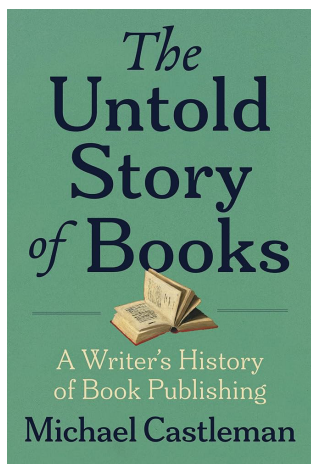


Book Review: *The Untold Story of Books* by Michael Castleman

Reviewed by Brianna Lantz



The Untold Story of Books takes readers through the history of publishing and bookselling in three major eras of the book business. From the Gutenberg Press to the current age of digital publication, Michael Castleman leaves few corners unexplored of the long-standing industry that is constantly evolving.

Castleman, a long-time author with over 50 years of experience in the publishing industry, spent a major portion of that time researching the history of publishing. Drawing on his own personal notes, articles saved over the years, and a four-volume, 3000-page publication, he created an in-depth account of books, full of surprising facts and insights.

In the early history of publishing, reading and book production were rare and often controversial. Publishing was done by scribes who handwrote texts, making books both labor-intensive and expensive. At the time, monarchs, popes, and bishops alike feared that once literacy became widespread, they would no longer have any control about what information was being released. With the invention of the Gutenberg Press, text was able to be copied and printed accurately, getting rid of the need for scribes. Over the next few hundreds of years, printing presses spread worldwide, allowing for mass production of text.

This shift lends to the second era of the book business, where publishers began to see and understand the profit that stood to be gained from book publishing, and then moved onto now, the third era of book business: the digital age.

Ethically, one of the book's most relevant themes is the long history of piracy and copyright. In the early stages of publishing, it was relatively easy for both the public and the publishers to reproduce authors' work without prior permission. With no copyright laws, creators had little protection, and the industry had few procedures when it came to addressing and potentially stopping piracy. At the time, authors were seemingly less concerned with this, as it was sometimes frowned upon to accept payment for written work. But over time, more protections and laws were put into place to make sure that piracy and theft of text was no longer possible on the large scale that it was happening. Castleman's greatest strength is his ability to make the history of publishing feel both accessible and relevant to current conversations about authorship, ownership, and access.

The Untold Story of Books provides unexpected parallels between the current publishing industry and its original format. It is a work for both readers and creators of books, for those who want to learn more about the industry, and anyone who is searching for an untapped part of history.