Error and Print Culture, 1500-1800:
A one-day conference at the Centre for the Study of the Book, Oxford University
Saturday 5 July 2014

Call for Papers

'Pag. 8. lin. 7. for *laughing*, reade, *languishing*.'
Richard Bellings, *A Sixth Booke to the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1624),
'Errata'

Recent histories of the book have replaced earlier narratives of technological triumph and revolutionary change with a more tentative story of continuities with manuscript culture and the instability of print. An abstract sense of technological agency has given way to a messier world of collaboration, muddle, money, and imperfection. Less a confident stride towards modernity, the early modern book now looks stranger: not quite yet a thing of our world.

What role might error have in these new histories of the hand-press book? What kinds of error are characteristic of print, and what can error tell us about print culture? Are particular forms of publication prone to particular mistakes? How effective were mechanisms of correction (cancel-slips; errata lists; over-printing; and so on), and what roles did the printing house corrector perform? Did readers care about mistakes? Did authors have a sense of print as an error-prone, fallen medium, and if so, how did this inform their writing? What links might we draw between representations of error in literary works (like Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), and the presence of error in print? How might we think about error and retouching or correcting rolling-press plates? What is the relationship between engraving historians' continuum of difference, and letter-press bibliographers' binary of variant/invariant? Was there a relationship between bibliographical error and sin, particularly in the context of the Reformation? How might modern editors of early modern texts respond to errors: are errors things to correct, or to dutifully transcribe? Is the history of the book a story of the gradual elimination of error, or might we propose a more productive role for slips and blunders?

Proposals for 20-minute papers are welcome on any aspect of error and print, in Anglophone or non-Anglophone cultures. Please email a 300-word abstract and a short CV to Dr Adam Smyth (adam.smyth@balliol.ox.ac.uk) by 14 April 2014.