A Guide to

EARLY PRINTED BOOKS and *Manuscripts*

Mark Bland

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of

Don McKenzie
(1931–99)

&

Julia Briggs
(1943–2007)

and for my parents

Fred & Phillippa

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Acknowledgments

THIS book began with a light-hearted remark: late in 2003, over coffee with Tiffany Stern, I suggested for some amusement that we write a book on literary methodology; she, to my surprise, suggested that I write a book about the practice of bibliography as it pertains to early printed books and manuscripts. On our way back to the Bodleian, she urged me to think about it more seriously. A few days later, I saw Andrew McNeillie, who at that time was still at Blackwell. I mentioned the conversation to him; at an astonishing speed, he agreed, a proposal was written, readers' reports came in, and a contract was issued. Alas, I must confess, progress since then has been rather slower than anticipated. To Tiffany and Andrew, unintended godparents of this book, who were there at its inception, I owe my heartfelt thanks.

I dislike extended litanies of obligation, but there are some debts that need to be acknowledged, both professional and personal. If I was to mention every library, record office, and archive I have visited, the list would be very long, so I hope it is sufficient to say to those who have helped me in ways both minor, and more extensively that my debt is deeply felt. Similarly, I have had conversations, not all of which can be remembered, that made me reflect on an idea or issue that was on my mind at the time: for every suggestion that was made to me, or anything I had to explain, I owe those who were interested my gratitude.

There are some libraries, and their staff, to whom I owe a more particular debt. The Alexander Turnbull Library was the first nursery of my studies, and it has been a pleasure to engage with its collections, and to benefit from the gift as it was first intended and conceived. Similarly, at Duke Humfrey's, the staff have unfailingly catered to my requests for almost 20 years, and have quietly taught me more than they realized. Similarly, the staff of the relevant collections at Cambridge University Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, the National Library of Scotland, the Houghton Library at Harvard, the Beinecke Library at Yale, the Newberry Library and the University of Chicago, the Folger Shakespeare Library and Library of Congress, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, and the Huntington Library have helped with my understanding of these matters in ways that are largely beyond recall, although the debts are no less real. To my employer, De Montfort University, I am grateful for the patience and support that have been shown. To Emma Bennett, and the production staff at Blackwell, I hope this book has justified the wait: they have been enormously tolerant.

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To Peter Shillingsburg, the debt is both more serious and specific: to him I owe the wisdom of his company, his engagement with everything that I have done in recent years, his sometimes acerbic but always astute comments on what I have written, his patience with my foibles, his discussions of textual scholarship and bibliographical history beyond the call of professional kindness, his generosity and companionship, and his profound sense of decency. I could not have asked for a better colleague, or friend, in my first four years at De Montfort.

Bright lights cast deep shadows. It was on my return from London to New Zealand in 1979 that I found myself, aged 17, at Victoria University sitting alongside Mary McCallum in the second row on the left-hand side of Easterfield 006. In the course of the next hour, my life changed, although it took longer perhaps to realize the full significance of what that class had meant. Over the next few years, I was privileged to be taught by Don McKenzie on several occasions and, in 1983, he not only supervised my 'dissertation' on the late plays of Jonson; Alexandra Lutyens, Jan Moore, and I were the last students to take his literary scholarship class before he left for Oxford. A few years later, he was my supervisor in Oxford, and I last saw him in the Bodleian a day or two before I went out to New Zealand in 1999, three weeks before his death. This book would have been immensely better for his oversight and advice: I hope it does some justice to the debt I owe him.

Julia Briggs had been at Oxford with Don, and when I moved to De Montfort we shared an office together for several years: at idle hours, our conversation would often turn to the debt we both felt towards his inspiration and kindness. Julia had a knack of reminding me of my better instincts: whatever Don had left brick, she made marble.

The debt to my parents ought not to require any further explanation: I have been graced by their support, generosity, and love.

Oxford
10 May 2009

Contents

1 *A Guide for the Perplexed*

THIS is a book about how to look at written and printed words, not as texts, but as processes of communication in which meaning is made through the relationship between signs, structures, and materials. It has been written to complement the use of Gaskell, and to expand on those areas that were not covered in his book.[1] In the following pages, the intention is both to explain the methods and processes that are used to describe and study early printed books and manuscripts, and to situate that understanding in a scholarly context in order that the insights so derived might be fruitfully employed. The focus will shift from broader narratives about the methods and ideas employed in bibliographical study to specific details and examples that serve to make a more general point. The illustrations have been chosen, where possible, with an eye to freshness. The hope is that those who wish to read this will be able to look at a book or manuscript and study the way in which it was made, the processes through which it may have evolved, and its history as reflected through the archival records as well as the evidence of its use.

I

When we look at the handwriting of someone that we do not know, we form an impression of their personality from their 'character'. We may not do so consciously, but we sense handwriting to be unique and revealing. We perceive whether the script is open or tight; whether the forms are regular and disciplined, or whether majuscules and miniscules are mixed together. We notice whether the hand slopes in one direction, or whether there is a lack of consistency. The size of the letters may be large, small, or so cramped as to require magnification (and perhaps psychoanalysis) to be read. There is an immediate sense of whether a hand looks 'normal', even highly educated; or whether it shows the tremor and difficulty of age. Sometimes a script will reveal illiteracy (that the person has difficulty co-ordinating the letter forms), or it may convey a visceral sense of some deeper kind of personal disturbance. At a glance, we make all these assessments, and usually know whether it was written by a man or a woman, and perhaps the approximate age of the person concerned (owing to a period style, or immaturity), without reading a word.

Except amongst forensic specialists and palaeographers, no-one trains a person to read handwriting: rather, it is a judgment that is made from

[1] P. Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972; rev. edn. 1974).

experience: difference alerts us either to patterns that have been seen before, or to strangeness. Looking at early printed books and manuscripts requires the same kind of visual, tactile, and historical discrimination: memory, comparative analysis, and sensory perception are fundamental skills that are as much applied as they are theoretical. If the thoughts 'I have seen that elsewhere' or 'that looks odd' occur when handling a document, then the instinct should not be ignored. All early modern documents were subject to variation from one copy to another: there is, even for the same printed edition, no such thing as a duplicate copy in *all* its physical and textual details. As McKitterick remarks, books 'ostensibly offering shared knowledge on the basis of standardised text and image, in fact provided only partial standardisation'.[2]

To understand why some things may be unusual, it is necessary to have a feeling for what is conventional, and the only way to do this is to handle the original items, and a lot of them: microfilm or digital images may provide easy access and magnification, but they obscure information about the internal structure of a document; they impede descriptive methods, and they do not (beyond the image supplied) afford details about provenance or use, or give any indication about paper or bindings. To the scholar who has not seen a physical copy, they may be misleading about dimensions as well as type, and they cannot be structurally examined to determine what changes, if any, have been made. Textually, digital and print facsimile resources facilitate rapid access to an image of the original, but the limitations of simulacra need to be understood.

It is always helpful to look at multiple copies (if possible), to take detailed notes (including physical dimensions and shelfmarks—or call numbers as they are sometimes known), and to be aware not only of the history of the document, but of the libraries in which copies are found. It is not unusual to find that one copy of a printed book may have details about its earliest price or date of publication; another, a gift binding; a third may have marginalia, or an interesting provenance: cumulatively, copy-specific details build up a more complex picture than that which any one volume might present. Further, all copies (whether manuscript or printed) will differ from one another owing to either the practices of a particular intermediary, or as a result of proof correction.

Very deliberately, the emphasis in this *Guide* is on both manuscript and print, which are viewed as parts of a larger whole rather than as being separate fields of study. There are certain technical terms, methods of description, and conventions that are used. Thus a *printer* was fallible

[2] D. J. McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge, 2003), 80.

flesh and blood, not a machine linked to a computer, whilst a book that is *slightly foxed* is not in a state of (inanimate) confusion but has paper that is discoloured owing to the conditions in which it has been kept. Other words, such as *felt* and *revise* have a specific technical meaning.[3]

When we look at books as books, we are conscious of more than simply shape, colour, and weight. Imagine, for instance, that on the table is a copy of an early eighteenth-century poem, printed in folio and set in large type with obvious spaces between the lines. If a literary person was asked 'What is the most obvious thing about what you are looking at?', their first reply might be something like 'It is a poem.' To the extent that a poem involves the layout of type on a page in a way that distinguishes it from prose, the answer would have some cunning, but to distinguish the text as 'a poem' is to invite a literary reading of the words as *words*. The most obvious thing about the page (before anything had been 'read') is, in fact, the size of the type and the space between the lines, and that is the step that is often overlooked: large type and extra space meant more paper was used, more paper meant more expense, and someone had to pay the bill—quite possibly not the printer, or publisher. The difference between looking at a page and seeing 'a poem', or seeing a relationship between type, paper, and space is the difference between 'being literary', and thinking like a bibliographer. The physical aspects of a text are always determined by the economics of book production ('Who paid for this?' is a useful question, if one not always possible to answer), as well as the materials and methods combined to create the document.

There is a second point to the example as well, and it has to do with the relationship between form and meaning. To recognize that the text is 'a poem' is to recognize something about its form, its conventions, and its readership.[4] In the first instance, the text does not matter. If, to make the point clear, we were to discover that the text was, in act, a prayer, we would want to know why the conventions of one textual form had been applied to another; and we would want to know who made that decision, why, and whether the text was, in some way, verse. What the text actually said would still be of secondary importance, and would only come into play once we had understood the way in which the formal criteria had been reapplied. Over time, this is how the conventions of textual design evolve: slight adjustments are made to the formal aspects of presentation

[3] An important general reference work for such terms is J. Carter, *ABC for Book Collectors* (London, 1952; last revised, 1973; many subsequent editions); see also, P. Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000* (Oxford, 2008).

[4] See, N. Barker, *Things Not Revealed* (London, 2001, in offprint): these Panizzi Lectures were given out at the end of the final lecture but have yet to be finally published.

that cumulatively affect the appearance of the page in quite radical ways. Furthermore, texts get presented in new ways to reflect the changing history of their use: an early edition of Shakespeare was printed according to the conventions of seventeenth-century casual reading; a modern edition is usually designed for the classroom with its accompanying introduction, illustrations, notes, and list of textual variants.

An awareness of how the formal aspects of books affect their transmission, and of how the material evidence speaks not of the text but of its own history, lies behind the assertion by Greg that 'with these signs [the bibliographer] is concerned merely as arbitrary marks; their meaning is no business of his', although he allowed that 'we all involuntarily pay attention to the sense of the texts we are studying'.[5] In more recent times, Greg's comment has been ridiculed, and his obvious literary interests pointed up, but that criticism is mistaken in its understanding of the distinction that he was trying to make. Greg believed 'that bibliography necessarily includes, as its most distinctive branch, the study of textual transmission',[6] and he argued for the need to take account of physical processes when establishing the history of a text.

One of the most obvious ways to trace the evolution of a text is to study its typography, or its manuscript equivalent, script. The history of letterforms, and the way in which they are laid out on a page reflect social conventions as well as individual choice. This is why it is possible, simply by looking at a document, to estimate when it was made to within a period of five or ten years. Bindings similarly reveal periods and tastes, as do the apparently incidental features of format, ornament stocks, and the use of ruled borders. Each of these elements has required a conscious decision by someone at some time, and for this reason it is as necessary to see the text as to read it. Indeed, sometimes it helps not to read the text at all—certainly it helps to read the text only after these other aspects of the book have been taken into consideration.

Bibliography is a historical and analytical discipline concerned with literature in the broadest meaning of that word. Hence, it is an appreciation of literary texts and historical facts that usually shapes a desire to recover more accurately the history of a text through the processes of its making and the ways in which it was read.[7] The point,

[5] W. W. Greg, 'Bibliography—An Apologia', (Oxford, 1966), 247, 248.

[6] Greg, 'Bibliography—An Apologia' 259.

[7] Greg was unashamedly frank about this connection, to his later detriment at the hands of scholars who ought to have admitted as much: 'At any rate I freely confess that my own interest in bibliography is by no means purely bibliographical. It is literary. . . . It was the results of bibliography that I wanted but my search led me to the far greater discovery of the importance of the subject itself': 'What Is Bibliography?', *Collected Papers*, 82.

however, is that in order to understand printed books and manuscripts, the approach to literary documents cannot be limited to 'high' literature. A printing-house produced more than play quartos or sermons, a scrivener copied more than verse (in fact, more often a scrivener copied political and financial documents), whilst those private individuals who copied poems also wrote letters and wrote or copied other documents. Unless the full range of evidence is taken into account, crucial details will be overlooked that may affect our understanding of such basic matters as attribution, date, or the identity of the person responsible for copying or producing a document. Almost certainly, a limited perspective will deny to any text its proper *context*, and thus obscure the purpose that it first served. There is nothing difficult about being thorough; the problem with thoroughness is that that not all the evidence will survive, and that it is time-consuming and, sometimes, wearying.

Perhaps the most basic concept that needs to be borne in mind when studying early books and manuscripts is that repetition reveals process, identity, and expectation; difference describes history. The information so derived may be of two kinds: physical or cultural. For instance, the shift from black-letter to roman, the setting of text within rules and the subsequent disappearance of such rules, the shift from sidenotes to footnotes,[8] and from single-volume folio collections to multi-volume octavo sets, are all defining moments in the evolution of the early printed book, but they can only be perceived to be so because of their difference from past practices. Individual traits may equally be recognized: both Bacon and Jonson preferred (and had access to) fine Italian and Spanish papers rather than the coarser but more commonly available imports from northern France. Whilst the vanity of Margaret Cavendish is revealed in her choice of double pica type for the printing her books—a size larger than even the *Works* of King James, and matched as a text font in the period only by royal proclamations and other broadsides of that ilk. Some authors paid to have their books printed, or paid for special work to be done, but Cavendish is the first clear example among English authors of someone who simply had her work printed in a type of a very large size.

II

As a discipline, bibliography has always allowed itself a very broad scope, even if at times the practice has been rather narrower. All bibliographers, or historians of the book, are interested in the methods

[8] See, A. T. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Princeton NJ, 1997).

and mechanisms of human communication and record. Yet defining what this involves succinctly, and how it differs from other disciplines that are broadly interested in the same texts and materials, has provoked considerable debate. In their respective ways, such issues as the role of memory in the transmission of the past, and the instabilities of the digital archive, extend the discipline beyond what is written, printed, or inscribed on a durable surface.[9] With some prescience, almost a century ago, Sir Walter Greg defined the subject as the study of 'the transmission of all symbolic representation of speech or other ordered sound or even of logical thought', and he described what he called 'critical bibliography' as 'the science of the material transmission of literary texts'—the word 'literary' having the meaning 'written' rather than narrowly 'of aesthetic interest' although, even by Greg, this is how it came to be applied.[10]

In some ways, Greg was his own worst enemy. When he first set out his ideas, he was careful not to limit the scope of the subject to printed books (a restriction that he termed 'a very foolish one'); but, in practice, the study of manuscripts, and of memorial, and inscribed texts remained limited to those scholars who had to establish a relationship between non-printed texts in order to study a particular author (Donne is the obvious early modern example). The study of English printed books and early printing-houses, on the other hand, was largely driven by the editing of Shakespeare and the Renaissance drama. Continental book production, and the editing of humanist authors became a separate area of interest, as did the novels and verse of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Gaskell sought to find some common ground between these various fields of research; but, as a consequence, the focus of his account is deliberately on the production and description of printed books.[11] By the 1970s, medieval and early modern manuscript studies had become, almost, separate disciplines unto themselves.

The important moment of change in bibliographical studies, though delayed in its reception, was laid out in the 1957 Lyell Lectures of the great typographer Stanley Morison (best known for the design of Times Roman). These lectures, which are magnificent for their sheer generosity of scope and richness of detail, went largely unnoticed through the 1960s,

[9] See, in particular, D. F. McKenzie, 'What's Past Is Prologue: The Bibliographical Society and the History of the Book', *Making Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays* (Amherst MA, 2002), 259–75; also, P. L. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (Cambridge, 2006).

[10] Greg, 'What Is Bibliography?', 75–88 esp. 78 and 83; Greg's paper was first published in *The Library* in 1914.

[11] Gaskell, *New Introduction*, 1.

as they were not published until 1972.[12] Whilst some have criticized aspects of Morison's argument,[13] the lectures exemplify in their scale of vision the principle that was established on the first page of the introduction: it is not only, he observed, that without bibliography 'the accurate description of anything written, engraved, or printed for the purpose of being read cannot be complete' (something that is necessary for the comparison and analysis of artefacts as witnesses to the texts they record), and thus 'It is the task . . . of the bibliographer to control documentation'; he claimed that the 'grammatically or philologically accurate transcription of a set of alphabetical signs may not always exhaust the suggestions of the text'. What then followed was a statement that Morison modestly suggested was 'for the future':

> The bibliographer may be able, by his study of the physical form of an inscription, manuscript, book, newspaper, or other medium of record, to reveal considerations that appertain to the history of something distinct from religion, politics, and literature, namely: the history of the use of the intellect. So far, that is, as intellect has made its record in script, inscription, or type.[14]

In New Zealand, the first person to borrow Morison's *Politics and Script*, on its arrival at Victoria University of Wellington Library, was D. F. McKenzie.[15] During the 1960s, McKenzie used his detailed knowledge of the Cambridge University Press at the end of the seventeenth-century to overturn prevailing assumptions about early modern printing-houses, most notably in the landmark article 'Printers of the Mind'.[16] Morison offered McKenzie the next step in his argument, one that shifted the study of printing-houses in a positive direction towards an engagement with all the methods of textual transmission in their full complexity.

[12] S. A. Morison, *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Græco-Latin Script from the Sixth Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.*, ed. N. J. Barker (Oxford, 1972). An important related study is M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1993).

[13] For instance, A. Petrucci, 'Symbolic Aspects of Written Evidence', *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, ed. and trans. C. M. Radding (New Haven CT, 1995), 103–31.

[14] Morison, *Politics and Script*, 1. The comment is also a critique of Greg's claim that the 'real aim and value' of type is that 'it enables us to assign an undated and unlocated book to a particular place and date' (Greg, 'Bibliography—An Apologia', 242).

[15] Shelfmark Z40 M861 P: The issue card has been removed, but the date stamp remains.

[16] First published, D. F. McKenzie, 'Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices', *Studies in Bibliography*, 22 (1969), 1–76; reprinted: *Making Meaning*, 13–85.