Rogers concentrates on the period before 1854 when the colonial government sponsored translations into Maori and supported the publication of bilingual newspapers. Half a century before Robinson Crusoe and Pilgrim's Progress were translated into Maori, a Tamil edition of Pilgrim's Progress was the first English novel printed in India. Although the genre was not part of the Indian literary tradition, its increasing popularity is analyzed by Priya Joshi in “Culture and Consumption: Fiction, the Reading Public, and British Novel in Colonial India.”

From its founding SHARP has been concerned with the teaching of book history, and in this collection the editors present well-documented papers that contribute to the discipline, will spark classroom discussion, and can serve as models for research.


Reviewed by Kevin Berland

There were three William Byrds of Westover; the second was responsible for building the Westover collection of nearly three and a half thousand volumes, the most extensive private library in colonial America. Thomas Jefferson considered purchasing it in the 1770s but couldn't afford the price. After the suicide of William Byrd III in 1777, the collection was sold to Virginia industrialist Isaac Zane, who shipped the books to Philadelphia where he hoped they would fetch a better price. First Robert Bell, then William Pritchard, and finally Zane's brother-in-law John Pemberton undertook the task, but sales were disappointingly slow. Zane and Pemberton died in the 1790s, the medical books went to the Pennsylvania Hospital, and the slow dispersal continued for some years.

Determining what books were in this library is an interesting puzzle. John Stretch, a journeyman printer and binder, compiled a list in the 1750s. A catalogue for the 1777 sale was published, but no copies survive. Then there is the “Zane Catalogue,” compiled when Pritchard took stock after the sale, but sales were disappointingly slow. Zane and Pemberton died in the 1790s, the medical books went to the Pennsylvania Hospital, and the slow dispersal continued for some years.

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What Hayes has done — and on the whole done very well — is to create a hypothetical reconstruction of Byrd's library by bringing together all the available evidence and then guessing the rest. Guessed work is necessitated by the fact that the Stretch Catalogue lists only binders' titles.

The book should prove to be a valuable tool for Byrd scholars and students of the history of the book in colonial America. Hayes sketches the particular strengths of the library (medical texts, the classics, law books, voyages, histories), which may well support further explorations of Byrd's character and accomplishments. Of course, the nature of such evidence is limited. The presence of a book in a library does not establish influence (nor whether it was ever read); the absence of a book from a library does not mean that it was never read. Important titles may have been loaned or given away, or they may disappear in grab-bag listings such as Miscellaneous Tracts, Plays, or Comedies.

Hayes reconstructs the Stretch titles by searching through the standard bibliographies (NUC, OCLC, RLIN, the BLC, Pollard and Redgrave, Wing). Some titles are easy enough: Reflections on Learning (Hayes 251) is Wotton's Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning (London, 1694). Sometimes the binder's title is ambiguous enough to comprehend several possibilities: Constitution of England (Hayes 568) might be Charles Leslie's The Constitution, Laws, and Government of England, Vindicated (London, 1709) or William Higden's View of the English Constitution (London, 1709 etc.), or conceivably some other title Hayes does not mention. The ESTC lists well over two hundred titles including the phrase “Constitution of England,” and it is not easy to see how Hayes settled on Leslie and Higden. Many other titles defy speculation: searching for Harrod Conspiracy (Hayes 360) in the ESTC brings up 134 titles. Hayes wisely leaves the entry blank.

Hayes notes when William Byrd II mentions a book or an author in any of his extant writings. Such notes include counting the times Byrd mentions in his diaries that he has been reading a particular author. Other references are less consequential, as when Hayes adds to his entry on Dacier's Plato (Hayes 972) seven sayings attributed to Plato, recorded by Byrd in his commonplace book. The sayings do not come from Dacier, so they establish nothing more than the fact that Byrd at some time was thinking about Plato.

However, other notes provide valuable cross-references to Byrd's letters and other writings. These are occasionally misleading: for instance, references to Diogenes Larytius misname him simply as "Diogenes." Hayes generously invites people who find new Byrd books or who have corrections to make to send them for projected addenda. I can think of several valuable additions: (1) a CD-rom version of the catalogue; (2) a separate list or index of books whose location is known; (3) a separate index of as-yet unidentified titles.

The introductory material provides the reader with an account of the life of William Byrd II, together with a discussion of the reasons he acquired certain books. Some Byrd scholars may take issue with Hayes' conclusion that the wealth of books establishes their owner's erudition — people collect books for any number of reasons. Nonetheless, the Hayes catalogue promises to become an excellent tool for examining the relationship of this interesting colonial gentleman to his books.