

A SUCCESSOR TO MCKERROW

Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*.
Oxford, at the Clarendon Press. 1972. U.K. price £6.00

The true value of Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, replacing McKerrow's *An Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students* in its publisher's list, is something that only a decade of use is going to establish; however a number of things may confidently be stated at once. The first is that no member of this society can afford to be without access to a copy. As an expert, wide-ranging and admirably ordered overview of the present state of knowledge of the development of printing, papermaking, typefounding, publishing and book-selling, combined with a useful account of the aims and tasks of bibliography and the techniques of bibliographical description, it would be welcome enough; but beyond this it offers a very great amount of new information, the result of Dr. Gaskell's own research, which will not be found elsewhere, or at least not in the secondary literature of the subject. There are few matters which could be of concern to the generalist bibliographer which are not touched on, and quite a number which receive valuable new illumination.

In measuring the new introduction against the old, our first reaction is likely to be one of relief that a small but still quite widely current body of misconceptions fathered by McKerrow should at last have been set to rights. One of the most serious of these, first queried over thirty years ago by R.C. Bald, concerns the drying of paper during the handpress period. Illustrations of early printing houses often show sheets hanging on lines, the reason for this being that the printers imposed on wet paper which had to be dried before collation could proceed. McKerrow, through ignorance of the quick-drying properties of the infernal concoction of linseed and lamp-black which passed for ink during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, assumed that the point of the process was to avoid set-off and that there must consequently have been a delay for drying before perfection during which the order of sheets in the heap might be expected to become disturbed. Gaskell's account of the damping of sheets is an excellent example of his feel for the raw materials of the book and makes clear that the real situation was the reverse of that hypothesised by McKerrow - that

it was, in fact, important that there should not be too long a gap between the white paper run and the reiteration:

The quires were drawn one by one through a pan of water, unfolded, and laid out flat on a board one on top of another, a sheet being folded down to mark each token. Paper had to be wetted in order to secure a good colour on the printed sheet, for there was not enough power available in the common press - only about 2.25 kg./cm² over the area of the platen even though it covered only half the forme at a time - to force the fibres of dry rag paper to take ink evenly and fully. . . . The early accounts agree that the heap was turned over, and the reiteration printed, immediately after the printing of the white paper. Indeed the printer would be unwilling to leave the heap for long with only one side printed, for the paper would begin to dry and shrink - or would be liable to change shape differentially if it had to be redamped - so that it became impossible to fit the point holes over the points and make register. Exactly how long is uncertain, but experiment with a damp cloth over a heap suggests that it could be kept for no more than two days without distortion.

[pp.125, 132]

The care and exactness of Gaskell's accounts of such things are perhaps the greatest strengths of his book; whether, on the other hand, such a concern with detail is entirely proper to a self-proclaimed 'Introduction' is another matter, and one that helps restore the balance in McKerrow's favour. The earlier book has survived as much for its author as for its substance. The voice we hear in it is that of an ideal Scottish dominie, affable, judicious, shunning obscurity and determined at all times that what is expounded should be intelligible even to the industrious dunce. The effect of Gaskell's writing is very different. His basic concern is to cram the maximum amount of information into his given ration of pages, a task which allows little latitude for getting on good terms with his readers, even assuming him to have possessed McKerrow's gift for this. One cannot see the *New Introduction* charming a reader into an interest in bibliography, as many must surely have been charmed by McKerrow. Even less can we imagine

it disarming sceptical book-collectors and literary scholars to whom bibliography is increasingly just another self-absorbed specialism making irritating and arrogant claims for its importance to him, while simultaneously fencing off its secrets behind impenetrable barriers of jargon. Indeed there must surely still be a role that a suitably pruned and corrected McKerrow could play, not perhaps as an introduction - Gaskell having given an altogether new dignity to that term - but at least as a primer of bibliography.

The difference between the two approaches may be seen in almost every subject treated by both writers. Take for instance first McKerrow and then Gaskell on the subject of leading between the lines:

'Leading' (it is convenient to keep the term 'leading' whether the actual 'leads' were metal or wood, though strips of wood used in this way are properly called 'reglets') is, of course, a very common practice nowadays; the great majority of books in which there is no special desire to save space are led, as it is thought to make a book more readable. In Elizabethan times the practice seems, however, to have been unusual, if not non-existent. I do not indeed know of a single English book of the sixteenth century which is consistently led throughout; though leads may have been in occasional use for special purposes, e.g. to place between stanzas of poetry. Generally, however, 'quads' seem to have been employed, i.e. pieces of metal similar to spaces, but much broader, so that a few - say half a dozen or eight - would fill an ordinary line. Whenever the blank space is found to be of the same depth as an ordinary line (or two or three ordinary lines) of type, it is probable that the space has been made by inserting a line or lines of quads.

[p.12]

This passage is a model of didactic prose. The argument is completely lucid, the tone personal and engaging. Moreover the writer is prepared to indicate the exact point at which certainty gives way to conjecture, a courtesy not always extended by Gaskell. McKerrow also has a footnote explaining how leading in an early book might be recognized as such, a gesture which has the effect of enrolling the novice reader straight away as a collaborator in the continuing work of bibliographic investigation. Gaskell, although

much better informed, much more precise, and admirably economical, is distinctly less considerate towards the beginner:

At all periods, but uncommonly before the eighteenth century, the lines of type might be 'leaded', thin strips of typemetal, reglet, or card being slipped in between each one. The leading might be done either in the stick (in which case quads were often set at the ends of the lines in order to prevent thin pieces of type from slipping up and down beside the ends of short leads), or after the lines had been transferred to the galley and were being made up into a page.

[p.46]

We can hardly doubt that Gaskell's contradiction of McKerrow is a conscious and deliberate one and that he would be able if challenged to produce a sixteenth century page leaded in the manner he describes. But at the same time the reader has to work considerably harder at the passage than is the case with the corresponding sentences in McKerrow. It should also be mentioned that neither 'quad' nor 'reglet' appears in Gaskell's index.

The real problem arises from the fact that Gaskell is not really giving us an introduction at all but the ground plan or first draft of a *summa bibliographiae* which in a second edition - and it is to be hoped that we will not have to wait another forty-five years for one - can hardly help but spread well beyond its present size. One cannot avoid the suspicion that if his commission had not been to produce a replacement for McKerrow he might easily have preferred encyclopedia form (with Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* the obvious model) and drawn on other hands besides his own to provide some of the specialised information. There are, after all, limits to what even the most accomplished generalist can be expected to achieve, and in a number of passages one senses a blurring of focus which seems to come from not having lived long or closely enough with particular problems.

An issue of some moment to students of early printing is that of the order of sheets through the press during the reiteration, which in turn has considerable

bearing on the editorial puzzle of locating press variants and interpreting their significance. A large part of our uncertainty comes from lack of knowledge of the precise effects of the process known as 'turning the pile' which is described by Moxon in these words:

Having *Wrought off* the *White-paper*, he turns the *Heap* thus:

He takes the *Paper-board* that his *White-paper* lay on, and sets it down on the ground: Then removes the *Heap* to his Left Hand; then takes up the *Paper-board*, and lays it on his Right Hand: And if it be *Twelves*, or any *Form Imposed* like *Twelves*, as *Twenty fours*, &c. he turns it from one long side of the Paper to the other, that is, the long side of the Paper that stands on his Right Hand when the Printed side lies upwards, he turns over to his Left Hand, and lays the un-printed side upwards. In performing this, he grasps off of the *Wrought off Heap* so much at once between both his Hands as he can well govern, without disordering the evenness of the sides of the *Heap*, viz. a *Token*, or more, and lays that upon the *Paper-board*; then takes another grasp in like manner, and lays that on the first grasp, and so successively, till he have turned the whole *Heap*, grasp by grasp. Then removes the *Heap* near the *Tympan*, and lays the other *Paper-board* beyond it, as the first *Paper-board* stood before; always remembering to lay a Waste-sheet first on the *Paper-board*.

Mechanick Exercises, ed.
Davis and Carter, p.297.

The passage is hardly a model of lucidity and readers will get no help from Gaskell in unriddling its mysteries - in fact they may even feel that he has failed to unriddle them himself. Most students of Moxon, including his editors, have assumed, and there is evidence in other manuals to support the supposition, that the practice described is not, as the literal sense of the passage would seem to imply, restricted to 12^{mo} and 24^{mo}, but was in use with all formats with the difference that the usual direction of the turn would be end-for-end. It is also generally agreed that the result of the process would be that the sheets would be perfected in more or less the same order in which they had gone through the press in the first place. That there was at least a strong tendency for this

to be the case is shown by the striking instances of early state perfecting early state and late state backing late state discovered by A.K. McIlwraith in the quartos of Massinger.* Gaskell, however, is prepared to state categorically on p.131 that the reiteration was printed 'in reverse order of sheets', implying that the 'turning' was merely lateral and did not involve an inversion of the heap. Then on p.144 we suddenly find him contradicting his earlier statement but in terms which still leave us in doubt as to what it is precisely that he understands by 'turning':

Let us hypothesize a case of remarkable regularity, in which all the sheets of a particular book were printed inner forme first. The heaps, moreover, were not too large to be turned straight over for printing the reiteration, so that early impressions of the inner forme were backed by early impressions of the outer forme, and vice versa. Thus each heap was delivered to the ware-houseman with the final impressions of both formes on the topmost sheet, and with that of the outer forme facing upwards.

What Gaskell means by the heap being 'not too large to be turned straight over' is not clear to me, but it would seem likely that he has in mind Hinman's analysis in *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* of the practice of Jaggard's pressmen in the early 1620's. If so, it can only be said that Hinman's account remains the clearer and more helpful statement of the problem. His position is that when the heap was fully turned the order of the sheets back through the press would be in accordance with the interpretation of Moxon given above; however he also believes that in the case of the first folio there is evidence to show that the pile was not always fully turned. His conclusion is as follows:

It follows necessarily from these facts, I think, that different practices with respect to 'turning the pile' were adopted at different times. At least occasionally the whole of the pile was turned, but more often, it would seem, only part

* 'Marginalia on Press-corrections in Books of the Early Seventeenth Century', *The Library* 3rd series, IV (1950), 238-248.

of it; moreover, the number of first sides left unturned when perfecting began was sometimes considerably smaller than at other times. Procedure was variable.

[p.233]

The ideal, in other words, was that the sheet should go through the press both times in much the same order; however, as is the case with many ideal prescriptions this was neither necessary nor invariably followed.

It is possible that this uncharacteristic moment of fuzziness on Gaskell's part is partly a product of his interest in a method of reiteration described or to speak more accurately implied in the sixteenth-century account by Le Roy, a method which could conceivably provide an alternative hypothetical explanation for some of the patterns of variants which have been called on as evidence for the 'normal' direction of turn. Some years ago while studying the quarto of Thomas Southerne's *The Wives' Excuse* (1692), the present reviewer attempted to make use of a technique devised by Povey to determine the order in which the sides of the sheet were printed, and was puzzled to find himself, despite the greatest care, getting different results from different copies of the same sheet. Le Roy suggests that only that number of sheets would be printed on a particular day as could be perfected on the same day (a practice that has obvious relevance to Gaskell's observations quoted earlier on the problem of shrinkage). In shops where this method was current, it would follow that printing would recommence on the second day with the forme that happened to be on the bed of the press - i.e. that used on the previous day for perfection - providing a remarkably elegant explanation (assuming that neither the method nor the observer were at fault) for the disparity encountered in *The Wives' Excuse*. Such a method would also tend to produce a situation where early states were backed with other early states and late with late independently of the method of turning employed. Indeed, it is theoretically possible for a sheet produced by this method to be indistinguishable from one produced by normal complete turning, except, of course, in the particular that it would exist in two states with regard to priority of formes. On the other hand it must be borne in mind that the practice was apparently unknown to Moxon. His account of the pressman's duties before and after his midday dinner break is firmly based on the premise that he is to resume work on the same forme.

Gaskell's most signal advance on McKerrow comes in his hundred-and-twenty page section on book production in the machine-press period; indeed a comparison produces much the same effect as one between maps of the world before and after Cook. As bibliographical studies of Australian and New Zealand printing are for the most part restricted to products of the iron press, this section will be eagerly welcomed by local workers, though it is not clear whether all the refinements of technology described by Gaskell will have found their way across the ocean. Knowledge of the dates at which major innovations first found their way to the South Pacific area could have useful practical applications. A problem frequently enough encountered by Australian and New Zealand librarians is that of localising and dating pamphlets, especially when, as can happen with or without subsequent binding, they have lost their wrappers. Gaskell is rather vague about the date of the invention of stabbing machines, but is prepared to give 'about 1875' for the introduction of the wire staple. A spot check of a nonce collection of a hundred and thirty duodecimo pamphlets dateable on external evidence between 1860 and 1882 and representing the work of some twenty Australian and New Zealand printers yielded only one that was stapled - a libretto of Gounod's *Faust* printed by William Marshall of Royal Lane Melbourne in 1882. It also showed that stabbing was generally reserved for pamphlets of more than one gathering, but that one printer, Robert Bell of Melbourne, was side-stitching pamphlets of all sizes with a sewing machine. It is not clear - though perhaps John Gartner or Walter Stone could tell us - whether Bell's technique was unique to him, but it may serve as an example of the kind of localised technical singularity which might someday help to reduce the occurrence of that last infirmity of a cataloguer 'n.p., n.d. (1850?)'. Gaskell's careful descriptions and datings of successive innovations will be of great value in the search for such features.

My comments so far have chiefly been concerned with Gaskell's accounts of printing techniques; however, his interests naturally extend far beyond this. His accounts of typefounding and papermaking are as detailed and exact as we would expect of him and contain much new information. His introduction to the aims and problems of bibliography and the elements of bibliographical description which forms a separate third section of the book can hardly be said to break fresh ground but will be valuable to those who lack the resolution for a full scale assault on Bowers and Tanselle. There are also some useful sections on publish-

ing and bookselling. Gaskell's remarks on what might be termed the social history of the printing industry are suggestive rather than exhaustive - he does not for instance find it necessary to make specific reference to such a watershed as the repeal of the Statute of Artificers - but what he does give us is generally pertinent and helpful. His chief concern is naturally with the organisation of the big book-printing houses, and it could be argued that this preference creates a somewhat distorted view of the industry as a whole. R.T. Fitzgerald's *The Printers of Melbourne* points out that the most important changes in the structure of the industry during the nineteenth century were on one hand the growth of large newspaper printeries which in Australia at least became important seedbeds of unionism, and the multiplication outside the large printeries of huge numbers of tiny and often suicidally competitive jobbing offices. Indeed even in the eighteenth century one suspects that if book production could be seen in the context of the total output of printed sheets, it would appear of rather less importance by comparison with commercial printing and ephemeral pamphleteering than might appear from the activities of such illustrious houses as those of Bowyer and Baskerville. One wonders how many journeymen followed the example of Thomas Gent in supplementing his earnings from Midwinter by printing bills for cockfights on a few founts reprieved from the furnace. Melbourne's first printer, Thomas Strode, was of the same breed, producing a newspaper single handed with type that had been lying pied for years, and his kind is certainly not unknown today. One aspect of the social history of printing in the nineteenth century which does draw Dr. Gaskell's attention is the increased reliance on women and untrained boys and the difficult position of apprentices who were frequently turned out as soon as they had ceased to be a source of cheap labour. Fitzgerald points out that Australia was in some ways a beneficiary of this. In 1853, the London Society of Compositors formed an emigration aid committee which financed departing migrants with grants averaging £25. There was also, as such names as McKinnon, McCutcheon and McCarron show, extensive migration from Scotland.

Gaskell was probably well advised not to let himself be too deeply drawn into the broader social and historical questions raised by his material, but what he does say suggests valuable lines of research that others, it is to be hoped, will take further. To hold an early book in one's hand and to appreciate how each

of its elements has come into being - how presses and tools were constructed; how paper was pulped from rags or hemp, moulded into sheets, passed through the press, collated, folded and sewn; how type was cut and cast, distributed into cases, assembled into lines, pages and formes, distributed again, then reassembled; how the folded sheets were secured to the boards; how leather was cured; how cloth, at a later period, was coloured and moulded - to be aware, in other words, how many dozens of hands have been active in the making of the single book one holds, this is surely the distinguishing mode of awareness of the bibliographer. But if at the same time he can see the book not simply as the creation of hands, or machines, but as the expression in the broadest sense of human lives, bibliography ceases to be simply the study of books and becomes part of the study of man, a humanity in its own right. One of the great achievements of recent bibliography, and one of which we are reminded at every stage of Gaskell's book, is the increasing personalisation of bibliographic investigation, the drive to discover even in such theoretically predictable processes as composition and presswork the distinguishing style of the individual craftsman - Hinman's folio compositors or McKenzie's Cambridge journeymen. But need the interest of the bibliographer stop with what these men did *inside* their places of work? One would hope it need not, and that Gaskell's tentative gestures towards placing the activities of the creators of the physical book within a social as well as a professional perspective will be further developed in the years ahead. It is significant - as it will also be a source of great satisfaction to members of this society - that a book which, whatever its defects, seems certain to be at least as great a stimulus to the further development of its subject as its predecessor has been, should bear a dedication to our Vice-President Don McKenzie, whose own work has played so vital a part in reminding us that bibliography is ultimately a study of men.

Harold Love

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