

OBITUARY



Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer, 1919–2010

Although Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer never visited Australia or New Zealand and was known personally to relatively few people in our bibliographical community, her death is an event that should be drawn to the attention of readers of *Script & Print*. In some English-speaking circles there is a tendency to contrast Anglo-American approaches to book history grounded in physical bibliography with French-style *histoire du livre* based on the quantitative methods dear to the *Annales* school. That this is a caricature hardly needs to be repeated. However, it is salutary to remember that the late Henri-Jean Martin taught the new discipline in the Fourth Section of the *École pratique des Hautes Études* in association with Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer, whose role it was to initiate would-be book historians into the subtleties of bibliographical analysis. Thus, nearly half a century ago, the “French school” was being trained by a remarkable specialist, who was properly described in the dedication of the massive *Bibliography of French Emblem Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* by Alison Adams, Stephen Rawles and Alison Saunders (Geneva: Droz, 1999–2002, 2 volumes) as “Doyenne of French Bibliographers and our long-term Guide, Mentor and Friend.” The tribute links scholarly eminence to the personal generosity that marked her unflinching helpfulness to researchers who came from near and far to work in the *Réserve* of the *Bibliothèque nationale* in Paris. Two generations ago students of literature in France were usually quite ignorant of bibliographical matters. Recent

perceptible changes in attitude and competence are largely attributable to the teaching and influence of someone whose whole career was spent in the Richelieu building in a cosier and better-lit equivalent of London's old North Library.

Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer (née Roussel) had a lifelong association with Normandy, where she was buried on 21 January this year. Yet it was in Paris during the Second World War that she completed a *licence-ès-lettres classiques* and a diploma from the French national school of librarianship before beginning her professional activity at the Bibliothèque nationale and marrying Étienne (an engineer at Air France and, in retirement, a painter), the father of her four sons. Initially her special field of interest and competence was artists' books of contemporary painters. In the 1950s her responsibilities turned to sixteenth-century printing and punch-cutting in order to launch an edition of the manuscript materials on the Paris trade that had come to the library from Philippe Renouard. The first product of this effort was a very substantial article on Antoine Augereau published in 1956. Henceforth her scholarly work would be divided essentially between French typefounders down to the Revolution and a wide range of questions related to physical bibliography.

It is hardly surprising that these new specialisms brought her into close contact with the Anglo-American world. She sometimes mentioned to me what she had learnt from Laurence Hanson in Oxford, and her links with the circle of Stanley Morison, and notably with Harry Carter, are clear in her publications. Indeed she once expressed to me her envy of Carter, able through his position to spend his days in the exacting study of typefaces, whereas she, as a librarian committed to various tasks of administration and public service, had fewer opportunities to keep her eye in practice. Despite this handicap her contributions to the history of typefounding were considerable and well recognised on the other side of the Channel. In February 1968 she read a paper "Aperçu sur la fonderie typographique parisienne au XVIII^e siècle" to The Bibliographical Society (see *The Library*, 5th series, 24 (1969): 200–18), and in 1977–78 she was Lyell Reader at Oxford, lecturing on "La Famille Fournier et la fonderie typographique en France au XVIII^e siècle."

Relatively little of what she produced is available in English: an article, written with Annie Parent, on "Claude Garamont: New Documents" in homage to Harry Carter (*The Library*, 5th series, 29 (1974): 80–92); a paper on "Caxton and France" presented at the Caxton International Congress in 1976 (*Journal of the Printing Historical Society* 11 (1975–76): 33–47); the substantial "Introduction" to Fred Schreiber's *Simon de Colines. An Annotated Catalogue of 230 Examples of His Press, 1520–1546* (Provo, Utah: Friends of the Brigham Young University Library, 1995, xiii–lxxiv; English translation, xlv–lxxvi). For the rest, Anglophone readers must make the effort—rewarding in all sorts of ways—to consult the originals.

Shortly before Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer's retirement an ample selection of her papers, carefully revised by her own hand, was published under the title *La*

Lettre et le texte: trente années de recherches sur l'histoire du livre (Paris: École Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles, 1987). In nearly 500 pages we have a demonstration that physical bibliography ("bibliographie matérielle" in the translation suggested from Monash University in the 1960s by Roger Laufer) is an integral part of book history. At the same time the collection goes further insofar as it embraces texts on library collections, for example "L'Enfer vu d'ici," 393–421, and on an individual bibliophile ("Un collectionneur engagé, François Rasse Des Neux, chirurgien parisien," 423–77) alongside the long sections on punch-cutters and typesetters, on printers and workshops, and "De la fabrication des livres à la bibliographie matérielle," 273–366. The last includes her magisterial "Fabriquer un livre au XVI^e siècle," 273–319, taken from volume I of the *Histoire de l'édition française*, and a ground-breaking intervention in the bibliography of Molière, "A la recherche des *Précieuses*," 339–66. Some 37 publications up to 1985, not all of them reproduced, are listed, XXV–XXVIII.

Those omitted from the selected reprints include the first two volumes of the collaborative monument Philippe Renouard's *Imprimeurs et libraires parisiens du XVI^e siècle* (1964 and 1969), the re-edition, with Brigitte Moreau, of Renouard's repertory of the Paris trade to 1600 (1965) and various contributions to exhibition catalogues, notably the splendid *Ronsard: la trompette et la lyre* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1985). However, Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer's research did not stop at her retirement. She continued to work and publish for the best part of another decade and a half, as is attested not only by her articles in the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du livre* (Paris: Éditions du Cercle de la Librairie, 2 volumes to date, 2002–5), but also by important studies on aspects of the eighteenth century: "Un voyage bibliographique au XVIII^e siècle" in Giovanni Crapulli, ed., *Trasmisione dei testi a stampa nel periodo moderno*, vol. II: *II Seminario internazionale Roma-Viterbo 27–29 giugno 1985* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1987), 171–206; "Livres arrêtés, livres estampillés: traces parisiennes de la contrefaçon" in François Moureau, ed., *Les Presses grises: la contrefaçon du livre (XVI^e–XIX^e siècles)* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1988), 101–12. It is obvious that a comprehensive bibliography of her work is needed. It will be supplied in a small memorial volume now being prepared by the Ancora Press.

Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer's last years were affected by severe memory loss, a particularly cruel affliction for a bibliographer. None the less, her achievements will live in what she wrote with exemplary accuracy and clarity and in the influence she had on many pupils and colleagues. One can regret that she did not produce a full-blown French equivalent of McKerrow's *Introduction to Bibliography*, but I think we agreed that the time was not quite ripe, that the corpus of carefully studied cases was not large enough. Work by those inspired and guided by her will make it possible in this generation.

Among the talented people who have been employed in and who have presided over the Réserve of the Bibliothèque nationale de France since the Second World War, Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer was exceptional. Like Ian Willison at the British Library she understood her function as one of welcoming local and international researchers and of putting them in touch with others working on related topics. The specialist rooms in the Richelieu building were, as a consequence, a creative centre of scholarly interchange. She was more than liberal in inviting visitors to dine in her successive apartments over several decades. I remember in particular a grand occasion in 1967 when my wife and I met that redoubtable scholar and publisher Eugénie Droz, an almost legendary figure in Renaissance studies. The generosity did not falter. That it was openly recognised is evident in the unusual subscriber support for the publication of *La Lettre et le texte*. What is said in Nicole Cazauran's preface and in Henri-Jean Martin's "Hommage à l'auteur" with elegance and precision is borne out by the many names of individuals and institutions. To be sure, there was eagerness to acquire an important book, but there is no sense of careerist constraint in the declarations of respect and affection implicit in the subscriptions. As one who profited mightily from Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer's help and advice I endorse the sentiments expressed nearly a quarter of a century ago and record my personal loss in the disappearance of a scholar quite out of the ordinary.

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