

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62638-6 - The Sources of English Literature: A Bibliographical Guide  
for Students: Sandars Lectures 1926

Arundell Esdaile

Excerpt

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**THE SOURCES  
OF  
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### INTRODUCTION

Elected by my University to follow in this Readership the company of the greatest bibliographers of this generation and the last—among them our late Librarian, through whom the light lit by Henry Bradshaw was passed on, Gordon Duff, who received it from him, and who not only in his Sandars lectures but in his bequest acknowledged his debt to Cambridge, and Mr Alfred Pollard, from whom I also have imbibed the tradition—I must begin by explaining why, unlike them, I do not propose to detail the results of some specific piece of bibliographical research, and why it is not the profane, but the initiate, to whom I would cry *procul, o procul*.

While still turning about in the English books of the later seventeenth century, at which I was then working in view of the handlist of that period which is to be the next in the Museum's series of special catalogues, and following two or three lines, rather uncertain which to take, I was removed from my peaceful province to one in which there is no peace, and (what is worse) no books, other than those which enshrine minutes and official

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correspondence. For a time, exactly fulfilling the description of Issachar as “a strong ass couching between two burdens”, I doubted whether I ought not to resign the Readership. But time was growing short, and I reflected that if I gave up the idea of embodying new research, I might yet fulfil the intentions expressed by Mr Sandars in his foundation of this Readership.

The function of Universities in promoting research and the disinterested addition to knowledge is normally that one of their functions which is most easily neglected. But in this particular field it is the reverse. The Sandars lectures as a series represent a massive body of profound and original learning. But to profit by them, their hearers must have already had not only much instruction, but much practical experience of similar researches. There seemed therefore to be room for a year in which these lectures should be addressed, not to palaeographers or palaeotypographers but to novices, to mere readers of books, not to College Librarians but to undergraduates. Having for several years taught the first elements of bibliography in the School of Librarianship at University College, London—a School of a kind, let me add, of which the first to be founded should have been founded not at a younger University, but at Cambridge—it seemed that I might well attempt “things unattempted yet” in this place. Some

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small part indeed of the material I shall give you in these lectures formed part of lectures of different scope given in that School, and it is to the excellent notes of a member of my class that I owe the sole record of them—this being, doubtless, the only point in which I resemble Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas.

Even the elements of bibliography are a very large and diverse field; and it remained to select some branch of it, within my own competence and of use to as many of you as might be. The choice was easy. We have here a large and distinguished School of English; much of my experience has been gained in the arduous task of filling up the gaps in the Museum's collection of English books of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The sources of the bibliography of English literature then are my subject.

## THE NEED OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

It is not at all a new observation that as mathematics are the grammar of physical science, so bibliography is the grammar of what used to be called book-learning, the science which is to be drawn from the written or printed word. And this is peculiarly true of the historical study of literature, for in that study the exact words of an author are,

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as in no other, vital. Of rival texts you must decide which is the true one, that is, often, but not always, the earliest; and errors and imperfections in the text chosen you have to explain in ways not inconsistent with the methods of book production of the time.

All of you, as professed students of English literature, will have to do this; but some of you will no doubt edit early authors, and you will find that a good editor is only a good student putting his principles into practice, and that every good student is a good editor *in posse*. The knowledge at the base of the student's and the editor's work alike must be a knowledge, first of the author's own writings; of the editions or sources chosen so that the true text is available, and arranged in order of appearance so that his development may be clearly traced; and also a knowledge of the writings of his time. All this cannot exist without bibliography. Behind every editor stands a bibliographer, and according to the work of the latter will the work of the former be; obviously the two heads should wear the same hat. Before our editor-bibliographer can choose his texts, he must find them. Moreover, when he has in his hand a copy of an original edition, he may well have some doubt of its perfection when he collates it, which only another copy, or even other copies, can set at rest. Again, scholars are now realising more and more that in the days of the cumbrous and slowly working hand-

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press it was an easy and frequent matter to alter the pages (called by the printer the "forme") when only partly printed off. The result is that two copies of the same edition of the same book may reveal important variations.

An instance of this which has recently (because of the high price paid) attracted a good deal of public attention is that of the first edition of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, pt 1, 1678. Five perfect copies are known. There may of course be more—but so far no more have appeared; and the scores that have been sent to the Museum by their sanguine owners since the sale in 1926 of Mr Warner's copy have all been of the nineteenth century; one was authenticated (by letter) as the first edition, since it contained "a photo of Bunyan opposite the front page". Well, in two of these copies the space below the "Finis" is occupied by five lines of errata, obviously discovered after the printing-off of the earlier sheets they refer to, and during the printing-off of the last sheet. They certainly represent what Bunyan wrote; and any editor who reprinted from one of the other three copies without collating one of these and incorporating the corrections, would be missing a point.

Before I leave this matter I will give you one more instance, this time from a French and not from an English book, one which has, so far as I know, not been noted by bibliographers.

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Ordinary copies of the “Histoire de Barbarie et de ses Corsaires, par le R. P. F. Pierre Dan, Ministre et Supérieur du Couvent de la Ste Trinité... Bachelier en Théologie”, Paris, 1637, 4<sup>o</sup>, have the last leaf of Book 2, p. 251 and blank (sig. li 2), a cancelling leaf, giving Dan’s account of Berber marriage customs. There is a copy of the book in this, the ordinary state, in King George III’s Library (147. b. 18). There is in the Museum another copy, in the Old Royal Library, bound in red Turkey morocco with Charles II’s cypher (C. 80. a. 2). In this copy the original cancelled leaf remains in its place; the scissor slit, the signal to the binder to cancel it, was ignored, as it was made in the middle instead of at the foot of the leaf. The cancelling text is found printed on the blank last leaf of the book, thus economising press-work. The original text of p. 251 reveals a surprising variation. It contains a sentence, which the author discovered after that sheet, but before the last, was printed off. The newly married Corsair bride, he says, “ne sort point du logis, disant qu’elle porte le dueil de sa virginité, qu’elle suit l’exemple de la fille de Iephté, qui après auoir perdu la sienne, courut toute désolée les montagnes de Iudée, & qu’elle l’imiteroit tres volontiers en ce point-là, n’estoit l’apprehension qu’elle a des lyons, & des autres bestes cruelles & dangereuses”.

The whole of this, after “porte le dueil de sa



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virginité”, is omitted in the King’s Library copy. Now, one does not have to be a Reverend Father Superior to perceive that there is something wrong about this version of the story of the Daughter of Jephtha. And in fact, on referring to Judges xi. 38 in the Vulgate and in the French Bible, you will find that “deflevit virginitatem suam per illos montes”—“elle ploroit sa virginité ès montagnes”. She lamented her virginity on the mountains, not, of course, because she had lost it, which she had not, but because she was not to lose it, nor to be a mother in Israel. The reverend author must have been eager to cover up his absurd mistake in time; but the negligence of a binder has, after nearly three centuries, betrayed his secret.

Now if you had been reprinting Dan on the Barbary Corsairs, and supposing that you had an ordinary copy, in the corrected state, on finding this leaf to be a cancel you would instantly have had to set out to find all the other copies available, until you had traced one that contained the uncorrected original leaf. My hunt was short; but it might have been long. Success has not yet attended that for a copy of Boswell’s *Tour to the Hebrides* with the original leaf containing the first version of the account of Sir Alexander Macdonald’s want of hospitality. When one reads the second, which in its turn was toned down (it is said under threat of the horsewhip) for the second edition, one wonders what

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the first can possibly have been. Of every edition of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries several copies should be collated; if one only finds a thrifty author like Munday dedicating different copies of the same book to different patrons, one learns some fact worth knowing, as well as picking up a little ill-natured amusement by the way.

But to trace other copies of a known book, just as to gather records of unknown books, requires a repertory of all English books of the period in hand. Where does such a list exist? It is safe to say, after 1640 and till the other day outside the quarter of a century before 1500, nowhere. The best we can do is to know what bibliographies and catalogues exist, and to that knowledge I hope to provide you with some introduction.

#### WORLD BIBLIOGRAPHY

There are a sort of projectors, as Swift would term them, who call for a complete bibliography of the world's literature. They are, indeed, more modest than those (they really existed, if they do not still exist) who called for a single detailed index of all printed matter, wherever or whenever produced. When the promoters of these schemes descend from Laputa, a little conversation with bibliographers who live and work on the mere