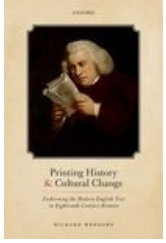

Printing History and Cultural Change: Fashioning the Modern English Text in Eighteenth-Century Britain

Richard Wendorf

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FRONT MATTER

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> A rule of thumb about culture is that personal or public yearning for a better time to come or one in the past and nostalgia of any sort are reliable signs of the counterfeit. The past is there to be studied in its reality, moment by moment, and the future can be discussed in its reality to come, which will be a reality moment by moment; but doing that means being honest just as doing it makes you too busy to yearn; and doing it shows you that nostalgia is a swindler's trick. A sense of the real is what is meant by good sense. And because of the nature of time and because of how relentlessly change occurs, good sense has to contain a good deal of the visionary as well as of ironic apology to cover the inevitable mistakes.
>
> (Harold Brodkey, *"Reading, the Most Dangerous Game"*)

I hope that I have absorbed Harold's lesson. I hope that you will not be subjected to a swindler's trick. And I now offer apology that is *not* ironic for whatever mistakes large and small I may have made while working on this book for over two decades. *Printing History and Cultural Change* has always been the bridesmaid, never the bride, as I have either written books on other subjects that have caught my interest or edited or written books associated with the institutions I have served. Along the way, many friends and colleagues have attempted to keep me honest and to offer me good sense. I take profound pleasure in thanking them, and in apologizing if I have forgotten anyone who lent a helping hand as I slowly traced the abandonment of the capital.

This study is particularly indebted to the work of three scholars, two of whom I've had the privilege of knowing, who have laid the groundwork for analyzing the changing features of the printed page in English: Nicolas Barker, David Foxon, and D. F. McKenzie. Among scholars of my own generation, I am particularly indebted to the work of James McLaverty, James Raven, and Michael Suarez. Heather Ummel-Wagner served on two continents as my research assistant and it gives me pleasure to thank her, many years later, for her meticulous work. Two readers for Oxford University Press provided detailed critiques of this book, for which I am extremely grateful. And my thanks go once again to Terry Belanger for reading my work with patience, good humor, and a meticulous eye.

p. viii I also offer my warm thanks for advice and assistance to Peter Accardo, Ming Aguilar, Danielle Allen, Susan Allen, the late Hugh Amory, Maphon Ashmon, Megan Benton, Peter Berek, John Bidwell, John Bloomberg-Rissman, Barry Bloomfield, Keeley Bogani, the late William Bond, Thomas Bonnell, Joanna Bowring, Archie Burnett, Mark Chonofsky, Alice Cresap, Caroline Currin, Mark Dimunation, Laura Doran, Holly Dowse, Andrew Edmunds, Lori Anne Ferrell, Christopher Fletcher, Peter Forsaith, Eric Frazier, Arthur Freeman, Ian Gadd, Jill Gage, Fernando Galvan, David Gants, Helen Gilio, James Green, Stephen Gregg, David Hall, Wayne Hammond, Stephen Hebron, Miki Herrick, Susan Hill, Elizabeth Hilliar, Caroline Holden, Paul Hunter, Ian Jackson, Mervyn Janetta, Nora Khayi, Wallace Kirsop, John Kristensen, Michael Kuzinski, Henrike Lähnemann, Lawrence Lipking, Roger Lonsdale, Elizabeth Lyman, Dennis Marnon, Catherine McGrath, David McKitterick, James Misson, Brian Moeller, Leslie Morris, Elizabeth Morse, James Mosley, Martin Mueller, Elissa O'Loughlin, Nicola O'Toole, Martyn Ould, Karen Nipps, Stephen Nonack, Michael North, Catherine Parisian, David Perkins, Kaara Peterson, Julian Pooley, Margaret Powell, Goran Proot, Jessy Randall, Bruce Redford, Christopher Reid, Sir Christopher Ricks, Nigel Roche, Loren Rothschild, the late Charles Ryskamp, Karen L. Schiff, the late Kevin Sharp, Patricia Meyer Spacks, David Spadafora, Roger Stoddard, Michael Suarez, Charlotte Sussman, Stephen Tabor, James Tierney, Julia Underwood, David Vander Muellen, Scott Vile, Susan Walker, David Webb, Liz Hopkinson Wildi, Abigail Williams, David Zeidberg, Amanda Zimmerman, and Steven Zwicker. At Oxford University Press, I have been warmly supported by Jacqueline Norton, Eleanor Collins, Aimee Wright, Nicola Maclean, Dharuman Bheeman, and Christine Ranft. I am also thankful to many colleagues in the Bodleian's photography department who managed to locate books and produce images during the upheaval of the recent pandemic.

I have had the opportunity to rehearse the scope and arguments of this book in several congenial settings, for which I am also grateful: the American Museum & Gardens, Bath Spa University, Boston University, the Boston Athenæum, the Huntington, the University of South Florida, Exeter College, Oxford, and Yale University. The Houghton Library, the Boston Athenæum, and the American Museum & Gardens have provided a home base for over thirty years, and I therefore thank my colleagues and trustees at these institutions for encouraging their director to pursue scholarly as well as managerial pursuits. The research for this book has been generously supported, moreover, by the Huntington, the British Academy, the Newberry Library, and Exeter College, Oxford.

My colleagues at Bath Spa University have provided a helpful intellectual environment in which to work, and I thank Kristin Doern, Ian Gadd, and former Vice Chancellor Christine Slade for making my appointment as a visiting professor such a pleasant one. More recently I have had the opportunity to serve as a Visiting
p. ix Fellow at Exeter College, Oxford, and I extend warmest thanks to the ↳ Rector, Sir Richard Trainor, for this helpful sabbatical in 2019 and for five decades of warm friendship. Six cohorts of NEH summer seminarians —at Northwestern, Harvard, and the Boston Athenæum—have worked with me on issues relating to literature and the visual arts, and I am therefore thankful to almost one hundred scholars for their contributions to my own intellectual life.

Previous versions and rehearsals of parts of this book appeared in *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*, in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (ed. Kevin Sharp and Steven N. Zwicker), and in my book *The Scholar-Librarian*. I am grateful for permission to build upon those essays here.

This book is dedicated to Elizabeth Hilliar, who has put up with a "highly skilled migrant" with unstinting
p. x patience and love. ↳

For Elizabeth Hilliar

In some modern Books, the common Names of Substantives are not printed with Capitals, only the proper Names.

(Ann Fisher, *A New Grammar,* 1750)

I am very apt when I write to be too careless about great and small Letters and Stops, but I suppose that will naturally be set right in the printing.

(Sarah Fielding, *Correspondence*, 1758)

we only use small characters because it saves time. moreover, why have 2 alphabets when one will do? why write capitals if we cannot speak capitals?

(The inscription on Bauhaus writing paper, 1919–1933)

If you read older books you will see that they do pretty well what they please with capitals and small letters and I have always felt that one does do pretty well what one pleases with capitals and small letters…. We still have capitals and small letters and probably for some time we will go on having them but actually the tendency is always toward diminishing capitals and quite rightly because the feeling that goes with them is less and less of a feeling and so slowly and inevitably just as with horses capitals will have gone away.

(Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America,* 1935)

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1
The Great Divide

The difficulty is, how shall i begin?
(Luke Hansard, *The Auto-Biography*)

Old Style and New

This is a wide-ranging book about what may appear, at first glance, to be a rather narrow subject. My ambition is to provide, by example, a necessarily limited but nonetheless positive answer to the general challenge posed to scholars of the history of the book several decades ago by D. F. McKenzie: "is bibliotextual history possible, as a fine conjunction of literary, cultural, social, economic, material and behavioural history expressed in the world of the book?"[1] In order to meet this challenge, my preliminary focus is in fact *minuscule*. In the following chapters I chart the gradual abandonment of pervasive capital letters (majuscules), as well as italics and caps and small caps, in English books published during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. The first part of this book, whose province is printing history, presents a descriptive and analytical account of how this process unfolded in London and the colonies from roughly 1740 to 1780. I gauge this fundamental change in printing conventions by drawing on an extensive database that maps this development in five-year increments and in a wide range of genres, with particular emphasis given to poetry and plays, the novel, the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, sermons and religious writings, newspapers, magazines, anthologies, classical texts, and government publications. This study provides what is probably the most detailed and comprehensive examination ever devoted to such a critical transformation in the material substance—and the comparative *lisibilité*—of the printed page.

Books published in London in 1740 were usually printed in what I call the old style. With their employment of heavy capitalization, italics, caps and small caps, they are still essentially early modern books, their typographical appearance predicated on an elaborate (if inconsistent) protocol of hierarchical differentiation.

[1] McKenzie, "Typography and Meaning," in his *Making Meaning*, 207. My starting point could be plotted on what Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker call the "Whole Socio-Economic Conjuncture," an adaptation of Robert Darnton's "Communications Circuit," under the heading of "Manufacture" but affecting several other stages in the "conjuncture." See Adams and Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," esp. 14, and Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?"

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Books published in London in 1770, on the other hand, were likely to have been printed in a newer style, with a much more restricted use of italics and small caps, and with only the occasional capitalization of words that are not proper nouns. Within fifteen years, following the abandonment of the long "s" and its affiliated ligatures in John Bell's edition of Shakespeare in 1785, most books printed in England and its colonies began to present modern texts to their readers, essentially providing the kind of encounter with the printed page with which we are familiar today.[2]

Stanley Morison famously claimed that "the history of printing is in large measure the history of the title-page."[3] This book argues that this is patently not true for England during the eighteenth century, even though an analysis of title-pages can certainly extend our understanding of how the printed page changed during this period. Instead of focusing on a single page, important as it is, I want to direct attention to the average page—to every page, in other words—so that we can gauge the aesthetic and cultural shift that took place during the middle decades of the century. Bonnie Mak has noted that we are so habituated to the "operation" of the page that we often overlook how it sets the parameters for our engagement with the text itself.[4] Joseph Dane has rightly pointed out that we have no commonly shared word in English to capture the visual appearance of the page, with its text, running heads, columns, commentary, margins, and typographical variety. Dane suggests "format" or "layout"; Richard Kroll has adopted the French *mise-en-page*; Nicolas Barker has written about the "morphology" of the page; Cynthia Wall has explored the "topographical" and "picturesque" page. We could also approach the page in even more visual terms, as W. J. T. Mitchell has, as a sophisticated species of iconotext.[5] But however we choose to describe the material appearance of the printed page, we must acknowledge that fundamental changes

[2] For Bell, see Steinberg, *The First Hundred Years of Printing*, 113 (among several other sources). Bell then dropped the long "s" in his *English Chronicle* and *World* in subsequent years. Steinberg notes that catchwords at the foot of each page were first abandoned in 1747 by the Foulis Press (67). The best surveys of the evolution of the page during the century are Nicolas Barker, "The morphology of the page" and "Typography and the Meaning of Words," but see my summary of all of these issues in the Coda to the first section of this book.

[3] Morison, *First Principles of Typography* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 16. I am pleased to see that Alan Bartram agrees with me: only the pages themselves "show the remarkable changes that have taken place over the centuries" (*Five hundred years of book design*, 11). This is not to denigrate the interesting permutations of the title-page during the eighteenth century, but rather to put any focus on this feature of the printed book into proper perspective. For commentaries on the title-page, see Barker, "The morphology of the page"; Paul Luna and Martyn Ould, "The Printed Page," 528–45; Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design*, ch. 3; James McLaverty, "Questions of Entitlement"; Richard Kroll, "Mise-en-Page," 14–20; and Joseph Dane, *Out of Sorts*, ch. 4, where he argues that title-pages are age-specific rather than tied to specific genres. I provide a summary of changes in the Coda to the first section of this book.

[4] Mak, *How the Page Matters*, 9, who works almost exclusively with a Renaissance Italian manuscript and its printed and digital editions.

[5] Dane, *What Is a Book?* 85; Kroll, "Mise-en-Page" and *The Material Word*; Barker, "The morphology of the page"; Wall, *Grammars of Approach*, ch. 3; Peter Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts*; and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 95.

in printing conventions occurred during this period, and that the roles of minuscules and majuscules need to be examined within a broad and multifaceted historical context.

The second part of this book, whose province is cultural history, therefore confronts a rather different challenge, which is to expand upon *how* this transformation took place by attempting to explain *why* it should have occurred in England during this particular historical period. This has led, in turn, to my exploration of a number of related issues, including how we edit eighteenth-century texts and how we calibrate the role of typographical conventions in textual interpretation. As Michael Warner argued some time ago, many of the scholars working on the history of the book "suppose printing to be a nonsymbolic form of material reality," divorced from rhetoric or forms of subjectivity—a medium that is itself unmediated.[6] This can lead, in turn, to a focus on printing history that is entirely separated from other cultural forces that are at play at the same time. It can also lead us, as James Raven has pointed out in his cautionary essay on "print culture," to forget that "historians start with people, study people and make conclusions about people." The history of the book is, in his words, "the history of human relationships and the relationships between people and objects."[7] My intention in this book is to keep individuals—writers, readers, publishers, and printers—clearly in view, and my ambition is to demonstrate just how deeply printing history was embedded in the fabric of British life at a time when significant changes were taking place elsewhere in the cultural arena.

It is remarkable that a change in the presentation of English texts as fundamental as this could escape the notice of so many scholars who have attempted to chart the history of the book in Britain—or that it could, at least, be noted so infrequently in the scholarly literature devoted to the history of the book. There is no mention of capitalization in Steinberg's wide-ranging survey of the first five hundred years of printing, nor in the more recent two-volume *Oxford Companion to the Book*. There is nothing in *The Book History Reader* nor in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, nothing in *The Book: A Global History*, nothing in Adrian Johns' *The Nature of the Book*, nor in Richard Sher's *The Enlightenment & the Book*.[8] There is nothing in the volumes of *A History of the Book in America* covering the period before 1850.[9] James Raven addresses various issues of capitalization in

[6] Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 5; his entire first chapter paints a cautionary tale about "print determinism" in the hands of Elizabeth Eisenstein, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and others. See my discussion in Chapter 8, below.

[7] Raven, "'Print Culture' and the Perils of Practice," in Jason McElligott and Eve Patten, eds., *The Perils of Print Culture*, 218 and 228.

[8] Michael F. Suarez and H. R. Woudhuysen, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Book*; David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *The Book History Reader*; Michael F. Suarez and H. R. Woudhuysen, eds., *The Book: A Global History*; Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book*.

[9] Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in America*; Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *An Extensive Republic*.

The Business of Books, but they are, appropriately, financial rather than typographical. In the volume of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* devoted to the eighteenth century, there is only one mention of these changes in capitalization, by Nicolas Barker, and that has been prompted by the work of David Foxon, who almost single-handedly drew our attention to the importance of this issue by examining—in great detail—the evolution of Alexander Pope's manuscripts and printed editions. Scholars who have written about these issues have been working primarily in linguistics, the history of printing manuals, and textual editing (which is where my own interest was first piqued several decades ago). Gavin Edwards, the only literary critic other than Bertrand Bronson to have focused extensively on these changes in typography, has written about authors in the early nineteenth century—Crabbe, Blake, Wordsworth, and Dickens—and he has concluded that the treatment of capitals was quite unsettled during the second half of the eighteenth century.[10] This was not the case, as I shall demonstrate at the end of this chapter.

In the pages that follow, we shall encounter a number of eighteenth-century figures who noted that such changes were under way—many welcoming them, some naturally resisting them—but no one, to the best of my knowledge, attempted at the time to explain why this transformation was happening: not on aesthetic grounds, nor in terms of the economy of the printing house, nor on the basis of England's commercial and political relationships with its continental rivals. The most relevant passage I have found is a single sentence in Lindley Murray's *English Grammar* of 1795, which focuses on the coherence and aesthetic appearance of the printed text: "It was formerly the custom to begin every noun with a capital; but as this practice was troublesome, and gave the writing or printing a crowded and confused appearance, it has been discontinued" (174). This is a retrospective interpretation, however, written several decades after these changes in printing conventions took place, and I therefore relate these significant changes

[10] See Gavin Edwards, "William Hazlitt and the Case of the Initial Letter," "George Crabbe: A Case Study," and "Capital Letters." Edwards draws the wrong conclusion about the state of capitalization in the second half of the eighteenth century because he quotes from grammars and printers' treatises rather than examining actual practices during this period. He is, however, perceptive about the social and political dimensions of deliberate capitalization and italicization after the turn of the nineteenth century. James McLaverty is attuned to the variations in capitalization in his chapter on "Poems in Print" and in *Pope, Print and Meaning*. Cynthia Wall provides a lively discussion of capitalization and other typographical conventions in ch. 3 of *Grammars of Approach*. For debates over capitalization placed in their linguistic context, see Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words*, 51–53, who also notes Michel Maittaire's use of the first-person "i," which could be compared with Hansard's many decades later.

Capitalization is frequently discussed by Jocelyn Hargrave in *The Evolution of Editorial Style*; see especially her chapters on the printing manuals by Moxon, Smith, and Luckombe. One of her main arguments is that John Smith attempted to establish "editorial standardization definitively" in *The Printer's Grammar* (87) and that his treatise represents the pinnacle of editorial innovation (see her graph on 258). She also includes a concise history of the treatment of italics (89–91). See also Lisa Maruca, "Bodies of Type: The Work of Textual Production in English Printers' Manuals" and her book *The Work of Print*.

to a number of other forces as well: to the roles of author, publisher, and printer during this period, to the growth (and diversification) of the reading public, to the emergence of an English pantheon of canonical works and writers, and to comparative printing practices in Paris, Rome, Madrid, and the American colonies and Ireland.

Essential to my own model of historical explanation is the analysis of other cultural phenomena with which these changes in the printing house might profitably be associated and correlated, particularly the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752, the publication of Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755, and the imposition of house numbers in the streets of London in the 1760s. My research suggests that such a fundamental shift in printing conventions was closely tied to a pervasive interest in refinement, regularity, and standardization at mid-century—and that it was therefore an important component in the self-conscious process of modernizing English culture. Modernization on such a pervasive scale necessarily included a less isolated view of Britain's relationship with the rest of Europe, and especially so with France. Johnson could note that "Our language, for almost a century, has, by the concurrence of many causes, been gradually departing from its original *Teutonick* character, and deviating towards a *Gallick* structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recal it."[11] But by 1755, when Johnson published these words in the "Preface" to his *Dictionary* (in the new style), the typographical floodgates had stood open for almost twenty years.

Part of the argument of this book is that our eighteenth-century precursors initiated and eventually completed a transformation of the printed page in English that influences virtually everything we read today. It is crucial to remember, however, that the new style with which we are now comfortable actually posed interpretive problems for less-educated readers when it was introduced in the first half of the century. Joseph Dane has made a similar argument about various kinds of type (roman, italic, gothic): "Legibility of type is not a quality inhering in type but a function of a reader's reading experience." There is no legitimate way, he writes, in which a twenty-first-century reader "can judge the readability or legibility of a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century type to [its] contemporary readers."[12] Like the movement from gothic to roman type in English printing, the transition from the old style to the new was a gradual one, based in part on the increasing facility of the general reading public to understand texts that were now bereft of their traditional typographical styling. What is relatively difficult (or at least cumbersome) for us to read today was easy (or at least less cumbersome) for our eighteenth-century predecessors—and vice versa. The earliest attempts to strip English poetry of its typographical distinctiveness were aimed at an elite and highly educated class of readers, not at Johnson's "common reader," let alone at

[11] Johnson, "Preface to the English Dictionary," in *Johnson on the English Language*, 95.
[12] Dane, *What Is a Book?* 125.

those whose experiences as readers were limited to the rudiments of literate culture (the Bible, the chapbook, the weekly newspaper). Before we turn to imprints of any kind, however, we need to establish a common vocabulary and provide a context for the roles of minuscules, majuscules, and italics.

Defining Terms and Contexts

> They that content themselves with general ideas may rest in general terms; but those whose studies or employment force them upon closer inspection must have names for particular parts, and words by which they may express various modes of combination, such as none but themselves have occasion to consider.
>
> (Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*)

Perhaps I can best introduce my terms of engagement by quoting from Guy Miege's *English Grammar* of 1688. After discussing the various manuscript hands that were in common use among English writers, Miege remarks that "in the Art of *Printing*, there is much more Uniformity and less Disproportion, than in that of *Writing*. In *England* we use three Sorts of Letters for *Print*," which he then presents in their appropriate fonts as "Roman," "*Italick*," and "English" (120) (Figure 1.1).[13]

My initial focus will center on these three kinds of typeface, but it may be helpful to point out a number of other important elements that are captured in these two short sentences. Although Miege will later stipulate that capital letters should begin "any Noun that has an Emphasis with it, or that is predominant" (126), his text actually exemplifies the old style, with every noun—common as well as proper—dutifully elevated (as in "Uniformity" and "Sorts"). Miege will later inveigh against the contemporary taste for inserting numerous words printed in italics into a roman text, but here he in fact singles out two words for this treatment in each of his two sentences. He employs the long "s" (which I shall not reproduce in my own text), and he spells "*Italick*" with a final "k," which (like the long "s") will not disappear for another hundred years.

Miege refers to the third family of typeface as "English," whereas we are more used to calling it "gothic," "textura," or "black letter." The earliest books printed in England appeared in black letter; the first English book completely printed in roman type did not appear until 1555; the Bishop's Bible (1568) and the authorized King James version (1611) were printed in black letter; and royal proclamations were printed in this style until 1730.[14] By the time Miege published

[13] Miege, *English Grammar*, 119–20. S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, provides a good historical summary of these three typographical families (11).

[14] Harry Carter, *A Short View of Typography*, 92.

120 *The Engliſh Grammar.*

Viz.

The { Roman / *Italick* / English } Letter.

Which are diſtinguiſhed into theſe following *Sizes*, or *Degrees*, with their ſeveral Names prefixt.

The *Names.*	The *Sizes.* Roman.	Italick.
Pearl,	Citizen.	*Citizen.*
Nompareil,	Gentleman.	*Gentleman.*
Brevier,	Eſquire.	*Eſquire.*
Long Primmer,	Knight.	*Knight.*
Small Pica,	Baronet.	*Baronet.*
Pica,	Baron.	*Baron.*
Engliſh,	Viſcount.	*Viſcount.*
Great Primmer,	Earl.	*Earl.*
Double Pica,	Marquis.	*Marquis.*
2 *Line Engliſh,*	Duke.	*Duke.*

As

I left out of the Liſt the *Engliſh* (or *Black*) Letter, both for want of room, and becauſe it grows out of date.

There has been formerly a leſſer Sort of Letter than *Pearl*, known by the name of *Diamond*; but

Figure 1.1 Guy Miege, *English Grammar* (1688).