Foreword

The familiar historical processes by which, over the centuries, texts have changed their form and content have now accelerated to a degree which makes the definition and location of textual authority barely possible in the old style. Professional librarians, under pressure from irresistible technological and social changes, are redefining their discipline in order to describe, house, and access sounds, static and moving images with or without words, and a flow of computer-stored information. By contrast, academic bibliography has only recently begun to find fresh stimulus in those developments and to tap the new experience and interests of students for whom books represent only one form of text.

Although bibliographers have always found interest not only in books themselves but in the social and technical circumstances of their production, it is again only recently that historical bibliography has gained acceptance as a field of study. The partial but significant shift this signals is one from questions of textual authority to those of dissemination and readership as matters of economic and political motive. Those relationships are difficult to pin down, but they are powerful in the ways they preclude certain forms of discourse and enable others; and because they determine the very conditions under which meanings are created, they lie at the heart of what has come to be known as *histoire du livre*, a form of inquiry relevant to the history of every text-dependent discipline.

Bibliography and textual criticism have, since at least the 1920s, normally formed part of a training for scholarly research in literary

history, and they remain indispensable tools. But literary history and scholarship no longer look quite as they did. Definitive editions have come to seem an impossible ideal in the face of so much evidence of authorial revision and therefore of textual instability. Each version has some claim to be edited in its own right, with a proper respect for its historicity as an artefact; and yet the variety of authorized forms has opened up editorial choice in new ways, even to the point of creating, through conflation or even more adventurous forms of adaptation, quite new versions thought appropriate to the needs of newly defined markets. Redirecting bibliographical inquiry in a fruitful response to recent developments in critical theory and practice is certainly not easy. There is a paradox too in the ease with which new technologies now permit readers to reconstruct and disseminate texts in any form they wish, with few fully effective legal constraints, let alone those of a past scholarship which might have conferred another kind of authority. In many ways such uncontrolled fluidity returns us to the condition of an oral society.

When giving the Panizzi lectures, my purpose was to express a need and to stimulate discussion, and discussion there certainly was. In 1986 I took on one of the most exciting and demanding roles any teacher could wish – inducting each year's new intake of research students to the English Faculty in Oxford. The chronological range of their topics and the diversity of their interests demanded both a rigorous reduction of bibliographical principles to those readily seen as relevant to everyone's needs, and then the application of those principles to an almost infinite number of authors, periods, genres, and media, and to widely differing conditions of printing, publishing, reading, listening, or viewing. Eight weeks were devoted to 'text production' (the archive of surviving texts, the labour force that created it, the materials that form it, the technologies and processes involved in making it, and the formulae for describing it in its full variety), and then another eight weeks were spent on 'the sociology of texts' in which the students themselves explored, in a series of case studies relevant to their own research, the complex interrelationships of those conditions of production and the kinds of knowledge they generated.

My own journey to that end took fresh shape thanks to the generosity and guidance of Philip Gaskell. To the world at large his authority is manifest in the expository brilliance of his *New Introduction to Bibliography* and *From Writer to Reader*, but it was his intimate knowledge of the late seventeenth-century documents of the Cambridge University Press and his characteristic willingness to share them, that made possible the resurrection of an early printing house, its resources of type and presses, and the day-to-day activities of its managers, compositors, pressmen, correctors, joiners, and smiths. Its detailed records of pricing, type set, sheets printed, and wages paid supplied the evidence needed to reconstruct the working processes common to all printing houses of the hand-press period and the complexity of the working relationships within them. For the first time, scholars had a dynamic model of the manner in which printed books were made. Since the economic principle of concurrent production which it revealed implied that no one book would ever contain all the evidence needed to explain how it must have been produced, the new model was disconcertingly at odds with many assumptions then current in analytical and textual bibliography. Only by studying total production at any one time could a pattern be reliably discerned, and as the time and interests of most editors were usually and understandably limited to a single text, the kind of 'scientific' certainty once sought in analysing the printing of their text seemed less attainable than ever. As comparable evidence for other houses had failed to survive, it followed that for most books any detailed account of their physical production was irretrievable. There was one further important implication. While the *processes* of composition, correction, and printing were universal, the *relationships* between them on any one day were constantly changing – in the number of men and their output, in the resources they might deploy, and in the number, quality, and edition quantities of jobs on hand.

Paradoxically, this extension of knowledge about the context of book production, while it induced a scepticism about the kinds of truth some forms of analytical bibliography might yield, also opened up the discipline in at least three ways. First, because the conditions of production were so much more complex than had hitherto been thought,

it released the subject from the straitjacket of induction, giving it a new imaginative life in the speculative range it now demanded. Second, and ineluctably, in seeking to recover the complex conditions by which texts and their multiple meanings came to be made, it drove inquiry into ever widening circles of historical context. The logic of such an extension may be seen even in the practice, common in seventeenth-century London, of splitting up a book so that several printing houses might work on it at once. This again was a principle of concurrency whose attendant complexities in such cases demanded study of the trade as a whole if there were to be any hope of understanding the actual conditions of production. Third, it directed critical attention to other forms of visual evidence in the books themselves as determinants of meaning, especially the role of craft conventions in choosing a size and style of type consonant with the subject, its disposition on the page for clarity or emphasis, the functions of white space and decoration, the relation of format and paper quality to genre and readership, and so on.

For a book is never simply a remarkable *object*. Like every other technology it is invariably the product of human agency in complex and highly volatile contexts which a responsible scholarship must seek to recover if we are to understand better the creation and communication of meaning as the defining characteristic of human societies. To that end, the replication of comparable forms of inquiry for manuscripts, films, recorded sound, static images, computer-generated files, and even oral texts, should therefore be notable, not for what is different about them, but for what is common to them all in their construction of meaning. The recognition that those forms of record and communication are not disparate but interdependent, whether at any one time or successively down through the years, implies such a complex structure of relationships that no model is likely to embrace them all. At best perhaps we can acknowledge the intricacies of such a textual world and the almost insuperable problems of describing it adequately – and yet still travel imaginatively and responsibly within it. For ultimately what gives the highest significance to the history of all such forms and their making is their far from silent witness to a wealth of human experience

whose recovery is the principal end of our scholarship. As to print, its study might be called *histoire du livre*, or the sociology of texts, or even (since books have been traditionally its source and substance) bibliography.

The great thing about lectures is that they can be given a teasingly speculative quality: ideas are offered with an implied request that an audience use its 'imaginary puissance'. I hope these Panizzi lectures will give such a sense of being open and responsibly speculative. They are accompanied by a more detailed paper on the Treaty of Waitangi. This too was first given as a lecture, in this case to the Bibliographical Society in London, where its general principles were intended to encourage a European audience more immediately knowledgeable about the arrival of printing some centuries earlier in other manuscript cultures. Thus it extends my notion of the sociology of texts in a context quite different from that of the London book trades. It continues to have for me a more personal value in helping to make some sense of the role of oral, manuscript, and printed texts in determining the rights of indigenous peoples subjected to European colonization and to the commercial and cultural impositions of the powerful technologies of print. Interpretation of the treaty remains a highly sensitive political issue and the significance of its implications for New Zealand society demands, by contrast with the Panizzi Lectures, the sub-text of full documentation with which it is here supported.

William Congreve wrote at the end of the preface to his first book in 1691, '*I have gratified the Bookseller in pretending an Occasion for a Preface*'. Following that old custom, so too have I. It remains only for me now to express my gratitude, first, to Nicholas Wade for his permission to print his image of 'Droeschout's First Folio Shakespeare' as seen through the text of Ben Jonson's poem to its reader, and to the trustees of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, for the plates in the essay on the Treaty of Waitangi. Among the many others to whom I owe thanks for their support and advice, cautionary and corrective, I mention in particular Albert Braunmuller, Tom Davis, Mirjam Foot, Linda Hardy, John Kidd, Harold Love, David and

Rosamond McKitterick, David Norton, Brian Opie, Sarah Tyacke, and Ian Willison. I owe a very special debt to Roger Chartier for giving the book a much wider circulation in French than it has hitherto received in English, and for his highly perspicacious preface to that edition. The graduate students I was privileged to teach in Oxford for some ten years were a constant source of inspiration. In their intellectual quality, enthusiasm, dedication, and most of all perhaps their ingenuity in so creatively extending our inquiries into the kind of bibliography now demanded of us, they have carried the discipline forward into quite new areas while continuing to demonstrate its central role in our understanding of all forms of text. Finally, this new edition of the first series of Panizzi Lectures is most welcome for the opportunity it gives me to thank in a fittingly public manner their 'ONLIE.BEGETTER', Mrs Catherine Devas, a lover of books and of the scholarship devoted to them. Oxford had long had their Lyell Lectures and Cambridge their Sandars, but London offered no comparable series devoted to the scholarship of the book until Mrs Devas proposed that the British Library might host such a project. The generosity of her benefaction has brought into being a lectureship of great distinction, whose close association with the British Library is fittingly celebrated in the name of Sir Anthony Panizzi, the great Victorian librarian and effective creator of the British Museum Library in Bloomsbury. His administrative brilliance and political astuteness, but most of all his moral intelligence, in affirming and securing the nation's commitment to the principle of free access to knowledge as the essential condition of a true democracy, still have their exemplary and admonitory force. To the trustees of the Panizzi Lectures Trust, I again record my gratitude for the compliment of their invitation and my hope that their expectations and those of the donor may have been in some measure fulfilled.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF TEXTS

For Stuart Johnston

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The book as an expressive form

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My purpose in these lectures – one I hope that might be thought fitting for an inaugural occasion – is simply to consider anew what bibliography is and how it relates to other disciplines. To begin that inquiry, I should like to recall a classic statement by Sir Walter Greg. It is this: 'what the bibliographer is concerned with is pieces of paper or parchment covered with certain written or printed signs. With these signs he is concerned merely as arbitrary marks; their meaning is no business of his'.[1] This definition of bibliography, or at least of 'pure' bibliography, is still widely accepted, and it remains in essence the basis of any claim that the procedures of bibliography are scientific.

A study by Mr Ross Atkinson supports that view by drawing on the work of the American semiotician, C. S. Peirce.[2] It can be argued, for example, that the signs in a book, as a bibliographer must read them, are simply iconic or indexical. Briefly, iconic signs are those which involve similarity; they represent an object, much as a portrait represents the sitter. In enumerative bibliography, and even more so in descriptive, the entries are iconic. They represent the object they describe. Textual bibliography, too, may be said to be iconic because it seeks, as Mr Atkinson puts it, 'to reproduce the Object with maximum precision in every detail'. In that way, enumerative, descriptive, and textual bibliography may be said to constitute a class of three *referential*

[1] 'Bibliography – an Apologia', in *Collected Papers*, ed. J. C. Maxwell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 247; published originally in *The Library*, 4th series, 13 (1932), 113–43.

[2] Ross Atkinson, 'An Application of Semiotics to the Definition of Bibliography', *Studies in Bibliography* 33 (1980), 54–73.

sign systems. Analytical bibliography, however, would form a distinct class of indexical signs. Their significance lies only in the physical differences between them as an index to the ways in which a particular document came physically to be what it is. It is their *causal* status that, in Peirce's terms, makes the signs *indexical*. In the words of Professor Fredson Bowers, writing of analytical bibliography, the physical features of a book are 'significant in the order and manner of their shapes but indifferent in symbolic meaning'.[3]

I must say at once that this account comes closer than any other I know to justifying Greg's definition of the discipline. I am also convinced, however, that the premise informing Greg's classic statement, and therefore this refinement of it, is no longer adequate as a definition of what bibliography is and does.

In an attempt to escape the embarrassment of such a strict definition, it is often said that bibliography is not a subject at all but only, as Mr G. Thomas Tanselle once put it, 'a related group of subjects that happen to be commonly referred to by the same term'.[4] Professor Bowers virtually conceded as much in dividing it into enumerative or systematic bibliography, and descriptive, analytical, textual, and historical bibliography.[5] The purity of the discipline which Greg aspired to is to that extent qualified by its particular applications and these in turn imply that his definition does not fully serve its uses.

The problem is, I think, that the moment we are required to explain signs in a book, as distinct from describing or copying them, they assume a symbolic status. If a medium in any sense effects a message, then bibliography cannot exclude from its own proper concerns the relation between form, function, and symbolic meaning. If textual bibliography were merely iconic, it could produce only facsimiles of different versions. As for bibliographical analysis, that depends abso-

[3] *Bibliography and Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 41; cited by Atkinson, p. 63.
[4] 'Bibliography and Science', *Studies in Bibliography* 27 (1974), 88.
[5] Principally in 'Bibliography, Pure Bibliography, and Literary Studies', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 47 (1952), 186–208; also in 'Bibliography', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1970), III, 588–92.