Introduction

The chapters that follow were delivered, in slightly shorter form, as the Sandars Lectures at Cambridge University on May 12, 14, and 16, 1997. My aim in writing the lectures was to provide an introduction to the activity of bibliographical analysis – the examination of the physical characteristics of printed books, pamphlets, and broadsides – through a historical sketch of some of the principal events in the development of the field. Such a sketch raises the issues that analytical bibliographers have faced and describes the accomplishments they have achieved. It thus offers a rationale for pursuing this kind of work and a sense of the basic techniques to be employed in carrying the work out; and it supplies a point of view with which to approach the large body of writing in this area. The result – both the particular synthesis I am attempting here and the classified list of further reading that follows it – will, I hope, be useful to beginners and specialists alike.

The opening chapter, on the evolution of thinking about the theoretical foundations of the field, is followed by two chapters treating the two orientations that bibliographical analysis can take: an interest in reconstructing book-manufacturing processes from the clues present in books themselves, and a concern with recovering the historical meanings embedded in the design features of books. The former primarily (though not exclusively) involves physical details that readers were not meant to notice, and the latter deals with those that readers were expected to be influenced by. The two together cover much of the life history of books as objects, from the initial stages of their production through the responses of successive generations of readers to their physical appearance.

This second subject – the historical implications of book design – has not traditionally been studied by those who have thought of themselves as "analytical bibliographers"; but since the last third of the twentieth century it has been increasingly discussed by scholars of "book history" and critics interested in the visual aspects of literature. The two approaches (one focusing on manufacture, the other on the resulting product) are properly treated together, since both are concerned with physical details found in books; and indeed a combination of the two is required to produce a comprehensive examination of the basic physical evidence that books offer. It is an innovation of the present study to gather them under the same rubric. Though there has been no comparable survey of either one, the chapter on design features is inevitably more exploratory and tentative than the one on manufacturing clues. Whereas those clues are readily classifiable according to the part of the printing-shop process that each relates to, a framework for studying design features is not equally obvious and is proposed here for the first time.

The three chapters have been kept brief (with many details relegated to endnotes) in order to provide a convenient overview, all of which is a relevant part of the mental equipment to be brought to every act of bibliographical analysis, regardless of the period or focus involved. Indeed, all readers, not simply professional scholars and those engaged in book-world activities, should have some idea of the connections between physical books and the texts they contain (the texts being physical also when they are displayed as inked images). Everyone should understand what may be learned from examining multiple copies of the same edition and what it means to read the object along with the apparent intellectual content (as conveyed by words, musical notes, pictures, and maps). Everyone should realize, in other words, that the physicality of books is like that of all other objects in being a source of information about the past. Books are a part of material culture. Every artifact, every physical object made by human beings, is a record of human effort at a particular time and place, as well as a tangible link to all the succeeding moments of its life. Our understanding of the story each one tells enriches any use we make of it. We use books principally for reading; and the experience of reading is deepened by knowing how the makeup of the text and the details of its design, on the pages in front of us, came to be as they are and how they affected previous readers.

Following the three chapters is a section on further reading, consisting of a list of the works quoted from or alluded to in the text and notes, accompanied by a chronological index and a subject guide. The last of these should be thought of as an integral part of the book. Anyone who has read the expository chapters should be in a position to use this classified guide intelligently as a way of learning more, when necessary, about the repertoire of analytical approaches that have been developed for studying printed books. It serves as a fundamental selection from the vast literature of the field, enabling one to locate some basic material on particular topics, techniques, or periods. For those who have occasion to go beyond the group of citations provided here, references are included to more extensive lists, especially those in the latest version (2002 as of this writing) of my *Introduction to Bibliography: Seminar Syllabus* (which is also available on the internet at www.rarebookschool.org/tanselle/).

Very little mention is made in this book of *descriptive*, as opposed to *analytical*, bibliography. Although analysis is inevitably involved in description (and is indeed a tool of it, since description entails identification, which in turn requires analysis), the two activities are different enough to make the separate treatment of them feasible and desirable. Bibliographical description is concerned with the writing of accounts (whether in great or more limited detail) of the physical structure and appearance of books as wholes; frequently such accounts draw on external sources as well, and they are often brought together to provide full coverage of the output of individual authors or presses, arranged to reflect the relationships among different editions, impressions, and issues of books containing the same work. (The procedures involved have developed over the past century and a half and are now well codified.) Bibliographical analysis, on the other hand, concentrates on using physical details to learn something about the manufacturing processes that produced a given book and its text, the historical influences underlying its physical appearance, and the responses that its design engendered (which may require some attention to what successive owners have done to individual copies). Each act of analysis may examine one or more of the physical aspects of a book but does not necessarily attempt a thoroughgoing account. Such analyses may be combined

to form fuller treatments and may be incorporated into bibliographical descriptions.

Although there has been no comprehensive general introduction to bibliographical analysis since R. B. McKerrow's classic *Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students* (1927), other aspects of bibliographical study have been furnished with more recent sound introductory accounts. For descriptive bibliography, there is Fredson Bowers's *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (1949), supplemented by a series of articles I have written and intend to collect in book form. (Those from before 1987 are listed in "A Sample Bibliographical Description with Commentary" in *Studies in Bibliography* for that year; brief general introductions to the aims of descriptive bibliography were subsequently provided by David L. Vander Meulen's and my Engelhard Lectures, published in 1988 and 1992.) For the history of type, paper, illustration processes, binding, printing, and publishing, there is Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (1972), which summarizes the essential background that one must know before embarking on either analysis or description. The present book is intended as a complement to these works.

The emphasis here is on printed books, and indeed generally on the verbal-text part of them, not their illustrations or bindings; but illustrations (or other nonverbal material) and bindings, when present, must be analyzed as well, and they are briefly touched on at several points in the second and third chapters. Manuscripts and computer-terminal screens are also not specifically discussed, but the general approach and basic principles described here are applicable to all physical objects carrying verbal (or verbal-pictorial), cartographic, and musical texts in visible form. Physical analysis of manuscripts, usually called *codicology* or *palaeography*, is a well-established field, if no more widely understood than bibliography; the corresponding analysis of electronic files has scarcely begun. But all these fields can benefit from further interaction. It is increasingly being recognized that the arrival of printed books did not cause manuscripts to be entirely supplanted as a vehicle for publication, and we now have electronic texts existing alongside texts in both of the older kinds of object; thus the historical study of the production and reception of works made of words, musical notes, pictorial prints, and maps must take account of all the forms of their presentation. An understanding

of the value of examining the physical setting of texts, which has been articulated with particular fullness for printed books, is essential for intellectual and cultural history as well as textual study.

Another related endeavor not explicitly taken up here is that branch of judicial forensics dealing with the authentication and dating of documents. Although much bibliographical and palaeographical analysis is not primarily motivated by the need to authenticate printed or handwritten material, all such analysis – when carefully conducted with historical knowledge – does uncover any suspicious features that may lead to a determination of inauthenticity. The frame of mind reflected in this book, and even the specific techniques of analysis outlined here, are appropriate to forensic investigation as well as to bibliographical analysis. Both pursuits exemplify the critical spirit in which all artifacts can most productively be approached and experienced, revealing the human activity that produced them and illuminating what was seen and felt by those who encountered them.

W. W. Greg, addressing the Bibliographical Society in 1930, noted that Cambridge "might lay some claim to be regarded as the particular home of that study [bibliography] in England, and it was of course by many years the earliest to have a formal and endowed readership in our subject." It gave me pleasure to use that readership to speak about bibliographical history, and I thank Peter Fox, A. W. F. Edwards, and the other members of the Cambridge community who showed me that the tradition of hospitality to bibliography – and to those who speak about it – still flourishes there. I am also deeply indebted to David McKitterick, Paul Needham, and David L. Vander Meulen for reading and commenting on these lectures before publication; but of course I am alone responsible for the flaws that remain in them.

CHAPTER 1

Foundations

TO 1908

In April 1870 Henry Bradshaw, librarian of Cambridge University, published a little pamphlet entitled *A Classified Index of the Fifteenth Century Books in the Collection of M. J. De Meyer, Which Were Sold at Ghent in November, 1869.* Despite the unpromising title, it deserves to be considered a landmark in intellectual history – indeed, as far as bibliographical scholarship is concerned, one of the greatest of landmarks – for it contains a passage of major significance emphasizing the importance of systematically examining the physical evidence in printed books. Bradshaw insisted that arranging early books according to the locations and presses where they were printed was the only method whereby knowledge of early printing would be advanced, since it provides a basis for dating or identifying the printers of books that do not readily proclaim their origins:

> we desire that the types and habits of each printer should be made a special subject of study, and those points brought forward which show changes or advance from year to year, or, where practicable, from month to month. When this is done, we have to say of any dateless or falsely dated book that it contains such and such characteristics, and we therefore place it at such a point of time, the time we name being merely another expression for the characteristics we notice in the book. In fact each press must be looked upon as a *genus*, and each book as a *species*, and our business is to trace the more or less close connexion of the different members of the family according to the characters which they present to our observation. The study of palaeotypography has been hitherto mainly such a *dilettante* matter, that people have shrunk from going into such details, though when once studied as a branch of natural history, it is as fruitful in interesting results as most subjects. (pp. 15–16)

Bradshaw had made earlier comments that imply this point of view, going back at least to his letters to William Blades a decade earlier.[1] But this passage gains its landmark status by being the first published rationale of bibliographical methodology, explicitly envisioning a whole field of endeavor, from the person who was more responsible than any other for setting in motion what Stanley Morison called the "bibliographical revolution."[2]

That revolution consisted of a growing awareness of the ways in which the physical evidence in books provides a powerful tool for historical investigation and is relevant to reading the texts contained in them. In fact, this revolution is still in progress, for the significance of books as physical objects has proved to be a difficult concept for people to grasp, or at least it does not spontaneously occur to many of them. Books, both manuscript and printed, have always seemed to be in a class apart from other objects because they contain words that supposedly speak more directly to us than other physical details. We read the texts and pay little attention – or assume we are paying little attention – to the physical characteristics of the books, believing that any other containers would serve as well to convey the texts. Most people have had little occasion for thinking about the idea that books, like all other objects, must bear traces of the physical effort that went into their making, the culture that underlay their craftsmanship, and the treatment they have received since their creation. Even historically minded readers, including literary scholars, have generally not been interested in pursuing such history, apparently believing – along with the less historically minded – that the utilitarian vessels have no direct relevance to, or effect on, the contents or our knowledge of the past.[3]

The fundamental fact that underlies this situation is the intangibility of language: readers understand this truth intuitively, since they know that a verbal work can exist (or be recreated) simultaneously in multiple locations, whenever its words are brought together in physical or oral form; they consequently tend to denigrate the vehicle that in any given instance transports those words.[4] It is this nearly universal predisposition of readers, whatever their level of sophistication, that made the bibliographical revolution so long in coming and still makes its progress so slow. But the movement itself, and the results it has achieved in its first century and a half, form one of the fascinating

stories of recent intellectual history, a chapter in our developing understanding of our artifactual environment.

The revolution is really a change in our way of thinking about the physical objects called books; and Bradshaw's own thinking was formative in this process because he not only understood that physical details in books have their own stories to tell but also saw that those stories are relevant to a study of the texts in the books. It would be extravagant, however, to claim that Bradshaw was the first person to display any recognition of either of these points. In 1715, for example, Thomas Bennet published *An Essay on the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion*, which remarkably uses evidence of broken type and distinctive spacing in eight copies of the 1571 *Articles* to determine whether textually variant copies are from the same or different typesettings. Furthermore, Bennet drew on his considerable knowledge of printing (apparently gained through his association with Cambridge University Press) to attempt an explanation of how the variations could have occurred and what their sequence was, and he then tried to show how such an analysis illuminates a textual puzzle (the absence in some copies of the opening clause of the twentieth Article).[5]

Another, more direct, precursor of Bradshaw was Joseph Ames, whose *Typographical Antiquities* of 1749 made typographical analysis the basis for dating, and identifying the printers of, undated or unsigned incunabula (items printed from metal letterforms in the fifteenth century, also called "incunables"). He saw the usefulness of illustrating (and numbering) typefaces and of arranging descriptions "as near as possible into a sort of chronological order of time, beginning with each Printer's first work." His understanding of the concept of primary evidence is concisely expressed in his preface: "I did not chuse to copy into my book from catalogues, but from the books themselves."

In their different ways, Bennet and Ames can both be seen as emblematic of a general movement away from impressionistic antiquarianism and toward systematic scholarship, a movement that was gradually affecting the examination of artifacts of all kinds. Yet Bennet's concentration on a sixteenth-century book and his textual orientation make him appear an isolated forerunner of the "New Bibliographers" of the early twentieth century, whereas Ames's

concern with arranging fifteenth-century books according to their printers places him directly in a line that stretches internationally through the eighteenth century, from the *Annales typographici* of Michael Maittaire (beginning in 1719) to that of G. W. F. Panzer (beginning in 1793).[6] Book collectors in the eighteenth century also paid considerable attention to the physical aspect of books, though their goal was not likely to be systematic study; but by the early nineteenth century, even the most voluble exponent of that era's bibliomania, Thomas Frognall Dibdin, showed a serious interest in the typography of incunabula through his expanded edition (1810–19) of Ames's work (which had already been once expanded, by William Herbert in 1785–90).[7]

And Thomas Hartwell Horne, another writer stimulated by the bibliophilic euphoria following the 1812 sale of the Duke of Roxburghe's library, produced in 1814 *An Introduction to the Study of Bibliography*, which showed some awareness of the relevance of bibliographical evidence to an interest in the content of books. His conception of bibliography as a systematic field of inquiry, which in his preface he called "the infant science of Bibliography" (p. viii), brought together library history, the classification of books, the history of printing, and the analysis of the "forms" of books (such as determining format with the help of the "water-lines" in the paper) to "prevent confusion in describing editions" (p. 288) – a point made in a four-page section entitled "On the Forms and Sizes of Books" (pp. 288–92).

If these various writings, and a few other similar efforts,[8] set the stage for Bradshaw's appearance, it is clear that his role was the foundational one for all that followed: his analytical mind produced a rigorous pattern of thinking about the structure of books, and his selfless desire to promote the field caused him to be generous in assisting other scholars. Indeed, the great monuments of the first half-century of the bibliographical revolution have other names on their title-pages, but Bradshaw's influence usually underlies them. The first such monument was William Blades's *The Life and Typography of William Caxton*, the two volumes of which appeared in 1861 and 1863 (the first biographical, the second typographical). Its status as a revolutionary work is clear from its 1863 preface, which not only contrasts its "systematic" classification according to typefaces

with the approaches used by previous writers but also emphasizes the broader role of physical details. The "dissertation on printing as practised by Caxton," Blades says, is "founded on a critical examination of his workmanship" and includes "several particulars hitherto unrecorded," such as "many evidences of the practices adopted in the workshops of the Papermaker, Typefounder, Compositor, Pressman, and Bookbinder." This preface is, for 1863, a noteworthy declaration of the importance of "a careful physiognomical examination" of every book – indeed, the value of "a diligent comparison of copies, supposed to be the same."

Blades inherited from Ames the idea of illustrating and numbering Caxton's types for use in identifying and describing Caxton's output; but many of the details in Blades's study derived, directly or indirectly, from Bradshaw. Although Blades had a headstart over Bradshaw in thinking about early typography, Bradshaw quickly outstripped Blades in the acuity of his insights, as his letters to Blades in the late 1850s and 1860s show. Blades gave some idea of Bradshaw's contribution to his work in the preface to the second volume: "To H. Bradshaw, Esq., of King's College, Cambridge, I owe much for information concerning the true collation of the early unsigned books, as well as for numerous suggestions and critical remarks while many sheets were passing through the Press." And although Bradshaw's name turns up in some of the descriptions, it has since been shown that Blades's debts to Bradshaw went well beyond those that were specifically acknowledged.[9]

Bradshaw's catalytic role in the early days of analytical bibliography is illustrated by other correspondence as well – such as his letters to J. Winter Jones of the British Museum and to J. W. Holtrop (and later M. F. A. G. Campbell) of the Royal Library at The Hague.[10] Holtrop, like Blades, began his incunable studies earlier than Bradshaw, the first fascicle of his *Monuments typographiques des Pays-Bas au quinzième siècle* appearing in 1856, and Bradshaw called him "my chief."[11] But Bradshaw showed his own mastery in his letters, for there he was the instructor, not the pupil; and some indication of Holtrop's and Campbell's recognition of his leadership is afforded by an 1886 letter of Campbell's to G. W. Prothero, Bradshaw's biographer. "Mr. Bradshaw," Campbell wrote, "always has exalted our books as a sample to be followed in every other country where typography has