Introduction

> Mr. *Curll* is a Person who knows the *Privileges* an *Englishman* was born to, and makes a very free Use of the *Liberty of the Press*.
>
> *The Bee: or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet* (1733)

The study of book history has taken great strides in recent years. In one particular area, we know much more about the London print trade in the eighteenth century, and a few good accounts of individual publishers have emerged.[1] However, no attempt has previously been made to investigate the detailed operations of any major figure as evidenced by his or her day-to-day practice. This is an effort to fill that gap by exploring the career of Edmund Curll, and to go beyond the mainly biographic treatment he has received so far. The relevant issues may be broadly distinguished as the things that happened off the page, and those present on the page. Up to now, the former has received more attention. In the chapters that follow, I seek to analyse Curll's work under both aspects. Among the topics considered are his relations with colleagues in the trade, including his co-publishing ventures: his place in the real or mythical milieu of Grub Street, his activity in the civic affairs of the capital, his presence in miscellanies, his publicity methods, and his alleged piracy. Sections are devoted to his use of paratextual devices, and his manipulation of imprints.

What ended up on the page in one of Curll's books? The topics selected for this study may help to answer that question, and in places to suggest why a given element was there. From this point of view, the method in Part I is chiefly descriptive and oblique. The chapters in Part II are more analytical and direct in their approach. Part III concentrates on particular kinds of books that illustrate the strategies Curll employed, while Part IV comes back to his famous quarrel with Alexander Pope to explore in detail some of the workings of their relationship.

The title *Edmund Curll at Work* has been chosen to stress the actual processes that characterise his productions, based on decisions he made in

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composing and marketing his list. It is intended (to steal a phrase from Keith Thomas) to throw light on the tools and the job.[2] In his astonishingly wide-ranging *Oxford Book of Work*, Thomas covers a variety of craftsmen, as well as miners and waitresses, but no printers. Equally, his section on 'Shopkeepers and Salesmen' includes a grocer and John Betjeman's young executive, 'viable from ten o'clock till five', but no bookseller – not even Curll, viable at all hours.[3] (That is, if we can judge by the speed with which he got out responses to his enemies, followed by fresh editions, sometimes almost daily.) A sign that was once common in city streets was 'Danger Men at Work': when people in the literary business, whether authors or fellow publishers, knew that Curll was around, they must have learnt to watch out for some new threat looming up on his construction site.

The title also helps to locate Curll as a worker in the print industry, one who rose from obscurity outside the powerful guild of Stationers to become one of the most famous personages in the literary world of the nation, causing recurrent disquiet in the lives of Matthew Prior, William Congreve, and Allan Ramsay (himself a bookseller) among others. Here, one strategy was to tempt these men into retaliation and thus supply free publicity. In some situations, we also encounter Curll at play, laying aside his more conventional work so that he could toy with his opponents in cheeky appropriations of their own materials and their practice. Robert Darnton begins his study of piratical French publishers with a chapter entitled 'The Rules of the Game', and is then able to explain how the game was played.[4] We can certainly recognise a ludic aspect to Curll's operations, for example in his jocular advertisements – though he was mainly concerned to see how he could bend the rules of the game, as the government and the courts drafted them. Nor does he altogether fit the standard description of a pirate, as we shall see in Chapter 7.

It is his works that dominate this study – difficult as he made it for bibliographers to be sure exactly what *was* his and what was not. In a valuable study, *The Work of Writing*, Clifford Siskin identifies a division of labour in the literary market place, out of which the Author (insistently capitalised in Siskin's text) will eventually emerge. Prior to this, the booksellers were able to take advantage of the Copyright Act to achieve a situation in which authors were 'a means to a specific economic end for the monopolists – a weapon wielded by the booksellers which their opponents managed to turn against them'.[5] Whether the two groups operated all the time in quite such a fiercely oppositional way, outside

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the big showdown cases in the courts, is a matter for debate. Nor do I think Curll's broadly successful career was heavily dependent on the Act, whose provisions he regularly set out to challenge. But Siskin's argument is valuable in emphasising the *functional* role that publishers played alongside authors in creating the literary environment of eighteenth-century Britain.

Aims of the Book

In his lifetime, Edmund Curll (1683–1747) was widely reviled as the most notorious of all publishers. Eustace Budgell called him 'a *Disgrace* and a *Nuisance* to Mankind . . . as dangerous a *Villain* as ever breathed'.[6] Even today, his reputation survives on account of his battles with Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, his many brushes with the authorities, and his promotion of dubious forms of literature. He published books that gave offence on grounds of sedition, breach of privilege, obscenity, blasphemy, plagiarism and piracy. If there had been a trade descriptions act, in his day, such as the one that has existed in Britain since 1968, he would have fallen foul of the law almost every week of the year. Together his activities brought him a variety of punishments, ranging from spells in the pillory and gaol to parliamentary censure. As a result, he is now perhaps the best known of all members of the profession from the entire eighteenth century, although in terms of a contribution to literature his achievements rank far behind those of men like Jacob Tonson and Robert Dodsley. His name continues to turn up in books, articles, and websites, and commentators including Janine Barchas, Bradford K. Mudge, and John O'Brien have found ways to justify some of the ways of Curll to modern readers.[7]

Scholars sometimes affirm that Curll and Pope were much of a muchness in their desire to profit from literature. In reality, this was a claim made in 1742 by the author of *Sawney and Colley: A Poetical Dialogue*, who deemed the two men 'Akin by Trade', with a note explaining that the similarity lay in Pope's 'having lately turned *Bookseller* to himself, selling all his own Pieces, by Means of a *Publisher* [i.e. a distributor, who held no rights], without giving his Bookseller any Share in them'. Likewise, the poet had been guilty of 'practising, in all respects, the lowest Craft of the Trade', including 'different Editions, in various Forms, with perpetual Additions and Improvements, so as to render all but the *last* worth nothing; and by that Means, fooling many People into buying them several times over'. This was almost word for word the charge laid against Curll. We can see how the entry of Pope into the role of self-publication

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gave his enemies a stick to beat him with, when they brought up his implication in Curll's edition of the letters. 'Colley' (Cibber) addresses 'Sawney' (Pope):

> But with the *Wizard*, C——L, to *juggle*
> And, *Hocus Pocus*, help him *smuggle*
> Thy Correspondence with thy Betters.[8]

It is indeed possible to recast Curll as a loveable rogue unfairly maligned by establishment figures such as the highly esteemed Pope. This book may perhaps contribute to the ongoing re-evaluation of his place in history.

Posthumously, too, Curll has given the book trade and the world of scholarship enough grief to rival any pain that his contemporaries endured. His publishing practices bewilder anyone who wishes to bring a sense of order to his vast output. By a combination of deceit, disguise, concealment, suppression of sources, elision of evidence, and muddling of dates, amongst other sleights, he has made it almost impossible to track the exact content of many titles, along with the correct sequence of editions, and the source of his materials. Moreover, Curll recycled much of what he issued, so that surviving volumes exhibit widely different contents from copy to copy. Once the scourge of literary London, he has plagued students of book history in our own day. In any attempt to establish principles on which to base enquiries regarding his methods, it is necessary to go into what may seem a tediously detailed analysis of particular works.

For the past twenty-five years, Paul Baines and I have made a systematic effort to unearth more information about Curll's career in the world of eighteenth-century writing and publishing, and to clear a path through the bibliographic jungle Curll left behind him. (My own efforts in this direction began, more sporadically, in the 1960s.) At the centre of this project lay first a biography, *Edmund Curll, Bookseller*, published in 2007; and second a catalogue of his output, still in progress (see Appendix 2). Since the former came out, we have continued to explore Curll's activity in a number of essays and articles, some written jointly and some individually. Several of these, in a revised form, supply the basis for most of the chapters in this book: two others and one appendix, based on a lecture and conference papers, have not been published before.[9] The planned *Catalogue* will differ from, and we trust will improve upon, the list compiled by Ralph Straus, almost a century ago, on which all enquirers have been obliged to rely up till now.

Our hope is that, when completed, the *Catalogue* will make it possible for antiquarian book dealers, rare book collectors and curators, librarians,

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bibliographers, and scholars to establish more precisely the books which pass through their hands. Many questions remain unanswered, and some cases may never be answered in a completely satisfactory way. We believe that we have at least narrowed the scope of uncertainty surrounding Curll's productions. In addition, this compilation should provide a basis for reviewing the publishing fortunes of a man who could certainly claim to be among the most prominent booksellers of the eighteenth century, whatever view is taken of his working methods. Recently some commentators have taken a more favourable view of his practices. But even those who accept the traditional view of Curll as a rogue element in the trade should benefit from a fuller conspectus of his output.

The Context of Publishing

In our survey of the publisher's career, we attempted to correct and supplement previous work on his output.[10] However, that work was conceived chiefly as a biographic account, and it naturally proved impossible to cover in detail all the books he issued. This left a variety of first-order questions unsettled. As indicated, an enormous amount of new knowledge, as well as new ways of interpreting this knowledge, has emerged since Straus wrote. Thanks to the work of writers such as D. F. McKenzie, Michael Treadwell, and Ian Maxted, we now have a much fuller understanding of the shape of the publishing industry in Curll's day. He is far from a representative member of the trade: one distinctive feature of his production line is the fact that, more than any of the well-known publishers of the era (Andrew Millar, Robert Dodsley, and John Murray, for instance), Curll did not just write books himself, but also served as the interventionist editor of the books of others, so that his presence can often be tracked throughout their text. Nevertheless, detailed study of his multifarious undertakings can show what was possible within the legal and political constraints of the time. His battles in the courts and in the press were undertaken not to revolutionise the print world, but to enable him to sell as many books as possible. In that respect, different as some of his methods were, he had a common aim with his brethren in Paternoster Row and Little Britain.

That being so, this book seeks to consider various aspects of Curll's publications in the context of the London publishing industry as it then operated. It touches on issues that arose over the five decades in which he was a member of the trade. Consideration is given to different portions of his list, with a particular emphasis on the notorious biographies of the

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recently deceased that did so much to blacken his name, then and now.[11] While it would not be quite true to say that Curll invented the form, there were not too many examples in popular literature, outside lives of criminals or notorious prostitutes such as Sally Salisbury. Other chapters raise more general issues, as remarked already. Two that have close links are Chapter 3 and 4, partly through the association they trace with the bookseller William Mears, which has been neglected in previous scholarship. The final section takes up Curll's well-known battles with Pope, treating matters such as their shared exploitation of anonymity, as well as the poet's reworking of material by Ben Jonson, along with the triangular relation with the aggressive writer John Dennis.

The purpose of this book is not to offer judgments about Curll's supposedly dissolute life (about which we have next to nothing in terms of reliable evidence), or to make a moral assessment of his ways of doing business. Its concerns will involve the practical forms that this business took as regards the selection of items for his list, the means of acquiring copy, the promotion of his goods, and other issues. Promotion, of course extended to strictly non-textual elements such as his inventive use of shop signs, which ended up as part of the information on title-pages, along with a logo of Pope's Head, which became his most recognisable trademark, and his rococo monogram. Curll showed some initiative in his readiness to move around London, from the City to the Strand and Covent Garden, in his quest for potential customers. His seemingly innovative 'Literatory, or Universal Library' in 1729 may have been little more than a glorified warehouse-cum-showroom, but it is one more indication of his flair for publicity; it stood next to Will's famous coffee house in Bow Street, close to Drury Lane theatre, and came with a sign of green spires.[12] His opponents saw that he was the king of this branch of the business: 'The *Original Art of Advertising* was stolen from Mr. Curle's *Literatory* by Grub *Orators* and *Hyp Doctors* by Paper-mongers, by Pamphleteers, and by Titles of books, &c. and Mr. Curle's Native Right to that *ingenious and profitable Art is indisputable*.' (*GSJ*, 6 January 1732).[13] He could not legally take apprentices in the trade. We do not know much about his staff in the shop, except that he had a poor teenage maid who was transported for stealing books from his stock.[14] His son Henry (1707–37) took over briefly when Edmund was otherwise occupied, in gaol, but drifted out of the business before his early death. That leaves his two wives, who certainly would have helped him run the enterprise.[15] As Richard Grassby has observed, 'Wives were particularly involved in the book trade. John

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Dunton noted the contribution of his wife . . . [who, as] "bookseller, cash-keeper, managed all my affairs for me".'[16]

In seeking to give a more detailed account of his publishing techniques than has been attempted before, in the case of Curll or any bookseller of his time, the approach unavoidably leads to some discussion of his disputes, as it were off the page, since he made books news, and the presence of newspapers at a pivotal stage of their development was vital to his strategies of publicity. And a narrative of his career without reference to Pope would be like *Hamlet* without the four scenes with the ghost. However, there is no extensive coverage of the complicated dance routine between the two men that accompanied the publication by Curll of the poet's correspondence in 1735–37, because this has been the focus of ample debate for more than a century and a half.[17]

The scope of the chapters just outlined extends at greater or shorter length to most areas of Curll's output. Some consider a single publication, and some a group of items, while others deal with a particular relationship or a genre such as the miscellany in Chapter 7. I have not included full treatment of two topics, one of which has perhaps arrogated too much attention. This relates to his works condemned for obscenity – a conspicuous element of his publishing performance, but one that previous writers have gone over thoroughly.[18] It is quite a small proportion of Curll's list that falls into this category: no more than twenty items at the very most. A minuscule fraction – and even fewer of those raise significant bibliographical issues. The other absentee is the component of books on antiquarian subjects. They are of mixed quality: few have very much to say on behalf of Tristram Risdon's *Survey of the County of Devon*, written by c. 1632, but first published in 1714 by Curll in a clumsy and slipshod manner that John Aubrey might have termed crinkum crankum. Aubrey was a Curll author, too: his *Natural History of Surrey* came out in five volumes (1719), as well as his *Miscellanea* (1714). The work on Surrey was edited by Richard Rawlinson, who can certainly be identified as the man behind many of the works on antiquities, besides the source of several minor literary pieces, some emanating from Oxford. (In his days of conducting book auctions in London, Curll also came across Richard's brother Thomas, the great collector.) Thomas Hearne knew both Rawlinsons, and hated Curll, whom he accused of 'abominable Impudence, Ignorance, and Carelessness' in producing Elias Ashmole's *Antiquities of Berkshire* (3 volumes, also 1719), though he thought the author was also to blame.[19] Despite Hearne's comments, this was in many

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ways an impressive record within a specialised corner of the trade (see also the 'A Survey of Curll's Publishing Career').[20]

Inevitably, a number of the same topics arise across the separate chapters. In order to avoid a great deal of outright repetition, I have provided summaries and cross-references that are intended to mitigate any reader's resistance on this point. However, the book does not aspire to be a through-written work with a single argument about Curll, but offers rather a series of linked perspectives on the diverse and confusing circumstances that made up his career. The goal is to uncover the strategies he adopted in assembling and marketing his works so as to ensure their greatest appeal to the public.

Connections

John Feather has remarked that 'The publishing industry can only be understood . . . as part of a wider picture. We cannot ignore either readers or authors.'[21] Unfortunately we can only make vague speculations about the readership for most of Curll's books: those who commented in the most vociferous manner are unlikely to be representative of the general body of consumers. It is different with authors, where the evidence permits more reliable deductions. By its nature, the scope of this book extends beyond Curll himself to prominent members of the literary profession, whose writings filled the coffers of the trade. As well as Pope and Swift, among those who enter the story are Addison, Congreve, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Prior, and Rowe. The bookseller even crossed paths with Dr John Arbuthnot, responsible for the best known quip about him. As for the corps of lowly ranked authors who produced copy for Curll's voluminous list, and sometimes earned a reference in *The Dunciad* for their pains, many of them figure in the chapters to come. They include John Dennis (who stands at the heart of Chapter 9); Charles Gildon; Giles Jacob; John Oldmixon; and George Sewell. The role that they and their fellows took as a partial embodiment of the Grub Street milieu receives some attention in Chapter 3. Leading members of the theatrical profession show up in connection with Curll's activities, notably Colley Cibber, Anne Oldfield, and Robert Wilks. All this suggests that no comprehensive literary history of the period can afford to sweep him out of the picture.

The long arm of the law seldom had to stretch far to lay its hands on Curll, who spent much of his life challenging its injunctions – sometimes literally so, as when he published a book by Thomas Burnet in 1734 with the comment, 'N.B. This learned Work was suppressed by an

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unprecedented and most partial Decree by the late Lord Chancellor Macclesfield, thro' the false Informations of Francis Wilkinson, Esq; but *Mortui non mordent*' (the dead don't bite).[22] Still, the courts did bite him several times, and in the chapters that follow we shall regularly come across cases that landed the contumacious fellow in deep trouble. Sometimes he ended up at the King's Bench gaol, sometimes in the chamber of the House of Lords (once, though, to claim victory over Pope), frequently in the office of the Secretary of State in Whitehall, more than once in the Court of Chancery (then held at Westminster Hall), and most famously in the pillory, when he stood at Charing Cross in the view of his customers and his enemies. Perhaps he took the view of a contemporary pamphleteer, that every bookseller in London would rejoice to have his pamphlets ordered to be burnt by the common hangman: 'The *Pillory* is an Estate certain to any one, who will accept the *Post*.'[23] He was subject to informal punishments, too, by the boys of Westminster School, and by Pope. The Commissioners of Customs asked for him to be prosecuted, and he offended successive Bishops of London, while his colleague in the trade Benjamin Motte wished he would learn his lesson and desist from his infractions (small hope).

There have been only a few scholarly considerations of publishers in the light of the burgeoning importance of print culture in early modern Britain. Particularly valuable in terms of book history are those of Stephen Parks on John Dunton (primarily a bookseller, author, and editor) and, covering a slightly later period, William Zachs on the firm of John Murray. Both contain excellent checklists of publications.[24] To these might be added Harry M. Solomon's study of Robert Dodsley; James E. Tierney's edition of Dodsley's correspondence, and Donald W. Nichol's work on the correspondence of William Warburton and John Knapton.[25] But we still have no adequate biography of Jacob Tonson, though we do possess volumes of his correspondence edited by Stephen Bernard.[26] The present book tries to do something not yet attempted in respect of Curll, that is give a detailed account, illustration, and analysis of a number of his practices, with regard to issues such as the make-up and formal method of his books in various genres. We shall also take stock of his exercises in collaboration, another largely neglected topic.

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