



Dingbats

ORNAMENTS & *fanciful initials*



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The Devil's Artisan

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Forging Ahead

WITH ITS ARCH ADAPTATION of Shakespeare's preface to the First Folio—"This Figure, that thou here seest put, / It was for gentle Shakespeare cut"—the audacity of this bookplate could only be eclipsed by the notoriety of its owner, Henry Buxton Forman (1852–1917).¹

Forman was an antiquarian bookseller, a celebrated bibliographer of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and an infamous literary forger.² The two images of Shelley's grave and birthplace ("Field Place") and the marble bust bearing Shelley's name point to Forman's bibliographic reputation and scholarship; his poem—skirting the line between plagiarism and homage—points to his more spurious activities.

In collaboration with Thomas J. Wise (1859–1937), Forman printed fraudulent "pre-first edition" pamphlets—publications that were billed as privately printed copies for an author's personal use but were, in fact, falsely dated. Their scheme required bibliographic expertise and intimate knowledge of the rare books market to target obscure, but not undesirable, works; to construct a plausible provenance for each item; and to ensure that the forgeries were accepted as genuine.

Wise and Forman authenticated their pamphlets in their books, bibliographies and personal libraries, and they made extravagant donations to the British Library to have them entered into the *Catalogue of Printed Books*—considered sufficient proof by many book dealers that the work was legitimate. These forgeries enhanced Wise and Forman's academic prestige, as they received increasing recognition for their "discovery" of many previously unknown works by notable authors.

The truth about the pamphlets Wise and Forman produced was revealed nearly 20 years after Forman's death, and only after the development of new methods of chemical analysis and bibliographic detection. In the innocuously named *Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth-Century Pamphlets*, John Carter and



of the original items. With such a notorious history ahead of the sombre figure depicted in this plate, how ironic his reproach to anyone daring to obtain his books through guile.

The figure that you here see put
Was for H. Buxton Forman cut,
Amid his household gods to bide
And relics culled from far and wide.
This book is his on whom you look;
For Scott his gravings tackle took
And etched the man to watch therein,
That none by guile the book might win.
Then siste fur [stop thief]!
Of great and small
The world holds books enough for all.
Of roughly handling this beware,
And put it in its place with care.

Graham Pollard conducted a chemical analysis of the forgeries' wood pulp paper—at the time, a recent manufacturing development—to prove the dates on their title pages false, and scrutinized the typography to positively identify the single printer responsible for their publication.

The still-living Wise initially took the fall for the two forgers; but 50 years—and pages of dedicated scholarship—later, Forman received his due. Fannie Ratchford, a librarian at the University of Texas, painstakingly reviewed decades of correspondence between Wise and Forman to eventually uncover the first piece of definitive evidence linking Forman to the forgeries: an 1896 letter between Wise and Forman containing the gleeful observation that the false date in a printing of Tennyson's *Last Tournament* "might lead 'someone to think' it was printed in 1871!"

In the aftermath of these publications, ephemera from the two forgers has become increasingly valuable on the rare books market—so much so that, in a curious twist, the forged pamphlets are now more valuable than many

1. The preface to the First Folio reads:
This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With Nature, to outdo the life:
O, could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brass, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then surpass
All, that was ever writ in brass.
But, since he cannot, Reader, look
Not on his Picture, but his Book.
2. The plate's engraver, Scottish poet and artist William Bell Scott (1811–1890), was also known for his scholarship on English Romantic poets.

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The Rare Books and Special Collections Bookplate Collection can be accessed from the UBC Library Digital Collections and Services site, <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca>.

