

Who Wants Yesterday's Papers?

*Essays on the Research Value of
Printed Materials in the Digital Age*

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Contents

Preface	v
<i>Bruce W. Dearstyne</i>	
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xi
<i>Yvonne Carignan</i>	

Part 1 The Race against Time

1 Introduction	3
<i>Susan Klier Koutsky</i>	
2 Books and the "Iniquitie or Wearing of Time"	5
<i>Eric N. Lindquist</i>	
3 Some Thoughts on the Race against Time and Inherent Vice: Library Preservation in the Late Twentieth Century	23
<i>Mark Roosa</i>	

Part 2 Digital Demands vs. Paper Pleas

4 Introduction	39
<i>Martha Nell Smith</i>	
5 How Theories Became Knowledge: Why Science Textbooks Should Be Saved	45
<i>Stephen G. Brush</i>	
6 What Do Books Want?	59
<i>Neil Fraistat</i>	
7 Who Needs Yesterday's Papers When Today's Are on the Internet?	65
<i>Jordan Goodman and Kara M. McClurken</i>	
8 Above the Fold: The Value of Paper Newspapers	75
<i>John E. Newhagen</i>	

Part 3 Enduring Value

9	Introduction	93
	<i>Abby Smith</i>	
10	Print Collections and Their Possible Futures	99
	<i>Walter Cybulski</i>	
11	The Importance of Primary Records	115
	<i>Phyllis Franklin</i>	
12	Why We Collect: Curators, Collectors, and the Urge to Acquire	123
	<i>Douglas P. McElrath</i>	
13	Conserving the Physical Object	129
	<i>Nancy Carlson Schrock</i>	
14	There Are No Easy Answers: Analog vs. Digital for Preservation Reformatting	141
	<i>Steven Puglia and Kara M. McClurken</i>	
15	Uses of Primary Records from the Past	155
	<i>G. Thomas Tanselle</i>	

Part 4 The View from the Archives

16	Introduction	165
	<i>Yvonne Carignan</i>	
17	Assessing the (Non-Monetary) Value of Archival Records	167
	<i>Thomas James Connors</i>	
	Afterword: What Do We Mean by "Yesterday's Papers?"	179
	<i>Richard J. Cox</i>	
	Selected Bibliography	187
	Index	191
	About the Editors and Contributors	197

Preface

Bruce W. Dearstyne

Who Wants Yesterday's Papers? The question is intriguing and provocative. In our fast-moving society with its emphasis on novelty, transience, 24/7 news, bombardment by TV and Internet, and preference for operating in "real time," the first-impression, superficial answer might be: "No one does!" But the essays in this book point toward a better, more responsible, and more profound answer: "Everyone should!"

"Yesterday's papers" are important sources of transmission of knowledge and information and therefore launch pads for learning. "We're bound to learn from the past whether or not we make the effort," notes John Lewis Gaddis, "since it's the only database we have . . . we advance bravely into the future with our eyes fixed firmly on the past. . . . Studying the past . . . *prepares* you for the future by expanding experience, so that you can increase your skills, your strength, your stamina—and, if all goes well, your wisdom."¹

But understanding the past requires us to revisit it, in a sense, and this we can do only through the traces it leaves behind. Deliberately created traces are most important of all. David Levy praises documents, which he calls "talking things"—books, records, computer tapes, and other media where we (or our predecessors) have recorded information and which can carry and present that information at long distances from where it was created and long after its origin. "All of them are bits of the material world. . . to which we delegate the task of speaking for us. . . . Each one speaks out, tells its story."²

But that result happens only if the "documents," broadly defined, are saved, arranged, described, cataloged, preserved, given proper housing, and made available to people whose information need can be met, in full or in part, by using them. They can "speak" only if they survive. This presupposes institutions such as libraries and archives, supported by society as a whole, with adequate resources, dedicated to this complex work. It also presupposes literate, educated people with the time and inclination to study and read, the capacity to absorb and order information, the ability to understand and synthesize it, and the

instability. He argues that in cases where we cannot preserve the medium, we should preserve the content.

Roosa also provides specific advice to preservation administrators. He details eight essential elements of a modern preservation program that would address destructive factors, including those described by him and Lindquist. Roosa's comprehensive preservation program reflects a trend in today's research libraries to provide the greatest good for the largest number of items, with emphasis on appropriate collection storage environments being a prime example. Roosa focuses on preventing damage to collections of materials rather than repairing one damaged item at a time but advises that conservation treatment must also be part of a complete preservation program. He also argues that we may not need to save all of yesterday's "papers" as long as we save the relevant content, in whatever forms appropriate.

The pairing of the two essays in this introductory section suggests to me a cycle of appraisal and preservation. To explain rather simplistically, after a text is created and fixed into a particular medium, someone must decide if it should be kept or discarded. If the decision is to keep the item, then it is stored for future use. At some point, whether in the near or distant future, someone will again have to decide whether to keep or discard the item. The decision will be made based upon condition and value. If the decision is to keep the item, it is again stored and the simple cycle is repeated. Lindquist describes how people formed collections of printed material, thus making conscious decisions to keep and preserve certain items. In fact, an early approach to preservation was simply to make and keep many copies. Today many of these old collections sit in research libraries where curators and others must now again decide whether to keep or discard them. Many of these volumes are so badly deteriorated that keeping the original is extremely costly, and the most deteriorated may be discarded in favor of newer or reformatted volumes. Inevitably, some value is lost. The cycle will continue to some point in the future when a decision is made again. We can hope that by the time the cycle repeats itself, research and technological advances will make the decision less painful. Even though we follow established criteria to help in our decision making, we still must make subjective judgments. Unfortunately, it is a race against time for many volumes. The essays by Lindquist and Roosa capture what we did in the past and help point the way to creating a better plan for the future.

2

Books and the "Iniquitie or Wearing of Time"

Eric N. Lindquist

The British Library recently held a symposium with a name and purpose similar to this one. "Do We Want to Keep Our Newspapers?" as they called their conference, was concerned mainly with the newspaper holdings of the British Library.¹ We have a broader theme and we think we have a catchier title. The British Library could have called its conference "Who Wants Yesterday's Papers?" because the title is taken from a product of British culture. As some might remember (or have learned from a quick search on the World Wide Web), our title comes from a song by the Rolling Stones that appeared on their 1967 LP *Between the Buttons*. It is an obscure song, perhaps deservedly so. It will surprise many that the Rolling Stones ever expressed any interest in preservation issues. However, while their question might give us hope of their concern, their reply is disappointing. "Who Wants Yesterday's Papers?" they asked. "Nobody in the world," they answered.

Obviously they were not thinking of scholars and librarians, who, it seems safe to say, feel an anxious concern to see the record of human experience preserved as fully as possible. Although scholars and librarians may not always agree on the forms that preservation should take, they share a sense of the importance of continued access to as many texts and textual artifacts as possible.

In this essay, I want to place those concerns in some historical context by looking at some of the problems of survival that books (broadly conceived as any material artifacts containing textual information, including pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers, and broadsheets) have encountered in the past, particularly between the mid-fifteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the period when printed books were produced on the hand press. Printing was often described during this time as the art that preserves all other arts. Something similar can be said about the book in general. The book is the technology, the form of knowledge that preserves many other forms of knowledge. The book is a major instrument, arguably the most important instrument, of human

progress (if we may use that term), but for all its power, the book is also extremely fragile. The book has taken various forms in human history—the clay tablet, the papyrus roll, the parchment codex, the hand-press book printed on good paper, the industrial book mechanically produced on acidic paper, and now the electronic book. These are quite different forms, but they all share one important characteristic. Because they all involve some material embodiment, they are all vulnerable to destruction. Writing about the fifteenth-century book, Lotte Hellinga notes, “A text usually has a much longer life than any of the material vehicles in which it is presented.”² But, we might add, often the short life of the material vehicle also means a short life for the text. Contrary to the beliefs of some, the electronic book has not yet proven an exception. As the authors of *The Evidence in Hand*, a recent report on “the artifact in library collections” highly relevant to our concerns, point out, “issues of stability and fixity . . . are quite troublesome for digital texts. . . . Precisely because the technologies used to encode, display, and enact digital information are changing so rapidly, the digital artifact that goes untouched for 10 or 20 years may well be unrecoverable.”³ We face these new and developing challenges while also having to attend to the abundant problems inherited from the past in the form of vast numbers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century books and other artifacts printed on what is now brittle paper.

But however acute these challenges now seem, anxiety over the loss of books is nothing new, as a fascinating story from early in the Christian era shows. The story appears in the *Vita Adae et Evae*, one of the so-called Adam Books, composed by Jewish writers in Hebrew but surviving in Greek and Latin versions. The Adam Books contain first-person accounts of the Fall by Adam and Eve. The *Vita* recounts how after Adam’s death, Eve, foreseeing her own death, summoned all her children and said to them:

I and your father transgressed the command of God, and the archangel Michael said to us, “Because of your collusion, our Lord will bring over your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water and then by fire; by these two the Lord will judge the whole human race.” But listen to me, my children! Make now tablets of stone and other tablets of clay and write in them all my life and your father’s which you have heard and seen from us. If he should judge our race by water, the tablets of earth will dissolve and the tablets of stone will remain; but if he should judge our race by fire, the tablets of stone will break up and those of clay will be thoroughly baked.⁴

Recording these important texts in two different formats would enhance the chances of their survival even in a highly perilous environment. This story was apparently the origin of a medieval tradition that Eve was the inventor of writing. We might also take it as evidence that Eve was the first preservation librarian.

By the time the *Vita* was composed, the tablet was no longer the primary form of the book but had been replaced in the Mediterranean world by the papyrus roll. It was no doubt on a papyrus roll that the *Vita* was first written down. Papyrus, it is well known, is extremely fragile, and because it is so fragile, and because few copies were made of most texts, only a small percentage of ancient Greek and Roman books, literary and otherwise, have survived. M. I. Finley notes, for example, that one of the most famous ancient Greek literary genres, tragedy, is only known to us by a minuscule number of surviving examples. “The names of some 150 Greek authors of tragedy are known,” he writes, “but, apart from odd scraps quoted by later Greek or Roman authors and anthologists, the plays of only three, Athenians of the fifth century B.C., are extant. Nor is that the end of it. Aeschylus wrote 82 plays, and we have 7 in full; Sophocles is said to have written 123, of which 7 still exist; and we can read 19 of Euripides’ 92.”⁵ Perhaps the most powerful symbol of book loss in all of history is the destruction of the great ancient library at Alexandria. At its height, the library was said to have had 500,000 or even 700,000 rolls; a partial shelf list by itself filled 120 rolls.⁶ According to one account, when the library was destroyed, the rolls were burned to heat the public baths of Alexandria, and it took six months to burn them all.⁷ In fact, that story is almost certainly apocryphal. Many accounts have been offered of the destruction of the Alexandria library, but we do not really know what happened to it. It might have been burned deliberately; its end might have been prolonged and less dramatic. What is not debatable is that in part because of the loss of the Alexandria library and the other libraries of the ancient world, the great majority of ancient Greek texts have disappeared.

The books in the Alexandria library were papyrus rolls, but around the time the library met its end, the papyrus roll was giving way to yet another form of the book, the parchment codex, which remained the dominant form of the book in Europe for a thousand years. Parchment is a good deal sturdier than papyrus, and in fact many medieval parchment books—several hundred thousand—have survived to the present. Christopher de Hamel notes that “more manuscripts survive from the Middle Ages than any other artefacts.”⁸ The adoption of the parchment codex probably contributed to the survival of many ancient texts,

though it did not guarantee their survival. Some texts that survived long enough to be recorded on parchment have not survived to the present.⁹ However, while the parchment codex was a good deal sturdier than the papyrus roll, the limited number of copies in which most medieval texts were recorded meant that they continued to be vulnerable to destruction and loss, and many—probably most—medieval texts followed their ancient forbears into oblivion. Destruction was sometimes deliberate. For example, in fifteenth-century England, heretical Lollard books, including all copies of some texts, were hunted down and burned.¹⁰ Equally damaging was accidental or unthinking loss. Writing about the loss of medieval music books, Andrew Wathey notes, “the relatively short life-span of [musical] compositions imposed limits on the working lives of books, and as a factor in their survival was markedly more important than physical wear and tear.”¹¹ Medieval musicians were not much interested in out-of-date music. They did not copy or recopy music that was slightly out of fashion or music that was not actively being used, with the result that much medieval music has disappeared without a trace. The vulnerabilities of manuscripts of course continued when paper replaced sturdier parchment as the dominant medium. Musical losses are not confined to anonymous medieval works; one of the most grievous losses in cultural history is the disappearance in the eighteenth century of a substantial number of manuscript compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach, including at least one passion setting.¹² Further afield, less than four percent of the fifteenth-century Chinese encyclopedia *Yongle Dadian*, which filled more than 10,000 manuscript volumes, has survived.¹³ Such are the perils of manuscript culture.

At its first appearance in the middle of the fifteenth century, printing with movable type was hailed as a divine art, partly because it seemed to promise, through multiplication of copies, to keep texts from perishing. “Of all the new features introduced by the duplicative powers of print,” Elizabeth Eisenstein writes in her seminal study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, “preservation is perhaps the most important.”¹⁴ The fifteenth-century humanist Francesco Filelfo praised printing “for by it a great abundance of books, which for the most part would have presently perished, lived again to the great praise and fame of their authors.”¹⁵ Such sentiments continued to be expressed throughout the hand-press period. When King James VI of Scotland wrote an advice manual on kingship for his son at the end of the sixteenth century, he had seven copies printed and given to trusted servants “to be kept closely by them, lest in case by the iniquitie or wearing of time, any of them might haue beene lost, yet some of them might haue remained after me, as witnesses to my Sonne, both of the

honest integritie of my heart, and of my fatherly affection and naturall care towards him.”¹⁶ Thomas Bartholin, a Danish physician and writer, noted at the end of the seventeenth century that “books are not so readily exposed to destruction if they have multiplied themselves by the aid of type so that they may be read in more than one thousand copies dispersed throughout the earth, unless this universe which we inhabit be subjected to common ruin or flames spread themselves to all corners of the earth.”¹⁷ We find the same sentiment expressed a century later by Thomas Jefferson, who wrote to Ebenezer Hazard in 1791, approving his plan to publish a collection of historical and state papers. “Time and accident,” Jefferson noted, “are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. . . . let us save what remains . . . by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.”¹⁸

Printing made possible the easy multiplication of copies, and for four hundred years at least, these copies were printed on rag-based paper that has often proved long lasting. Compared to fragile and disintegrating nineteenth- and twentieth-century books, books of the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries can seem remarkably well preserved. Since early modern texts were printed in many copies, obviating the major problem of medieval book preservation, and were printed on good paper, obviating the major problem of modern book preservation, it might seem that preservation problems for hand-press books would be almost nonexistent. Sadly, that is not the case. Contemporaries were aware that printing made books only relatively more likely to survive, not absolutely so. Bartholin only said that the printed books “are not so readily exposed to destruction.” He was not confident that printing would save books completely, and in fact it did not. All that marvelous paper was still extremely vulnerable.¹⁹ Like earlier books, hand-press books were subject to deliberate destruction in times of war and other occasions. Isaac Disraeli noted in his essay “The Destruction of Books,” published toward the end of the hand-press period, “it is remarkable that conquerors, in the moment of victory, or in the unsparing devastation of their rage, have not been satisfied with destroying *men*, but have even carried their vengeance to *books*.”²⁰ The early modern period did not see anything on the scale of modern “*libricide*” (a term coined by Rebecca Knuth to describe the deliberate and systematic destruction of books carried out for ideological reasons by various twentieth-century regimes), but the random damage was often bad enough.²¹ One of the worst episodes of book destruction in the early modern period took place when the armies of Charles V sacked Rome in 1527 and turned their attention to many of the city’s libraries,

including the Vatican library. The destruction was deplored even by Protestant reformers like Philip Melanchthon, who lamented that the libraries of Rome "have no equal anywhere in the world." Anticipating Disraeli, Melanchthon observed that "soldiers and Mars despise books."²²

In the long run, probably harder on books than deliberate destruction was the extensive accidental destruction inevitable in societies that depended on open, unguarded flames for heat and illumination. Libraries continue to be vulnerable to accidental fire, of course, but it is not the scourge it was in earlier centuries.²³ Accidental fire consumed hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of books during the hand-press period. Fire destroyed private libraries—so commonly that laments over the loss of a library by fire almost comprise a minor literary genre. The most famous example is Ben Jonson's "Execration upon Vulcan," written after his library was destroyed in November 1623.²⁴ Similarly, Thomas Bartholin published *On the Burning of His Library* in 1670 (reporting that his grandfather's library had also burned before his). Bartholin lost both his large collection of printed books and many of his own manuscript works in progress (which was true of Jonson as well). "There had been no people, no age, in which the best books have not suffered harm from Vulcan," Bartholin writes.²⁵ Among famous early Americans who lost libraries to fire were Increase Mather, in 1676, and Thomas Jefferson, whose first library was destroyed with his ancestral home at Shadwell in 1770 (and whose second library, numbering some 6,500 volumes, was sold to the nation to replace the first congressional library, destroyed when British soldiers set fire to the Capitol in 1814).²⁶ Fire also destroyed many institutional libraries, including many of the earliest such libraries in British North America. The public library established by Thomas Bray in Annapolis burned in 1704; the library founded in Boston for public use by Robert Keayne burned in 1747; the library of the College of William and Mary was consumed by fire in 1705; and the Harvard College library, probably the largest institutional library in the colonies at the time, was destroyed by fire in 1764.²⁷ Fire also consumed whole towns and cities, along with all the books in them. Nearly every early modern city had at least one great fire. The destruction visited by the Great Fire of 1666 on London, the dominant publishing and bookselling center of the English-speaking world, was severe. The booksellers in and around St. Paul's churchyard, where the largest concentration of booksellers was to be found, had stored much of their stock under the cathedral; this was all consumed when the cathedral collapsed. Books, as one observer commented, "for their luggage and cumbersomness, could not be res-

cued from the jaws of that unmercifull Element," and he reported that "judicious men of that Trade affirm, that the onely losse of Books in that place, and *Stationers-hall*, publick Libraries, and private persons Houses, could amount to no less than 150000 pound."²⁸ (In a twentieth-century parallel, the London wholesale booksellers concentrated around Paternoster Row lost at least six million volumes to German fire bombs in 1940.)²⁹ Similarly, although on a smaller scale, the Boston fire of 1711 destroyed most of the bookshops in what was then the major center of book culture in British North America.³⁰

Vast numbers of books were lost through fire deliberately or accidentally set, but probably more books disappeared through sheer wastage. Many books were lost in the course of being used—"destroyed primarily by the diligence of their original readers," as Oliver M. Willard puts it.³¹ Book historians use the expression "read to pieces" to describe the fate of many popular books as they were read and reread by the same readers or passed among many different hands. Such was the fate of many schoolbooks, for example. The famous *New England Primer*, which combined reading and religious instruction, went through numerous editions beginning around 1690 and continuing through two centuries, but of the probably hundreds of thousands of copies printed in the eighteenth century, only a handful survive, none before 1727. Most copies were simply used up in the process of making children literate and godly.³² Other books were lost when they were no longer immediately useful. Almanacs were among the most popular books in early modern Europe. In Britain, as many as 400,000 almanacs were sold annually in the 1660s.³³ But out of all the millions printed, Bernard Capp observes, "only a few thousand survive, mostly those collected by bibliophiles." "The majority," he writes, "perished when the year ended."³⁴

Many books were sacrificed to other demands for their materials unrelated to reading since paper, fine though it often was, served many other uses for which there was no substitute in early modern Europe. The paper in printed books had to serve all the uses that other kinds of paper as well as other materials serve today. The possible uses of paper were almost endless, and writers seemed to delight in cataloging them. Paper from books was used to wrap tobacco or spices or groceries. Fernand Braudel describes vividly the markets of early modern Europe, with their "piles of produce, slabs of butter, heaps of vegetables, pyramids of cheeses, fruit, . . . fish, game, meat"—and "unsold books whose pages were used to wrap up purchases."³⁵ H. R. Woudhuysen notes that the book collector John Racliffe, "a Bermondsey chandler . . . was said to have become interested in book-collecting

when he saw printed leaves used for wrapping items sold in his trade."³⁶ Pastry cooks used paper from printed books to line pie dishes. And many books were used for a purpose it is perhaps too indelicate to mention. In the seventeenth century Sir William Cornwallis kept "pamphlets and lying-stories and two-penny poets" in his privy.³⁷ Many an early modern ballad, pamphlet, or book disappeared down the jakes. At the beginning of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, published in 1594, Thomas Nashe discusses facetiously some of the uses to which he expects his book to be put. He tells his readers that Jack Wilton (the traveller of the book's title) has "bequeathed for waste paper here amongst you certain pages of his misfortunes. In any case keep them precious as a privy token of his good will towards you." He goes on to suggest that his readers could use pages of his book to dry or light tobacco or to stop a mustard pot. "To any use about meat or drink," he suggests, "put them to and spare not, for they cannot do their country better service."³⁸

All of these uses took a severe toll on early printed books. Only a small percentage of books, pamphlets, and broadsheets printed on all that marvelous rag paper have survived; and all copies of a significant number of editions have disappeared completely. Some scholars believe that as many as 10,000 editions produced in the fifteenth century, one-fifth or more of the total, have completely disappeared.³⁹ (Ironically, in some cases a manuscript copy of a fifteenth-century printed book survives but no printed copy.⁴⁰) A recent catalog of Dutch incunabula (that is, of books printed before 1501) includes some 2,200 titles, of which a quarter survive in a single copy or mere fragments, which, David McKitterick notes, suggests that "many editions and probably some works are lost completely."⁴¹ A number of books known to have been printed by England's first printer, William Caxton, including some substantial volumes, have not survived in any copies or only in fragments.⁴²

Of course it is the slighter imprints that have suffered the greatest losses. The smaller the item the more vulnerable it is. Tessa Watt in her study of English ballads estimates that 3,000 different ballads were printed in the sixteenth century. If each was printed in 1,000 copies, a commonly accepted figure, at least three million separate printed sheets were produced. Of these three million, a mere 250 survive, only a few more than the 190 ballads a provincial Oxford bookseller sold on a single day in 1520.⁴³ The survival rate for copies of sixteenth-century ballads is thus about .008 percent. Even in the nineteenth century, ballads disappeared at an alarming rate. In 1813, Isaiah Thomas, printer, historian of early American printing, and founder of the American Antiquarian Society, presented to the society a collection of ballads recently

purchased from a Boston ballad printer and seller; two-thirds of the broadsides in the Thomas collection are unique to that collection.⁴⁴ Commenting on the survival rates of early American imprints, William S. Reese writes, "Where we really are reduced to guesswork is in the vast submerged body of ephemera and street literature: ballads, sale posters, theater announcements, personal declarations, advertisements, dying words of criminals, 'elegies and amateur poetics', political statements, and accounts of extraordinary events. Virtually all of this material from the first century of printing has disappeared, mostly through contemporary usage or through loss in fires and paper drives over the centuries." Reese thinks that perhaps two-thirds of early American imprints, most of them being such ephemera, have disappeared.⁴⁵ French Reformation pamphlets, Francis M. Higman comments, because of censorship and small formats, are "extremely rare." "Possibly a significant proportion of Reformation books is definitively lost."⁴⁶ Such imprints are of increasing interest to many researchers studying early modern European and early American history and culture, and the losses are serious.

But it is not only these kinds of relatively anonymous publications that have disappeared. Even the world's most famous writer has not been immune to loss. A quarto edition of a play by Shakespeare entitled *Love's Labour's Won* was evidently published around 1603, but no copies have survived, and the text survives nowhere else.⁴⁷

Ballads, pamphlets, and even quarto plays by Shakespeare were forms of cheap print, the kind most vulnerable to destruction, the most likely to be used to line pie dishes or stop mustard pots. But these were not the only kinds of printed materials that wasted away. Many more substantial books did as well, and from late in the hand-press period. James Raven reports that "not a single copy appears to survive of 133 or almost a tenth of the total novels published between 1770 and 1799 (although of these a dozen or so have surviving later editions)." Of the lost editions, he comments, "In certain cases titles and reviews suggest that the artistic loss is bearable, but there are also some distinguished casualties."⁴⁸

Despite these serious losses, most editions have probably not disappeared completely, and Oliver M. Willard, who pioneered the study of the loss of early modern English books, remarks that "for the largest books the loss of any editions is very uncommon."⁴⁹ But if most editions have survived, the great majority of copies of those editions have disappeared, with serious loss of bibliographic and other kinds of information. Curt Bühler, in his study of the fifteenth-century book, notes that "printed book production prior to 1501 probably amounted to some

six million copies, of which slightly more than half a million have survived to our day.”⁵⁰ Even the most famous books printed on the hand press have suffered severe losses. Of the 180 copies of the 42-line Bibles probably printed by Gutenberg, only 48 survive, and some of them are incomplete.⁵¹ Only 228 copies of the Shakespeare First Folio survive, many of those also incomplete (or compounded of two or more other copies). Given the value of this book—the last copy sold at auction, in October 2001, realized \$6,166,000—it is likely that all surviving copies are accounted for—though at that price you might want to check your attic just in case.⁵² It is not known how many copies of the First Folio were printed, but 750 is the figure commonly accepted by scholars, which means that more than two-thirds of all copies of one of the most famous books ever printed in English burned in fires deliberately or accidentally set, or were torn up so that the pages could be used as kindling or to wrap spices or fish, or perhaps even disappeared down privies.⁵³ Other important books from the period survive precariously. Many of Caxton’s imprints survive only in a single complete copy, including his 1485 edition of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, a substantial volume that is one of the most important works of medieval British literature.⁵⁴

The *English Short Title Catalogue* is an online database that aims to catalog for the period ca. 1473–1800 all surviving editions in any language printed in English-speaking countries and all English-language imprints printed anywhere. As of early February 2004, some 468,432 editions were recorded in the database. The database also provides a census of known copies, and for these editions, a total of 3,001,612 copies, or an average of 6.4 copies per edition, had been identified by the same date.⁵⁵ If, on average, each edition was produced in 1,000 copies, some 465,430,388 artifacts have disappeared. The number of surviving copies here given is certainly too low—the census of copies is not complete—but even if the actual number turns out to be twice or even ten times greater, it remains the case that the vast majority of pre-1800 British textual artifacts no longer exist.

What did contemporaries make of all this destruction, this general wasting of books through the iniquity and wearing of time? How would they have answered the early modern equivalent of the question asked in the title of our symposium? We have seen Thomas Nashe’s facetious answer, but Nashe’s facetiousness perhaps concealed anxiety about the fate of his book. Ben Jonson was more open about his anxiety, as Ian Donaldson has recently argued.⁵⁶ Following ancient models, Jonson proclaimed his confidence in the immortality of his writings—and his confidence in the fate of his detractors’ books, which he suggested

would end up wrapping tobacco, or worse. But also following his ancient models, he expressed his anxieties about the ephemerality—the physical ephemerality—of his own books, which he worried would involve the destruction of his literary fame. Even multiple printed copies might not save him from the fate of many ancient writers. His books too might end up wrapping groceries or drugs, as he suggested at the end of his epigram “To My Bookseller.” These fears perhaps came true in part. “To My Bookseller” might have appeared first in a 1612 edition of Jonson’s epigrams that has apparently not survived in a single copy.⁵⁷ Perhaps the pages of many copies of the book did end up as his epigram foretold, or being put to even more ignominious uses.

It is not surprising that authors would be anxious to see their own books survive. What is surprising is the idea, which became commonplace in the early modern period, that there were too many books in the world and that the loss of many of them would not be a cause for lament, an idea explored by Jon Thiem in a study of early modern attitudes toward the destruction of the library of Alexandria.⁵⁸ “Book-impooverished scholars of the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” Thiem notes, deplored the destruction of the Alexandria library, an attitude shared by us moderns. Beginning in the sixteenth century, however, many writers suggested that the destruction of the library was a “fortunate misfortune.” The French humanist Louis LeRoy wrote at the end of the century, in a work translated into English in 1594 as *Of the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World*, that the destruction of so many ancient books was a boon: “If all that hath bin written by the auncient Philosophers, Historiographers, Oratours, Poets, Physitians, Diuines, and Lawiers, had come to our hands, all had bin full of bookes; and we should haue had no other moueables in our house but bookes: we should be constrained to go, sit and lie vpon bookes. And yet there remaine so many, and are made from day to day, that the age of man could not suffice to read, not onely the writings in many disciplines; but in one particuler.”⁵⁹ LeRoy’s last sentence is remarkably modern sounding, and many a scholar shares his frustration with the unending flood of publications, though few would wish openly for the destruction of books as a solution. The English writer Thomas Browne wrote in *Religio Medici*, published in 1643, that there were too many books and that he “could with patience behold the urne and ashes of” certain libraries. He proposed a synod “to condemne to the fire those swarms and millions of *Rhapsodies*, begotten only to distract and abuse the weaker judgements of Scholars, and to maintaine the Trade and Mystery of Typographers.”⁶⁰

Something of this attitude can be seen in the actions of Sir Thomas Bodley, who at the very end of the sixteenth century began creating at Oxford University the great library that eventually bore his name. In 1610, Bodley arranged for the library to receive free copies of all books printed by members of the Stationers' Company in London.⁶¹ However, Bodley was not interested in acquiring all the imprints of English presses. He was adamant about excluding what he called "idle books, & riffe raffes," a category that included plays.⁶² It is no thanks to Bodley that the works of his most famous contemporary, Shakespeare, have survived.⁶³

Many people then were willing to see certain categories of books lost, or even eager to hasten their destruction. But beginning at least by the seventeenth century, others were beginning to see a value in saving even the slightest and most ephemeral imprints. John Selden, the famous historian and legal scholar, collected ballads because, he thought, "more solid Things do not shew the Complexion of the Times so well as Ballads and Libells."⁶⁴ Other antiquarians and collectors, including Anthony Wood and Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist, followed his example. Part of Selden's collection of ballads was apparently acquired by Pepys and absorbed into his collection, which he later gave to Cambridge University. More than half the broadsides in the Pepys collection exist only in the Pepys collection, and it has been characterized as "perhaps after the Diary, the greatest treasure in his library."⁶⁵ Pepys also collected chapbooks, another form of cheap print, and this collection also remains intact at Cambridge.⁶⁶

The same period saw the creation of substantial collections of another kind of cheap print in Britain, political and religious pamphlets. When control of the press lapsed in the 1640s and 1650s, thousands of sermons, speeches, newsbooks, and tracts poured from the British presses, and a number of contemporaries began acquiring them in large numbers, the most famous collector being the London publisher and bookseller George Thomason.⁶⁷ Thomason's collection, numbering some 22,000 titles, many of them unique, and arranged in 1,955 volumes, survived long enough to be absorbed and preserved by the British Library.⁶⁸ Pamphlet collectors said little about their motives. Some apparently did not look beyond their own lifetimes since their collections were dispersed at auctions upon their deaths. Fortunately for posterity, however, some realized that their pamphlets had important uses and kept their collections intact.

Also fortunately, such collectors had their counterparts in early America. Many more early American imprints would have been lost but for collectors such as the New Englander Thomas Prince, who said

he had "a zeal of laying hold on every Book, Pamphlet, and Paper, both in Print and Manuscript, which are either written by persons who lived here, or that have any Tendency to enlighten our History," and Thomas Walcutt of Boston, who gave some 10,000 imprints, many of them pamphlets, to the American Antiquarian Society in 1834.⁶⁹ We have already encountered Isaiah Thomas and his ballad collection, which, he noted in an inscription in the first of the three volumes that contained it, was "Bound up for Preservation, to shew what articles of this kind are in vogue with the Vulgar at this time."⁷⁰

When many people began to think it worthwhile to preserve extensive (if not necessarily complete) collections of cheap print, an important stage had been reached, and we must be grateful to Thomason, Pepys, Thomas, and others like them for saving much significant material that otherwise would have been lost to us. On the other hand, we might also hold them responsible for our current fix. If they had not for the first time answered the question, "Who Wants Yesterday's Papers?" (or an earlier version of that question), positively, libraries might never have become vast storehouses of paper demanding our urgent attention.

Notes

1. The conference program, with links to unedited papers, is available at <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Centre/Newspapers/conference.htm> (accessed 20 November 2003). The proceedings have since been published in David McKitterick, ed., *Do We Want to Keep Our Newspapers?* Publication 15 (London: King's College Office for Humanities Communication, 2002). Another recent conference relevant to our concerns was one on "Lost Libraries," sponsored in 2000 by the Cambridge Project for the Book Trust. The subjects of the papers ranged in time and place from ancient Mesopotamia to twentieth-century China. The conference program can be found at <http://www.cambridgebook.demon.co.uk/lostlib.html> (accessed 3 February 2004). The proceedings are forthcoming in James Raven, ed., *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections Since Antiquity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). I would like to thank James Raven for alerting me to the publication of this book.

2. Lotte Hellinga, "The Codex in the Fifteenth Century," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures 1986-1987*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: British Library, 1993), 65.

3. Stephen G. Nichols and Abby Smith, *The Evidence in Hand: Report of the Task Force on the Artifact in Library Collections* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2001), 49-50. Available online

at <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub103/pub103.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2003).

4. Eric Jager, "Did Eve Invent Writing? Script and the Fall in 'The Adam Books'," *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 229–30.

5. M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, rev. ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), 19. For further discussion of ancient literary losses, see Frederick G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 28–32.

6. Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 36–39; Roy MacLeod, "Introduction: Alexandria in History and Myth," in *The Library of Alexandria: Centre of Learning in the Ancient World*, ed. Roy MacLeod (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 5–6. See also Diana Delia, "From Romance to Rhetoric: The Alexandrian Library in Classical and Islamic Traditions," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1449–67.

7. MacLeod, "Introduction," 10.

8. Christopher De Hamel, *Scribes and Illuminators* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: British Museum Press, 1992), 4.

9. Colin H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1983), chap. 13.

10. Anne Hudson, "Lollard Book Production," in *Book Production and Publication in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 136.

11. Andrew Wathey, "The Production of Books of Liturgical Polyphony," in *Book Production and Publication in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.

12. Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000), 456–61.

13. Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 175.

14. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1: 113.

15. L. A. Sheppard, "A Fifteenth-Century Humanist, Francesco Filelfo," *The Library*, 4th ser., 16 (1935–1936): 25.

16. Basilicon Doron, in *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Somerville, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

17. Thomas Bartholin, *On the Burning of His Library, and On Medical Travel*, trans. Charles D. O'Malley, Library Series, no. 9 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries, 1961), 32.

18. Nichols and Smith, *Evidence in Hand*, 70.

19. Johannes Trimethius argued that books printed on paper were actually more vulnerable to destruction than books copied on parchment: "The printed book is made of paper and, like paper, will quickly disappear. But the scribe

working with parchment ensures lasting remembrance for himself and for his text." It was the scribe who made scholarship permanent. Johannes Trimethius, *In Praise of Scribes*, ed. Klaus Arnold, trans. Roland Behrendt (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1974), 35.

20. Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature. Consisting of Anecdotes, Characters, Sketches, and Observations, Literary, Critical, and Historical* (London, 1791), 64.

21. Rebecca Knuth, *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003). See also Hilda Urén Stubbings, *Blitzkrieg and Books: British and European Libraries as Casualties of World War II* (Bloomington, Ind.: Rubena Press, 1993).

22. André Chastel, *The Sack of Rome, 1527*, trans. Beth Archer, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1977 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 96, 220.

23. For some recent library fires, see Nicholson Baker, *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (New York: Random House, 2001), 199.

24. Ben Jonson, *Poems*, ed. Ian Donaldson (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 193–201.

25. Bartholin, *On the Burning of His Library*, 6.

26. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the Virginian* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), 125–27; Dumas Malone, *The Sage of Monticello* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977, 1981), 168–84. The library destroyed in 1770 consisted mostly of law books but probably included some classics as well. According to tradition, Jefferson's first reaction upon being told of the fire was to ask if his books had been saved. Tragically and ironically, most of the books Jefferson sold to the nation after the 1814 fire were themselves destroyed in a fire in 1851.

27. Elmer D. Johnson, *History of Libraries in the Western World*, 2d ed. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1970), 310, 313, 314. The Harvard fire was back in the news a few years ago, when one of the 144 books charged out at the time of the fire (the third volume of Bishop Kennett's *Complete History of England*) resurfaced after more than 200 years and was restored to the library. Debra Bradley Ruder, "Overdue Book Returned After 233 Years," *Harvard University Gazette*, 15 May 1997, <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/1997/05.15/OverdueBookRetu.html> (accessed 30 January 2004).

28. Rege Sincera, *Observations, Both Historical and Moral, upon the Burning of London, September 1666* (London, 1667), 13–14.

29. Knuth, *Libricide*, 91.

30. William S. Reese, "The First Hundred Years of Printing in British North America: Printers and Collectors," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 99 (1989): 367.

31. Oliver M. Millard, "The Survival of English Books Printed before 1640: A Theory and Some Illustrations," *The Library*, 4th ser., 23 (1942–43): 173.

32. Marcus A. McCorison, "The New-England Primer Enlarged, 1727," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 108 (1998): 63–66.
33. Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500–1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 23.
34. Capp, *English Almanacs*, 66.
35. Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds, vol. 2 of *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 28–29.
36. H. R. Woudhuysen, "The Caxton Chaucer and Its Source," *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 July 1998.
37. Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth Century England* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 48–49. In their post-1949 war against Tibet, which involved the destruction of some 85 percent of the country's written documents, the Chinese used sacred Tibetan writings to wrap shop purchases or for toilet paper. Knuth, *Libricide*, 219.
38. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 253.
39. Curt F. Bühler, *The Fifteenth Century Book: The Scribes, the Printers, the Decorators* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 144, n. 119.
40. Bühler, *The Fifteenth Century Book*, 38–39.
41. David McKitterick, review of *Incunabula Printed in the Low Countries: A Census*, by Gerard van Theinen and John Goldfinch, eds., *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 February 2000, 35.
42. George D. Painter, *William Caxton: A Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1976), 119, 154, 157, 165, 166, 182, 184.
43. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45; Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, 14.
44. Arthur Schrader, "Broadside Ballads of Boston, 1813: The Isaiah Thomas Collection," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 98 (1988): 77.
45. Reese, "First Hundred Years of Printing in British North America," 362–63.
46. Francis M. Higman, "French-Speaking Regions, 1520–62," in *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François Gilmont, English ed. and trans. Karin Maag, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, Hants, England and Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1998), 129.
47. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 349. Only one copy of the first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594) survives and only a fragment of a copy of the first quarto edition of *I Henry IV*. Both are at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

48. James Raven, "Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age," in *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, vol. 1, 1770–1799, by James Raven and Antonia Forster, with the assistance of Stephen Bending (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 20. The 133 missing titles are known from publishing records or reviews. I am grateful to James Raven for several communications on the subject of early novel survival.
49. Willard, "The Survival of English Books," 175.
50. Bühler, *The Fifteenth Century Book*, 38–39. Other scholars have suggested fewer surviving copies.
51. "The Gutenberg Bible," <http://www.gutenberg.de/english/bibel.htm> (accessed 3 February 2004), provides a list of surviving copies and their whereabouts.
52. Michael Dobson, "Whatever You Do, Buy," review of *The Shakespeare First Folio: The History of the Book* by Anthony James West, *London Review of Books* (15 November 2001): 9.
53. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the First Folio was subjected to a fate to which valuable books are sometimes incident: defective copies were broken up to supply missing pages in other defective copies in order to make whole copies. Peter W. M. Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Washington, D.C.: Folger Library Publications, 1991), 36–40. Blayney notes, "It is usually estimated that about 230 or 240 copies of the First Folio survive. But that figure includes 'copies' made up from fragments—in some cases, fragments from more than a dozen broken copies. The number of original copies of which parts survive is probably closer to 300."
54. Janet Backhouse, Mirjam Foot, and John Barr, comps., *William Caxton: An Exhibition to Commemorate the Quincentenary of the Introduction of Printing into England* (London: British Museum Publications for the British Library, 1976), 55, 62, 71, 74, 75, 79, 80, 82, 85, 86. The complete copy of *Le Morte d'Arthur* is owned by the Pierpont Morgan Library. The John Rylands University Library of Manchester owns an incomplete copy.
55. "RLG Database Sizes," <http://www.rlg.org/filesizes.html> (accessed 2 February 2004); Juliet McLaren, personal communication with author, 3 February 2004. I am grateful to Juliet McLaren, assistant director for English projects and senior bibliographer for early serials for the *English Short Title Catalogue*, and John Bloomberg-Rissman, formerly of the *English Short Title Catalogue*, for several communications on this subject.
56. Ian Donaldson, "Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Destruction of the Book," in *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 198–216.
57. Donaldson, "Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Destruction of the Book," 210.
58. Jon Thiem "The Great Library of Alexandria Burnt: Towards the History of a Symbol," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979): 507–26.