
PART I
Methods and Approaches

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Why Bibliography Matters

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Year by year millions of copies of books are published and distributed to all the countries of the world. Books are printed on paper, on vellum or parchment, on wood, and on metal: any surface capable of bearing ink can carry text. The common codex – a collection of leaves hinged at the left – is given paper covers, or none, or covers of cloth, pasteboard, plastic, leather, or even human skin. Books are disseminated to institutions, warehouses, bookshops, libraries, private collections, and households so that they are omnipresent: it is unusual for anyone to be far from books. Books are among the most widely dispersed artifacts in world culture, and the book is still the commonest form of transmitting information and knowledge.

It is primarily the task of bibliographers to deal with the flood of books that issues from the world's presses. Bibliographers are the good housekeepers of the world of books. Even though most books declare their origin and auspices on the title page or its verso, bibliographers must determine a host of crucial details that many people would think transparently obvious. There are books with title pages in unexpected places and books without title pages at all. Many books do not have clear author statements. Many official publications, for instance, credit the contributions of so many committees, commissions, departments, and offices that it is difficult to decide which of them gives the books their author-ness or authority. A significant portion of popular modern books such as novels are published pseudonymously; unless authors' real names are discovered, such authors will be deprived of part of their work and their literary biographies will be inadequate. This is only one area in which potential obscurities in the identification of a book must be resolved.

In order to put books – or at least bibliographical records – in their right places, at the very least bibliographers must establish who wrote a book or at least assumed intellectual responsibility for its content; its title (if it is a translation, the title in the original language); the edition (whether the book has been published before and where the edition stands in relation to the title's previous publishing history); the place of publication and the name of the publisher (that is, the issuing body); and the date of publication, possibly the most crucial datum of all, about which more will be said.

The process of putting books into their right places and of recording where they are is *bibliographical control*. Without such fundamental instruments of bibliographical

control as bibliographies (lists of books) and catalogues (libraries', booksellers', publishers'), and their modern extensions into cyberspace, particularly as databases and OPACs (online publicly accessible catalogues), the complex modern literary culture that we take for granted would scarcely exist. Without these tools, which the Internet is making more widely and usefully accessible, the information explosion of the past decade or so could not have occurred. Modern students are more familiar with electronic databases (for instance, the MLA International Bibliography or the English Short Title Catalogue [ESTC]) than catalogues and bibliographies, but in most cases they depend on print. Historians of the book particularly should not neglect the printed works that lie behind the electronic records, or the artifacts that underlie the printed records.

Bibliographical control probably began when an individual or an institution had too many books to recall their titles or their position in the collection. To classify or even to arrange books on a shelf in alphabetical order of authors' names or titles is a form of bibliographical control whether or not the arrangement is accompanied by a written list. However, early librarians found that it was not efficient to arrange all their books, ranging from huge elephant folios to miniature books like thumbnail Bibles, in a single sequence on the shelves. It was better to classify the books by size or form (as maps are in most large libraries). Alternative forms of classification could be considered, from which arose the considerable physical complexity of modern libraries, where catalogues must reveal not only which books are in the collection but where they might be found. Librarians are the foremost of the bibliographers who exert control over the multifarious products of the world's presses.

So the merest neophyte in book history studies is already the beneficiary of three or more thousand years of bibliographical activity: the discipline of bibliography has a long history and an extensive literature. Its essence is taxonomy (classification), which bibliography shares with such studies as botany, paleontology, and astronomy, and therefore depends on logical principles common to most sciences. Of this kind is *enumerative* (or systematic) bibliography, *analytical* (or critical) bibliography, and *descriptive* bibliography, to employ common distinctions (Stokes 1969). The greatest English bibliographer of the first part of the twentieth century enlarged the simple definition of bibliography to "the science of the transmission of literary documents" (Greg 1966: 241, see also 75–88, 207–25, 239–66). Therefore, often regarded as a further division of bibliography is *textual* bibliography, in which bibliographers or textual critics study the taxonomy of the texts that are transmitted through documents that may have a different taxonomy. Finally, there is *historical* bibliography, which in itself is basically not taxonomic. (This chapter and the illustrative examples it cites necessarily depend on my experience with British books and bibliography.)

Enumerative Bibliography

Bibliographers, particularly enumerative bibliographers – those who make lists or catalogues of books – consider books from several viewpoints. Titles can be selected for

inclusion in a bibliography on the basis of their *period* of publication: hence the well-known printed short title catalogues of English books printed 1475–1640 (Pollard and Redgrave 1976–91) and 1641–1700 (Wing 1972–88) and lists of *incunables* (books printed before 1500). There are lists of books written or printed in particular *languages* (for instance, Lloyd 1948), or printed or published in particular *places* (Cordeaux and Merry 1981), or produced by particular *printers* or *publishers* or *binders* (Isaac 1989), or printed in particular *types* (Carter 1967), or – too common to require illustration – books written by individual *authors* or classes of authors like women or children. And, of course, innumerable bibliographies gather together records of books on particular *subjects*. Of paramount importance to historians of the book are the bibliographies that take bibliography and book history as their subjects. A principal example for English bibliography is Howard-Hill (1969–99); for American bibliography, Tanselle (1971). These bibliographies are readily approached through such general reference guides as Harner (2002).

All of these bibliographical attributes can exist in different combinations in a single bibliography. However, in every instance, the compilation of a list depends on the bibliographical (analytical) examination of copies of books. The longest bibliography starts with the first copy. Not even book historians appreciate the extent to which their work depends on the products of enumerative bibliography: that is, lists of books. Enumerative bibliographies and library catalogues are constructed from descriptions of copies of individual books that are taken to represent, more or less faithfully, individual works that contain distinct texts. Incorporating the products of analytical and descriptive bibliography, it is enumerative bibliography that provides the basic material for the history of books. If books incorporate the collective memory of humankind – that is, preserve what is worth preserving – then without enumerative bibliographies access to the record of civilization would be random: civilization itself would experience a kind of Alzheimer's disease. Enumerative bibliographers and library cataloguers bind together the elements of civilization and society, providing access that magnifies the power of each element. The increasing sophistication of libraries and the development of bibliographical method exactly parallel the progress of civilization as we know it, not merely as a consequence but as an essential enabling factor. More narrowly, as book historians participate in the extension of knowledge, they build on foundations erected by bibliographers.

I will elaborate more specifically. Usually, bibliographical description for any purpose starts with a single copy of a document. (I will use “bibliographer” for “cataloguer” mostly hereafter.) Identification of the copy to hand is the first concern of the bibliographer. When the cataloguing is “original” (that is, when the bibliographer is not simply matching the copy to hand against a description written by someone else), identification may not be easy, particularly if the work itself was hitherto unknown to bibliographical history. Information sufficient to identify the work or book may be lacking or be false, or the bibliographer may not have the means to make a correct identification. To illustrate this, there are records of twenty-five Hookham and Company Circulating Library catalogues, scattered amongst eleven libraries in my database. For all but three of the

catalogues, the dates are conjectural, in some instances pro forma. For instance, the Bodleian Library conjectures “[1829]” for a volume (Bodleian Library 2590 e.Lond.186.1) that consists of a catalogue that contains “Addenda 1821” and a separate 1829 supplement with its own pagination, register, and printer. The Bodleian cataloguer apparently dated the book 1829 as the year in which the three parts were issued together, but that obscures the fact that the volume was produced in three different years.

Further, the extent of anonymous and pseudonymous books in the early period is considerable and the bibliographer may have great difficulty in determining what the authority of such a book is (Griffin 1999). Many books lack much of the information that may allow a bibliographer readily to put them into their historical context exactly. Of 10,904 monographs recorded in my database in June 2002, 1,058 (roughly 10 percent) did not identify the author on the title page, 129 were pseudonymous, 1,407 were anonymous, 2,672 did not supply the place of publication, 2,587 did not give the name of the publisher or printer, 2,293 did not give the date of publication, and in 1,087 records the date of publication is doubtful. Identifying such books is essentially an historical enterprise because the author of an anonymous or pseudonymous book can rarely be identified without recourse to *external* biographical or literary information. Sometimes also the bibliographer must interpret the text of the document, as in the case of *Proposals by the Drapers and Stationers, for the Raising and Improving the Woollen Manufacture, and Making of Paper in England* (1677), a broadside signed “H. 1000000”, that is, Henry Million (Wing 1972–83: no. P3715D).

A glance at the *National Union Catalog* (NUC), in which square brackets are employed to denote information not supplied by the title page, illustrates the extent to which the fundamental basis of authority in intellectual discourse is the creation of bibliographers operating within and on book culture. In an age in which accountability is a prevalent social concern, the bibliographer’s attribution of authority and therefore responsibility for the contents of books has larger than bibliographical relevance. In earlier times, when the press was often under state control, the consequences of a bibliographer’s attribution of responsibility for works were generally more serious. Bibliographers interpret the individual written responses to the common (human) condition and, by interpreting and classifying them, enable readers to participate fully in the world’s business. Further, a work may survive in only a few copies, but the record of its existence is disseminated in a multitude of bibliographical descriptions that may even sometimes be more numerous than the number of copies of the work originally printed: such dissemination enlarges immeasurably the work’s possible intellectual influence. Enumerative bibliographies amplify the effects of books in all communities.

A catalogue or bibliography is fundamentally a work of historical interpretation, as can be seen even more clearly when we consider the bibliographer’s paramount obligation to place a book in its correct place in history. Just as many early books are anonymous, so were many issued without a statement of the date of issue. A date may not have been perceived to be necessary at the time for purchasers, for the publishers knew when it was published and the readers knew when they read it as a contemporary document. This is particularly true of early library catalogues, in which modern book

historians naturally have an interest. Very often catalogues of subscription and circulating libraries bear no dates: this should not be surprising. The recipient of such catalogues knew what year it was, and unreflectingly discarded them whenever an updated edition appeared.

This points to another interesting characteristic of undated literature. Some printed documents (sometimes called “ephemeral”) may be so fully dependent on their intellectual or social contexts that they may not even contain information that allows them to be placed chronologically with any precision or confidence. Apparently, readers were expected to insert the text into their existing knowledge of the circumstances and discourse surrounding the ostensible subject of the pamphlet. Nevertheless, bibliographers must accept the task of identification as at least a guide to scholars who might want to include the work in their intellectual investigations.

Analytical Bibliography

Analytical bibliography is predicated on the simple principle that even mechanized or repetitive tasks, especially if human beings are involved, are often performed incorrectly. For instance, compositors may misread authors’ handwriting and introduce errors into the text; in early works an ink ball can lift a type which may be replaced incorrectly; the work may be imperfectly imposed so that the sheets when folded show the pages of the text in the wrong reading order; or the binder might stamp an incorrect title on the binding. Whatever can go wrong will sooner or later go wrong, even in modern books. On the other hand, there are variations amongst copies of books that may be intentional; for instance, an issue of a title might be given a different colored binding, or be printed on large paper, or be trimmed to a different size. Any such physical variation raises the question of identity and requires resolution.

The bibliographer’s next task after identifying the book is to ascertain if it is perfect; that is, if it embodies the proper intentions of all the agents in its production correctly. Some errors are obvious; some will only be detected from comparison of many copies of the same title, often by optical collation of the text. When the Hinman Collator (developed to compare copies of the Shakespeare First Folio) was applied to the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the result was “the discovery of ‘a variant state or concealed impression’ . . . for every one of the first English editions collated” (Howard-Hill 1992: 124). From analysis of variations in copies in relation to their understanding of the physical processes that made the book, bibliographers move toward writing a description of the book based on the concept of the “ideal copy,” that is, the intended form of the book against which particular copies can be measured. (Hence such notes on copies of books in catalogues as “Lacks leaf [A4]”.)

Analytical bibliography of the material object is fundamentally historical. To understand the production of the book at a certain period in history, employing the characteristic means of production of the age within the social practices that influenced both labor and capital, involves bibliographers’ knowledge of those processes and social

conditions and the ability to apply them to the material object at hand. Not all bibliographical analyses may lead to formal descriptions of books, but as an historical science analytical bibliography needs no further object.

Descriptive Bibliography

Descriptive bibliography, which Tanselle (1992a: 25) characterized as “history, as a genre of historical writing,” seeks to establish a description of the book beyond the simplest level used in basic enumerative bibliographies in relation to various levels of potential use. Its primary function is “to present all the evidence about a book which can be determined by analytical bibliography applied to a material object” (Bowers 1949: 34). Descriptive bibliographies differ from enumerative “in respect of the quantity and kind of detail which is included” (Stokes 1969: 96). To illustrate this point, Stokes compares the one-line entry for the Shakespeare First Folio in the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, adequate for its simple purpose; the twelve- (now nine-) line entry with additional bibliographical information in Pollard and Redgrave (1976–91: no. 22273); the more detailed four-page description in Greg’s *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (1957: 1109–12); and the 468 pages of his *The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History* (1955). Now, following Hinman’s magisterial analysis of copies of the Folio in the Folger Shakespeare Library (1963), Anthony James West (2003) has been able to extend the description of the Folio to details of the surviving copies, in a volume of 438 pages. These last works show how strenuous analytical and descriptive bibliography may be, especially when, as in the preparation of a descriptive bibliography of the works of a prolific author, a bibliographer must travel widely to obtain access to multiple copies of the author’s work. This and the formal requirements of bibliographical description (Bowers 1949), elaborated in recent years by Tanselle (see Howard-Hill 1992: 129), render the preparation of a descriptive bibliography a most demanding scholarly task.

Historians of the book do not always need to be able to undertake bibliographical analysis or description themselves: they may have other concerns. However, they should be able to read bibliographical literature with a modicum of understanding, and certainly be able to read bibliographical descriptions of books for the historical and cultural information they contain. Many recent bibliographies devoted to individual authors are essentially biographical (Laurence 1983), presenting descriptions of their works in chronological order of publication. They usually include documentary information about the gestation and composition of these works, the authors’ relations with publishers, their publishing history, and notices of textual variations. Such bibliographies go far beyond the provision of what has been traditionally considered “bibliographical” information into wider realms of culture, economics, and textual transmission and reception. In so doing, they underscore the importance of bibliography for the history of the book.

Textual Bibliography

The interest of literary students in the works of authors contributed to the growth of textual bibliography in the previous century. Textual bibliography (or textual analysis) is essentially the bibliographical study of text in relation to the material processes of its transmission. Editing is the application of the findings of textual analysis to the production of different kinds of editions for different kinds of readers, under the aegis of one or another theory of editing. Although “[t]he chief purpose of bibliography is to serve the production and distribution of correct texts” (Gaskell 1972: 1), not all bibliography is subordinated to text, and not all textual bibliography is promulgated in the form of editions. Later twentieth-century bibliotextual theory, as developed by Jerome McGann, treated a published text as the result of a collaboration between the author and all those (amanuenses, proof-correctors, editors, publishers) who had an opportunity to alter that text (McGann 1983). This trend was propelled by an egalitarian devaluation of authorial intentionality, combined with a growing interest in popular forms of literature and their dissemination amongst lower-income readerships, often in adaptations and abridgements. (For a fuller discussion of this approach to the book, see chapter 2.)

Historical Bibliography

Historical bibliography focuses on the physical processes that contribute to the production of books, such as copy-editing, composing, proofreading, printing, binding, and illustrating. Historical bibliographers have compiled biographical dictionaries of printers, booksellers, and publishers, as well as individual biographies of prominent members of the book trade. They have also produced studies of the history of type-founding, papermaking, composition, printing, binding, publishing, bookselling, and the personnel and organization of the book trade. The history of libraries and book-collecting, both personal and institutional, is also an interest shared by book historians and historical bibliographers.

Book historians learn from historical bibliographers that the literary contents of a book at any time may have been modified for non-literary reasons. For instance, when Benjamin Franklin undertook to publish Samuel Richardson’s novel, *Pamela*, he was obliged to commit a large amount of his capital to purchase paper for it, usually the main cost of a book. Despite setting the text in small type in order to condense its three volumes into one, he used seventeen sheets of paper for each copy, instead of the up-to-four sheets normally required for his other publications. Later eighteenth-century American printers found that it was possible to compete with British imports only by abridging the novel: Franklin’s was the only full text among thirty-eight editions published in America in the century (Stallybrass 2004: 1348), where *Pamela* was usually read in shortened form.

Bibliography and Modern Book History

Now, after the naming of parts, we can consider more specifically how bibliographers support book history in exploring authorship, reading, and publishing. The benefit to book historians of familiarity with bibliographical scholarship is incontestable; its neglect, as the president of the Bibliographical Society of America illustrated in her annual address (Mayo 2004: 15), can be debilitating. Historical bibliography makes a definitive contribution to book history through the history of libraries. Analytical bibliography plays its part by defining the contents of libraries or collections, which necessarily must be identified before any library history can be written. For the study of early British or American libraries, for example, book historians and bibliographers both use a variety of manuscript materials: diaries, minutes of library societies, and lists of books in national and county archives; advertisements and references to libraries in newspapers, histories, and memoirs; and, of course, the surviving printed catalogues, regulations, and transactions of libraries. And bibliographers are essential for overcoming the two main problems for the study of libraries: chronology and access.

Chronology (needless to say) is crucial to history. But even when one narrows attention from the comprehensive history of libraries to simply the history of their catalogues (bearing in mind that to a great extent their catalogues *are* their histories) chronological problems are rife. Bibliographers discover that many library catalogues consist of an initial edition to which was added any number of additional lists, appendices, or supplements. These may have concurrent page numbers, extending the pagination of the original catalogue. Sometimes the register of gatherings will be continuous, or the supplement may begin at signature A or B. Sometimes the supplement will start a new register but continue the pagination – or the converse. The supplements or appendices may have title pages or merely caption- or head-titles. A printer's colophon may give an indication of the place of publication, but dates in colophons are quite rare. Most catalogues survive only in single or a very few copies, widely dispersed, making it difficult for bibliographers to determine by comparison of copies whether to catalogue a volume as a single bibliographical item or many separately datable items. Most often, they will not be able to determine whether a particular volume was reissued with the supplements or whether they were bound-in subsequently.

The style of the book entries in early library catalogues designed for general use is remarkably succinct, often merely an abbreviated name and truncated title. Dates are usually not given for monographs, but they may appear when the library lists its holdings of a serial such as the *Annual Register* or *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the absence of any explicit dating, bibliographers must attempt to locate each item in history themselves. They follow the rough working principle that supplementary catalogues usually appear in chronological order, after the initial dated or datable catalogue that establishes the base date for the supplements. The appendices can be dated from entries that bear dates in the catalogue (for example, "*Annual Register*. 1794") or from entries that appear to relate to recently published novels that are datable from other bibliographical sources,

such as the British Library catalogue (BLC). In the first instance, bibliographers do not know whether *undated* items later than the noted dated items occur in the catalogue. In the second, they cannot be sure that the items that they have selected to look up in BLC or NUC truly provide a *terminus ad quem* for the publication of the catalogue: had bibliographers selected different entries to check in bibliographies or catalogues, they might have reached different conclusions about the conjectural date of publication. Eventually, any such dates that bibliographers assign to undated catalogues, without unimpeachable external evidence, are merely more- or less-informed guesses, indicated in modern catalogues and bibliographical databases by the use of square brackets and/or question marks with the date.

It is clear that the chroniclers of these library catalogues are themselves creating a history of the book. The history of libraries in Britain and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depends to a substantial extent on the interplay of the datable information supplied by the document and the bibliographer's knowledge of the existing historical literature related to the works being catalogued. Insofar as the historicity of the book is concerned, therefore, bibliographers make a crucial and indispensable contribution.

Access to this material is another matter. The United Kingdom deposit libraries, notably the British and Bodleian libraries and the National Library of Scotland, may possess no more than a fraction of the catalogues of provincial libraries: calculations made from my records suggest about 30 percent. Many catalogues can be found only in the libraries or archives of the regions where they originated, but even such well-documented extant libraries as the Leeds Library or the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Literary and Philosophical Society do not hold complete runs of their own catalogues. Often access to these catalogues cannot be sought in such tools as the ESTC (English Short Title Catalogue), NSTC (*Nineteenth Century Short Title Catalogue*), COPAC (the University Research Libraries' Catalogue), UK Public Libraries on the Web, or OBI (OPACs in Britain and Ireland) that give access to British public libraries and their OPACs, simply because many small libraries do not have home pages on the Internet, and many more do not have OPACs. Also, most OPACs are not retrospective and do not include older material.

There are other aspects of bibliographical description vital to historians of the book. The localization of the products of presses and publishers is almost as important as authority and dating to book historians: if they are to understand the conditions and character of local book trades correctly, they must have the information that bibliographers have made available in printed catalogues and bibliographies (with indexes) or in on-line databases like the ESTC, which can facilitate searches by places of origin and the names of the makers and distributors of books. The ESTC, which is available on-line, "assisted, if it did not actually encourage, the transformation of bibliographical studies to Book History" (Williams 2003: 219).

However, as essential as short title catalogues are to constructing a full understanding of the place of books in society, they do not provide all the information that might have been expected from them. In particular, efforts to write the histories of local book

production or of individual members of the book trade are frustrated by the variability of information supplied in catalogues. It is difficult to reconstruct the publishing activities of stationers whose names in imprints or colophons have been omitted by modern bibliographers to save space in databases. Also, the omission in the STCs of a record of printers' colophons as well as publisher's imprints similarly affects the possibility of understanding the relationship between publishers and the country printers who often worked for them, and fails to provide a direct way of identifying printers' output. The recognition that existing enumerative bibliographical resources do not supply the whole range of information that book historians require in order fully to sociologize "the book" points to the contribution that other forms of descriptive or even analytical bibliography may make to the history of the book.

D. F. McKenzie famously advocated a movement from the conception of bibliography as the study of books as material objects to the history of the book in society, i.e., "to what their production, dissemination, and reception reveal about past human life and thought" (McKenzie 1992: 298). He urged that the study of all forms of symbolic communication should be seen not as a new and competing area of study, still less as a rejection of bibliography, but rather as a natural expansion of bibliography's scope and function into a wider sphere. His central position was that, historically, the historiography of the book in Anglophone countries has been a development of Anglo-American bibliography. Even the most apparently straightforward bibliographical approach to books through the preparation of a checklist or catalogue is inherently historical and interpretive. As such, book historians cannot neglect, despite its contingency, the basic bibliographical foundation that affords the starting-point of their wide-ranging investigations.

Bibliographies supply an immediate overview of the world of books that is all the more commanding because it depends on the hands-on experience of countless copies of books. No one has done more to make the modern world aware of the significance of books than the bibliographers who have devoted their lives to studying them. It may be, as Peter Stallybrass (2004: 1351) protests, "one of the hidden scandals of the literary profession" that literary historians turn so infrequently to librarians: certainly the latter should be consulted more often. And it is worth noting that the sensibility toward books that the "history of the book" invokes in its more florid moments is not new. In 1830, Sir Henry Parnell wrote: "Books carry the productions of the human mind over the whole world, and may be truly called the raw materials of every kind of science and art, and of all social improvement" (Dagnall 1998: 347). These words remind us that without books there is no history, and without bibliography there is no history of books.

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