REFLEXIONS ON THE MAKING OF A BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Of the making of bibliographies there is no end." In fact, is it not paradoxical, at a time when the researcher is complaining more and more about the burden of our print culture and the problems of finding out what has been written, that at the very same moment bibliographical lists of all lengths and formats are spewing out as fast as the computer can print them? Perhaps we have lost sight of the more limited yet more important place of bibliography in throwing into relief the vast amount of printed material of the past; in other words, the role of the bibliographer as a social historian rather than simply as a compiler of lists.

This conception of bibliography is not new. It seems to many, however, to be a luxury, a lavish squandering of time which could better be used in producing longer lists. Such have been some of the comments following publication of *Les Imprimés dans le Bas-Canada, 1801-1810* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1967) compiled by Jean-Pierre Wallot and myself. Thus we are caught on the horns of a dilemma. The historians who have a different conception of the period can only state that we have somehow falsified the facts and conveniently left out certain items. (Never do they succeed in finding such items, of course.) The librarian, book-seller or collector is mainly interested in the listing of the books and pamphlets. Therefore, he feels it would be better to give fewer details but increase the coverage.

Yet anyone who has used that marvelous instrument prepared by Marie Tremaine, *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952) must realize the necessity for descriptive analytical bibliography. In fact, the bibliography of Lower Canada can be considered our homage to her great undertaking. It is a great pleasure for me to be able publicly to thank Miss Tremaine for her work and her example.

As a book collector, I was naturally interested in printed material during my early research into the social history of Quebec. Very soon, I was confronted with the attitude of the historian who places an inordinate value on manuscript material. Somehow the private opinion has become more important than the public utterance. Is it not true, however, that the printed book or pamphlet is a more accurate gauge of ideologies and mentalities? In recent years, of course, historians have turned their attention to newspapers.

Ten years ago, I started to collect early Quebec imprints before 1840, in preparation for my doctoral dissertation on the political and social vocabulary in Lower Canada. It soon became apparent to me that it would be essential to prepare as complete a list as possible of these imprints, especially for the period from 1801 to 1840. During these same years, I became involved in the preparation of bibliographies of French-Canadian literature. This preoccupation led me to examine the nature of bibliography and the different levels of description possible. Eventually also it led me to my present position as professor of French-Canadian literature and head of the documentation section of the French-Canadian Civilization Research Centre of the University of Ottawa. Therefore, what started as an outgrowth of my collecting and of the

preparation of a Ph.D. thesis became eventually the main preoccupation of my research.

Thus was born *Les Imprimés dans le Bas-Canada, 1801-1840*. From the very beginning, I decided to apply the same level of description and inclusiveness as Marie Tremaine. My first step was to prepare a card index of all Quebec imprints listed in the standard bibliographies for the years 1801 to 1820 (the cut-off date for the first volume originally). The second step was to locate copies for the physical description. Fortunately, at the time I was teaching at the Quebec Minor Seminary which has one of the best collections of early Quebec imprints.

It soon became evident to me that a team approach would greatly increase the usefulness of the bibliography. I therefore contacted Jean-Pierre Wallot, an historian specializing in the period. At first, he was skeptical. Even though he had worked intensively for several years on the period, he was under the impression that there were at most two dozen or so imprints during the years 1801 to 1820. As soon as he saw the material I had already assembled, he became enthusiastic. In fact, I can now state that he has become even more interested in the project than I. It was decided that I would be responsible for the bibliographical descriptions, the biographical notes, and all relevant publications, as well as for preparing the notes on the less important imprints. Jean-Pierre Wallot, for his part, prepared the notes on the more important imprints and on the newspapers. During the period of writing, we had weekly meetings to discuss problems and examine the texts. The whole text was of course a joint responsibility; therefore we each re-read the manuscript several times making corrections and changes where necessary.

For my part, I examined the newspapers of the period for advertisements and searched John Neilson's papers for imprints. In each case it was necessary to correlate these lists with those imprints that had been located. This gave me a file of unlocated titles. Eventually, I was able to find many of these during visits to Canadian and American libraries. Also, some of the texts printed by Neilson appeared in the *Quebec Gazette*.

Soon it became apparent that there were too many imprints in the period 1801 to 1820 for one volume. The first volume of the bibliography was therefore limited to the period 1801 to 1810. It listed 264 items:

- 185 located imprints,
- 46 unlocated imprints from Neilson's papers,
- 25 unlocated imprints from newspaper advertisements,
- 5 numbers for unlocated election propaganda,
- 2 European imprints considered significant,
- 1 imprint from Gagnon's catalogue which has disappeared.

Of the 185 located imprints only 66 had been listed in the standard bibliographies.

Subsequent examination brought to light the fact that the unlocated catalogue, no. 6, is in fact no. 7. Also the five numbers for election propaganda each contain up to twenty items from Neilson's papers. In future, we hope to eliminate such errors.

We were very fortunate that Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal agreed to publish the series. Their competent editorial staff has been most helpful, especially in the French terminology. As this type of descriptive bibliography was unknown in France at the time, it was necessary to create a French terminology. Since many of the imprints are either in English or bilingual, it would have been possible to write the bibliography in English. However, considering that both Jean-Pierre Wallot and I work and publish mainly in French, it seemed logical to publish our bibliography in that language. At the same time, it allowed us to make this form of bibliographical description known in the Francophone world.

Before turning to the results of our collaboration let me mention the importance of the detailed bibliographical analysis. In the first place, it is a guarantee against "ghosts" and a warrant of the integrity of the work. From the physical description, one can spot items which deserve further examination from the point of view of printing history. The detailed analysis of the content situates the item in its particular context. In many cases, the quotations are sufficient for the historian. If not, it is easy to examine the item in question.

Finally, a word on the results of our collaboration. The first has been the growth of the team approach by the organization known as GRISCAF (Groupe de recherche sur le Canada français). At present grouping six historians and economists from five universities, GRISCAF has organized two colloquiums, in 1968 and 1971. Then Professor Wallot and I have published a volume of texts from the period 1805 to 1810 under the title *Confrontations – Ideas in Conflict* (Trois-Rivières: Boréal Exprès, 1971). This selection of political, social and economic texts as well as travel narratives, in both English and French, is truly bilingual, with an introduction in both languages and notes in the language of the text.

It would be fastidious to enumerate the many different projects "in the works." The most important one, however, is the second volume of *Les Imprimés du Bas-Canada, 1811-1820*, which should be finished in 1972. I only hope that those who use it will have as much pleasure as we have had in its preparation.

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