Ashgate

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Literary texts in transmission

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Simon Eliot is Professor of Publishing and Printing History at the University of Reading and is Director of its Centre for Writing, Publishing and Printing History. He is also Associate Director of the Research Centre in the History of the Book based at London University. He is the author of many articles, and his publications include *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing 1800–1919* (1994). He is co-editor (with David McKitterick) of the volume covering 1830–1914 in the Cambridge *History of the Book in Britain*. He

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C.Y. Ferdinand, Fellow Librarian of Magdalen College, Oxford, has written on the eighteenth-century provincial book trade and the history of libraries. She met John Barnard when she first came to England to study at the Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism at the University of Leeds.

Paul Hammond is Professor of Seventeenth-Century English Literature at the University of Leeds. His books include *Love between Men in English Literature* (1996) and *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (1999). He is joint General Editor with John Barnard of the Longman Annotated English Poets Series, for which he has also edited the poems of Dryden in four volumes (1995–2000).

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Peter D. McDonald is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St Hugh's College. He has published articles on Anglo-American modernism, British literary culture in the 1890s, the history of the book, and South African literature. His first book-length study, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice* (Cambridge), appeared in 1997. He is currently working on a study of censorship in South Africa and the international reception of South African writing during the Apartheid era.

D.F. McKenzie The late D.F. McKenzie was Professor of Bibliography and Textual Criticism at the University of Oxford and Fellow of Pembroke College. His publications include *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1605–1800* (3 vols, Oxford, 1961–78); *The Cambridge University Press, 1696–1712* (2 vols, Cambridge, 1966); and *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986). He enthusiastically supported the idea of this collection, but his intended contribution to this volume was prevented by his untimely death in 1999 and we are very grateful to his wife, Christine Ferdinand, for her permission to include an edited extract from his unpublished work.

David Richards is Senior Lecturer at the School of English, University of Leeds, and his interests are in post-colonial literatures, anthropology and fine art. His publications include *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art* (1994), and he is currently working on two books on archaeology and post-colonial and modernist writing and on ethnographic representations of Morocco.

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Contents

Chapter One

Introduction: The Material Text

Maureen Bell

Students of English literature today face a demanding programme of study in a discipline which, over the past few decades, has developed dynamically (and often painfully) even as teachers and institutions of education have grappled with social and economic changes and financial constraints. In the late twentieth century 'literature' has enlarged its scope, absorbing into its syllabuses the non-canonical as well as the canonical, popular as well as 'high' literature, female as well as male writers, black as well as white authors and readers, and the variety of Englishes written and spoken in the post-colonial world. One legacy of the critical theory wars of the 1980s is that an understanding of the theory and history of literary criticism is now routinely and rigorously required of students. And in the final decades of the twentieth century, driven in Britain at least in part by the application of Marxist theory to the study of literary texts, came the development of a cultural materialist analysis in alliance with bibliography and with approaches from other disciplines – notably the French *annales* school of history – to produce the new and interdisciplinary field signalled variously by the terms 'sociology of the text', *histoire du livre* and, more broadly, 'book history' and 'print culture'.

Thus within the space of an academic working lifetime the old clear and central focus on *literary criticism*, with bibliography and textual criticism firmly positioned as ancillary skills in the service of aesthetic and moral judgement, has shifted; as has the relationship between those three aspects of the discipline. This book is intended as both argument for and demonstration of the potential of this realignment of literary criticism, textual criticism and the history of the book. Literary critics, textual editors and bibliographers, and historians of publishing have hitherto tended to publish their research as if in separate fields of enquiry. Our purpose here is to bring together in one volume contributions from some of the leading scholars in each of these fields in order to offer a dialogue which exemplifies, explores and encourages the practice of literary criticism rooted in the context of the transmission of texts. Arranged chronologically, so as to allow the use of individual sections relevant to period literature courses, this book offers students and teachers a set of

essays designed both to reflect these approaches and to signal their potential for fruitful integration. Some of the essays therefore answer the demand, 'Show me what literary critics (or textual editors; or book historians) do and how they do it', and stand as examples of the different concerns, methodologies and rhetorical strategies employed by these branches of literary study. Others draw attention to the potential of these approaches in combination and demonstrate the extent to which literary critics are incorporating the 'history of the book' approach in their interpretative strategies. All are concerned not simply with literary texts *per se*, but with the way in which the *transmission* of those texts is itself a process productive of meaning.

And literary criticism is, above all, about *meaning*. At every level of the text (word, phrase, image, style, form, genre) the critic has always been concerned with interpreting the meaning of what has been written, but our perspective on what constitutes meaning has changed radically. Whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century the text itself was heralded, notably by I.A. Richards, as the sole focus of critical attention, critics at the century's end have found that looking only, as it were, 'inside' the text is wholly insufficient to an understanding of both the *what* and the *how* of meaning. Indeed, the problems inherent in that innocent word 'text' are now familiar to every student of literature. The task of establishing the required 'authoritative' text has traditionally been the province of the textual editor and the bibliographer, whose skills were thereby rendered secondary (from the point of view of the literary critic) or fundamental (from the point of view of the bibliographer). Literary history has traditionally been the assistant of both literary and textual criticism, but the combined effect of modern critical approaches – notably new historicism, feminism, cultural materialism and the sociology of texts – is a more complex historicism which, at its best, raises new and fascinating issues. The kinds of questions about textual meaning with which literary critics have hitherto been concerned – *What and how does it mean now?* and *What and how did it mean at the time it was written?* – may now be extended to *What and how did it mean at any given point between then and now*?

A common feature of both the new theoretical approaches in literary criticism and of the 'new bibliography' characterized as the sociology of the text is their stress on contingency. In literary criticism, the assumption of the existence of universal aesthetic values transcending time and place has been radically and repeatedly questioned – not least by Marxists, historicists, feminists and theorists of reader-response and reception. At the same time, and partly in response to the same pressures, in bibliography the old chimerical

search for the 'ideal' text – a reconstructed text which, though it never existed materially, would represent most closely what (in the opinion of editor or bibliographer) the *author intended* – has been replaced by a critical awareness of the book as an inherently unstable form. Different printed (as well as manuscript) embodiments of the text deserve attention, therefore, not only in relation to each other but also in their individual and particular relation to their circumstances of production, distribution and consumption. The long-held expectation of the discovery or re-creation of an *originary* text, 'superior' to all others, has been replaced by a (more democratic?) respect for each manuscript or printed witness in its own right. In the case of Shakespeare, for example, the 'bad' quartos are being reinspected, reassessed and revalued in terms of printing history and performance practice.

Central to all of this is a developing and vital concern with the book as a *material* object. Transformations of meaning are effected by the very matter from which the book is constituted; differences in paper, format, typefaces, page layout, illustrations and bindings can make the same text *mean* differently. And the technology of print, far from *fixing* texts, has in practice proved as fluid a technology as scribal production. D.F. McKenzie, advocating the 'sociology of the text', argues that it is in its very *instability* as a physical form that the book offers evidence for the history of the book as 'a study of changing *conditions* of meaning and hence of reading' (1992, 297). Moreover, the details of those physical forms must be set in the wider context of the systems and agents of textual transmission:

> the physical signs in a book ... make sense only in terms of our assumptions about the historical conditions and processes by which they were made. Meanings are not therefore inherent but are constructed by successive interpretative acts, both by those who write, design, and print books, and by those who buy and read them. (McKenzie 1992, 297)

This wider context of historical conditions and processes is most familiarly represented to students by Robert Darnton's diagrammatic model of a 'communications circuit'.[1] Darnton's model elucidates not only the economic and material agents and processes of book production and distribution but also the wider political, legal, social and cultural circumstances within which the material text is produced and produces its meaning. The history of the book thus directs critical attention not to the study of an 'ideal' text but rather to a specific material text which can be studied not only diachronically – in its relation to other embodiments of the same text – but also synchronically, in relation to other texts produced at the same time (by the same printers and

publishers, for example, or within the printed output of a particular time or place) and in relation to the wider conditions of cultural formation.

The materiality of the text is central to any consideration of textual transmission just as the processes of transmission are central to Darnton's formulation of the history of the book. The materials which embody the text are made and supplied by several different specialists (in the hand-press period, for example, these included manufacturers and suppliers of paper and inks, typefounders and binders) and the text may pass through many hands on its way from author to printed form: those of scribe or copyist, amanuensis, secretary, typist, editor, translator, compositor, printer, proofreader and publisher. The work of all these agents alters the text (directly or indirectly, intentionally or not) and – by the addition or deletion of material, by errors and accidents in copying or typesetting, by supplying new contexts (prefaces, dedications, postscripts, indexes) or by repackaging the text among other texts (in compilations and anthologies) – substantially conditions what and how the text *means*. The texts we now study as 'literature' have of course always been a very small proportion of the total output of the printing press, and investigation of the details of printing house practices and of the businesses of specific individuals in the book trades has already proved a valuable corrective to theories built solely on physical evidence internal to the book.[2] Happily, students of literature in English have ready access to directories and biographical dictionaries of book trade personnel and the record of their output as represented by short-title catalogues such as *ESTC* and *NSTC*. But much remains to be done both in terms of mapping the trade in general and in relation to the economic and business practices of specific periods and individuals.[3]

The material processes of production are not, however, the end of the story in terms of the text's transformation. Darnton's 'communications circuit' ends with the reader; and readers, in McKenzie's phrase, construct meanings.[4] This argues for an investigation of the processes and institutions which mediate their reading of the text. In material terms this includes not only the agents and processes of distribution (booksellers, hawkers, pedlars, religious and political networks, commercial and institutional libraries, book auctions, informal lending) and questions of people's access to books (literacy, prices and geographical location) but also the very practices of reading. How, where and in what circumstances does the reader read? Is the book bought, borrowed, freely distributed or stolen? Is it read alone or communally, in secret or within a particular social or institutional setting? Annotations in surviving books and in the catalogues of private libraries yield answers to these questions for some readers, and can be supplemented by evidence from diaries and letters

in which readers describe or discuss their reading. But for other kinds of reader, particularly provincial readers of lower social status, the evidence is often fragmentary and is not easily recoverable.[5] And since, as Darnton indicates, authors too are readers, the investigation of the reading practices of authors themselves is a pertinent issue.

The third element of the Darnton model crucial to the elucidation of textual meaning is that of the wider social, political, legal and economic spheres which impinge on the production, distribution and reading of the text. Social, religious and legal institutions – as various as the monarch's exertion of prerogative rights, parliamentary statute, the actions of clergy as licensers, trade regulations and trade practices enforced by bodies such as the Stationers' Company or trade unions – provide the complex conditions within which printing operates. This wider social and cultural formation may directly circumscribe the text's production by, for example, imposing constraints upon what can be legally published. An obvious case is the imposition of censorship regulations which operate directly and formally on authors, publishers and readers alike or, more subtly, might produce a climate of caution and self-censorship. Similarly, economic circumstances both national and local have both direct and indirect effects on printing, affecting the supply and costs of labour and materials, and influencing the size and relative wealth of the potential market for books.

The research implied by the history of the book may seem daunting or even, as McGann indicates, impossible: 'the entire socio-history of [a] work – from its originary moments of production through all its subsequent reproductive adventures – is postulated as the ultimate goal of critical self-consciousness' (McGann 1988). Indeed, the very range of questions to be asked, lines of enquiry to pursue, skills to acquire and knowledge assumed has led some teachers to argue that it is inappropriate to expect undergraduates to engage with it at all.[6] Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the courses in North America and in Britain which announce themselves as 'history of the book' courses are aimed at graduate students;[7] but there is growing evidence and experience that the 'history of the book' approach is one which undergraduate students of literature find exciting and one which they benefit from exploring. Our reaction is, therefore, not a counsel of despair but an excitement about the richness of the field. The history of the book opens up new areas of enquiry with abundant potential for informing the practice of literary studies and for enthusing students about the nature of literary study. Our suggestion is not prescriptive – that any one individual (teacher, student, researcher) should (or could) master all these skills – but, conversely, that

every teacher, student and researcher can engage with some aspect of the materiality of the text and its transmission, and in so doing will enrich and enliven their engagement with literary texts. As a developing interdisciplinary field,[8] the history of the book has much to offer literary studies, not least in raising new and pertinent questions, placing the literary text in the wider context of printed books, and in helping to interpret the individual text. This collection of essays is intended to exemplify current practice, to encourage discussion, and to stimulate teaching and research by demonstrating that, in the twenty-first century, a study of the 'literariness' of texts cannot be adequately compassed without attention to the material forms and processes through which those texts have been and are still being transmitted. That 'transmission' is in itself a potentially fruitful focus for literary critics is amply signalled in many of the essays collected here.

Finally, a word about this book's origin. Few scholars are equipped to make a substantial and lasting contribution to all three of the branches of literary study addressed here and the retirement of John Barnard, Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds, spurred this effort to celebrate his rare achievement. Well known for his editions of *John Keats: The Complete Poems* (1973) and *John Keats: Selected Poems* (1988), he has also edited Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1972) and Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1979). Appointed General Editor of Longman Annotated Poets in 1975, as successor to F.W. Bateson, he has supported and influenced editions of the poems of Arnold, Tennyson, Shelley, Blake, Browning, Dryden and Milton. Further volumes of Shelley, Dryden, Browning, Marvell and Herbert are currently in active preparation. His literary criticism includes books on Pope (*Pope: The Critical Heritage*, 1973) and Keats (*John Keats*, 1987) as well as many papers on these and other poets and on Restoration drama.

That John would become a leading figure in the future of book history is aptly signalled by the title of his first article, published in 1963: 'Dryden, Tonson, and Subscriptions for the 1697 *Virgil*' (*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 67). Happily, that initial desire to elucidate the circumstances of Tonson's publication of Dryden's *Virgil* has remained and his most recent publications include two papers which return to this theme: one on Tonson's investment (*PBSA* 92, 1998) and another on the patrons of the *Virgil*, published in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays* (ed. Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 2000). His growing commitment to the history of the book during the intervening years is evident from both his teaching and his research interests. Closely involved since 1982 in the work of the Institute of Bibliography and Textual Criticism at Leeds, first as Acting Director and,

since 1996, as Director, he was responsible for the MA in Bibliography, Publishing and Textual Studies and forged working links for his students with *ESTC* and other projects. In 1988, as General Editor with the late D.F. McKenzie of volume 4 (1557–1695) of *History of the Book in Britain* (Cambridge University Press), he began the research project which has absorbed much of his research time in the last decade and which has placed him at the forefront of the history of the book as it has developed in Britain. The project, supported by the Leverhulme Trust, has already led to much published work, including his investigations of the stock of the Stationers' Company (in *Publishing History*, 36, 1994, and *The Library*, 21, 1999) and *The Early Seventeenth-Century York Book Trade and John Foster's Inventory of 1616* (1994, with Maureen Bell). In 1998 he was elected Vice-President of the Bibliographical Society.

A highly respected scholar, an advocate of his subject and of his profession at every level from departmental to national, and an immensely generous and humane teacher and colleague, John Barnard and his career supply the occasion and the unifying principle of this book. We intend it to be a *useful* book for teachers and students by showing what it is to study literature in exactly the way that John has taught his colleagues and students: by good-humoured example, with spirited enthusiasm, and through energetic scholarly engagement with the many aspects of literary texts and their transmission.

Notes

1 Darnton's model has been modified and challenged: see Adams and Barker (1993) and McDonald (1997).

2 See, for example, Hinman (1963) and McKenzie (1966); the argument is stated in McKenzie (1969).

3 The availability of short-title catalogues in easily-searchable electronic form (on CD-ROM as well as on-line) is a notable recent development. Other trade records are also becoming available electronically, such as the *British Book Trade Index* established by Peter Isaac.

4 In fact, Darnton supplies a dotted line to complete the circuit, indicating that authors are themselves readers.

5 This is particularly true for the period before 1700: for recent work on early modern readers of lower social status, see for example Colclough (2000); for provincial readers see Hunter et al. (1999) and Bell (forthcoming). The Reading Experience Database project, directed by Simon Eliot at the Open University, is collecting much valuable evidence on the material practices of reading across the centuries.

6 The SHARP Newsletter and e-mail discussion list (SHARP-L) frequently carry contributions to this debate between teachers of the history of the book, many of whom are members of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing.

7 British MA courses taking a 'history of the book' approach currently exist at, for example, the Universities of Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, London, Reading and at the Open University; at Birmingham a History of the Book course is available to undergraduates. Several departments of Library and Information Studies and of Communications Studies have relevant courses. North America has seen a similar flourishing of graduate provision.

8 That the subject has 'come of age' is demonstrated not only by its increasing visibility in graduate and undergraduate courses, but in its increasing institutionalization. Centres for the book proliferate, national and international conferences are well established and the several national histories of the book are bringing the subject to prominence.

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