

Typographic Research and Bibliography

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The relationships between typographic research and bibliography can be surveyed by looking at four principal categories of material: (1) histories of typefounding and of type designs—such as Rollo Silver's *Typefounding in America, 1787–1825* (1965) and Carter and Vervliet's *Civilité Types* (1966); (2) histories of printing and of publishing—such as D. F. McKenzie's *The Cambridge University Press 1696–1712* (1966); (3) descriptive bibliographies—also represented by McKenzie's work; and (4) works of bibliographical analysis—such as Robert Turner's articles on the bibliographical uses of type-damage evidence. These few recent examples of the uses of typographic research in bibliography can serve to illustrate the ultimate interdependence of all studies of printed letter-forms.

If bibliography is taken to mean the study of all aspects of the book and its production, then any kind of research into typography would be of concern to the bibliographer. It is more common, however, to define bibliography as the *historical* study of the book; and a “bibliographer,” therefore, finds that not all the activities which can be classified as “typographic research” are equally significant for his purposes.

While a person whose research involves the development of computer-generated type faces, for example, will benefit from knowing the evolution of the forms he is working with, and while the bibliographer will be aided in the reconstruction of earlier technical processes by observing current ones, each is focusing his attention on a different area. Studies of the legibility of various type designs and layouts or investigations of their psychological effects and their relation to the learning process, under normal circumstances, are of no concern to the bibliographer, although one cannot deny that such research might yield some data for a broad historical study of the book trade and popular reading habits, however little it has been used for this purpose in the past. At the same time, only bibliographers are interested in the analysis of broken types as an aid to a

detailed accounting of the printing history of a particular book, for such emphasis is not on the regular features of a given type design but on accidental variations in individual pieces of type.

To survey the relationships between bibliography and the whole spectrum of typographic research involves looking both at the bibliographical end of that spectrum and at the middle part in which various interests overlap. Moving from the middle toward the end, one finds four principal categories of material: (1) histories of typefounding and of type designs; (2) histories of printing and of publishing; (3) descriptive bibliographies; and (4) works of bibliographical analysis. Each of these is represented by one or more relatively recent books; a glance at these books, with perhaps some side-glances at a few of their predecessors, may serve to characterize the whole field.

Histories of typefounding and of type designs, aside from their importance as contributions to economic and cultural history, provide the bibliographer with knowledge essential for dating and identifying the work of particular printers. Probably the major bibliographical activity of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—manifested in the work of such men as Proctor and Haebler—was the analysis and classification of the type faces in incunabula, in an attempt to assign these books to the proper locations and printers; and the discovery of Thomas J. Wise's forgeries through an analysis of type designs illustrates the bibliographical importance, even for more recent books, of an acquaintance with typographic history. Any bibliographer, in other words, must know such basic general accounts as Stanley Morison's *On Type Designs* (1926, 1962), A. F. Johnson's *Type Designs* (1934, 1959), and D. B. Updike's *Printing Types* (2 vols., 1922); and he must then turn to whatever specialized studies of particular designs or traditions exist for the period with which he is concerned. A well-known instance of this sort is Horace Hart's work on the Fell types during his years at the Oxford Press—or, among the new books, Harry Carter and H. D. L. Vervliet's *Civilité Types* (Oxford Bibliographical Society, n.s. XIV, 1966).

Carter and Vervliet, in this admirably presented study, provide a thirty-page, well-illustrated historical sketch of the use of civilité types ("types rendering a cursive hand of the sixteenth century in a calligraphic form"). The rest of their book is given to detailed descriptions of each of the types, and histories of the punches and matrices for each,

with illustrations displaying the characters. The arrangement of the book is convenient for reference: the discussions of individual designs are grouped by punch-cutter (assigned a letter designation), and numbers are assigned to each type (B1 and B5, for example, are two types by Philippe Danfrie). The very useful tables, listing the types chronologically and by size (pp. 88–89), can then cite these “Carter-Vervliet numbers.” An appendix lists 636 books—printed between 1557 and 1874—which make use of civilité types, indicating with these reference numbers the types found in each (and the comprehensive index covers not only the text but all the names of authors and printers in this list). The work is an excellent illustration of one kind of typographic research that is of great usefulness to bibliographers, for the volume will clearly be indispensable to any bibliographer who is faced with examining a book in which these types appear.

Since not many individual designers or particular styles of type have been given such thorough treatment, bibliographers must often turn to specimens of founders themselves in order to identify certain types. The basic guides to this area are the checklists of known specimens—notably W. T. Berry and A. F. Johnson’s *Catalogue of Specimens of Printing Types by English and Scottish Printers and Founders, 1650–1830* (1934) and the list of pre-1800 specimens (by Harry Carter, *et al.*) in the *Library*, 4th series, XXII (1941–42), 185–204. Because early specimen sheets are very scarce, the series of *Type Specimen Facsimiles* (1963–), edited by John Dreyfus with a comprehensive introduction by Stanley Morison, is performing a valuable service on a grand scale. And the Bibliographical Society has produced standard encyclopedias of all the type faces in use at a particular place and time—such as Gordon Duff’s *Early English Printing* (1896) or Frank Isaac’s *English Printers’ Types of the Sixteenth Century* (1936).

Little scholarly attention has been paid to American typefounding, though Ralph Green prepared a list of American specimens (1951) and Carl P. Rollins edited *The Specimen Books of Binny & Ronaldson, 1809–1812* (1936). But Rollo G. Silver, in another of the new books, puts all students of the American book and printing trades even further in his debt. His *Typefounding in America, 1787–1825* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965) is a pioneer work which makes at least two important contributions: it furnishes a new chapter in American economic and industrial history, and it provides reproductions

from a generous number of American specimens of the period. It combines the functions of narrative history (with chapters on “Inventions and Patents” and “The Importation of Type”) and composite specimen book (with nine plates from Binny & Ronaldson and James Ronaldson specimens, for example, and eleven from D. & G. Bruce and George Bruce). If, as Silver says, there is much work yet to be done in identifying the occurrences of these types in specific books, his own research provides the essential tool with which to begin.

The second category of material—histories of printing and publishing—is less directly concerned with typography, but it is inevitable that most historical accounts of printing and many of publishing will include some discussion of typographic matters. Books like P. M. Handover’s *Printing in London* (1960), James Moran’s *The Composition of Reading Matter* (1965), and Colin Clair’s *A History of Printing in Britain* (1965) contain information of interest both to bibliographers and typographers, as does Lawrence Wroth’s classic study, *The Colonial Printer* (2nd ed., 1938); and collections of reproductions of printed pages, like Stanley Morison’s standard *Four Centuries of Fine Printing* (1924; 4th ed., 1960) or his and Kenneth Day’s more recent *The Typographic Book 1450–1935* (1963), by their nature place emphasis on the aesthetics of typography. General histories of publishing, such as Lehmann-Haupt, Silver, and Wroth’s *The Book in America* (2nd ed., 1951), Frank Mumby’s *Publishing and Bookselling* (4th ed., 1956), and Marjorie Plant’s *The English Book Trade* (1939) understandably have less to say about type, but some studies of individual publishers (particularly those who did their own printing) include typographic material.

A recent book which serves as an excellent example of this category is D. F. McKenzie’s two-volume *The Cambridge University Press 1696–1712: A Bibliographical Study* (Cambridge, 1966). This monumental work publishes the very full records and accounts of the Press which have been preserved for this period and constructs from them a detailed history of the “Organization and Policy” of the Press. The first volume presents the historical account, with a bibliography of the issues of the Press; the amount of information given about the Press’s typography is suggested by the long series of entries under “Types” in the index, or by the table (p. 52) showing the orders for types. The second volume consists of transcriptions of the documents on which the first is based—the Minute Book, the Vice-Chancellor’s Accounts, the Annual

Press Accounts, and the vouchers—and the thorough index allows one to locate orders or other transactions concerning any particular type during these years. Primarily financial data of this kind lay the groundwork for typographic history (one thinks of Ellic Howe's 1947 compilation, *The London Compositor*): the enormous amount of detail available in the Cambridge records forms a base from which to generalize about other contemporary printers and publishers. McKenzie's achievement, therefore, is of wider applicability than the title might suggest. And one of its most salutary features is its demonstration of the value of taking into account everything that was being printed in a shop at any one time—for analytical bibliographers sometimes describe the printing of an individual book as if it were the only job the printer had in process.

The next category—consisting of descriptive bibliographies—is in some respects still farther from the typographer's center of interest, for he is not usually concerned with the classification of the various editions, impressions, issues, and states of an author's work. But some sort of statement about typography forms a logical part of any thorough description of a book, and from this point of view the student of graphic arts does have an interest in descriptive bibliography, both as a shorthand way of recording the main features of a book's design and as a guide to the typography of books of the past. It has long been customary for bibliographers of incunabula to record styles of type and the vertical measurements of twenty lines; and Fredson Bowers, in *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (1949), summarizes this method as it applies to books of all periods. Some descriptive bibliographies, of course, include no comments on type at all, while others have elaborate notes on style, point size, leading, type-page dimensions, design of running titles, and so on. Such variations are due not simply to the degree of thoroughness of the bibliographer but also to the nature of his material.

Descriptive bibliographies of the work of particular printers or presses, for instance, obviously call for discussions of typography—such as Philip Gaskell's *Bibliography of the Foulis Press* (1964) or his *John Baskerville: A Bibliography* (1959). The most elaborate recent example is the bibliographical appendix (pp. 174–411) to the first volume of McKenzie's study of the Cambridge Press (1966), mentioned above. Each book printed at the Press between 1696 and 1712 is described with the usual quasi-facsimile title-page transcriptions and collation formulas; in addition, the type used in each major section of a book is identified in

the following form: "Text: English roman (20 ems x 31 lines)." If the reader wishes to see an example of any type described in this way, he can then turn to the "List of Types and Ornaments," where all the types employed by the Press are displayed, generally with full-page samples and extensive descriptive and historical notes. Such a piece of bibliographical research, though primarily historical in its orientation, provides valuable material for the student of letter-forms and book design.

No distinct line can be drawn between descriptive and analytical bibliography, for the techniques of bibliographical analysis are necessarily involved in the classification of impressions and states for a descriptive bibliography. But bibliographical analysis—the process of reconstructing the printing history of a book from the physical evidence found within the book itself—does produce a separate category of material, and one that is likely to appear most remote to the typographer or designer. Since the physical evidence which a book offers consists of paper and of impressions produced by types on the paper, bibliographical analysis is inevitably concerned with type and typography. But the bibliographer, looking for typographic clues that may yield information about the particular printing-house processes which produced a given book, often focuses his attention on what is accidental in the typography of the book—such as broken types or the inconsistent treatment of act- and scene-divisions in plays—so that his work can be considered typographic research only in a special sense. Nevertheless, it demonstrates one of the uses to which research involving type can be put.

Such research is of the greatest significance to the textual critic, for editorial decisions—choosing among variant readings—can be intelligently made only with a knowledge of the kinds of things that happened to an author's manuscript in the printing shop. The spelling habits of the compositors are important, therefore, as are the methods of proof-reading employed. In both of these matters—distinguishing precisely among the shares of each compositor and determining the exact order of formes through the press—a principal technique is the analysis of the patterns formed by the reappearances throughout a book of particular pieces of type recognizable by their peculiar damage. A related, though less reliable, technique is the analysis of type shortages by noting patterns in the use of wrong-font letters.

A considerable body of literature on analytical bibliography—and on those techniques involving type—has grown up in the last 25 years, in

connection with the textual study of English Renaissance drama. Although no manual or textbook yet exists, the chief monument of the method, Charlton Hinman's two-volume work, *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963), brings together most of the previous research and demonstrates the use of all the main techniques of analysis. Much of the work in this area has appeared as articles in bibliographical journals rather than as full-length books, and the journal which has been particularly associated with the development of analytical bibliography is the annual *Studies in Bibliography*, edited by Fredson Bowers for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia. Its latest volume (XX, 1967) contains an article by Robert K. Turner, Jr., on "The Printers and the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647, Section 2," which shows, through a tabulation and analysis of the components of the skeleton-formes, of reappearing types and type shortages, and of distinctive spellings, that the routine procedure in this section of the book was for two compositors to divide the work equally, each setting one page of each folio forme. In many previous articles Turner has been an articulate spokesman for the bibliographical usefulness of typographic analysis, as in his "Reappearing Types as Bibliographical Evidence" in the previous volume of *SB* or his exemplary review of Hinman's work in *Modern Philology* for 1964 (LXII, 51-58). The evidence and the conclusions in the new article are laid out so clearly that it becomes a condensed basic model of the methodology of this kind of research.

A similar use of type-face impressions for historical evidence is the system of "fingerprinting" type outlined by John Cook Wyllie in his Rosenbach lectures of 1960 (unpublished); peculiarities of individual pieces of type, resulting from the casting process, can serve to "fingerprint" a particular font owned by a given printer and can thus help to assign books to certain printers or to trace the transfer of types from one printer to another. However far such activities may be from the ordinary concerns of the typographer, the psychologist, or the student of mass communications, all persons whose research involves type have some interests in common. They may find one another's language incomprehensible at times, but they will always benefit from an attempt to understand that language. Perhaps these few recent examples of the bibliographical uses of typographic research can serve to illustrate the ultimate interdependence of all studies of printed letter-forms.

Skywriting Celebrates Its 45th Year

On a bright May day in 1922 a Royal Air Force pilot, Major John C. Savage, streaked across the skies over Epsom Downs and, trailing smoke behind, scrawled "The Daily Mail." Thus was born the advertising form known as skywriting. . . .

The mechanics of the system are simple enough. A specially prepared oil spiked with a paraffin substance is piped under pressure from a tank behind the pilot. When the oil hits the plane's hot exhaust pipe, it bursts into a billowy white smoke.

The mechanics may be simple, but the pilot has to be an alert and skilled craftsman of the sky. Writing on the ground is one thing. Writing in the sky is a thing quite apart. It is a matter of loops and rolls and dives. In addition there is a reversing process in the writing that must take place or the writing will come out a puzzle. It can be demonstrated if one writes something on a piece of paper and then holds the paper above his head to the light.

Once an absent-minded skywriter was not keeping his mind on his loops and rolls. The result was a lovely "ydnac tfol" in the skies. Dropping down to see what kind of a job he did, the embarrassed skywriter quickly drew a line through the mess and started all over again. . . .

The weather is the *bête noir* of skywriting. It must be perfect—a clear blue sky, moderate winds, smooth layers of air, and few up-drafts and down-drafts. In an average month in the skywriting season—from May through October—there are from six to ten days when skywriting is possible. . . .

Skywriting Corporation of America collects a minimum of \$400 for a single job and about \$3,500 for skytyping, the latest development in aerial advertising.

[SCA] spent eight years in developing the skytyping technique, and it was introduced for the first time in 1949. Five planes line up wing tip to wing tip in a smooth layer of air. The center plane carries a radio transmitter, which operates the smoke valve in each plane, opening and closing it at will. Thus, the message is traced across the sky in a series of smoke-puffs. From the ground, the puffs look like dots. But they are really about a block long. A skytyped message is accomplished very quickly. No looping or turning is necessary, and the message is completed long before it starts to blow away.

It appears that the skytyping technique is coming along just in the nick of time; there are only six skywriters in the country capable of writing messages in the old-fashioned way. The freelancers, who once abounded in the field, no longer appear to be available.

For a time it appeared that color would revolutionize skywriting. But color is a fickle thing. Red smoke soon becomes a pale pink in the sky and soon the pink becomes nothing at all. Colored smoke also costs four times as much as white smoke and at certain angles the rays of the sun will kill the whole project. . . .

Long names are still a problem for the lone skywriter. One assignment required informing Boston of the winner of a walkathon. The winner was a man named Michelavinski. Fortunately, the skies clouded and the skywriter was spared the task.

Skywriters do have a freedom denied most mortals. One, for example, hated mathematics during his student days. Finding himself with five extra gallons of "ink" at the end of a job, he blithely wrote across the skies of Manhattan: $1 + 4 = 6$. Then he blissfully flew off into the blue.

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