a motivator for choosing digital appears very low. The exaggerated image of the furtive reader, however, threatens to further perpetuate gendered stereotypes and distort not only understanding of digital reading but understanding of the audiences for specific books and of women’s reading in general.

In Chapter 6, on the theme of love, I conclude that when it comes to emotion e-books and e-novels can function as incomplete books, but also as real books. Print inspires
deep feelings and passionate loyalty for many: numerous qualitative responses highlight love, either for print books themselves or for print-specific activities such as browsing physical bookshops. Qualitative responses expressing love for e-readers and e-books were far less frequent: an imbalance that recalls quantitative findings, where print books enjoyed enormous advantage over e-readers on dimensions such as enjoyment of the physical object and superiority for keeping as part of a personal library. That said, digital enthusiasts’ love is no less true for being somewhat unusual. While aspects of print books and print book culture, such as book-smell, may be disliked, no respondents in this study expressed hate for print books or print culture. Some respondents do hate e-books, as well as e-book retailers such as Amazon. That said, loathing of e-books is rare, and the most common stance towards e-books among book-lovers is tepid appreciation. Notably, e-reading is wholly compatible with a love of books: e-book readers are in fact more likely to identify as bibliophiles than those who read books only in print (though this difference is small and below the level of statistical significance for a survey sample of this size). What it means to be a bibliophile in the modern day is a matter for debate, though in the focus groups virtually all respondents were willing, after discussion, to align themselves with a term that was agreed to embrace aspects of collecting, ownership and enjoyment of the material print object. Many qualified the bibliophile definition to stress that while they loved the material object, they loved the contents of books more, describing themselves as ‘reading-ophile’s or ‘whatever the equivalent for stories is’. Technophilia motivates fewer than one tenth of readers to choose digital. Book-lovers, whether or not they embrace the label of bibliophile (and only a minority do embrace it), can love e-reading devices, can love books they encounter on screen, and can, through avenues including digital audition, annotation
and other forms of personalisation, and patronage, deepen their relationships with beloved e-novels.

These four conceptions of what an e-book is – a real book, an *ersatz book*, a digital proxy or an incomplete book – illuminate how the type of unrealness matters as much as the unrealness itself (Figure 81).

![Figure 81: Main conceptions of e-books: Real book, ersatz book, digital proxy, incomplete book](image)

Different conceptions further different agendas, and readers gain from being able to move between realness and unrealness, and back and forth between different forms of unrealness. The *ersatz book*, for example, is painless to discard and equally painless to steal. The digital proxy allows users to feel that they are spending time with their own cherished novels without hefting, transporting, or damaging personal print copies. The incomplete book can give, at least for some, experiences of absorptive reading pleasure, intimacy, and connection shorn of all that draws attention, takes up space, and makes demands of the reader or those around her. Any one conception of an e-book has
disadvantages: even the real book, for all its desirable attributes, presents opportunity costs in some situations. But moving between conceptions, even in the same reading situation or for the same book, offers the best of all worlds. Readers can, in effect, have their books and read them, too. The price is a degree of inconsistency, and evidence here indicates that readers are willing to accept that small price: to tolerate ambiguity, and to embrace contradiction rather than strive for tidiness. Given the rewards, it is easier to envision a future of continued flexible movement than it is to predict an outbreak of consistency; readers benefit from the instability.

The way that a given conception, such as the e-book as digital proxy, is relevant in multiple situations helps explain why these conceptions do not always map neatly to a binary, on/off grid of either bookness or realness: one cannot draw up four quadrants and assign ‘bookness no, realness yes’ to one conception.

The incomplete book, for example, cannot be mistaken for the real thing: it cannot simultaneously be part of a whole and that whole. But for readers who can become immersed in an e-novel, who feel as ‘lost in a book’ when reading on a Kindle as they do when reading a hardcover, that incomplete book can be said to have bookness. The role of the reader’s subjective experience means that incomplete books, ersatz books, and digital proxies are less three defined points on a grid than three clouds of thousands of small points on that grid, delineating zones that straddle borders.

Just as moving between conceptions requires comfort with a degree of inconsistency, the idea that an e-novel can attain bookness without first attaining realness requires a certain mental flexibility. But as Tea Uglow makes clear, it is possible to be an
enthusiastic consumer and creator of e-books (and even a Creative Director of a Google Creative Lab leading on pioneering Google Digital Editions projects) who regards e-books as books without conceding that e-books are real (Uglow, 2014). However counterintuitive the idea of bookness without realness might be, readers appear capable of holding it.

**Implications of research**

The present inability of e-books to consistently serve as real books presents e-novel creators with an immediate challenge and a longer-term question. The challenge lies in generating capital – economic, social or cultural – from e-novels when not only their value but their nature is in constant flux. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, evidence does not suggest that there some distinct population of readers that believes e-books to be always real, always enjoying bookness, or always equal in value to print novels: it is not a matter of separate camps. If it were, shrewd marketers might locate and cater to an ‘e-novels are real novels’ camp, and work to expand that camp by understanding and promoting its motivations and beliefs. The fact that it is the same readers, sometimes when reading the same novel, who see an e-novels as real or unreal, and enjoying or not enjoying bookness, as it suits their present needs, demands that any strategy address those present needs, and approach specific reading contexts and reading events, not just specific readers.

On the level of marketing, framing a given e-novel as a portable, unobtrusive part of a book (as contemporary Kindle marketing, with its iconography of park benches and beach totes, so often does) is not immediately compatible with framing it as real and
whole, or indeed as a handy digital proxy or undemanding ersatz book. While major publishers or retailers may have the data and the resources to microtarget advertising based on reading context and reading event (a crude but immediately feasible example would be using location data to speak differently to a reader on a speeding commuter train, a reader outside her usual country of residence, and a reader sitting in her own home), smaller operations may not. If so, independent publishers and retailers could be forced to choose, foregrounding one conception at the expense of others. On a deeper level, that of e-book and e-reading device design, the e-novel as product could be shaped to cater to certain needs, and hence conform to certain conceptions: either in committing to one path and accepting that readers will be fickle, or in attempting to create texts and devices capable of adaptation. Examples could include further advances in adaptable paratext, with changes controlled by the reader (as with customisable font) or controlled by the publisher (as with targeted advertisements overlaying a Kindle Original e-book on a basic-model Kindle). In this dissertation, I have discussed reader customisation efforts such as hacking e-book files to embed favoured cover images, as with Penguin Classics-inspired cover art for the Harry Potter series (see p.251-252). Netflix’s controversial practice of presenting the same film with different movie-poster visuals depending on customer viewing history and inferred demographics (for example, sometimes showing minor African-American characters as if they were central characters, but only to customers whom Netflix thinks may be African-American) (Iqbal, 2018) raises the possibility not only of targeted cover art, but other elements of peritext such as blurbs, scholarly prefaces, reading group guides, and preview chapters that influence reading of the text. A retailer like Amazon knows when a given customer reads the same e-novel twice, suggesting that it had become a rare ‘reread novel’. Similarly, it knows (as long as all the purchases were with Amazon)
when a given customer has bought an e-book followed by a print edition, suggesting either digital audition or gift, or print followed by an e-book edition, suggesting reading copy. The way that a retailer like Amazon could then tailor paratext to foreground a real book, *ersatz* book, incomplete book, or digital proxy conception opens up new possibilities for paratextual exchange – if authors and publishers are privy to the essential data.

The question facing e-novel creators is whether e-books represent a viable medium for their art. The idea that e-books can ever be real could be welcome news to novelists previously leery of e-only and or digital-first imprints. But the fact that any e-novels they make will not be consistently real, and can at any moment lose their bookness, may not satisfy the author, editor, designer, or artist called to create books. Is the e-novel real enough, book enough, to be her life’s work? A sense that she has created a functional part of a book (such as a text that fosters genuine narrative engagement and gives a true experience of being ‘lost in a book’ even if certain aspects of enjoyment of the physical object are, so to speak, out of reach) may be acceptable, but the sense that she has invested her hours and her identity into the making of an *ersatz* book may not. Whether contingent realness and unstable bookness can be enough may depend on a given creator’s combination of personal motivations: e.g., creating for the sake of profit, prestige, wide readership, professional recognition, what Hyde would recognise as a gift to the world (1983) or any proportion of these. But, as Uglow demonstrates, creators are not dependent on realness any more than bookness is dependent on realness. Creators may find the idea of parallel and coexisting conceptions of realness liberating and invigorating, opening up new creative possibilities for books that do not need to be real to be useful, valuable, important, meaningful, and loved.
For readers, implications include the degree to which experiences of realness are individual, contextualised, utilitarian, and specific. Just as creators need not strive in every case for realness as a necessary precondition for importance or meaning, readers need not grasp after it either. As consciously switching between conceptions allows readers to effectively make e-books real at will, the power appears to have shifted in this regard decisively from authors and publishers to readers. With digital audition, reading device choice, and paratextual customisation offering further opportunities to readers to consciously distance themselves from some texts and cultivate closer relationships to others, authors and publishers are more dependent than ever on negotiation with, rather than dictation to, the reader. But as the power of publishers wanes, the power of retailers may be increasing. If the act of purchase can indeed meaningfully foster feelings of connection to a given e-book (an important area for further research), exactly how Apple and Amazon and other major distributors frame the transaction – as purchase or (as with Kindle Unlimited) as loan – will have enormous influence on readers’ relationships to e-novels, and potentially to the entire genre of novels (much, perhaps, as Netflix and Amazon and Hulu exert influence on relationships not only to streaming television platforms but to the medium of television itself).

Limitations of this study

I achieved my objectives of 1) gathering original empirical data on reader conceptions over a period of years, 2) piloting different types of reading exercises to evaluate their viability, 3) critically examining the roles of e-novel bookness in context, and 4) discussing the implications of findings for the publishing industry and for other
participants in the digital communications circuit, but my study has definite limitations. One is in timeliness. In a time of rapid change, continuing to investigate these phenomena and revise and update theories in light of new developments in mass e-novel reading will be essential for maintaining accuracy and relevance (though even without continued investigation these data will remain valuable as historical data for future generations of researchers). A second is in the depth of investigation of genre. While genre considerations featured in focus groups and were a component of the paratext exercises, genre emerged as a factor of great potential importance and merits immediate follow-up study. A third is in my focus on readers rather than other participants in the communication circuit. Investigating how authors, editors, booksellers, etc. conceptualise e-books and constitute e-novel legitimacy in their professional capacities would be an ideal future direction for this research.

**Directions for future research**

This dissertation study points towards numerous directions for future research. Some would serve to confirm suspected effects for which the sample size here was insufficient for statistical confidence, such as links between youth and greater enjoyment of print (see p.203-204) and lesser enjoyment of reading devices (see p.219-220), the sharp drop in bibliophilia amongst readers over 65 (see p.356), and the unemotional pragmatism of digital font choices (see p. 378-382).

Others would require new data collection, in the form of new reading experiments, surveys, or interviews/focus groups on specific aspects touched upon but not explored in depth via the questions asked here. Questions most concerned with an in-depth
understanding of subjective experience could be best suited to qualitative data gathering via interview or focus groups. These include how conceptions of e-book legitimacy may affect e-book usage by readers with dyslexia and other visual impairments (see pp.243-248), whether the intimacy and reduced power differentials of some digital reading could reduce reverence or respect for a text (see p.254-256), the book collecting experiences of expatriates (see p.179), reading privacy as a bookish value, particularly for print-only readers, in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (see pp. 325-339), and how different kinds of bookish groups negotiate the modern meaning of ‘bibliophile’ (see p.355). The latter could also benefit from a more ethnographic approach that contrasts traditionally female-dominated groups (such as book groups) with more male-dominated groups (which might include print-lovers who are also lovers of vinyl records, vintage typewriters, etc. and gather around a shared enthusiasm for many forms of analogue media) and considering the possible role of such groups in the gap between women’s and men’s identification with the word ‘bibliophile’. New surveys could be the best choice for investigating the image of the Kindle in different countries as either exciting new technology or a commonplace, even dowdy, everyday tool (see p.372) and the potential link between technophilia and exceptionally strong relationships with at least some publishers (see p.373). A historical approach might best suit investigation of the ‘little magazine’ tradition of artisan publishing as a possible factor in differing experiences and expectations of short fiction vs novels (for example, in leading short fiction readers to be more attentive to matters of typography and layout) (see p.212). Finally, e-reading experiments of the kind piloted in this dissertation can be usefully applied in exploring additional aspects such as cover design, including commissioning cover designers to produce professional-quality guises and adapting the exercise for large-scale online experiments, partnering with CS/HCI colleagues to create
the online interface (see p. 69), investigating genre differences, particularly criteria readers apply to commercial fiction, ‘literary’ fiction and science fiction (see p. 105-106), and using further editions of the font exercise to confirm the Burt-guided methodology to continue examining font (see p. 378-382). A mixed methods approach, combining survey, experiments and qualitative data, would be ideal for study of the urgent commercial question, discussed above, regarding potential effects of purchase vs loan (or piracy) on relationships to e-novels (see p. 184) as well as the urgent creative question of how sometimes-real e-novels can or cannot serve as a meaningful and rewarding medium for authors, editors, and designers.

**Final remarks**

In producing a study of e-books where legitimacy is central, and in focussing on e-novels as the most popular form of e-book yet not always representative of e-books as a whole, my study addresses a gap in scholarship. My study makes an original contribution to knowledge by testing the viability of selected experiment designs, gathering empirical data on e-novel legitimacy – in many cases, the first empirical data on topics previously explored only via theory or anecdotal evidence – and by analysing these data to generate new theories that advance the state of the art.

Some findings harmonise with prior research and serve to confirm, update, and add nuance to existing thinking on e-books and e-reading. One such finding is the enduring role of the material print object: survey data quantifies its importance to readers, confirming that enjoyment in handling and using print is a primary motivation for choosing print books, identifying the web of relationships between this and other
motivations, and further confirming that there is no sign of decline in this preference over the four years of the survey. Qualitative data provides insight into the special role of appreciation of the material object in bookish groups, exposing materiality scepticism as a taboo subject in groups otherwise accepting of different opinions and forgiving of dissent. These findings deepen understanding of known phenomena.

Other findings, however, do not harmonise with prior research and instead challenge conventional thinking, offering fresh evidence and new perspectives. Problematised phenomena such as digital paratext, with its event dimension, and the accommodating book, adapting to the needs of the reader’s spouse or boss or child as much as the needs of the reader, demand a re-examination of the affordances of digital reading. Conclusions on preference for print among younger readers, particularly in terms of control, pleasure, and identity, represents a meaningful change from the landscape charted by key studies from the early 2000s. Findings on e-book piracy support prior research on the scale of piracy but challenge existing thinking as to motives: considering piracy as principled resistance (at least some of the time) has particular implications for publishers and retailers seeking to curb illegal downloads. Findings on the role of digital audition help to explain why format choices are not binary or permanent, and how vital patronage and the layering-on of formats can be to readers seeking to deepen relationships to chosen novels. Data on digital privacy powerfully refute conventional wisdom on furtive reading, allow fresh critique of the role of gender stereotypes in discourse on the topic, and offer an alternative viewpoint on the language of shame, guilt, and embarrassment as applied to digital reading.
The most important advancement beyond the state of the art is in identifying different conceptions of what an e-book is, and tracing how and why readers move between them. The roles and uses of the ersatz book, digital proxy, and incomplete book conceptions propose an entirely new framework for thinking about e-books and the roles they play in reading lives. I have uncovered important aspects of contemporary reading and made a contribution to a deeper understanding of the novel’s role and status, and its potential future in evolving literary culture.
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Appendix A: online survey questions

Introduction:

We’re studying e-book usage as part of a PhD research project at UCL. We would be very grateful for a few minutes of your time in completing an online survey about your reading - what you read, how you read it, and what you like about print books and e-books.

1. ‘Do you read e-books?’ [y/n]  
   ‘If no, the survey will take you to questions about your print reading. If yes, we’ll ask you about your digital reading as well.’

BRANCH 1: ‘yes’ to e-books:

2. ‘What kind of e-books have you read in the past 12 months?’ (Please select all you’ve read, or write in other kinds on the last line.)
   - Non-fiction (history, biography, business, etc.)
   - Short fiction
   - Poetry
   - Novels
   - Reference (manuals, encyclopaedias, etc.)
   - None - I haven’t read an e-book in the past 12 months
   - other (write in)

3. ‘Which of the following have you used for reading in the past 12 months? Please select all the devices you’ve used.’
   [Two columns: any e-book, e-novel]
   - Tablet (iPad, etc.)
   - Smartphone
   - Kindle
   - Other e-reader (Sony, Nook, etc.)
   - Laptop computer
   - Desktop computer
   - None - I haven’t read an e-book in the past 12 months
   - Other (please write in)

4. ‘How have you obtained your print books in the past 12 months? Please select all the options you’ve used.’
   [Two columns: any print book, print novels]
   - Chain bookshop (Waterstones, etc.)
   - Independent bookshop
   - Secondhand bookshop
5. ‘How have you obtained your e-books in the past 12 months? Please select all the options you’ve used.’
   o Chain bookshop (Waterstones, etc.)
   o Independent bookshop
   o Amazon
   o Other online retailer
   o Direct purchase from publisher
   o Gift
   o Library
   o Project Gutenberg or other online free source
   o Other (write in)

6. Was the last e-book you downloaded a:
   o Digital version of a print book (you could have chosen a printed copy)
   o Digital original (there was no printed copy to choose)
   o Didn’t check
   o Don’t remember

7. ‘We’re curious about why people use e-books or print. When you read digitally, what are your reasons? Please select all options that apply, and write in any you’d like to add.’
   o Cheaper/better value
   o Easier to read
   o Easier to obtain
   o Faster to obtain
   o A reading device is more enjoyable to handle and use
   o Better for keeping as part of a personal library
   o Better selection
   o I’d describe myself as a technophile
   o Better for privacy - no one can see what I’m reading
   o The books I want aren’t always available in print
   o Other (please write in)

8. ‘When you read in print, what are your reasons? Please select all options that apply, and write in any you’d like to add.’
Cheaper/better value
Easier to read
Easier to share
A printed book is more enjoyable to handle and use
Better for giving as a gift
Better for keeping as part of a personal library
Better for borrowing or buying secondhand
Better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read
Better selection
I’d describe myself as a bibliophile
I prefer to support physical bookshops
The books I want aren’t always available electronically
Other (please write in)

9. ‘Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your digital or print reading?’ [Write in.]

BRANCH 2: ‘No’ to e-books

2. ‘We’re curious about why people choose traditional books over digital alternatives. Why do you choose print?’ (Please select all the reasons that apply to you, or write in other reasons on the last line.

Easier to read
Easier to share
Better to give as a gift
Better for keeping as part of a personal library
Better for borrowing or buying secondhand
Better for privacy - no one is tracking what I buy or when I read
More enjoyable to handle and use
Better selection
I prefer to support traditional bookshops
I’d describe myself as a bibliophile
The books I want aren’t always available electronically
I don’t read books
Other (please write in)

3. ‘How have you obtained your print books in the past 12 months? Please select all the options you’ve used.’
[Two columns: any print book, print novel]
Chain bookshop (Waterstones, Barnes & Noble, etc.)
Independent bookshop
Secondhand bookshop
Amazon
Other online retailer
4. ‘Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your digital or print reading?’ [Write in.]

BOTH BRANCHES: Demographic questions

Thank you. We would like to ask a few demographic questions for sample balancing purposes. If you would prefer not to share this information with us, please check ‘decline to state.’

10. / 5. Your age:
   - Under 18 years
   - 18-25
   - 26-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+
   - Decline to state

11. / 6. Your gender:
   - Male
   - Female
   - Decline to state

12. / 7. Do you live in the UK?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Decline to state

13. / 8. We will be carrying out further interviews, focus groups and surveys as part of the research project. Would you be interested in taking part? Please give us your e-mail address if you would like more information about this next phase. (The email address you provide will be used for the sole and express purpose of this research. Such details will not be shared with any third party and will be stored securely and disposed of after processing has ceased.)

Thank you very much for completing our survey.

Screen grabs, showing how the survey appeared online (using a PC, taken 2.4.2015):
BRANCH 1: ‘Yes’ to e-books:
BRANCH 2: ‘No’ to e-books:
BOTH BRANCHES: Demographic questions
Appendix B: Pilot experiment phases 1 & 2, sample

participant information sheet, instructions and

response sheets

Digital Reading Focus Group
30th October, 2017

Dear [NAMES OF PARTICIPANTS],

Welcome to this focus group on digital reading. In a separate packet you’ll find an agenda for
the session and the response sheets you’ll use to record your impressions of four texts. We’ll
start with a brief exercise and move on to discussion. Please feel free to ask questions, get
refreshments and step out for comfort breaks at any time.

The session will be recorded for transcription and analysis. Your responses will be anonymous,
and no names will appear in published or otherwise disseminated results. This research is part
of a PhD at UCL supervised by Prof Claire Warwick and Dr Samantha Rayner and is covered by
the UCL Data Protection Registration, reference No Z6364106/2014/02/44, section 19,
research: social research.

To comply with good research practice, may I ask that you please indicate your consent below
and return this sheet to me? If there is anything that is not clear, if you would like more
information, or if at any point you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact me on
laura.dietz@anglia.ac.uk or laura.dietz.13@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for your time and for allowing the project to benefit from your
knowledge and insights.

Best,
Laura Dietz
laura.dietz@anglia.ac.uk
laura.dietz.13@ucl.ac.uk

I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the above information and understand
what my participation involves.

I consent to the recording and processing of my responses for the purposes of administering my
participation in the research. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly
confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

I understand that the findings of this research will be published, but that I will not be identified
by name in any such publication.
**Name:**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Agenda:**

6:30 p.m.: Welcome, introductions and instructions

6:35 p.m.: Warm up: first impressions of novels

6:55 p.m.: Discussion

7:15 p.m.: Final observations and close

**Instructions: ‘First impressions’: Evaluation of Novels (20 minutes)**

On the iBooks application of the iPad in front of you you’ll find 12,000 word samples of four new novels. We’ll ask you to start each one and record your immediate impressions on the attached response sheets. All titles, author names and other identifying items have been XXXXXed out. The novels are presented in no particular order - the numbers correspond to an alphabetical list of their authors.

With only 20 minutes to rate all four texts, each evaluation will by necessity be a snap judgement - this is precisely the kind of time-limited response we’re looking for. The moderator will keep track of time and prompt you to move on to the next sample. Please feel free to jot down notes as you go, but we’ll fill in the complete response sheets at the end.
Response sheet 1:  
Participant No. ______  
Participant Name: ______ -  

Sample 1 (First line: 'We are together, me and you, in the early morning mist. The ship canal shivers a wide arc …')

How would you categorise this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)
- Commercial fiction
- Literary fiction
- Genre fiction
- None of the above

Which of the following adjectives would you apply to this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)
- challenging
- derivative
- escapist
- experimental
- fun
- highbrow
- important
- light
- lowbrow
- middelbrow
- original
- relaxing
- rewarding
- serious
- significant
- worthy
- none of the above

Given the time, would you continue reading?  □ yes  □ no

How would you rate the novel, based on what you’ve read? (On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest.) ______
Sample 2 (First line: ‘“Here boy.” Although she couldn’t see him, Caro could hear the dog over her own laboured breathing …’)

How would you categorise this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)

☐ Commercial fiction
☐ Literary fiction
☐ Genre fiction
☐ None of the above

Which of the following adjectives would you apply to this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)

☐ challenging ☐ derivative
☐ escapist ☐ experimental
☐ fun ☐ highbrow
☐ important ☐ light
☐ lowbrow ☐ middlebrow
☐ original ☐ relaxing
☐ rewarding ☐ serious
☐ significant ☐ worthy
☐ none of the above

Given the time, would you continue reading?  ☐ yes  ☐ no

How would you rate the novel, based on what you’ve read? (On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest.)  _____
Response sheet 3:  
Participant No. ______
Participant Name: ______

Sample 3 (First line: ‘There is a raw moment before everything makes sense. An Eden of the brain...’)

How would you categorise this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)
  □ Commercial fiction  
  □ Literary fiction  
  □ Genre fiction  
  □ None of the above

Which of the following adjectives would you apply to this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)
  □ challenging  
  □ derivative  
  □ escapist  
  □ experimental  
  □ fun  
  □ highbrow  
  □ important  
  □ light  
  □ lowbrow  
  □ middlebrow  
  □ original  
  □ relaxing  
  □ rewarding  
  □ serious  
  □ significant  
  □ worthy  
  □ none of the above

Given the time, would you continue reading?  □ yes  □ no

How would you rate the novel, based on what you’ve read? (On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest.) ______
Sample 4 (First line: The deed was done. With Felix and Emma both delivered into their classrooms...)

How would you categorise this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)

- Commercial fiction
- Literary fiction
- Genre fiction
- None of the above

Which of the following adjectives would you apply to this novel, based on what you’ve read? (Please tick all that apply:)

- challenging
- escapist
- fun
- important
- lowbrow
- original
- rewarding
- significant
- none of the above

Given the time, would you continue reading?  □ yes  □ no

How would you rate the novel, based on what you’ve read? (On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest.)  _____
Appendix C: Pilot experiment phases 3, sample participant information sheet, instructions and response sheets

FONT AND DIGITAL NOVELS

Thank you for taking part in this experiment! Your insights will help us to better understand the role of font in digital reading. We would like to ask you to:

1. Get on Canvas and go to the just-published module ‘Font Experiment’. Use any phone, tablet, computer, or other device you like to use for screen reading. (If you don’t have a device with you, please share with a classmate.)

2. You will find eight PDF files: four of one novel (DC v1-4) and four of another novel (HP v1-4).

3. Hit ‘download PDF’ to view most clearly (the ‘preview’ mode can be a little grainy)

4. Please look at all eight files and rank the versions each novel (use forms below):
   a. Which font is best for DC? Which is worst? Why?
   b. Which font is best for HP? Which is worst? Why?

5. When you’re done, please use the post-its for your key responses, to stick on the wall (one for DC, one for HP). Change your mind? No problem. Take down, change, or add ideas as needed. Use as many post-its as you like!

We’ll do the reading and post-it writing individually so we can get everyone’s first impressions. When everyone is done we’ll gather for a group discussion.

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<td>Worst</td>
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</table>

This research is part of a project at UCL with Prof Claire Warwick and Dr Samantha Rayner and is covered by the UCL Data Protection Registration, reference No Z6364106/2014/02/44, section 19, research: social research.

To comply with good research practice, may I ask that you please indicate your consent below and return this sheet to me? If anything is unclear, if you would like more information, or if at any point you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact me on laura.dietz@anglia.ac.uk.

Best,
Laura Dietz
laura.dietz@anglia.ac.uk

I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the above information and understand what my participation involves.

I consent to the recording and processing of my responses for the purposes of administering my participation in the research. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

I understand that the findings of this research will be published, but that I will not be identified by name in any such publication.

Name:

Signed:

Date:
Appendix D: sample front matter guises from phase 1 of pilot experiment


[Title]

[Author]
For XXXX
Guise B: digital only novel from major mainstream publisher:

[Title]

[Author]

[IMPRINT logo]
New York
To XXXX
For XXXXX
Guise D: anonymous – no front matter of any kind
Appendix E: sample page design guises from phase 2 of pilot experiment

Guise 1: mainstream (using Sample 2)

Jerusalem is a bad place to be a lamb. A whole city prattled on punishment. The Roman officials have been pressing them for offending the wrong people; the locals think the Samaritans have been seen as a punishment for offending the wrong deity; the Essenes are busy punishing themselves. Don’t even ask about the Carthaginians. Everyone is being punished for something everyone is punishing someone. Every sin is a calculated act of retribution.

The Temple is a huge prison for the excess guilt, having under the strain of inundational scale penitence. Blood and money, the effluence of abolution, pour from its guttered city below, feeding the river where Essenes and ascetics immersion washed bodies while crying out repent! It’s the highest point in the city, visible everywhere, but not the nicest district. Not like the palaces of Pilate and Herod. God is a middle-east bureaucrat.

The sun beams down like our Roman masters, killing the blood into streets where lepers cower and cry to anyone who can’t afford to be carried at a safe level.

In the night, Zadok, master Roman, who crucify Zadoki by day, making oursheds of disused bodies.

Pillarless and Sadrassine, semblable clean, interments behind doors locked right against the files that rise up in pillums from Gehenna District, where the city burns up anything too watched for the Temple to purify. Above the city that smog will mix with the clouds of incense from the Temple, choking down and curtain birds alike.

This is the end-of civilisation, formerly the centre of the Promised Land, a holy city decimated by empire. The prophets (who spring up faster than the elixir) serum strange hallucinogenic futures to people that have none. People like me, as I’m huddled through the stream by Marcus and his men.

"You can’t just shag me now! I’ve got friends who’ll notice I’m gone!"

"No you haven’t," says Marcus.

"Well. OK, but I’ve got people I owe money to,

Marcus sighed. “If they had their way we’d crucify you. No one cares about you, Benain, which is how you’ve got this job.

There were Roman soldiers dotted around the streets in groups of two and three.

That wasn’t normal. The Romans didn’t pass Gehenna District any more than they paraded the sewers. Two of them were supervising a group of slaves as they put up a poster. It had a picture of a masonic face smiling at everyone who passed. Underneath was written: “Wahabi Wahab bin Abbas. For blunder and sedition. Reward.”
**Guise 2: independent (using Sample 2)**

‘Prophecy,’ retorted Hector, ‘is written by the losers.’

***

(After)

‘Case of the missing virginity…’

“You what?” said the Roman soldier.

“Where did your friend go?” I asked, rubbing my beard.

Markus came round the building at a leisurely pace, followed by the rest of his soldiers. He spat into the gutter.

“If you'd preferred to fall out of a window, you should have mentioned.”

“Yes, there's some real nice windows at Pilate’s palace” said a soldier.

“Some real high ones.” More trained laughter followed that.

“I don’t want your damned job,” I said. “If the Zealots catch me working for Rome they’ll have me killed.”

“We'll have you killed if you don't work for us.” That's Rome for you. It takes what it wants and breaks what it can’t have. I didn’t tell Markus how I knew his face; how I knew which Jews had put some of the best scars on it.

“Put your sandals on.” He dropped three of them in front of me.

“We’re going for a walk.”

“Whatever happened to my right to remain silent… In bed…”

With a snarl.

Markus just grimaced and put a hand on the hilt of his sword. I put on two of the sandals and slipped the third in my pocket.

“Latin pig!” I muttered.

“Hey! Show some respect,” said a soldier, smacking me on the back of the head.

---

TWO

Jerusalem is a bad place to be a lamb. A whole city predicated on punishment. The Roman officials have been posted there for offending the wrong people; the Israelites think the Romans have been sent as a punishment for offending the wrong deity; the Essenes are busy punishing themselves. Don’t even ask about the Canaanites. Everyone is being punished for something; everyone is punishing someone. Every sin is a calculated act of retribution.

The Temple is a huge pump for the excess guilt, heaving under the strain of industrial scale penitence. Blood and money, the eluence of abasement, pour from its gutters into the city below, fouling the river where Essenes and ascetics immerse wrecked bodies whilst crying out repent! It's the highest point in the city, visible everywhere, but not the nicest district. Not like the palaces of Pilate and Herod. God is a middle-rank bureaucrat.

The sun beats down like our Roman master's, basking the blood into streets where lepers crawl and cry to anyone who can afford to be carried at a safe level.

In the night, Zealots murder Romans who crucify Zealots by day, making orchards of disdained bodies.

Pharisees and Sadducees, scrubbed clean, insinuate behind doors locked tight against the 8th that rises up in plumes from Gehenna District, where the city burns up anything too wrench-ed for the Temple to purify. Above the city that song will mix
Guise 3: CreateSpace (using Sample 2)

Markus came round the building at a leisurely pace, followed by the rest of his soldiers. He spat into the gutter.

‘If you’d preferred to fall out of a window, you should have mentioned.’

‘Yeah there’s some real nice windows at Pilate’s palace’ said a soldier.

‘Some real high ones.’ More trained laughter followed that.

‘I don’t want your damned job.’ I said. ‘If the Zealots catch me working for Rome they’ll have me killed.’

‘We’ll have you killed if you don’t work for us.’ That’s Rome for you. It takes what it wants and breaks what it can’t have. I didn’t tell Markus how I knew his face; how I knew which Jews had put some of the best scars on it.

‘Put your sandals on.’ He dropped three of them in front of me.

‘We’re going for a walk.’

‘Whatever happened to my right to remain silent… In bed… With a drink?’

Markus just grimaced and put a hand on the hilt of his sword. I put on two of the sandals and slipped the third into my pocket.

‘Latin pig!’ I muttered.

‘Hey! Show some respect,’ said a soldier, smacking me on the back of the head.

Jerusalem is a bad place to be a lamb. A whole city predicated on punishment. The Roman officials have been posted there for offending the wrong people; the Israelis think the Romans have been sent as a punishment for offending the wrong deity; the Essenes are busy punishing themselves. Don’t even ask about the Canaanites. Everyone is being punished for something; everyone is punishing someone. Every sin is a calculated act of retribution.

The Temple is a bilge pump for the excess guilt, heaving under the strain of industrial scale penitence. Blood and money, the effluence of abolution, pour from its gutters into the city below, foiling the river where Essenes and ascetics immerse wrecked bodies whilst crying out repent! It’s the highest point in the city, visible everywhere, but not the nicest district. Not like the palaces of Pilate and Herod. God is a middle-mink bureaucrat.

The sun bears down like our Roman masters, baking the blood into streets where lepers crawl and cry to anyone who can’t afford to be carried at a safe level.

In the night, Zealots murder Romans who crucify Zealots by day, making orchards of dissident bodies.

Pharisees and Sadducees, scrubbed clean, insinuate behind doors locked tight against the filth that rises up in plumes from Gehenna District, where the city burns up anything too wretched for the Temple to purify. Above the city that smog will mix with the clouds of incense from the Temple, choking doves and carrion birds alike.

This is the arse-end of civilisation, formerly the centre of the Promised Land, a holy city desecrated by empire. The prophets who spring up faster than the olives scream strange hallucinogenic futures to people that have none. People like me, as I’m herded through the streets by Markus and his men.

‘You can’t just drag me away! I’ve got friends who’ll notice I’m gone.’

‘No you haven’t,’ says Markus.

‘Well, OK, but I’ve got people I owe money to.’

Markus sighed. ‘If they had their way we’d crucify you. No one cares about you, Remain, which is how you’ve got this job.’

There were Roman soldiers dotted around the streets in groups
"Care of the missing virginity," he said. "You want?" said the Roman soldier.

"Tell me," I said, "where did your friend go?" I asked, rubbing my head.

"Where's he?" asked the Roman soldier.

"I don't know," I replied. "I just heard he's still alive."

"Well, I'm sorry," said the Roman soldier. "I don't know what to do."

"You don't," I said, "but I do." I reached into my pouch and pulled out a scroll. "Here."

The Roman soldier looked at it, then back at me. "What's this?"

"It's a map," I said. "It shows the way to Jerusalem."

"Jerusalem," he repeated. "Why would you go there?"

"I don't know," I shrugged. "I just heard it's a place of great importance."

The Roman soldier seemed to consider this for a moment. "Well," he said, "I'll go with you."

"Thank you," I said. "But..."

"But什么?"

"But I need your help," I said. "Can you give it to me?"

The Roman soldier looked at me, then nodded. "I'll help you," he said. "But..."

"But what?"

"But I need to protect myself," he said. "Can you protect me?"

"I can," I said. "But I need your help."
Appendix F: sample font guises from phase 3 of pilot experiment

Guise 1:

CHAPTER I. OF DIARIES AND DIARISTS TOUCHING THE HEROINE

Among the Diaries beginning with the second quarter of our century, there is frequent mention of a lady then becoming famous for her beauty and her wit: 'an unusual combination,' in the deliberate syllables of one of the writers, who is, however, not disposed to personal irony when speaking of her. It is otherwise in his case and a general fling at the sex we may deem pardonable, for doing as little harm to womankind as the stone of an urchin cast upon the bosom of mother Earth, though men must look some day to have it returned to them, which is a certainty; and indeed full surely will our idle-handed youngster too, in his riper season; be heard complaining of a strange assault of wanton missiles, coming on him he knows not whence; for we are all of us distinctly marked to get back what we give, even from the thing named inanimate nature.

The 'LEAVES FROM THE DIARY OF HENRY WILMERS' are studded with examples of the dinner-table wit of the time, not always worth quotation twice; for smart remarks have their measured distances, many requiring to be a brule pourpoint, or within throw of the pistol, to make it hit; in other words, the majority of them are addressed directly to our muscular system, and they have no effect when we stand beyond the range. On the contrary, they reflect sombrely on the springs of hilarity in the generation preceding us; with due reserve of credit, of course, to an animal vivaciousness that seems to have wanted so small an incitement. Our old yeomanry farmers—returning to their beds over ferry commons under bright moonlight from a neighbour's harvest-home, eased their bubbling breasts with a ready roar not unakin to it. Still the promptness to laugh is an excellent progenitorial foundation for the wit to come in a people; and undoubtedly the diarial record of an imputed piece of wit is witness to...
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