

A DANGER TO BIBLIOGRAPHICAL HEALTH?: A REVIEW ARTICLE

Stokes, Roy. *A Bibliographical Companion*. Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press, 1989. pp.x, 298. ISBN 0-8108-2175-3. US\$27.50.

Of the production of book-related encyclopaedias, dictionaries and glossaries there appears to be no end. They exhibit a certain overlap, but — such is the nature of the bibliographical universe — they tend to complement rather than compete against one another. Professor Stokes locates his *Companion* (what are the connotations of ‘companion?’) ‘somewhere between John Carter’s *ABC for Book Collectors* . . . and Glaister’s *Glossary of the Book*’ (p.v), probably the two most used and respected works in the field. Since the *Companion* has no direct competitor it has seemed most appropriate to regard it as *sui generis*, to be judged in isolation rather than by comparison with other occupants of the field.

Professor Stokes’s position in the bibliographical world is a singular one: in a discipline increasingly dominated (some would claim) by studies both technical and specialised, and therefore inaccessible to any but the fellow specialist, he has been a synthesiser and populariser — witness his revision of Esdaile¹ and his *The Function of Bibliography*.² His position is perhaps surprising in that he himself appears not to have been a contributor to the primary literature which he has synthesised and popularised, and at the outset I think that it has to be said that in this distance from the coalface lie some of the serious weaknesses of the *Companion*.

According to its author, the present work ‘will have little to say to the experienced bibliographer’; rather, ‘It is designed to meet the needs of students who are at an early stage in their bibliographical interests.’ (p.v) Here, I think, Professor Stokes is unfair to his own work: stand up all those bibliographers who can define or describe ‘Anopisthograph/Opisthograph’, ‘Backless Binding’, ‘Chronogram’, ‘Diaper’, ‘Explicit’ and ‘French Joint’, to proceed alphabetically no further. Bookmen’s guides such as this often have a particular bias: older ones tended to be overburdened with the esoterica of printing and bookbinding. Professor Stokes has his share of unusual bookbinding terms, but his particular hobby-horse is church service books — as he explains it:

They are included because experience has demonstrated the difficulty of talking with students about the Constance Missal or the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold when it was apparent that many students did not know what the words meant. Even a reference to a Book of Hours brought the inquiry, “Which of our books are you talking about?” (p.vi)

I should simply note that there are similarly silly or embarrassing anecdotes and observations scattered throughout before passing on to more central matters.

The ‘final’ basis for inclusion was a reading of the bibliographical journals of the past forty years and a scanning of booksellers’ catalogues. So far so good: it is proper that usage should determine inclusion. The material is arranged alphabetically (with ‘see’ and ‘see also’ references); each entry attempts in its definition/explication to ‘cover “not too little and not too much” ’ (p.v); and most entries conclude with ‘References’ (i.e. guides to further reading).³ Entries range from two lines (e.g. XYLOGRAPHY The overall term which covers all forms of working on wood, i.e., wood cutting and wood engraving.’ — without, incidentally, any reference to BLOCK PRINTS AND

BOOKS or WOOD CUTS AND WOOD ENGRAVING, both of which entries refer also to RELIEF) to two or three pages.

It is in the nature of things that no one's choice — no matter what the field — will be universally applauded. In the present context, though, one might justifiably believe that the 'final' basis for inclusion should properly have been the applicability of the particular phenomenon to bibliographical studies. My own view is that entries which consist merely of a definition which could be derived from a good general dictionary (like ANOPISTHOGRAPH, BOUSTROPHEDON, LIMNER and the various service books) are superfluous in a work such as this. The alphabetic arrangement also raises questions. Had the work remained the "Glossary of bibliographical terms" which it started life as (p.v) such an arrangement would have suited well (and straight definitions would have been the norm). But specific entries rub shoulders with others wide in scope and discursive in treatment without necessarily being exhaustive, thus sometimes requiring references in both directions. The general subject 'editing' may serve to illustrate the difficulties of finding one's way around and getting a complete picture. There is no entry for 'editing' or 'critical edition', but there *is* one for DEFINITIVE EDITION (six lines on the editorial sense, six on the authorial), which has no references, even though there is an entry COPY-TEXT (two pages), which does not use the term 'definitive' and has only one reference, to PRINTER'S COPY (on the basis of Paul Baender's muddle-headed article on the supposed confusion of the two terms). COPY-TEXT quotes Greg's 'Rationale' at length, including the famous distinction between 'substantives' and 'accidentals'; there *is* an entry ACCIDENTALS, which quotes the same passage from Greg, but not one on 'substantives'; the discussion under ACCIDENTALS suggests that a reference should have been made to VARIANT. (There are other gaps which, in view of DEFINITIVE EDITION, surprise: for example, 'apparatus', 'collation' (in the textual sense), 'old-spelling', 'variant forme' etc.) What all this disquiet on my part probably signifies is that I believe that in passing beyond the boundaries of a glossary Professor Stokes has strayed into no-man's-land, retaining alphabetic arrangement when his treatment of his material calls out for the systematic arrangement of a handbook.

But a work of reference may overcome the limitations of its arrangement if the entries themselves measure up. I have no hesitation in saying that in the *Companion* they simply do not: the work is so full of error, misunderstanding, irrelevance and ambiguity that I would adjudge it positively dangerous in the hands of the neophyte, at whom it is aimed; at the very least it will mislead or confuse.

Bibliographical format is a basic phenomenon on which the neophyte might well seek illumination. But the opening paragraph of FORMAT is more likely to puzzle than to illuminate:

Format is the term used to describe a book in accordance with the number of times and the manner in which the original sheet of paper was folded. It follows that format is not indicative of the size of the book because, in itself, it says nothing of the size of the sheet and this has varied from country to country and from time to time. The format of a book is one of the most important features in bibliography since it is upon that knowledge that information regarding its completeness will depend.

I would expect an experienced teacher of bibliography to be capable of better than this. After reading further one might sort it out for oneself, but surely one could expect to be told at the outset that 'format' designates the ratio of the leaf to the sheet of which, before folding or cutting, it once formed a part — i.e. 4:1=4° (quarto), 8:1=8° (octavo), 12:1=12° (duodecimo/twelvefold), etc. The reference to 'the size of the sheet' in the second sentence seems to suggest that there has been only one size at any one time in any one country, whereas what should be said (indeed, what may have been intended) is that there have always been several sizes of paper used in printing and that there has always been a certain latitude of dimensions even within sheets of the same nominal size, such as 'crown', 'demy', 'foolscap' etc. The third sentence doesn't mean anything that I can determine.

Matters are no better when the individual formats are described:

Broadsheet or Broadside. No siglum is suggested: 'brs. or 1°' might have been expected, but if one turns to BROADSHEET one finds that Allan Stevenson 'supports the use of the abbreviation "Brs" rather than 1° in description' — why is not suggested. Despite Professor Stokes's assertion to the contrary, broadsheets are not necessarily bound into volume form 'along one long edge' (there is a reference to OBLONG FORMAT as well as to BROADSHEET). The statement that broadside volumes, especially color-plate books, are 'frequently mis-described as "grosse in-folio," "large folio" or, most commonly, as "elephant folio" ' is misleading, to the extent that legitimate terms are being *mis-applied*.

Folio. To understand the explanation one needs first to read WATERMARK (to place the watermark on the sheet) and LAI D MARKS [literary warrant?] (to find out what chain lines are) — there are references to neither. Folding 'across the width' is unclear (which direction is 'the width?'): 'parallel to the shorter side' is much more explicit. The term 'quiring' might usefully have been introduced to denote the process by which 'three or four sheets [are often] placed together and folded so as to give a gathering of six or eight leaves respectively'. The description of a 'pair of leaves from a single sheet' as a "bi-folio" is unusual; perhaps Professor Stokes means 'bi-folium', which comprehends a pair of conjugate leaves in any format. The siglum 'fol. or 2°' is not offered, and there is no entry for 'folio' to provide any assistance.

Quarto. This sub-division is preceded by the statement 'Further foldings, in the direct line of formats, will continue to be across the narrow direction of the previous format . . .' The expression 'in the direct line' has no accepted connotations, though in the context it clearly means continuing the process of folding in two, each time 'across the narrow direction' (which must mean the same as 'across the width' or parallel to the shorter side).

Octavo. Though mention is made of the fact that 'in a trimmed book, very little will usually be visible of the watermark' no indication is given of where the watermark might be expected to be found, either in terms of leaves within the gathering (GATHERING is a particularly unhelpful entry) or in terms of position within the leaf — compare this with Quarto, where 'the watermark [is] cut by the sewing in either the outer or the inner pair of leaves'. The reference to octavos being gathered in sixteens

in 'modern books' is meaningless without any notice of machine-printing and the inappropriateness of applying the conventional designators of format to its products. Duodecimo. Why the duodecimo should be regarded as 'an interesting variation in [the] direct line of foldings' is not made clear. Agreed, there *are* 'several different foldings which will produce this format', but it is just not true that 'one of the most common is to fold the original sheet in three across the width, followed by two folds in the other direction'. No other method of imposing in twelves is mentioned, though the standard scheme was to produce a cut-off of four leaves which, when removed and folded, were inserted as leaves 5-8 within the other eight, separately folded, leaves.⁴ The unpopularity of the concertina-fold scheme was due simply to the fact that it produced a deckle edge at the head of four leaves in every gathering, whereas folds and cuts were desirable, so that when the sewn gatherings were ploughed a smooth surface would result, especially necessary if gilding were to be applied. The quoting of Austin Dobson's description of twelvemos, 'somewhat inaccurately', as "the dear and dumpy twelves" serves no purpose whatsoever.

Octodecimo and Vicesimo-quarto are merely mentioned as 'variations' of duodecimo and are described as 'common': octodecimo yes (though only in the second half of the eighteenth century), but vicesimo-quarto *common*?

Since I have a particular interest in a number of topics with entries in the P sequence for present purposes I have concentrated on that sequence, which typifies the volume as a whole:

PAPER QUALITY MARKS. Of the 47 lines 42 are devoted to a discussion of the existence of various qualities of paper (and might more properly have been included in PAPER). The other five show a fundamental misunderstanding of the marks; or perhaps it is simply that in the severe compression the essence has been expelled — one would have to follow up the footnote to make sense of this:

During the eighteenth century, printed symbols, set on the signature and catchword line, were used by some presses to indicate varying qualities of paper.

But these appear to have been used only to distinguish between sheets of the same size paper when there were separate issues within an edition and were provided as a guide to the binder.

As in other entries, Professor Stokes rejects the accepted term 'direction line' in favour of the certainly-more-obviously-intelligible-but-nonetheless-unwarranted 'signature and catchword line'. And surely it is not unreasonable to insist that the hyphen ('paper-quality') be retained, since the sole literary warrant for the term does have a hyphen, which ensures that 'paper' and 'quality' are taken as a compound adjective rather than 'quality' and 'marks' as a compound noun.

PART-ISSUES. The 'practice of issuing the work in parts' did not begin 'in the second quarter of the eighteenth century' — what about Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises*, 1677/8-1684, which includes 'the whole art of printing', known to all bibliographers as the earliest of a long line of printer's grammars. The anecdote about the two Canadian encyclopaedias, which 'provides an excellent example of similar and complementary works appearing at the same time in different forms of issue', is painfully irrelevant.

And one might have expected at least a mention of Wiles's *Serial Publication*, the standard work on the period up to 1750.

PASTE DOWNS. [another candidate for a hyphen?] In this entry 'paste down' is used only in the sense of a liner of a board or spine, but there is a reference to END PAPERS, the conjugate of 'the fly [*vere* 'free?'] end paper'. END PAPERS also has a reference to PASTE DOWNS, but nowhere is there any suggestion that the one term does truly embrace two distinct phenomena.

PIN HOLES. Professor Stokes has to resort to periphrasis because he does not use the term 'register' (which is defined, s.v. REGISTRUM, only in the incunabula sense of 'a list of the gatherings as an aid to the binder in arranging them prior to binding'). It is difficult to visualise how the points 'went through the first center fold of the sheet equidistant from the top and bottom of the sheet' — maybe they could have been more clearly related to a line joining the mid-point of the two longer sides. Clarity aside, the statement does not hold for the commonest forms of imposing in twelves (and sometimes in eighteens), where the cross-piece of the chase (and therefore the pins, which were accommodated by slots in the cross-piece) connected the longer sides one third of the way along.⁵ The final paragraph, suggesting that 'the early printer . . . was adapting a method already in use in the writing of manuscripts' — *viz*, the practice of scribes in pinning down their vellum to a board in order to keep it steady — is, to say the least, fanciful.

PRESS FIGURES or PRESS NUMBERS. (with a reference from the immediately following PRESS LETTERS — what is the warrant for this variant?) 'Press figures are small [is size relevant? they seem often to be in the text size or in the size of the catchword] numbers [typographic symbols and letters of the alphabet are not mentioned] usually [where else might they be?] in the lower margin, on or close to the signature and catchword line [*vere*, direction line]; they are most often within the range of 1 to 9 [no reason is adduced for the limitation — the number clearly reflects the number of presses available to the individual printer: even in the eighteenth century figures as high as '22' are found, while in the early nineteenth they go at least as high as '25']. So much for the first sentence. Thereafter 'printer' is confusingly used for 'pressman'; the periphrasis 'side of each sheet printed' is employed instead of the useful 'forme' (for which there *is* an entry); no justification is provided for the assertion that 'It is important that press figures be recorded, whenever they are present, in a bibliographical description'; nor is any explanation given for the advice that 'The page should be designated as B7^a . . . rather than as page 29.' Incomprehensible, however, is the repetition of the conventional view that 'Press figures are found from the last quarter of the seventeenth century onwards' when one of the References is an article whose title implies that they are to be found as early as 1629.

There is so much more deserving comment, even in the P sequence; but the inadequacies of the entries — at least as seen by this observer — will have been made obvious.

Finally, though, something needs to be added about the References appended to most of the entries. In principle, good: the student should be led from the entries themselves, which for the most part discuss the phenomena in general terms, to specific

cases, where the phenomena are exemplified in analysis and other forms of application. However, there is no evidence of discrimination: eighteen references, for example, are appended to the one-page entry VARIANT, ten to the twelve-line ISSUE, and so on. The number of the References is clearly a reflexion of the literature unearthed by Professor Stokes in his reading of the past forty years' journals, not of the importance of the subject or, indeed, of the References themselves. Most References contain the key word — thus of the twenty-three references appended to COMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS (arranged, incidentally, alphabetically, not chronologically, as promised in the entry itself) only Bowers's 'Bibliographical evidence from the printer's measure' does not contain 'composit-' in its title.

More alarming, however, than the lack of discrimination in selecting the References is the implication that the title alone may have determined the inclusion of specific articles in particular lists. Thus in the References appended to COMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS, among the studies of composers involved in the setting of the Shakespeare First Folio, is R.A. Sayce's 'Compositorial practices and the localisation [*vere* '-z-'] of printed books, 1530-1800'; despite the presence of 'compositorial' in the title Sayce was not concerned in the slightest with *compositorial analysis* (defined by Professor Stokes as 'try[ing] to determine which parts of a text have been set by which composers . . . [and] try[ing] to assess what individual characteristics each might have had which would have affected their work', a form of circular reasoning endemic in compositorial studies). Indeed, 'localization' is a topic which Professor Stokes does not do justice to at all: Giles Barber's 'Catchwords and press figures at home and abroad' — the article which gave the as-yet-unnamed pursuit its formal beginning — appears appended to both CATCHWORD and PRESS FIGURES, while C.J. Mitchell's 'Quotation marks, national compositorial habits and false imprints' is cited in QUOTATION MARKS in support of the typically vacuous statement that 'the matter [i.e. the evolution of practice] seems to have attracted little more attention until a few years ago.'

Often, too, the References are not prepared for by the entry: thus 'first formes', 'variant formes' and 'setting by formes' — the substance of the four References appended to FORME — are not even mentioned in the entry, which is confined to a description of the chase, the furniture and type-pages and a definition of "outer" and "inner" formes. ('Setting by formes' appears in a passage from Hinman quoted in CASTING OFF but is not defined explicitly — in fact the entry is very confusing in jumping from "casting off" as no more than a calculation of 'the number of pages into which the text would set' to its being 'a good example of the kind of printing house practice which has important bibliographical implications', with the quotation from Hinman serving as the only (oblique) reference to printing from type not set seriatim.

It is perhaps ironic that a bibliographical companion should be such an unattractive book. In the age of 'desk-top publishing' ragged right margins and the use of underlining to represent italicisation seem unsophisticated, evoking that transitional period in modern publishing when author-prepared camera-ready copy was of necessity produced at a typewriter (but even then italics have been available for at least twenty years via the now-obsolete IBM golf-ball element). And there are no illustrations or diagrams. Entries on aspects of typography would in particular have benefited from

visual representation. Thus the entry BLACK LETTER quotes Herman de la Fontaine Verwey's four-fold classification, which, without illustration, is, however, quite unilluminating; and the definition of BODY — 'the name given to that part of a piece of type which is measured to secure the expressed size of the type. It expresses the measurement of the stem or shank of the piece of type from front to back.' — would have been helped immeasurably by a simple diagram illustrating the various parts of a piece of type.

That I have found nothing good to say about this work is to be explained by the simple fact that in my estimation the whole enterprise lacks any redeeming feature. It is a *bad* book — not just flawed or mediocre but positively *bad* — and potential users (particularly students) should be warned against it: it is a danger to bibliographical health.

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NOTES

1. Arundell Esdaile, *A Student's Manual of Bibliography*, 3rd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin/The Library Association, 1954); 5th ed. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1981).
2. (London: André Deutsch, 1969); 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Gower, 1982).
3. To avoid any confusion I have reserved the lower-case r for 'reference' in its general application, the capital R for further reading.
4. See Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), fig.55 (p.[97]).
5. The best illustrations of the location of cross-pieces are those in J. Johnson, *Typographia, or the Printers' Instructor*, v.2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1824), pp.*1-*46(=145-190).

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