

REVIEWS

Thomas Foster Earle, *Portuguese Writers and English Readers: Books by Portuguese writers printed before 1640 in Oxford and Cambridge Libraries*. Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, Third Series VI, 2009, lxxxvi + 237 pp. ISBN: 0 901420 53 (hardcover). £40.

Reviewed by John N. Crossley

I couldn't put it down. This reaction is more to be expected to a Dan Brown or an Agatha Christie novel than to a bibliographical catalogue. Of course I mean the introduction, rather than the catalogue, but the former fills eighty-six pages and is so delightful and full of information—information that one feels one ought to know, but does not—that it had this effect.

The Oxford Bibliographical Society has long been putting out illustrious volumes—this one is in the third series—most notable of which is surely Neil Ker's 1954 book, *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts Used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings*, reprinted with corrections in 2004, and the present work is a happy addition.

Earle is a great advocate for Portugal and gently chastises the English for their neglect of their oldest ally. A treaty, formally signed in 1386, has been in effect ever since; an alliance that was in place long before Britain became united. The Portuguese have not only fortified the wine the English drank but also the waters surrounding England, providing a defensive fleet when England had none. Between 1384 and 1390, under the terms of the treaty of Windsor, a squadron of Portuguese galleys, generally six in number, was based permanently in English waters, usually in Southampton. The enemy was usually the Dutch or the Spanish, although the Spanish and Portuguese crowns were united from 1580 to 1640.

This book only lists books published before 1640, but the choice of this cut-off date seems to have been influenced by the existence of Paul Morgan's unpublished sixteen volume catalogue, *Inter-Collegiate Catalogue of Pre-1640 Foreign Books in Oxford Libraries outside the Bodleian*, of 1979, rather than the change in sovereignty in the Iberian peninsula.

There are surprisingly many books by Portuguese authors from the period, and it is appropriate to note that, in addition to military help, Portugal provided support of an intellectual nature through the books that were imported into England. These were by no means all published in Portugal, because the quality of the printers, even in Lisbon, left something to be desired (lxiv). Many authors chose to publish abroad, notably in the Netherlands (about twenty with Plantin) and Germany. Not publishing in Portugal had several effects, the most obvious of which is the lack of awareness by readers that the authors were indeed Portuguese, though they usually affirmed their Lusitanian origins on the title

page. Nevertheless books by Portuguese authors travelled to the furthest parts of the world, even in the Spanish half: sixteenth-century printings of works by Pinto and Azambuja went to Mexico and the Philippines.¹ The subject matter was the usual for the time: theology, law and medicine, though there are also some books about Portuguese discoveries and exploits in the Far East. On the theological front the books from Catholic Portuguese writers that emerged around the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent were read by Protestant English readers with respect if not agreement (xxxiv ff.). Most of the books are written in Latin, while medical books in Hebrew provide the great exception. Few are written in Portuguese since, although Spanish was tolerably well known, Portuguese was not.

The remaining two thirds of the book contain a short-title catalogue of 2,343 copies of books by Portuguese in the university and college libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, together with a useful list of the holdings in each of the forty-eight libraries. The index covers not only the introduction but also the catalogue, helpfully including names of previous owners of the books. There is an extensive bibliography that is thematically divided into six, a division I did not find particularly helpful.

The entries for the individual works include the shelf marks for the locations of all the various copies (sometimes with strange abbreviations for college names), valuable notes on bindings and previous owners, and interesting facts about material bound with the copies. Extremely useful notes on the individual authors are included in this catalogue, together with alternative names. I did notice one anomaly: Jerónimo de Azambuja, whose Latin name is correctly stated as Oleaster (xxxiv), thereafter becomes Oleander, and Oleaster is not to be found in the index. A botanical confusion perhaps? Although both are trees, the oleaster bears edible fruit while oleander is totally poisonous. For Australasian (and other) readers it should be noted that Markham's volumes on Queirós (Quirós) have long been superseded by the work of the Australian Franciscan Fr Celsus Kelly, whose newer translation was also published by the Hakluyt Society in its second series as volumes 126 and 127 as *Australia* [sic] *del Espíritu Santo: the Journal of Fray Martín de Munilla, O.F.M., and Other Documents Relating to the Voyage of Pedro Fernández de Quirós to the South Sea (1605–1606) and the Franciscan Missionary Plan (1617–1627); Translated [from the Spanish] (1966).*

I had some initial difficulties understanding the arrangement of titles under each author, which is not explained. In general the books are arranged in very

¹ See Otis H. Green and Irving A. Leonard, "On the Mexican Booktrade in 1600: A Chapter in Cultural History," *Hispanic Review*, 9.1 (1941), 1–40, rptd in Irving Albert Leonard, *Books of the Brave* (Gordian Press, New York, 1964), and Angel A. Aparicio, OP, ed., *Catalogue of Rare Books, University of Santo Tomas Library*, Vol. 1, 1492–1600, Vol. 2, Part 1, 1600–1699 (Manila: University of Santo Thomas Library, 2001).

strict alphabetical order, but collected works head each list in which they appear. Letters have precedence over spaces, and therefore many titles appear in long subtitles beginning with “In ... ” or “De ... ”. Book entries comprise an informative extract from the title page, including the publisher’s name and address as it appears there, and the size of the copy. I found the punctuation in the annotations problematic: there seems to be a dearth of full stops, which makes the entries somewhat awkward to read on occasion. Also on grammar, John Sparrow, that erstwhile doyen of Oxford bibliophiles, would have had a busy time “which” hunting, as he called it, in the introduction. However, the thoughtfully concise listings in the catalogue are much to be commended.

Earle modestly concludes his introduction: “So the present study has to be seen for what it is, a pioneering excursion into a bibliographical world whose precise extent and significance for the moment can only be guessed at.” This seems more accurate and hopeful for the future than his pessimistic words at the end of the foreword: “So, though one day, when every book in Oxford and Cambridge has a full computer record, including a record of the nationality of its author, this book will be obsolete, that day is some way off.” I would dispute this feared obsolescence, since having a focussed bibliography brings books into close proximity, offers new insights, and opens up opportunities for further investigation in a way that the cold comprehensiveness of even excellent computer files never does. Having said that, I also believe that it would be invaluable to have this book available in an electronic format so that it was even easier to search. Perhaps the Oxford Bibliographical Society will include a CD in the back of their next publication? They are already making some material available online.

So this book is much more than the sum of its parts; it is a joy to read, charmingly written, full of information, pleasantly instructive, and a valuable contribution to the increasing awareness, particularly in the last decade or two, of the impact that people from the Iberian peninsula have had, not only in geographical but also in intellectual exploration, not just Spanish but also Portuguese.

Horst Meyer, *The Decline and Fall of BBB: A Valedictory Volume. Bibliographie der Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte (BBB), Band 22/23 – 2002/03. Mit Nachträgen aus den Jahren 1980 bis 2001*. Bad Iburg: Bibliographischer Verlag Dr. Horst Meyer, 2004. 560 pp. ISBN 3 923526 22 9. €79.00.

Reviewed by Wallace Kirsop

Horst Meyer’s efforts during nearly a quarter of a century to record the production of monographs, articles and reviews relating to book and library history in the widest possible sense have to count among the more heroic exploits in our field of research. The last number in this final contribution to the series is 6,801. This

gives some notion of the quantity of data treated each year, especially since the figures are higher in some of the earlier volumes. In noting the demise of an important reference tool, it is necessary to indicate what it offered specialists and to understand why such initiatives have become enormously difficult, if not impossible, in our new millennium.

Although *BBB* has never attained universal coverage, it is far more than a guide for German-speaking countries alone, whatever their weight in the international book world. The structure of the volume conforms to the normal *BBB* pattern: a detailed table of contents setting out the various subject divisions, including a long section devoted to reviews; a brief preface in which the compiler pulls no punches; a list of the journals searched (13–26); the subject arrangement (27–388), followed by reviews (388–470); an index of authors of books and articles (471–521); an index of reviewers (522–33); a name index (534–50); a place index (551–4); a subject index (555–60). It is, therefore, not hard to find the information contained in the bibliography. The subject organisation is an open invitation to look over fences and to make fruitful comparisons, something that is more than ever required in a research community afflicted with tunnel vision.

Meyer thanks as usual the friends and colleagues who have sent him references and offprints and notes the now much reduced number of libraries in which he could pursue his researches (9). There is no mention of editorial or proofreading help. There are, alas, a large number of literals that a polyglot user can fairly easily correct. Was this part of the hidden burden of working alone on such a demanding task? However, pedantic grumbles should not obscure how much book and library historians owe to *BBB*.

And now it is all over. The first news I had of this—before *The Decline and Fall of BBB* was sent to me, somewhat belatedly, for review—was in Peter R. Frank's brief article, "Ein Notruf..." in *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Buchforschung in Österreich* (2005-1: 40–42). The main reason given by Meyer for the cessation of his activity is the fact that periodical holdings in German libraries have been slashed. My innocent questions in 2005—after nearly three decades away from Germany—about lapses in subscriptions to the *Australian Journal of French Studies* (which still appears in *BBB* 22/23) revealed to me the extent of Meyer's difficulties. In such circumstances, the necessary work of inspecting physical copies of all the items to be included is inevitably stymied. More than a generation ago, and for much more modest enterprises in reference bibliography, I discovered the perils of trying to cover the ground for Australia in one state capital. Multiply these difficulties a thousandfold and it can be seen why *BBB* had to cease, with the disastrous consequences for scholarship that are spelt out by Peter Frank.

Meyer notes the decline in interest in book and library history in the professional journals he has indexed for over two decades. Much of what is relevant to us, workers with the small, the unique, the marginal, the pettifogging,

is carried in local historical journals and such places. These will escape, as they do now, the digitised packages of major publishers, and will become *ipso facto* unattractive to research libraries interested in collecting as easily as possible. In present circumstances one hesitates to add “as cheaply” given the profits expected by the publishing industry. But, in a climate of economic disturbance and with all sorts of doubts abroad about the maintenance of copyright, surprises are entirely possible. Institutions that have blithely jettisoned their hard-copy journal sets may soon regret their actions.

In advance of the digital storm, some of us are taking to hoarding books, pamphlets and magazines on the shelves. Fuddy-duddy reactions? Not necessarily, because alongside all the advantages of the digital revolution—for example the full indexing possibilities for newspapers—there are traps. The fate of *BBB* illustrates one of them, as Peter Frank points out. Meyer’s bibliography is not, and cannot be in foreseeable circumstances, replaced by internet searches. Its rational and practical design, its comprehensiveness in the German field, with lots of excursions to other cultures, these are the things that made it easy and quick to use. But we have reached a crisis point in our willingness to support the means and the tools of historical scholarship. For this reason alone the “decline and fall” of *BBB* is much more than a trivial incident.

The British Book Trade: An Oral History, edited by Sue Bradley. London: British Library, 2008. xxiv + 328 pp. ISBN 978 0 7123 4957 4. £25

Reviewed by B. J. McMullin

First, two clarifications: (i) “book trade” here covers only publishing and bookselling; (ii) this volume is not to be confused with Trevor Howard-Hill’s *The British Book Trade, 1475-1890; A Bibliography*, which was published in the same year, also by The British Library (jointly with Oak Knoll Press and in conjunction with The Bibliographical Society and The Bibliographical Society of America).

The Note to Readers explains the origins of the present volume:

The accounts in this book are edited extracts from interviews recorded between 1997 and 2006 for Book Trade Lives, one of a number of oral history collections initiated by National Life Stories, an independent charity based at the British Library Sound Archive. The original full-length versions are accessible at the British Library, with content details available online at www.cadensa.bl.uk. Some interviews have been closed for a time by the speakers. Further information about National Life Stories and its collections can be found at www.bl.uk/nls. The aim of this book is to offer a flavour of what the Book Trade Lives collection holds and an invitation to explore it further. (vii)

The British Book Trade in its oral form consists of a total of sixteen hundred hours, or an average of fifteen hours per interview. Whether or not in its published form it does truly represent the interviews can presumably be determined only by listening to them—quite a challenge, I should think, if you are interested in a subject rather than a person. The present volume is not a distillation but more a commonplace book. It consists of nineteen chapters, each devoted to a particular topic, headed “Lunch” and “Readers and Writers,” for example. Within chapters snippets appear under the names of interviewees; most snippets are self-explanatory, with only the occasional interpolation of the interviewer’s question where needed to provide context and continuity.

The name of only one of the 117 individuals interviewed for the *Book Trade Lives* project (84 extracted here) will be familiar to students of bibliography: Robin Alston, who was interviewed presumably on account of the innovatory reprographic processes developed at his Scolar Press. He is not represented in the present volume.

Overall, what we get is a series of reminiscences and anecdotes, laced with lashings of gossip, all wrapped up in an aura of nostalgia: those were the good old days (which lasted until the 1980s), when publishing houses were family owned, when booksellers were independent and idiosyncratic. They have now given way to conglomerates and chains.

This is a book for insiders—the names of interviewees will by and large be unfamiliar to others, who will find it difficult keeping up with who’s who and who’s where at a particular time (members of the trade seem nowadays to be particularly mobile). A few of the interviewees began their careers before the Second World War (a couple in the 1920s), but most began after, many considerably after.

From these insiders’ reminiscences: we learn of the trials and tribulations—not to speak of machinations—of publishers’ reps on the road; we get portraits of some of the “characters” in the trade, such as Christina Foyle; we get a feel for the “gentlemanly” practices of the old publishers, some of whom, perhaps with private means, appear to have had little concern for the bottom line; we get plenty of evidence of the bibulous goings-on of members of the trade, not least their Friday lunches; we get a feeling for the resentment about the intrusion of newcomers such as Paul Hamlyn and Robert Maxwell; and there comes through the camaraderie that once permeated the trade and that has now been lost under new, more competitive, management regimes. But, as already observed, not much of this is likely to be of particular interest outside the trade, unless as material for a picaresque novel.

The major difficulty is that the chapters are fragmented—that is, we get, for example, a collection of reminiscences of working at the wholesalers Simpkin, Marshall, before and after the bombing of their warehouse 29 December 1940, but by their nature they do not create a coherent whole. That said, there are

chapters that may provide source material for writers of other kinds of history. Two chapters stand out in this regard: the one on arguments for and against the retention of the Net Book Agreement (abandoned in 1995), the other about the treatment of unsolicited manuscripts in publishers' offices ("go through an agent" seems to be the best advice).

Oral history has its limitations, as Ms. Bradley acknowledges in her Introduction: we are advised to treat these snippets as "partial, subjective and fluid." (xviii) Also, I suspect, interviewees have been cautious about uttering adverse criticism of confreres, even those now dead—what, I wonder, was withheld when the name of Robert Maxwell cropped up? The final word I leave to Andrew Franklin:

Witness statements – which is in effect what these are – are problematic sources of evidence, I think. And conversations are even more problematic, because naturally I'm guided both by the questions you ask and by the relationship I have developed with you as my interlocutor. So if I was conducting research, I would never use these on their own: I would go and look at other things as well. I would look at the trade press and at contemporary newspapers, which comment on the state of independent publishing interestingly, if erratically, from time to time. And there are some thoughtful books about publishing. I would certainly go and interrogate the financial statements. [...] I'm sure that you've covered British publishing from all sorts of angles, but I still think you have to contextualise it with concrete information. (302)

Amen.