

**BOWERS'S PRINCIPLES:  
SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON ISSUE,  
FORMAT, AND INSERTIONS**

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In 1991, on the occasion of Fredson Bowers's death, B.J. McMullin offered in these pages (15: 53-59) a sensible assessment of the status of Bowers's *Principles of Bibliographical Description* after forty-odd years and made three suggestions for its revision. Since I have written and thought about the same matters that McMullin takes up, it is perhaps appropriate for me to offer some reflections on his proposals. My extended delay in doing so allows me to regard these comments as a way of marking, in the *Bulletin*, the fiftieth anniversary of the original appearance of the *Principles*. McMullin's three points and my thoughts on them are as follows.

**1. Issue**

McMullin argues that the concept of *issue*, which in the *Principles* seems to be largely restricted to re-issue, should be expanded to include distinct 'planned units' that were published simultaneously, such as copies with different booksellers' imprints or copies printed on different qualities of paper. I thoroughly concur with McMullin; indeed, I intended what I wrote about *issue* in 1975 to convey this point. In 'The Bibliographical Concepts of *Issue* and *State*' (*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 69: 17-66), I defined *issue* as 'a consciously planned publishing unit' (to be distinguished from *state*, which refers to the kind of correction that was not meant to call attention to itself as a marketing effort and which can only categorize an individual page, not a book as a whole). As examples of *issue*, I mentioned not only variant imprints and special-paper copies but also some kinds of variant publishers' bindings. Although Bowers, not dealing extensively with the machine-press period, did not consider bindings as determinants of *issue*, I think it is important to extend the concept to encompass the conditions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century publishing.

**2. Format**

Handmade paper was occasionally produced in double-size moulds. In many of those instances there was a cross-bar in the deckle that caused two separate sheets of conventional size to emerge; apparently at other times the product was a single large sheet that had to be cut in half before printing. McMullin, dealing with the latter, says that the practice 'presents certain

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difficulties' to the bibliographer in denominating the format of the books that result, since he regards format as 'an expression of the relationship between the leaf and the sheet of which it once formed a part'. He suggests treating the cut sheets that the printer placed on the press as if they were whole sheets, rather than following the practice of Greg and Bowers in handling 'turned chain-lines' with such expressions as '(8° form) 16"'. McMullin's suggestion makes good sense; but I would go further and not even regard it as an exception to the regular concept of format. If one defines format, as I prefer to do, in terms of the number of *pages* in one complete forme (the word 'format', after all, is related to 'forme'), the size of the sheet as manufactured is irrelevant. This approach, in dealing with the present example, makes it unnecessary to speculate about whether two separate sheets or one larger one originally came from the mould (and treating the two situations in the same way would seem to be a requirement for a helpful definition of format). In the case of machine-printed books, bibliographers are often unable to find clues as to the original size of the paper (which in many instances may have come as a roll); but when (as occasionally happens) it proves possible to determine the number of pages on the press, one then knows the format. (I plan to write in more detail about this approach to format in the near future.)

### 3. Insertions

I am happy to note that McMullin accepts my suggestions for the collation-formula notation of insertions (as made in 'Title-Page Transcription and Signature Collation Reconsidered', *Studies in Bibliography* 38[1985]: 45-81). He quite properly adds that one should test this plan to see whether it is usable in all situations. As one such test, he asks how one would treat 'an insertion consisting of an odd number of leaves where the one disjunct leaf is found in the middle'; and he wonders whether '1.2.3.4.5' would be satisfactory to describe such a situation when the total number of leaves is five. My answer is that it would not be, since it does not make clear which leaves are conjugate and which disjunct (and they cannot all be conjugate with each other, as it seems to suggest). Following my two basic rules – simply numbering the inserted leaves consecutively and using periods and commas to indicate conjugate and disjunct leaves, respectively – I would express the structure as '1.5, 2.4, 3'.

In addition to these three matters, there is one other point of McMullin's that I should like to comment on. After alluding to the description of cloth colours, he says in passing that 'one might wonder aloud whether it really is possible to comprehend both hand- and machine-printed books within one set of principles'. I would not, however, regard a system of colour identification as a matter of principle but as the mechanics for recording one

particular detail. The fact that details present in some books (such as publishers' bindings, or press figures, or engravings) are not present in others does not lessen the feasibility, or desirability, of approaching all books with an outlook grounded in the same principles. And there is no reason why a manual of procedures as well as of principles (which Bowers's book actually is) cannot deal with books of all periods. Indeed, my view is that it is more efficient to take the comprehensive approach because more details are common to books of all periods than are unique to the hand- and machine-press periods.

I hope these comments are helpful. But in any case I trust they can be taken, along with McMullin's from which they spring, as a sign that Bowers's *Principles* still provides a firm base for productive discussion.

*New York*

#### CORRECTIONS

*BSANZ Bulletin* v.23 no.1, 1999: in Hugh Amory's 'The Texts of Fielding's Ovid', at p.18, line 7 up, 'vivenda' should read 'videnda'.

*BSANZ Bulletin* v.23 no.1, 1999: in the title of Keith Maslen's Tribute to Don McKenzie the year of birth should read 1931, not 1932. The exact date of birth is correctly given within the text. The author apologises profusely for this error.