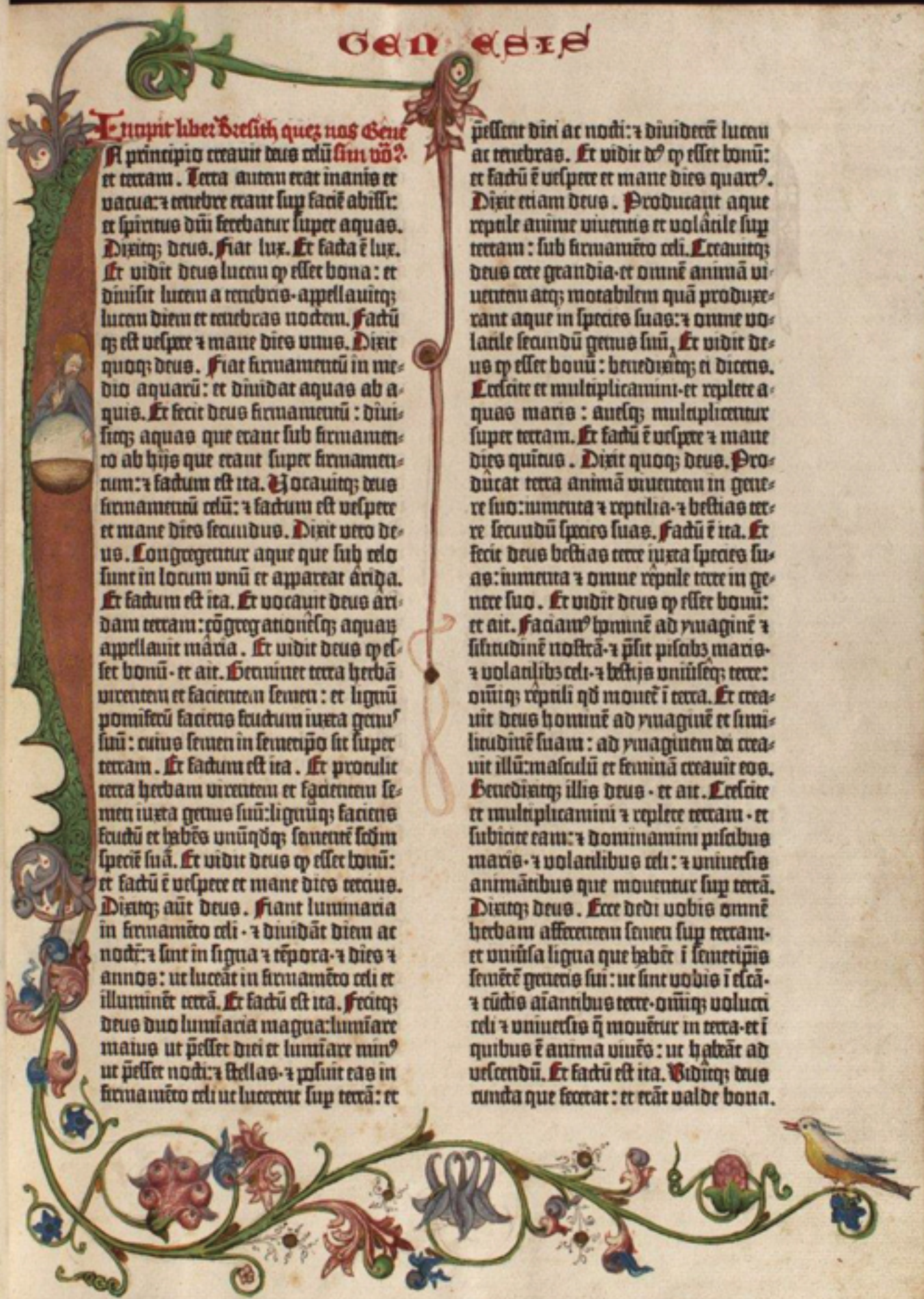


Inquit liber breuiter que nos Gene

A principio creauit deus celū suū vō?
 et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et
 vacua: et tenebre erant sup facie abissi:
 et spiritus dñi ferebatur super aquas.
 Dixitq; deus. Fiar lux. Et facta ē lux.
 Et vidit deus lucem qd esset bona: et
 diuisit lucem a tenebris. appellauitq;
 lucem diem et tenebras noctem. factū
 q; est vespere et mane dies vnus. Dixit
 quoq; deus. Fiar firmamentū in me-
 dio aquarū: et diuidat aquas ab a-
 quis. Et fecit deus firmamentū: diui-
 sitq; aquas que erant sub firmamen-
 to ab hijs que erant super firmamen-
 tum: et factum est ita. Vocauitq; deus
 firmamentū celū: et factum est vespere
 et mane dies secundus. Dixit vero de-
 us. Congregentur aque que sub celo
 sunt in locum vnū et appareat arida.
 Et factum est ita. Et vocauit deus ar-
 idam terram: cōgregatōneq; aquas
 appellauit maria. Et vidit deus qd es-
 set bonū. et ait. Germinet terra herbā
 virentem et facientem semen: et lignū
 pomifecū faciens fructum iuxta genus
 suū: cuius semen in semetipō sit super
 terram. Et factum est ita. Et protulit
 terra herbam virentem et facientem se-
 men iuxta genus suū: lignūq; faciens
 fructū et habēs unūq; sēmentē scdm
 specē suā. Et vidit deus qd esset bonū:
 et factū ē vespere et mane dies tertius.
 Dixitq; aut deus. Fiant luminaria
 in firmamēto celi: et diuidāt diem ac
 noctē: et sint in signa et tempora: et dies et
 annos: ut luceat in firmamēto celi et
 illuminēt terrā. Et factū est ita. Fecitq;
 deus duo luminaria magna: lumīare
 maius ut pēset diei et lumīare min⁹
 ut pēset nocti: et stellās: et posuit eas in
 firmamēto celi ut luceant sup terrā: et

pēssent diei ac nocti: et diuiderēt lucem
 ac tenebras. Et vidit d⁹ qd esset bonū:
 et factū ē vespere et mane dies quart⁹.
 Dixit etiam deus. Producant aque
 reptile anime viuētis et volātile sup
 terram: sub firmamēto celi. Creauitq;
 deus cete grandia. et omnē animā vi-
 uētē atq; motabilem quā produxe-
 rant aque in species suas: et omne vo-
 lātile secundū genus suū. Et vidit de-
 us qd esset bonū: benedixitq; ei dicens.
 Crescite et multiplicamini. et replete a-
 quas maris: auēsq; multiplicentur
 super terram. Et factū ē vespere et mane
 dies quintus. Dixit quoq; deus. Pro-
 ducat terra animā virentem in gene-
 re suo: inuenta et reptilia: et bestias ter-
 re secundū species suas. factū ē ita. Et
 fecit deus bestias terre iuxta species su-
 as: inuenta et omne reptile terre in ge-
 nere suo. Et vidit deus qd esset bonū:
 et ait. faciam⁹ hominē ad ymaginē et
 similitudinē nostrā. et pōsit pisces maris:
 et volātilib; celi. et bestijs uniuersq; terre:
 omīq; reptili qd mouēt i terra. Et crea-
 uit deus hominē ad ymaginē et simi-
 litudinē suam: ad ymaginem dī crea-
 uit illū: masculū et feminā creauit eos.
 Benedixitq; illis deus. et ait. Crescite
 et multiplicamini et replete terram. et
 subicite eam: et dominamini piscibus
 maris. et volātilibus celi: et uniuersis
 animātib; que mouentur sup terrā.
 Dixitq; deus. Ecce dedi vobis omnē
 herbam afferentem semen sup terram.
 et uniuersa ligna que habēt i semetipō
 semēte generis sui: ut sint vobis i escā.
 et cūctis aiantibus terre. omīq; voluci
 celi et uniuersis q̄ mouētur in terra. et i
 quibus ē anima viues: ut habeāt ad
 vescendū. Et factū est ita. Viditq; deus
 cūcta que fecerat: et erāt valde bona.



Meditations on the History of the Book

Excerpted from a talk by Anthony Payne, Oxford, 30 January 2020

Strictly speaking a work, text or indeed the contents of a book can be said to be by an author, but not the book itself – as Roger Stoddard, the eminent book historian and librarian at Harvard once said:

‘Whatever they may do, authors do not write books. Books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines.’

I want to tell a few stories about old books, about books as objects, and people and books – I will introduce you to some rarities (some of high monetary value, others not), some fraudsters and a murderer – but I will have relatively little to say about the contents of these books – that is the texts they carry within.

We can begin perhaps with the three questions that I have most commonly encountered in the antiquarian book world, at least in relation to printed books (manuscripts being a rather different matter): how rare is it; how many copies were printed; and what’s it worth?

I begin with the Gutenberg Bible, produced in Mainz by Johann Gutenberg in the course of 1454–55 and the first book known to have been printed in Europe. This has to be qualified, because Gutenberg may have been printing indulgences on single sheets in large numbers as early as 1452 but none has survived; also, strictly speaking, Gutenberg’s was the first printing from moveable metal type, rather than

PARABOLA

Incipit prologus sancti theononis presbiteri i parabolas salomonis
 ungat epistola quos iugit sacerdotum: immo terra non dividat: quos xpi uedit amor. Cometerios in osee amos: et zacharia malachia: quoq; postea. Scripsisse: si liquisset pre ualitudine. Mitibus solacia sumptuum: notarios nros et librarios sustentans: ut uobis potissimum nrm deludet ingeniu. Et ecce te latec freques uicta diuisa potestiu: quasi aut equu sit ne uobis elurientib; alijs laborare: aut in ratione dati et accepti: cuiq; prece uos obnox; sim. Itaq; lona egrotatione fradus: ne pautus hor anno reticet: et apud uos mutus esset: ridui opus nomini nro consecraui: interpretacione uidelicet nru salomonis uoluminu: masloth qd hebra pabolas: uulgata editio pibia uocat: coeleth que grece eccliaften: latine dionatore possunt dice: siraheum: qd i lingua nram uerit canicu canicoy. Fecit et panaretos: ihu filij sirahe liber: et ali pseudographus: qui sapientia salomonis inscribit. Quoy prior hebraicum repei: no eccliafici ut apud latinos: sed pabolas pnotatu. Cui iudi erat eccliafies: et canicu canicoy: ut similitudine salomonis: no solu numero libroru: sed ecia materia; genere coequaret. Secudus apud hebreos nullo; est: quia et ipse filius grecam eloquentia redoler: et nonnulli scriptoy uere; huc esse iudei filiois affirmat. Sicut ergo iudith et thobie et machabeoy libros: legit quide eos ecclia: sed inter canonicas scripturas no recipit: sic et hec duo uolumina legat ad edificatione plebis: no ad auctoritatem eccliaficoy dogmatu dirmmandam

Si cui sane septuagita interpretum magis editio placet: habet ea a nobis olim auedata. Neq; eni noua sit udim: ut uetera uelut am. Et tamen cu diligentissime legerit: sciat magis nra scripta intelligi: que no in reuiu uas ralsusa coacueit: sed statim de prelo purissime emedata tete: sinu sapore seruauerit. **I**ncipit parabole salomonis



Parabole salomonis filij dauid regis isrl: ad scienda sapientiam et disciplinam: ad intelligenda uerba prudentie et suscipienda eruditione doctrine: iusticia et iudiciu et equitate: ut deur paruuli astutia: et adolecenti scientia et intellectus. **A**udies sapiens sapientioy erit: et intelliges gubernacta possidebit. **A**ni adueret parabolam et interpretacionem: uerba sapientiu et enigmata eoy. **T**imor dni principiu sapientie. **S**apientiam atq; doctrinam stula despiciunt. **A**udi fili mi disciplinam pris tui et ne dimittas legem nris tue: ut addatur gratia capiti tuo: et torques collo tuo. **F**ili mi si te ladauerint peccores: ne acquiescas eis. **S**i dixerit ueni nobiscu: insidiamur sanguini: abscondam? rediculas deca insontem frustra: deglutiamus eu sicut infernus uiuente et integum: quasi descedente in lacu: omne preciosu substantia reperiem? implebim? domus nras spolijs: fortan mitte nobiscum: macsupiu sit unum omnium nrm: fili mi ne ambules cu eis. **P**rohibe pedem tuu a senitis eoy. **P**edes eni illoy ad malu currut: et festinat ut effundant sanguinem. **F**rustra autem iacit rete ante oculos penator. **I**pi q; contra sanguine suu insidiantur: et



from woodblocks (which came in slightly earlier), and his was the first such printing in the West, as moveable metal type is known to have been used in Korea as early as the thirteenth century. Gutenberg's bible was produced in a small edition, and we learn from a contemporary observer, Eneas Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II), who met Gutenberg in 1454 and later reported on the wonderful clarity of the finished bible's printing – it could easily be read without glasses he said, and added that he understood that 180 copies had been produced, a figure that has been confirmed and accepted by modern scholarship. There are 48 copies still in existence, not all of them complete, some lacking a few leaves or one of the two volumes. Copies seldom come up for sale, and indeed no two-volume sets have appeared on the market since 1978, when remarkably, like waiting for a bus, three turned up at once, all in America. One, formerly the property of the General Theological seminary in New York, was auctioned by Christie's and sold for \$2.2 million to the State Library of Württemberg in Stuttgart. The two others were sold at similar price levels, one via the New York dealer H. P. Kraus to the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz – so after 500 years it's returned to its birthplace – , the other via the London dealers Quaritch to the University of Texas at Austin. Recently, but not on the market, a set of both volumes has been given to Princeton University Library as part of the Scheide collection, a magnificent family library begun in the late nineteenth century which has been on deposit at Princeton for many years.

In case you begin to wonder how I know how many copies of a particular book exist, it is because scholars have compiled surveys – censuses is their usual term – in varying degrees of detail of surviving copies. This is a laborious process and inevitably has tended to concentrate on great books such as the Gutenberg Bible. It requires not only minute attention to detail but also scepticism – some years ago

a mischievous reference in an exhibition catalogue of the treasures of Eton College (Eton has one of the few Gutenberg Bibles printed on vellum rather than the usual paper) led to the inclusion for a while of the Gutenberg Bible at Blandings Castle (mentioned by P. G. Wodehouse in *Something Fresh*) in the record of extant copies.

I'm afraid I don't have a Gutenberg Bible to hand (!), but I can show you *The Principal Navigations of the English Nation*, by Richard Hakluyt, sometime Student of Christ Church and the first to give lectures in geography at Oxford. It was published over four hundred years ago (1598–1600 to be exact) and this copy's earliest known (probably its first) owner was Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy in northern Argyll, who died in 1631 (a rather sinister figure known as Black Duncan of the Cowl, you can read all about him in the *DNB*, but not that his family's library was one of the most important private book collections in early modern Scotland). It is still in the period binding as Sir Duncan had it – I hesitate to say 'original' binding because books at that time, unlike now, did not come from the publisher ready bound in standard trade bindings but were usually sold in sheets and bound to order by their first purchaser or by the bookseller who might have a few stock copies bound in anticipation of imminent sales. This is an English book, so we know that under the rules of the Stationers' Company that no more than 1250 copies could have been printed – the Stationers' Company, chartered in 1557 in the reign of Philip and Mary, is one of the City of London's livery companies. Under the authority of their royal charter, the Stationers regulated the English book trade (outside Oxford and Cambridge) and imposed this upper limit on print-runs (with a few exceptions, such as almanacs or government notices) to protect the employment of printers, meaning that if a book proved popular an entirely new edition would have to be created from scratch – we need to remember

THE
PRINCIPAL NAVI-
GATIONS, VOIAGES,
TRAFFIQVES AND DISCO-
ueries of the English Nation, made by Sea

or ouer-land, to the remote and farthest di-
stant quarters of the Earth, at any time within

the compasse of these 1500. yeeres: Deuided
into three seuerall Volumes, according to the
positions of the Regions, whereunto
they were directed.

This first Volume containing the woorthy Discoveries,
&c. of the English toward the North and Northeast by sea,
as of *Lapland, Scrickfinia, Corelia*, the Baie of *S. Nicolas*, the Isles of *Col-
goiene, Vaigarz*, and *Noua Zembla*, toward the great riuer *Ob*,
with the mighty Empire of *Russia*, the *Caspian sea*, *Geor-
gia, Armenia, Media, Persia, Boghar* in *Bactria*,
and diuers kingdoms of *Tartaria*:

R. Hakluyt.

Together with many notable monuments and testimo-
nies of the ancient forren trades, and of the warrelike and
other shipping of this realme of *England* in former ages.

Whereunto is annexed also a brieife *Commentarie* of the true
state of *Island*, and of the Northren Seas and
lands situate that way.

And lastly, the memorable defeate of the Spanish huge
Armada, Anno 1588. and the famous victorie
atchieued at the citie of *Cadiz*, 1596.
are described.

By RICHARD HAKLVYT Master of
Artes, and sometime Student of Christ-
Church in Oxford.



Imprinted at London by GEORGE
BISHOP, RALPH NEWBERIE
and ROBERT BARKER.

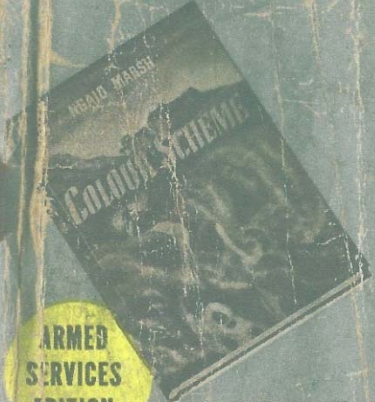
1598.

that until not so long ago every letter in every book had to be set by hand – that’s Gutenberg’s moveable type I mentioned earlier – and every page printed by a hand-press, representing an incredible investment of painstaking manual labour in even the most humble of publications. The restriction was an upper limit, and in fact, in the instance of this particular book, the number of copies printed is likely to have been much fewer than 1250, perhaps 500–750.

So that’s certainly a small edition, but a large proportion has survived – big books like this tend to have a higher survival rate than small ones. I know of over 250 copies of the *Principal Navigations*, the majority in major libraries in Europe and North America, but also some in Japan, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, – and no less than three in Iceland. There are five copies in the British Library, and 19 in the Bodleian and various other libraries here in Oxford. Copies regularly come on the market at varying prices depending on condition and completeness – the most expensive, a few years ago, fetching almost half a million pounds, but more typically in the £8000 to £40,000 range.

Let’s now look at another book, a paperback edition, on poor-quality wartime paper, of *Colour Scheme*, a novel by the crime-writer Ngaio Marsh – but nevertheless, as the cover proclaims, ‘This Is The Complete Book – Not A Digest’ (we might say complete text or work rather than ‘book’). Held together with a single staple, it was not designed to last or to make a profit, but was published with the permission of the original trade publisher by Editions for the Armed Services Inc, which was a non-profit organization established in New York in 1943 by the Council on Books in Wartime, working with the US Army Library Service – its books were intended for exclusive distribution to members of the American armed forces and were not to be sold or made available to civilians, the domestic

882



COLOUR SCHEME

A NOVEL BY
NGAIO MARSH

**FOR THE
ARMED
SERVICES
EDITION**

Overseas edition for the Armed Services Edition, authorized by the Special Services Committee for the Army, and by the Special Services Committee for the Navy, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947. Not for sale outside the United States. Armed Services Edition is a trademark established by the Committee on Government Publications.

THIS IS THE COMPLETE BOOK—NOT A DIGEST

commercial market thereby being protected. Copies were shared, re-read, and ripped into sections so they could be divided among several readers at the same time. A contemporary newspaper article recounted: ‘The hunger for these books, evidenced by the way they are read to tatters, is astounding even to the Army and Navy officers and the book-trade officials who conceived Editions for the Armed Services’. So ubiquitous and so comfortably fitting into a uniform pocket were Armed Services Editions, that servicemen felt they were incorrectly dressed if they did not have one on their person while on parade. And they were not just read in the comfort of the barrack room – in June 1944 an Armed Services edition was issued to each American soldier boarding a landing craft for Normandy.

It was an extraordinary publishing effort, producing for free distribution nearly 123 million copies of 1322 titles – that’s an average edition of just over 92,000 copies – and the works selected were designed to appeal to a variety of reading tastes, ranging from bestselling thrillers, to classics and poetry. Today the only complete set is in the Library of Congress (a near complete set is in the University of Alabama, other American libraries hold smatterings; only 65 titles in total are held in UK libraries). The literary scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli, a specialist in F. Scott Fitzgerald, wondered whether the post-war resurgence of interest in Scott Fitzgerald might have been sparked by the mass availability of his works thanks to Armed Services Editions – there is certainly much evidence to suggest that the Editions brought reading back into the everyday lives of men who had not touched a book since school and introduced them to works they had never heard of or never had any inclination to look at. In the instance of *The Great Gatsby* 25,000 copies were printed by Scribners, its original trade publisher between 1925 and 1942, compared to the 155,000 printed by Armed Services Editions, which gives you some idea of the scale of the novel’s potential readership in this format. Bruccoli

himself began collecting Armed Services Editions in the early sixties when he could buy groups of two or three for 25 cents in junkshops on Washington's skid row. In the early eighties the typical price range was \$1 to \$6 for an individual book, but by then having amassed over 500 titles, Bruccoli found it was becoming increasingly difficult to find further additions (he finally amassed about 570, so less than half the total). Armed Services editions continue to be collected and, looking at current offerings, typically sell in the \$10–\$30 range. Of *Colour Scheme* I can find – to my great surprise but thanks to the Internet in bringing things to the surface – four copies for sale, between \$12 and \$20 (that's £9 to £15 or so). But it would be impossible to build anything like a complete set now, they have simply not survived, and have never had sufficient monetary value to ensure their careful preservation.

The Armed Services Editions are a fascinating example of how books or a particular publishing programme can have a rich history quite independent of the texts within them and regardless of format or quality of production.

I'm going to turn now to a book, or rather a text printed on a single-sheet, *The Oath of a Freeman*, printed in 1639 and the first piece of printing produced in what is now the United States of America (it should be remembered that the Spanish had been printing in Mexico since 1539 [a catechism, no copy survives] and by 1600 more than 200 books had been printed there; a press was operating in Lima by 1584) (Incidentally, don't be misled by some historians who link the spread of Protestantism closely to the Reformers' use of printing – the Catholic church was more than capable of deploying the printing press in spreading its message.) The oath was a pledge of loyalty to the Massachusetts Bay Colony required from any man wanting to become a citizen of the Colony and thus be eligible to hold office

THE OATH OF A FREEMAN.

I·A·B· being (by Gods providence) an Inhabitant, and Freeman, within the iurisdiction of this Common-wealth, doe freely acknowledge my selfe to bee subject to the governement thereof; and therefore doe heere sweare, by the great & dreadfull name of the Everliving-God, that I will be true & faithfull to the same, & will accordingly yield assistance & support therunto, with my person & estate, as in equity I am bound: and will also truely endeavour to maintaine and preserve all the libertyes & priviledges thereof; submitting my selfe to the wholesome lawes, & ordres made & stablished by the same; and further, that I will not plot, nor practice any evill against it, nor consent to any that shall soe do, butt will timely discover, & reveall the same to lawefull authoritee nowe here stablished, for the speedie preventing thereof. Moreover, I doe solemnly binde my selfe, in the sight of God, that when I shalbe called, to give my voyce touching any such matter of this state, (in which freemen are to deal) I will give my vote & suffrage as I shall judge in myne owne conscience may best conduce & tend to the publick weale of the body, without respect of personnes, or favour of any man. Soe help mee God in the Lord Iesus Christ.

and vote in elections; we may assume the oath was taken by reading the printed document out loud and then perhaps signing it. Not one example survives today, although it is thought as many as 2000 copies were printed (over a thousand emigrants a year were reaching Massachusetts in the 1630s and by 1640 the colony's population was about 12,500, so even if only a minority became full citizens, a good stock of the printed document would have been required).

The existence of the printed oath has long been known from the journal of John Winthrop, the colony's governor, who recorded the beginning of printing at Cambridge, Massachusetts, by Stephen Daye in March 1639, and said that 'The first thing which was printed was the freeman's oath', and 'the next was the Psalms newly turned into metre'. The latter, now known as the Bay Psalm Book, was printed by Daye in 1640, in an edition (we know from the records of a legal suit in the 1650s) of 1700 copies. It now holds the record for the most expensive printed book ever sold – this was on 26 November 2013 at Sotheby's New York when one of the only eleven known surviving copies fetched \$14,165,000, or more than £10,000,000 at the current exchange rate (the buyer was the American businessman and philanthropist David Rubenstein, who plans to share it with the American public by lending it to various libraries in the States, before placing it in one of them as a long-term loan). As Sotheby's catalogue observed, it 'is as a book and not as a text, that the Bay Psalm Book is best known, celebrated, and revered'.

The previous record for a printed book, you will probably want to know, was established in December 2010 at Sotheby's London, when a set of John James Audubon's *Birds of America* sold for £7,321,250 (then \$11.5 million) (of this 119 complete sets are known; 200 might have been issued in the 1830s, but many have been broken up for their illustrations and some subscribers might not have

completed their sets). No copy of the Bay Psalm Book had been on the market since 1947, when one sold for \$151,000, which was then also a record price for a printed book.

Given the huge value, bibliographical importance and prestige, of the Bay Psalm Book, historians, bibliographers and collectors have often speculated on the possibility that a specimen of the Oath of a Freeman, its predecessor from Stephen Daye's printing house, might turn up and its likely value as the earliest item of printing in English North America, the future United States. As the bibliographer Charles Evans said in 1922,

'It would be difficult to exaggerate the patriotic feeling of our people, if it were known that a copy of this interesting and valuable state-paper, the first fruit of the printing-press in this country, whose ringing sentences of freedom preceded by nearly a century and a half the Declaration of Independence, had been discovered at this late date'.

If the original printing was lost, the text of the Oath was, however, known, because it was reprinted by John Child in *New-England's Jonas Cast up in London*, published in England in 1647 – this was an attack on the government of the Massachusetts Colony and the oath was important to the colony's opponents as evidence that in Massachusetts no allegiance was allowed to any earthly authority other than the Colony's government, which could not therefore be opposed or appealed against in any way.

So, the text survives, and perhaps you are beginning to see where this story is heading? If there is indisputable evidence that something did exist and a willingness to believe that somehow, somewhere, it might be found, then the

unscrupulous has no need to concoct the text itself, because this was genuinely known from its reprinting of 1647, and, copying the typography of the Bay Psalm Book (easy enough as this was available in bona fide facsimile editions), it would be possible to recreate the text in the appropriate format and make a plate from which it could be printed on suitable old paper – and, of course, add a price tag reflecting the fervent reception that the long-anticipated discovery of an original printing of the ‘Oath’ would be bound to create. Which was exactly what Mark Hofmann, murderer, master forger, and historical documents dealer (to reverse the trajectory of his career) attempted in the 1980s.

Hofmann, an established dealer specialising primarily in Mormon memorabilia and historical documents, claimed to have found the Oath in a New York bookshop in 1985 unrecognised for what it was (‘sleeper’ is the trade’s term for such oversights) and offered it to the Library of Congress and then the American Antiquarian Society at \$1.5 million. Hofmann had built up a pyramid of debt and complex – dodgy – financial obligations among various Mormon collectors and investors. Massively over-extended financially, the Oath, if sold, would have solved his problems, but, although initial reactions were not discouraging, there were delays in the thorough authentication of the Oath, without which no customer could be expected to buy it. Hofmann was becoming increasingly desperate and on 15 October 1985 he planted bombs in Salt Lake City that killed one of his collector-creditors, Steven Christensen and Kathleen Sheets, the wife of another. The next day Hofmann himself was severely injured when a bomb blew up in his car. At first, it was not clear who was responsible or that the bombs might be directly related to Hofmann’s dealings – it may be remembered that at this time the Mormon state of Utah was rife with Ponzi schemes and other investment frauds, earning it the dubious status of ‘scam capital of the world’ and

‘the white collar crime capital’, and there were any amount of feuds the murders could have been connected with – but, to cut a long story short, police investigations established that Hofmann was the culprit, blowing himself up with a bomb intended for another victim, and that the murders were linked to his business in historical documents. In pleading guilty, and in a bargain to avoid the death penalty, Hofmann revealed not only how he had forged the Oath of a Freeman, but also a host of other documents, many concerning the origins of the Mormon Church (some highly controversial).

There is clearly a temptation to create a forgery of something that should exist but does not – indeed the cynical forger could say he is simply meeting the demands of the collectors’ market. But sometimes, black tulips actually do turn up and scepticism and suspicion, however justified, have to be overcome. This is the story behind the bookseller Bernard Quaritch’s discovery in 1890 of the long-lost Spanish original of the printed letter of Christopher Columbus reporting his famous voyage of discovery in 1492. The Spanish printing, dating from spring 1493, had long been supposed to exist and the text had circulated in Latin translation in Rome from mid-1493, with at least seventeen editions in various languages appearing in different parts of Europe by 1497. A previously unknown Spanish-language edition, printed after 1493, was discovered in the 1850s, which encouraged speculation about the nature and existence of the original edition. In 1866 the influential bibliographer of Americana, Henry Harrisse, observed that while ‘No copy . . . of the Spanish original has yet been found’, ‘we should say that on receipt of the great news in Spain the Letter of Columbus was made public, and printed in the original Spanish, probably at Barcelona’ (where the royal court was then situated).

THE SPANISH LETTER OF COLUMBUS

Bernard Quaritch Michael Kerney

A facsimile of the original edition published by Bernard Quaritch in 1891

Dear Sir - I am glad to hear that the original edition of the Spanish Columbus Letter is safe in the library and in my keeping, and that the right and title to its ownership have been completed by the calling of the price to London this day, I take pride in seeing that a more opportune and appropriate place than has this work never made before in American Library or Collection.

With an Introduction by Felipe Fernández-Armesto and essays by Martin Davies on Pere Posa and the printing of the Spanish Columbus Letter at Barcelona in 1493 and by Anthony Payne & Katherine Spears on Quaritch, the Spanish Columbus Letter, and America 1890-1892

QUARITCH

As Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Columbus's modern biographer and contributor to the recent edition of the Spanish Columbus Letter remarks: 'This was an uncanny prediction', and 'also a challenge and perhaps an incitement to potential forgers. Anyone who found the *editio princeps* . . . would stand to make a fortune'. With the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage approaching in 1892, forgeries began to circulate. One was offered to the New York Public Library and was easily detected, whereupon the furious seller tore it up and flung it into a wastepaper bin (the librarian retrieved it and, carefully restored and finely bound, it is now held amongst the curiosities in the library's collections; it was apparently the third Columbus letter he'd been offered that day). Another, produced by a notorious Italian forger, fooled the London booksellers Ellis & Elvey, who issued a special catalogue with a critical commentary and facsimile of what they believed to be not only genuine but almost certainly the long lost *editio princeps* of the Letter. Although warned by HARRISSE that it might be suspect, Ellis persisted and offered it to General Brayton Ives, one of the foremost American collectors of the day, in March 1890.

All might have gone undetected had not Quaritch not been confident that another Columbus Letter in Spanish that he had just obtained in Paris was the real thing. It had been preserved as endpapers in the binding of another book – paper was an expensive commodity in the early modern period and it was common for bookbinders to recycle paper from unwanted printed items to use as binding material (the technical term for this is printer's or bookseller's waste). General Ives was, of course, a natural customer but the General decided to buy Ellis's Letter instead and denounced the other as 'not genuine' in the *New York Tribune* in December 1890. Quaritch replied the following month and, with his cataloguer Michael Kerney, went on to produce a compelling bibliographical and historical

case for the genuineness of his letter, publishing their findings as a short book in 1891 (which was reprinted in 2006 by the company that still bears his name). Offered initially at £1600, then £2000, then £1750, when Latin editions of the Letter were priced in the region of £400, this secured the eventual sale to the Lenox Library, now part of the New York Public Library, at \$8500 in 1892. There it remains and, although a few details have been revised or modified on a technical level – for example, the actual printer in Barcelona has now been identified as Pere Posa – the authenticity of the Letter has been more than fully endorsed by subsequent scholarly research. It is significant, however, that despite the enormous enthusiasm of the Columbus quatercentennial celebrations in 1892 and the deepness of collectors' interests and wallets in early Americana at that time, several other prominent bibliophiles besides General Ives declined to buy it. What a missed opportunity – no further copies have surfaced and the New York Public Library can today still be proud of possessing one of the world's greatest bibliographical treasures and a unique historical document of the utmost importance. As one of the librarians wrote in acknowledging safe receipt of the letter in October 1892, 'I am glad you were unable to find a customer for the Spanish folio until [now]. It would have been a pity if it had fallen into the hands of some of our American collectors. They don't know enough to recognize or appreciate a first-class prize'.

And what of General Ives, who was now left with a letter without a shred of credibility? A lawsuit ensued, one expert witness saying 'A worse humbug could not be imagined' than the General's Columbus letter, and, after seven years, the parties eventually came to an undisclosed agreement and abandoned the case.

Mr. WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARES
COMEDIES,
HISTORIES, &
TRAGEDIES.

Published according to the True Originall Copies.



To the Reader.

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Grauer had a strife
with Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but haue drawne his wit
As vvell in brasse, as he hath hit
His face, the Print would then surpasse
All, that vvas euer vvrit in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

B. I.

LONDON
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

No discussion of old books can omit the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623, probably (like the Hakluyt) printed in 500–750 copies, and originally costing about £1 (at a time when, for example, the headmaster of a grammar school might earn £20–25 p.a.). About 230 copies are known to survive – they are recorded by Anthony West and Eric Rasmussen in great detail in a catalogue of almost 1000 pages published in 2012. Since then one has been found at Saint-Omer, where it had been in the library of the English Jesuit college from the mid-seventeenth century until the French Revolution, when it was transferred to its present location, the town's municipal library. Another has come to light in Mount Stuart, the house of the marquesses of Bute on the island of Bute – although the press coverage rather implied it was a crofter's hovel on a remote island, Mount Stuart is in fact a palatial Gothic Revival building, financed by the family's fortune from Cardiff docks, and not at all difficult to get to. The third Marquess, who died in 1900, was a serious scholar-collector, and the Mount Stuart library contained one of the largest private collections of early English books until their sale at Christie's in 1995. Another previously unrecorded copy also surfaced in 2016, from Shuckburgh Hall in Warwickshire, bought in about 1800 by Sir George Augustus Shuckburgh-Evelyn, another scholarly antiquarian and collector. It was sold at Christie's later that year. The Saint-Omer copy, lacking its title-page, is the only one that can be said to have gone genuinely, and understandably, unrecognised and it is, I think, the most interesting historically.

Christie's have just announced they will be selling a copy – one of only six complete copies still in private hands – in New York in April with an estimated price of \$4–6 million. In Oxford, Oriel sold their First Folio in 2002 for a reputed £3.5 million to the late Sir Paul Getty and it is still in his library not far from here, at Wormsley. But books can sometimes find their way back to their old home – as

we saw earlier with the Gutenberg bible returning to Mainz. The Bodleian received its First Folio soon after publication and it was listed in the library's catalogue of 1635; but at some point it was discarded, apparently after the Bodleian's acquisition of the Third Folio, published in 1664 and recorded in the 1674 catalogue, where there is no longer an entry for the First Folio – now considered redundant, as the Third Folio contained additional material, including *Pericles*, the First was probably among the job lot of 'superfluous library books sold by order of the curators' to the Oxford bookseller Richard Davis in 1664. Two-hundred-and-fifty years later, in January 1905, an undergraduate Gladwyn Tarbutt walked unannounced into the office of Falconer Madan, Bodley's sub-librarian, carrying a Shakespeare folio from the library of his family's country house in Derbyshire, where it had been since the early eighteenth-century, and asked for advice on its restoration. Madan immediately recognised it as the Bodleian's old First Folio because of the particular style of its binding, commissioned from the local workshop of William Wildgoose in 1624 (as I mentioned earlier, books at this time were usually supplied unbound for the new owner to decide on the binding). A public appeal for funds eventually raised £3000 from over 800 donors for the Bodleian to buy it back and you might have seen it recently at the Bodleian's Shakespeare exhibition in 2016.

I've talked a lot about great books and great amounts of money, but returning to the Armed Services Editions, we should remember that while newsworthy, Shakespeare First Folios and the like tell one story, but books and their circulation go far beyond the worlds of connoisseurship and research libraries, and the most unassuming of publications can have much to tell us, and collecting can yield considerable historical lessons.



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