

## Manuscript-related Books for Collectors

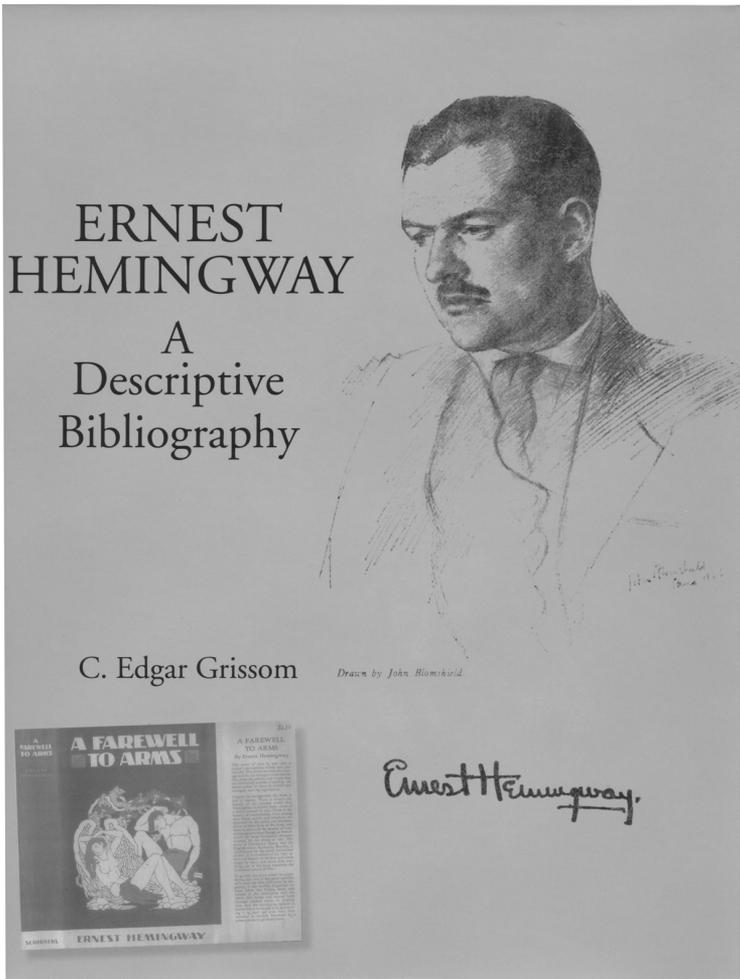
WILLIAM BUTTS

**GRISSOM, C. Edgar.** *Ernest Hemingway: A Descriptive Bibliography.* New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2011. Hardbound, dust jacket. x, 633pp. Illustrations, DVD-ROM. **\$225.00.**

**MCBRIDE, Bill.** *A Pocket Guide to the Identification of First Editions.* Hartford: McBride/Publisher, 2012. 16mo. Softbound. 142pp. **\$18.95.**

A book collector lurks in every autograph collector, especially when it comes to signed copies, signed limited editions, association copies and other autograph-related books. Yet often autograph collectors show a reluctance to branch out into books. They feel ill-informed or that they lack the specific knowledge to compete with seasoned collectors and to avoid making expensive errors or other legitimate concerns. One of the prime sources of the information that will allay these fears, though—bibliographies, a methodical listing and physical description of an author's work or a subject matter—are often ignored or overlooked.

Bibliographies have an unfortunate reputation among many collectors as the Big Bad Bear—the word itself is big and ungainly. Large tomes filled with mind-numbing amounts of weird abbreviations, columns of numbers resembling mathematical



equations, all manner of unintelligible gobbledy-gook. What's the prospective bibliophile to make of it?

Well, take it slow. Don't be daunted by what may be unfamiliar terminology; every pastime has its quirky vocabulary that takes getting used to. All but the most specialized esoteric bibliographies can be useful to the collector who takes the time to study them. The often-overlooked, all-important introduction is usually the key to unlocking a bibliography's mysteries, spell-

ing out the bibliographer's method and clarifying the criteria employed. Grissom does this in great detail.

What better way to dive into the usefulness of bibliographies for autograph collectors of a bookish bent than a hardcore bibliography of a literary heavyweight like Hemingway (1899-1961), one of the most collected of literary autographs? C. Edgar Grissom's *Ernest Hemingway: A Descriptive Bibliography* is just what its subtitle declares: *Descriptive*, and in bibliography that means description to the *n*th degree, the most detailed and in-depth type of bibliography. Some bibliographies are more properly described as checklists of titles, some contain the barebones bibliographical data (publisher, year, etc.), others are annotated and contain editorial commentary on the contents of the books.

Like any bibliographer, Grissom stands on the shoulders of those researchers who came before him. In the case of Hemingway scholarship, that's a substantial number of bibliographers, researchers, literary critics and others. High on his list are the late great Matthew J. Bruccoli, who almost single-handedly created the Hemingway cottage industry we know today, and Audre Hanneman, whose 1967 *Ernest Hemingway: A Comprehensive Bibliography* and 1975 *Supplement* have been standard references—up to now. But although Grissom finds Hanneman's work “deserving of acclaim for an impressive collection of secondary materials, he also finds it “wanting” in “its treatment of the ‘A,’ ‘B’ and ‘C’ items.” Grissom focuses exclusively on covering every edition of Hemingway's primary works, leaving the voluminous literary criticism, biographies, articles, reviews and such to others.

What Grissom does, and superbly, is take you through the entire Hemingway canon: “A chronological listing of all separately published books, pamphlets, broadsides, and other publications written wholly or substantially by Hemingway including all printings with English-language text,” as he summarizes it. This means the first (or “parent”) editions from the 1923 *Three Stories & Ten Poems* up through the many titles published since Hemingway's 1961 suicide, plus every subsequent English-language printing of each one of these titles—a daunting undertaking.

The amount of detail on these first and early printings is impressively thorough—I'm exhausted just studying it. There is the expected full collation, which accounts for every single leaf in all the titles, including blanks, complete title page and dust jacket

transcripts, binding and dust jacket descriptions (including variants if they exist), typography and paper description (including watermarks, chain lines, page thickness, sheets bulk, page edge trimming and coloring, etc.), quantities printed, locations of institutional copies examined and occasional other sections. The most minute variations between seemingly-identical copies of any given title can be explained and the printing properly identified using the Grissom bibliography. A number of long-standing bibliographical misconceptions and disputes, many dating to the 1930s and originating with early bibliographical attempts, are explored and convincingly settled. Most notable is Grissom's analysis of *Men Without Women* (1927). Publisher and bibliographer Louis Cohn stated that one could differentiate between printings of this work by a miniscule difference in their weight, a notion that has been widely accepted ever since. Grissom dissects this belief handily, making some surprising discoveries in the process.

The "Note" section for every edition I find quite useful, as it contains all kinds of additional background information on each title's creation, the publishing process, review copies, distribution and sales numbers. Only one Hemingway title was ever issued in signed, limited edition form (*A Farewell to Arms*, 1929, 510 signed copies), but this "Note" section often refers to specific inscribed copies examined by Grissom when the inscription itself adds to bibliographic knowledge. For instance, one copy of Hemingway's second book, *in our time* (1924), bears a Hemingway inscription to his second wife's obstetrician making an *incorrect* claim about the publishing history of this book and of his first book (*Three Stories & Ten Poems*). In an inscribed first edition of *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), Hemingway records that the book's epigraph was written "on the old [ship] Anita when we were out in the Gulf Stream." Scores of other unique presentation copies from Hemingway are quoted and explained.

As for the DVD-ROM that accompanies Grissom's bibliography: Not a fan. Sure, there's something high-tech sexy about including a slick DVD-ROM that appeals to publishers and makes a good selling point, but in my experience bibliographies are read by book people. It took many mental Post-It notes before I remembered to have my wife teach me how to put it into the computer and open the files. Bit of a hassle and I neglected to

put it back in its sleeve afterward, so I hope it's floating around on my heaped-upon desk somewhere. Admittedly many readers of this volume aren't as computer challenged as I, but you have to wonder how often DVD-ROMs are the nice-sounding bells and whistles that in reality are seldom used.

This DVD-ROM contains a vast number (supposedly more than 2,000) color images of dust jackets and bindings—truly a gold mine of images invaluable for comparison purposes. Note that the book itself does contain a good number of title page illustrations, though they're black and white and rather small. Autograph collectors will perk up at the DVD-ROMs file of 58 Hemingway autographs, arranged chronologically from 1908 to 1960. In a brief appendix (in the book, not the DVD-ROM), Grissom condenses his thoughts about Hemingway signatures and inscriptions:

*...several generalities appeared: signature, as well as handwriting, is usually slanted—either upward or downward; after 1924, the middle initial, M, is seldom encountered (during 1923-1924 he published as Ernest M. Hemingway); inscriptions for friends are often signed "Ernest," and for old friends, and almost always to family, "Ernie"; he used multiple pseudonyms in his journalistic work...; in his high-school period he employed numerous nicknames for himself and his friends, and occasionally used those in inscriptions in a later period; he commonly employed the European method of dating notes...; his inscriptions can be as entertaining as his letters and he occasionally wrote inscriptive letters on endpapers to explain circumstances surrounding his writing; his inscriptive comments regarding dates, publishing, etc., frequently dispute current biographical documentation.*

It disturbs this reviewer that this bonanza of images couldn't have been accomplished on paper, within the bibliography. Yes, it would certainly have increased the already-stiff \$225 price tag on this book considerably. While \$225 may seem spendy, if you're going to play the Hemingway game, books and/or autograph material, this isn't out of line. A simple Hemingway signature scrawled on a paper bar napkin will generally cost about three times this amount. (Incidentally, exhibiting at a high-end antiquarian book fair in Pasadena in February, the most expen-

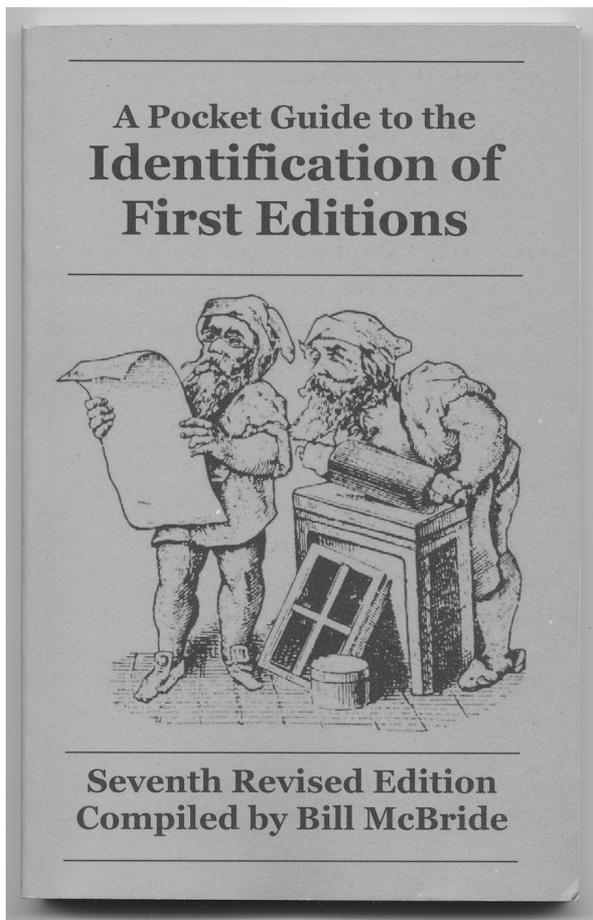
sive item I noticed was an unheard-of signed first of an early Hemingway title at a cool \$195,000.) Would those willing to pay \$225 for this bibliography buy it at \$275 – \$300 – \$350? To have this incredibly integral portion of this work published in a form that may make it unreadable at some point down the road strikes me as a disservice to scholarship—to posterity.

Not too many years ago this book may have been issued with a then-standard floppy disk, which of course couldn't hold anywhere near the amount of images this DVD-ROM holds. Could your computer accept that 5¼" or 3½" floppy disk today? It would sit in its sleeve at the rear of the book, lonely and unused—that is, if it hadn't already been lost or scratched and rendered unusable. Twenty years from now, what are the odds that my computer will be able to open this DVD-ROM? At our current frenetic rate of technological advances, what's considered state of the art now will probably be a relic in the near future. Aren't Grissom and Oak Knoll Press concerned about built-in obsolescence? I do know, on the other hand, that I'll be able to open Grissom's book and read it twenty years from now, as will my descendants. By the way, I'll be printing up hard copies of all 58 of the Hemingway signatures off this DVD-ROM to insert loose into my copy of Grissom's book.

This strong concern aside, Grissom's *Ernest Hemingway: A Descriptive Bibliography* is the most important contribution to Hemingway collecting and scholarship published in many a year. It's sure to become the gold standard for collectors, dealers and scholars in determining edition.

### Identification of First Editions

Another reference work to tempt autograph folks to dip their toes into bibliophilic waters is Bill McBride's *A Pocket Guide to the Identification of First Editions*—the seventh, revised edition of a booklet first published in 1979. This handy "cheat sheet" has been a mainstay of many a bookseller for three decades now, usually used in conjunction with less-handy out-of-print hardbound volumes such as Zempel and Verkler's *First Editions: A Guide to Identification* and a couple of earlier, rather outdated predecessors. I've recommended the *Pocket Guide* to countless bibliophiles or wannabe bibliophiles over the years. A hideous specimen held together by layers of packing tape and good will



has been within arm's reach for more than twenty years, and I keep a copy in every car's glove compartment.

The greatest fear of novice collectors is not being able to correctly identify a book's edition. This can lead to making a costly mistake, or can cause you to pass up an underpriced bargain. The vast majority of noncollectors are under the impression that a first edition is identified by those two words on the copyright page. Sometimes this is indeed the case, often not. Pitfalls abound. Not only are there many methods of indicating edition, many of them cryptic, but publishers often switch from

one method to another, apply them inconsistently or otherwise complicate matters to inadvertently confound collectors.

McBride's *Pocket Guide* is a simple A to Z listing of 5,835 English-language publishers current and former, from A & B Publishing through Zone Books. (According to McBride, that's 2,193 more publishers listed than the 3,642 that appeared in the sixth edition—up a whopping 38% – plus an additional 2,342 pieces of data.) A clever abbreviation system then shows each publisher's method of noting edition. The abbreviation or abbreviations that follow every publisher's name is explained in the key that appears on the inside of both covers. Baylor University Press, for instance, uses "NAP," as do a great many publishers, meaning "no additional printings are indicated in the book." Ross & Haines and countless others employ a straightforward "FE," meaning "words FIRST EDITION must appear on back of title page with no additional printings indicated." Rand, Avery & Co. and others favor "SD"—"same date must appear on title page and back of title page with no additional printings indicated." A dozen other abbreviations are used, including the popular "N" ("a sequence of numbers... must appear on the back of the title page with the '1' present") and "L" ("a sequence of letters... must appear on the back of the title page with the 'a' present") and the unfortunate "No designation"—yes, there are publishers for whom "no consistent way to determine one printing from another exists." But despite these general rules, exceptions do abound, and the *Pocket Guide* spells out many of them. For instance, a new collector might know the number sequence system noted above, but not be aware that Random House employed it incorrectly. Their first editions always begin with the number "2," which would usually indicate a second printing—so anyone not knowing this will misidentify a true first edition as a second printing—Amateur Hour mistake.

This listing of almost 6,000 publishers is prefaced by an eight-page introduction that crams in lots of condensed book-seller gems. Neophyte collectors overlook this at their own peril. There are thumbnail discussions on the distinction between edition, printing and impression, another on the often-misunderstood distinction between issue, state and point, a must-read section on identifying book club editions, and other tidbits of wisdom to shorten the learning curve. Read, study, and repeat.

As Bill McBride notes in his introduction, “The most useful tool in determining a first edition is an acute mind. This guide can take you only so far.” Oh so true, but without books such as the *Pocket Guide* providing concrete data that acute mind can really be stymied. And dealers need it just as much as collectors—more so, since they need to access this information far more frequently. Sure, any good dealer can normally identify most first editions without it, but this is a massive number of publishers, many of them obscure mom and pop presses rarely encountered. No one can keep this mountain of minutiae at their fingertips.

At 4” x 6” the *Pocket Guide* truly is pocket sized, easily taken on road trips for on-the-spot use. I wish it were bound in a heavy-duty spiral binding which would allow it to lie flat at any page, and that the cover stock were heavier and coated to make it cleanable. I wish the type size were larger. If you’ve ever tried to use it while balancing on a rickety ladder in a one-bulb basement you’ll know what I mean—the tiny type will have you sliding it back and forth like a trombone player. But these things would all increase the cost further, which rose from \$15.95 for the sixth edition to \$18.95 for the seventh.

Nonetheless, McBride’s *A Pocket Guide to the Identification of First Editions* is certain to be the smallest reference book on your reference shelf and probably the one you’ll use the most. Any reference work that helps make better collectors gets a big thumbs up in *my* book!

## **The Manuscript Society**

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