

THE PRESERVATION AND CATALOGUING OF BOOK-JACKETS

If surviving examples of jackets on twentieth-century paperbacks and nineteenth-century hardcover books are scarce enough that it is feasible to list them, a different means must be found for gaining bibliographical control over the vast quantities of twentieth- and twenty-first-century examples on hardcover books. We can look to descriptive bibliographies of authors and presses and to monographs on graphic artists for the recording of many significant jackets, but the number dealt with in this way will always be a tiny fraction of the total. The logical solution is for libraries to take note of the presence of jackets in their cataloguing of books¹⁰⁶ and to make it possible for such references to be located through searching in electronic catalogues. Some special-collections libraries already do this, but others do not.¹⁰⁷ In any case, the prior requirement is for libraries to preserve jackets in the first place—something that research libraries have generally been loath to do, except for books that go into special collections (though public libraries have often kept jackets, with a protective covering around them, on circulating books). The situation is reflected in Robert A. Tibbetts's comment, regarding the Charvat Collection of pre-1901 American fiction at Ohio State University, that "most of the dust-jackets that once accompanied its books were lost to library processing before the collection became an entity." Libraries' disregard for jackets is epitomized by the response of a major research library when it was offered the opportunity to purchase *en bloc* the great Leach collection of American nineteenth-century jacketed books: it rejected the offer on the grounds that a large portion of the books duplicated those already in the collection, ignoring entirely the fact that none of the jackets would have been duplicates. Barbara Ringer, when she was Register of Copyrights in the U. S. Copyright Office, was so "appalled" by the Library of Congress

106. That jackets might actually be useful in cataloguing is shown by Emma Stribling Dendy in *The Utility of Book Jackets in Subject Cataloging* (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 1956). Other library-school theses have dealt with the role of jackets in book circulation: examples are Deborah K. Smith, *Check-Out Rates of Books with Book Jackets versus Books without Book Jackets* (University of Wyoming, 1989), and Marian F. West, *Putting on a Good Front: The Impact of Book Cover Design on Circulation* (University of Central Arkansas, 1992).

107. An example of a website reporting the jackets in a special collection is "Vietnam War Literature Collection Dust Jackets," listing 245 jackets in the Special Collections Department of the University of Delaware Library, available through the Library's website (<<http://www.lib.udel.edu>>). The New York Public Library Digital Gallery site (<<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>>) includes "Dust Jackets from American and European Books, 1926–1947," containing over two thousand jackets that NYPL librarians saved from the routine destruction to which most jackets were consigned by the Library. Another website, though not sponsored by a library, is Alan Hewer's "Great War Dust Jackets," with thousands of images from the period 1914–39 (<<http://www.greatwardustjackets.co.uk>>).

practice of throwing away the “vast majority” of the jackets it received that she arranged to store them at her own expense.¹⁰⁸

Library practices vary, as A. S. A. Struik discovered in the mid-1990s when he conducted a survey of eighteen Dutch libraries and thirteen national libraries in other countries. His questionnaire asked, among other things, whether the jackets of newly acquired books were saved (and if so, how they were described and housed) and whether pre-1900 jackets had been inventoried or were ever purchased as such. The replies were not encouraging. Although many of the libraries claimed to save some of the jackets on newly acquired books, these affirmative responses were often undercut by various qualifications, and only two libraries (both Dutch) reported any effort to describe their jackets, even superficially. And not a single library answered yes to the question whether it intended to “collect or simply save” jackets in the future. As far as pre-1900 jackets are concerned, only one library—the Museum Meermanno Westreenianum in The Hague—indicated that it maintained an inventory of such jackets, and only five (the British Library, the Library of Congress, and three Dutch libraries) stated that they had ever bought a book purely for the sake of its jacket.¹⁰⁹

That so many libraries, including copyright-deposit libraries, are so unconcerned with jackets brings to mind the language (quoted in the first section above) of Alan Smith, who calls it a “tragedy” that libraries have shirked their “obligations” to scholars by engaging in the “vandalism” of destroying jackets. This language is not too strong because book-jackets, as an important class of primary documentation of publishing history, are unquestionably part of what research libraries are pledged to preserve. Other categories have been neglected in the past, such as publishers’ archives, but for a long time now the value of such records has been well understood. It is shocking, therefore, that in the early twenty-first century, with the field called “book history” flourishing, there should be so relatively little thinking directed toward the preservation and cataloguing of past and future book-jackets. The picture is not entirely bleak: thanks to the understanding of collectors and dealers, which has become widespread only in the past generation or so, special-collections departments are now in possession of a great many jackets, which have arrived largely as parts of collections but sometimes through the purchase of single items.

108. Tibbetts’s comment prefaces his list of nineteenth-century jackets in *Serif*, 10.2 (Summer 1973), 42. The offer of the Leach collection was reported by Kevin Mac Donnell (the dealer who made the offer) on *ExLibris* (see note 74 above), 22 April 2005. Ringer’s concern for jackets was mentioned in *Publishers’ Weekly*, 215 (20 February 1978), 29–30.

109. The detailed results of Struik’s survey are reported in the *Quaerendo* article cited in note 30 above. Among his observations is surprise that copyright-deposit libraries have no regulations about the retention and description of jackets.

These jackets are likely to be noteworthy because of their age or the fame of the books they cover, and their preservation seems assured. What we need to be concerned about is the fate of all the other jackets that survive and all that will appear on new books in the future. Some large libraries have not destroyed all the jackets that came their way; but those they have saved (often intermittently and inconsistently) tend to be very difficult (or in some cases nearly impossible) to use because of the way they have been stored and the lack of adequate (or any) cataloguing.¹¹⁰ Many jackets of the past are lost, but many others await an act of reclamation.

The idea of a "Jacket Conservation Year," proposed by Alan Smith, may be unrealistic; but there is reason to hope that we are entering a period of consciousness-raising in regard to jackets, judging from the conference on jackets that was sponsored by the Institute of English Studies at the University of London on 19–20 September 2005,¹¹¹ along with the news that a future series of Panizzi Lectures may deal with the subject. Libraries must be encouraged to face (and be given assistance in dealing with) three long-neglected tasks. First is the proper housing of all the jackets in their possession that are not in special-collections stacks, as well as all that come with future acquisitions. Whether jackets are kept on the books, with mylar around them, or filed separately will be decided differently by different libraries; the important matter is that they be carefully and systematically preserved. Second is the inclusion of a reference to the presence of a jacket in catalogue entries for books, so that a library's jacket holdings can be ascertained as readily as its book holdings. Third is the requirement for taking jackets into account in acquisition policies for noncurrent books.

Besides these basic necessities, the creation of a cooperative database of digitized images of jackets is a great desideratum (despite the problems that copyright may pose), so long as it does not lead anyone to suppose that the originals can be disposed of—a response that has all too often followed the microfilming or digitization of monographs and serials. Reproductions of jackets, like reproductions of anything else, can never replace originals.¹¹² And the need for the preservation of multiple copies

110. At the conference mentioned in the next paragraph, there were reports on the history of the handling of jackets in four libraries, by Stephen Bury (British Library), Julie Ann Lambert (Bodleian), David McKitterick (Cambridge University Library), and Rowan Watson (Victoria & Albert). These talks dramatically showed how the practices have varied over the years in each of these libraries and have resulted in posing obstacles for scholars.

111. Organized by Philip Errington and Warwick Gould, the conference was called "Dust-Jackets: The Fate and State of Removable Dust-Jackets" and consisted of talks by Brian Alderson, R. A. Gekoski, Alan Powers, Colin Smythe, and me, as well as the four reports mentioned in the preceding note. A thorough account of this conference is provided by Julian Rota in *Antiquarian Booksellers' Association Newsletter*, 333 (August–September 2005).

112. I have elaborated this point in many places, such as the three essays reprinted in part II of my *Literature and Artifacts* (1998)—"Reproductions and Scholarship," "The Latest

is just as crucial in the case of jackets as it is for books, newspapers, and all other printed items, since jackets are just as susceptible to variation among copies and since the value of widespread access to originals is just as great. Whenever libraries in quantity begin to regard the collecting and cataloguing of jackets as an accepted part of their mission and start contributing to a union database of images, we will be well on the way to rescuing what remains of a body of material that enriches publishing history, and thus cultural and intellectual history as well.

Forms of Book-Burning,” and “The Future of Primary Records”—and in “The Librarians’ Double-Cross,” *Raritan*, 21.4 (Spring 2002), 245–263 (reviewing Nicholson Baker’s 2001 book *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*).