



## Twentieth-Century Books

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A man said to the universe:  
“Sir, I exist!”  
“However,” replied the universe,  
“The fact has not created in me  
A sense of obligation.”

THE PLIGHT OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHER who specializes in twentieth-century books is analogous to that of the man in Stephen Crane’s poem. The universe refuses to take him seriously. The young, would-be bibliographer of twentieth-century books is hard put to learn his trade; and after he has somehow trained himself, there are few organs—in the United States, at least—in which he can publish. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Since the scholarly community is not yet altogether reconciled to the reading of twentieth-century books, it cannot help regarding the laborious bibliographical examination of them as faintly ludicrous. However, there is a second, more serious barrier; and this is the general attitude that modern technology has either perfected printing or made it so complex that it is beyond the comprehension of a bibliographer. Nevertheless, modern printing is by no means perfected—whatever that is supposed to mean; it has only become more highly developed. All problems have not vanished. If some of the old problems no longer recur, new ones have arisen. However, it is true that twentieth-century books often defy the bibliographer who lacks a working knowledge of machine printing. Merle Johnson stated this bluntly in 1929: “A good practical printer can tell more about first editions than all your experts.” There is nothing for it—a bibliographer working on twentieth-century books has to understand the fundamentals of machine composition, plating, imposition, and planographic printing.

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## *Twentieth-Century Books*

Since any account of the bibliography of twentieth-century books is invariably an apology for it, let us proceed with the defense. In this paper the term "bibliography" means "descriptive bibliography" and "textual bibliography." This involves studying a Hemingway novel with the same care that is applied to a Shakespeare quarto. The principal aims are the same—to establish the best possible text of a given work and to allow one researcher to describe one copy of a book in such a way that other researchers will be able to compare it with different copies. Valuable by-products also emerge from this work, such as an index of a book's popularity, a picture of an author's revision habits, and an indication of any censorship. This is clearly a very different thing from the check lists which masquerade as bibliographies of twentieth-century authors; however, such check lists are often useful when it comes time to prepare real bibliographies. If the detractors of twentieth-century literature are still unconvinced of the value of such bibliography, perhaps they can be reconciled to the thought that this work is developing methods which can be held in readiness until such time as a new renaissance comes along.

In a way, the title of this article is misleading. The bibliographical study of twentieth-century books is not a self-contained entity bounded by the year 1900; rather it is an extension of the methods applicable to nineteenth-century books. The period of machine printing was born when stereotyping was introduced at about 1825, and achieved its majority when linotype was invented in 1884-1885. But the bibliographer of twentieth-century books cannot find aid or comfort in this. He cannot draw upon a solid body of work on nineteenth-century books because the nineteenth century has not yet received proper bibliographical attention.

The situation of the bibliographer of twentieth-century books is unenviable. The apprentice bibliographer has nowhere to turn for his apprenticeship. If he is fortunate enough to attend one of the few universities offering work in the bibliography of hand-printed books, he may then complete his training by attaching himself to someone who has—God knows how—managed to acquire an understanding of the bibliographical study of machine-printed books. There are no texts on the subject. Apart from the last section of Fredson Bowers' *Principles of Bibliographical Description*,<sup>1</sup> John Cook Wyllie's article on "The Forms of Twentieth-Century Cancels,"<sup>2</sup> and D. B. Boswell's *A Text-Book on Bibliography*,<sup>3</sup> there is very little at all on the subject. The last-mentioned work, though extremely useful, is not a text on

bibliography; it is a primer on machine printing. An R. B. McKerrow of machine printing is wanted. Models, too, are wanted. J. N. Blanck's monumental *Bibliography of American Literature*,<sup>4</sup> which does not include authors who lived past 1930, provides a methodology. However, a work of such broad scope cannot—and was not intended to—supplant a series of model author bibliographies.

Both the library schools and the graduate school departments of English should develop comprehensive bibliography courses which cover hand printing and machine printing. Moreover, every effort should be made to establish rapport between the classroom and the university press, so that students will have opportunities to become familiar with equipment and shop practice. In addition to actually training bibliographers, this educational program would produce other benefits. The enlightenment of catalogers and curators would aid the cause of bibliography. After all, a bibliographer must locate books before he can examine them—and this tiresome chore would be accelerated if more libraries took an interest in preserving reprints of twentieth-century books. Just try to find certain discontinued Modern Library titles, for example. Critics too—even new critics—would benefit from bibliographical training. There would certainly be fewer explications of metaphors which entered the text as typos. An eloquent plea for the application of bibliography to the novel is given in Bruce Harkness's "Bibliography and the Novelistic Fallacy,"<sup>5</sup> which includes examples of textual blunders made by critics.

The situation of bibliography is typified by the reckless way bibliographical terminology is applied to twentieth-century books. A given form of a book may be described as a printing, an issue, a state, a variant, or even as an edition. Depending upon which glossaries one consults, each of these terms has a variety of meanings. As a result of this Humpty-Dumptyism, the terms have become virtually meaningless when applied to twentieth-century books, except in the hands of a few careful workers. Yet these terms have been, for the most part, respected in the area of hand-printed books. To date, the only attempt to reform the language of bibliography as it is applied to machine-printed books has been in *Principles of Bibliographical Description*.

*Edition* and *impression* involve no difficult concepts, and there is no excuse for the improper use of them. An *edition* consists of all the copies printed from one setting of type or from plates made from that setting of type. *Impression*—frequently called *printing*, but *impressions* is preferable—is included within *edition*. *Impression* refers to

### *Twentieth-Century Books*

the copies printed at any one time from the same setting of type without removing the types or plates from the press.

*Issue* and *state* are included within *impression*, and are more difficult terms. Bowers<sup>6</sup> proposes these definitions for machine-printed books:

**Issue:** A re-issue is a special form of the original sheets of an impression, this form resulting from post-publication-date alterations made intentionally on order of the publisher or issuer to the form or forms of the sheets as originally printed in the impression concerned or as subsequently altered in state or in issue. These alterations go beyond attempts to fulfill the standards for an 'ideal copy' in completeness or proof correctness intended but not achieved at publication. To cause re-issue of the sheets, the changes must represent alterations in content or form not envisaged on publication as necessary for an 'ideal copy'; hence they constitute a definite effort to improve or change the import of a part of the sheets in a manner justifying a re-issue of the unsold sheets. Re-issue is caused only by alterations to the sheets and is not affected by variations in the publishers' binding or any of its parts. A re-issue cannot comprise a complete impression but only a part of an impression.

**State:** As it relates to the sheets of a book, a state is a variant form of the type-setting or make-up of one or more sheets of an impression or any of its issues, the variants resulting from alterations of any kind (a) made during the impression of the sheets, (b) made after impression but before publication, or (c) made after initial publication providing the alterations are attempts to create a form of 'ideal copy' as envisaged at the time of publication. Alterations to the sheets of an impression form a state if they result from the binder's initiative and not as a publishing effort by order of the publisher. As it relates to binding, all variations of publishers' binding or its parts used to case the sheets of an impression (including its issues) comprise state of the binding whether occurring before or after the date of initial publication.

If these definitions overwhelm the neophyte, they also make the point that this branch of study demands accuracy.

The problem of terminology is of great moment. Not only does the present anarchy interfere with the exchange of information between bibliographers, it also undermines that excellent tool, the bookseller's catalog. The bibliography of twentieth-century books is a wide-open field, and it is a dull-witted bibliographer who fails to discover lines of investigation from the perusal of catalogs. But the

process is confused by the fact that bookmen are among the worst abusers of bibliographical terminology. A copy advertised as a second issue may lead to a textual crux; then again, it may be only a variant binding.

A terminological reform that carried over to dealers might well result in another great benefit, the education of collectors. Every bibliographer owes much to generous collectors who have shared their books with him. But all too frequently the collector of twentieth-century books does not really know what he is about; he may collect just "first editions" (i.e., first impressions of first editions) or perhaps he may gather binding variants under the misapprehension that these have some bearing on the text. The bibliographer has a real stake in acquainting collectors with the need to collect the later impressions of a book printed from plates. Much of the bibliographer's work in machine-printed books involves differentiating impressions, and it would be a great convenience to have impression collections to draw upon.

Mention of the differentiation of impressions leads to a discussion of the methods employed by the bibliographer of twentieth-century books. In undertaking any research on an author whose books were printed from plates, the bibliographer's first task is to establish an edition-impression family tree for each title. Publishers' records—even if these are available—are not to be accepted without verification. The separation between publishing house and printing plant has led to the situation in which the publisher knows little about the precise printing details of his books—and cares less. Nor are the details some publishers supply on the copyright pages of their books to be taken at face value. Concealed impressions are quite common. Moreover, the codes that some publishers employ to indicate impression frequently suffer breakdown. For example, the numeral at the end of the text used by Appleton to mark the first impression of Edith Wharton's *The Children* probably includes four impressions.

The best method for differentiating impressions of a machine-printed book is by determining the pedigree of its plates on the basis of textual revision or correction. The discovery of such plate emendations also provides the stuff of literary criticism. This writer's own studies of textual revisions in books printed from plates indicate, for example, that F. Scott Fitzgerald's highly-publicized illiteracy was at least partly the fault of cavalier editing<sup>7</sup> and that the erudite James Branch Cabell made errors in French, Spanish, and Latin.<sup>8</sup>

### *Twentieth-Century Books*

As a rule of thumb, it may be assumed that few books escape plate alteration. In addition to intentional textual emendation, plate batter is extremely common. Metal plates are actually quite delicate. Shop handling, shop mishandling, and the great pressures used in printing produce damage. Plates are usually altered or repaired by two methods: the page may be reset and replated, or part of plate may be cut out and replaced by a linotype slug. Since both methods involve removing the plate from the presses, the appearance of plate emendation is almost automatic proof of reimpression. The only exception is stop-press correction, which is extremely rare.<sup>9</sup>

The only reliable way to go about the chore of locating textual emendations in plates is to collate every word of a first-impression copy against a copy from the last impression of the edition. Since the mortised-in type metal is softer than the plate metal and tends to spread during printing, a quick check may be made by looking for lines or parts of lines which are darker; but the only satisfactory method is complete collation. Until recently this was a tiresome and imprecise process because the human eye is not a dependable instrument. Now, however, there is a splendid machine which makes the job easier and more accurate.<sup>10</sup> The Hinman collating machine enables the bibliographer to collate two copies of the same edition. The investigator looks at the same page in both copies at once through a binocular viewer. So long as the pages are identical, the effect is that of seeing a single page, but any resetting or damage will seem to blink. The trained operator will also be able to recognize signs of type wear. With practice, a book may be machine-collated at the rate of forty pages an hour; however, for most purposes it is not necessary to collate the whole work. A sample collation of fifty pages is sufficient. Of course, this machine is not limited to twentieth-century books. Hinman developed it to aid in his studies of Shakespeare's *First Folio*.

In cases where no plate emendation is discernable, the bibliographer has recourse to other methods. A change in the gathering of a book indicates reimposition, which indicates reimpression. For example, if two copies of a book are identical in every respect, except that one is gathered in 8's and the other in 16's, the bibliographer knows he is dealing with two impressions. Gutter measurement at gathering centers is another indication of reimposition. Any significant variation in gutter measurement—more than 2 mm.—between two otherwise identical copies is an almost certain sign of reimpression. Even unrepaired plate batter provides some evidence of reimpression, for

most batter occurs in handling and storage between printings. If everything else fails, any considerable amount of type wear may be taken as an indication of reimpression, for a plate will rarely have a first run long enough to produce signs of marked wear. Although plate batter and type wear are often extremely difficult to interpret, the results can be most rewarding. For example, the order of the first four impressions of Ellen Glasgow's *They Stooped to Folly* as indicated by the title leaves is completely reversed by an analysis of type damage.<sup>11, 12</sup> A preliminary attempt to apply these techniques of plate analysis to an author bibliography is reported in *James Branch Cabell: A Bibliography, Part II*.<sup>13</sup>

Problems of impression differentiation can be extremely complex, especially when one is confronted with duplicate plates. Although trade practice varies considerably, it appears that many publishers cast duplicate plates for a promising title and store the second set until the originals wear out. Sometimes the second set is leased to a reprint house. When the duplicate set is put to use, nothing more than reimpression is involved. But in some cases the duplicates are not revised in accordance with the revisions or corrections made during the life of the originals; and this presents the anomaly of late impressions which reintroduce an earlier textual state.<sup>14</sup>

The great development in photo-offset printing has introduced special problems which the bibliographer of twentieth-century books must recognize. A title may be reprinted by photo-offset by photographing two copies. Depending upon which impressions are used as copy text, the photo-facsimile may revert to an earlier textual state or even introduce a new textual state in the impression-edition family tree of the title.

Very little is known about the problems involved in resetting a work by rerunning a monotype tape through a type-setting machine. Reputed to be more common in Europe than in the United States, this procedure merits attention. However, the darkest area in the bibliography of twentieth-century books is imposition. In nearly every case it is currently impossible to determine how a given volume was imposed. O. L. Steele, who has been working on the problem, thinks that some techniques can be worked out on the basis of in-press type damage for books which were not printed on rotary presses.

The theme of these remarks is this: the bibliography of twentieth-century books is the last frontier of literary scholarship. A few pioneers have scouted the territory, but it is still virgin territory. Almost any

## Twentieth-Century Books

serious effort is bound to yield results; but a united effort by the librarian, the dealer, the collector, and the scholar will turn the wilderness into a garden.

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