Tulips, Rabies and Books

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"Not a living creature could have anticipated it: but this might be called the grand era of Bibliomania."[1] Thus Thomas Frognall Dibdin commented on the remarkable events at the Roxburghe library sale in London on June 17 1812, when the 1471 Valdarfer edition of Boccaccio's Decameron became the most expensive book yet sold, reaching the price of £2260.[2] The book was reputedly the only extant copy of the *editio princeps* of Boccaccio's masterpiece.[3] Bidding against each other were two cousins – George John, second Earl Spencer and George Spencer-Churchill, fifth duke of Marlborough, marquis of Blandford at the time. Blandford won the day, but his victory was short-lived, and his cousin was to have the last laugh: only seven years later, having run up significant debts by overspending on his famed book collection, Blandford was forced to sell it, including the Valdarfer *Decameron*, which was snapped up for only £918 by none other than the Earl Spencer. The episode and its sequel are pleasantly

1 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron; or, Ten days pleasant discourse upon illuminated manuscripts, and subjects connected with early engraving, typography and bibliography*, 3 volumes, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1817), 65.

2 Brian Hillyard, "John Ker, third duke of Roxburghe," in *Pre-nineteenth-century British book collectors and bibliographers*, eds. W. Baker and K. Womack, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 213 (1999), 196-206; id., "Ker, John, third duke of Roxburghe (1740-1804), book collector," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed April 23, 2023, https://www-oxforddnb-com.bnf.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15452; *A Catalogue of the Library of the late John, Duke of Roxburghe* (London: Bulmer and Co., 1812).

3 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Venezia: Christoph Valdarfer, 1471). The copy is now in the Rylands Library, Manchester. There are also copies in London, Paris and Milan, but the Roxburghe copy is the only complete, unmutilated one. The price reached by the Valdarfer in 1812 was not to be surpassed until the sale of a vellum Gutenberg bible in 1873.

piquant but also apposite, illustrating very well not only the high passions but also the considerable fluctuations in book prices that characterised this period.[4] Book-collecting was all the rage and books regularly changed hands at inflated prices. Interest in the printed word, in books in general, and more particularly the passion for old and rare books had been steadily increasing since the early 18th century and reached unheard of proportions in the late Georgian Age.[5] Private libraries were rare in late-17th-century British aristocratic households; by the mid-18th century, however, they were such an indispensable feature of the homes of aristocrats, the wealthy gentry and some of the wealthier members of the liberal possessions, that library furniture and accessories had become very fashionable and were to be had from the best designers.[6] Fifty years later the speculation on books had increased even more, scaling dizzy heights.[7]

The root cause of the excessive prices reached by the Valdarfer Boccaccio, and other books was, according to Dibdin, the 'Bibliomania' that beset his epoch. That Dibdin should have chosen to qualify the Valdarfer episode and the Roxburghe sale as an example of bibliomania would not have unduly surprised many of his bookish contemporaries. He was after all the author of a slim treatise on the subject that had appeared three years earlier entitled *The Bibliomania, or Book-madness*, and that he had then republished in a greatly extended and entirely recast new version, under a slightly different title, only one year before the Roxburghe sale.[8] Just over twenty years

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4 Ed Potten, "The rest of the iceberg: reassessing private book ownership in the nineteenth century," in *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 15/3, *Great collectors and their grand designs: a centenary celebration of the life and work of A. N. L. Munby* (2014), 125-149, 131.

5 Kristian Jensen, *Revolution and the antiquarian book: reshaping the past: 1780-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David McKitterick, *The invention of rare books: private interest and public memory, 1600-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

6 Mark Purcell, *The country house library* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Arnold Hunt, "Private libraries in the age of bibliomania," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland,* eds. Giles Mandelbrote & Keith Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) II, 438-458; David Pearson, "Private libraries and the collecting instinct," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* eds., Alistair Black & Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), III, 180-202.

7 On book sales and book collecting at this time see especially Potten, "The rest of the iceberg", *op. cit.* (note 4); Jon Klancher, "Wild Bibliography: The Rise and Fall of Book History in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Bookish Histories: Books, Literature and Commercial Modernity 1700-1900*, eds. Ina Ferris and Paul Keen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 19-40; Philip Connell, "Bibliomania: Book Collecting, Cultural Politics, and the Rise of Literary Heritage in Romantic Britain," *Representations*, 71 (2000), 24-47; James Raven, *The Business of Books: Book sellers and the English Book Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

8 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Bibliomania, or Book-madness, containing some account of the history, symptoms, and cure of this fatal disease. In an epistle addressed to Richard Heber* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1809), (87 pages); Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania, or Bookmadness, a bibliographical romance in six parts* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1811), (782 pages). See also Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania or book madness: containing some account of the history, symptoms, and cure of this fatal disease*, ed. Peter Danckwerts (Richmond: Tiger of the Stripe, 2004).

later, when the tide had started to turn, Dibdin's pen was once more at the ready, and he captured the new spirit of the age in his 1832 *Bibliophobia*, an essay bemoaning the waning interest for books.[9] From mania to phobia in only twenty-three years; Dibdin charted the rise and fall of a passion that was to enthral his contemporaries and lead to the excesses that were often seen in auction rooms at the time. Fortunes were made and lost. One seasoned commentator and literary figure of the period, Robert Pearse Gillies, observed that this collecting frenzy, or "bibliographical propensity [...] was nearly as absurd as the *ci-devant* "tulip madness" in Holland."[10]

Dibdin was one of several authors writing about bibliomania in Late Georgian England, who were in turn participating in a much lengthier European tradition. Early texts on the collecting of books include Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon* and the first chapter of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (Ship of Fools).[11] But the flowering of the genre, marking a desire on the part of authors across Europe to engage with the concept of bibliomania, occurred during the eighteenth century, when a constellation of texts appeared on the subject. Dibdin was clearly working within this tradition, but he had an effect on the discussion, as will be seen over the following pages. His work to a very great extent contributed to launching the debate in England, where he stamped his mark on bibliomania and on 'bookishness', but also on bibliography, during the late Romantic period. However, as shall be seen, his ideas were much in line with earlier writings by European authors. This essay attempts to examine the figure of Dibdin, as well as his essay and to analyse his contribution to book knowledge in the light of the other texts that had appeared or were appearing.

Dibdin was not solely a keen observer of and commentator on auction houses, book sales and the passions that bibliophilic affairs aroused. Few among his contemporaries would have denied that he also made regular contributions to the literature on book history and bibliophily, even if his writings often qualified him for the title of vulgarizer rather than serious essayist. His work covered a variety of genres, from lists and bibliographies to library catalogues, from essays to bibliographical tours. He also communicated his enthusiasm for books and printed matter through the spoken word, giving three series of lectures during the years 1806-1808 (a total of twenty-eight lectures) at the recently founded Royal Institution.[12] Under the title 'English Literature',

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9 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliophobia, remarks on the present languid and depressed state of literature and the book trade, in a letter addressed to the author of the Bibliomania, by Mercurius Rusticus. With notes by Cato Parvus* (London: H. Bohn, 1832).

10 Robert Pearse Gillies, *Memoirs of a literary veteran; including sketches and anecdotes of the most distinguished literary characters from 1794 to 1849* (London: R. Bentley, 1851), II, 2.

11 The *Philobiblon* was written around 1345 and first published in Cologne in 1473. The *Narrenschiff*, first published in 1494 in Basel, was translated into many languages and appeared in many editions. See Klaus Manger, *Das "Narrenschiff": Entstehung, Wirkung und Deutung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983); John Van Cleve, *Sebastian Brant's The ship of fools in critical perspective, 1800-1991* (Columbia: Camden House, 1993).

12 Gwendolen Caroe, *The Royal Institution: an informal history* (London: Murray, 1985).

they offered some insights into the authors of the past although, as Jon Klancher has recently observed, the audience learned less about poetry and prose than about the books as "objects of knowledge", since Dibdin liberally laced his lectures with details on book history, on bibliography and book printing and the history of libraries and book collections.[13] They were undoubtedly part of the range of subjects that Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and one of the founders of the Royal Institution, denounced as an effect of "fashion", not in accordance with the original intentions of the Institution.[14] Despite these misgivings, Banks could not deny that the lectures of Dibdin, and others like him, fulfilled one of the Institution's original intentions, namely bringing knowledge in an accessible form to a wide swathe of the population, rich or poor, uneducated or educated, female or male. The Royal Institution drew large audiences and Dibdin must have offered his literary and bibliographical knowledge to a wide and varied public. A sociable and affable figure, doubtless endowed with a silver tongue, Dibdin was a regular presence in literary and bibliophilic gatherings and gained a reputation as an influential figure in fostering and facilitating his age's passion for books, a vocation that he would pursue assiduously and enthusiastically for several years.

Herein lies part of the enigma surrounding Thomas Frognall Dibdin. Persuasive and engaging, he to a large extent overcame his shortcomings. After abandoning a career in law, he took holy orders and found a living paying an annual stipend of less than £200.[15] Keen to supplement his income, he embarked on a constant quest for preferment or for alternative remunerated activities. Writing and publishing seemed initially to offer him an acceptable source of income; they were, however, soon to contribute to his downfall and subsequent acute financial difficulties.

His early forays into the publishing world proved lucrative. In 1802 he produced an *Introduction to the knowledge of rare and valuable editions of the Greek and Roman classics*, which drew heavily on Edward Harwood's earlier work on the

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13 Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the arts and sciences: knowledge and cultural institutions in the Romantic age* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 72-73. See also Ina Ferris, *Book-men, book clubs, and the Romantic literary sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 67-70. Sarah Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019). Résumés of some of the lectures are to be found in *The Director*, vol. I, 1807, 57-60, 88-91, 155-158.

14 Klancher, *Transfiguring the arts and sciences*, *op. cit.* (note 13), 63-64.

15 A number of biographies of Dibdin is available: Edward John O'Dwyer, *Thomas Frognall Dibdin: bibliographer and bibliomaniac extraordinary, 1776-1847* (Pinner: Private Libraries Association, 1967); D.A. Stoker, "Thomas Frognall Dibdin", *Nineteenth-century British book-collectors and bibliographers*, eds. W. Baker and K. Womack, DLitB, 184 (1997), 69-80; William Alexander Jackson, *An annotated list of the publications of the Reverend Thomas Frognall Dibdin: based mainly on those in the Harvard College Library, with notes of others* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Library, 1965); Anthony Lister, "George John, 2nd Earl Spencer and his 'librarian', Thomas Frognall Dibdin," in *Bibliophily: Conference: Papers and discussion* eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986), 90-120; John V. Richardson, "Dibdin, Thomas Frognall (1776-1847), bibliographer", Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed April 23, 2023, https://www-oxforddnb-com.bnf.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7588.

same subject, and which sold out within six weeks. Encouraged by this success, he published three further (enlarged) editions over the next 20 years that earned him several hundred pounds.[16] The *Introduction* also brought him to the attention of the second Earl Spencer, who opened his collections to him, gave him permission to publish the catalogue of them, and even financed the cost of the publication. In all, Dibdin published seven volumes relating to the Spencer collections: five of these were detailed catalogues covering substantial parts of the library, while a further two were devoted to a description of Althorp and all the collections held there (books and artworks).[17] The catalogues were all printed to the highest typographical standards and included much graphic material – plates, facsimiles and illustrations in text. The cost was quite high, but Spencer willingly paid it.

In this context, the episode of the Spencer catalogue is instructive for two reasons. On the one hand, it highlights the strengths and the shortcomings of Dibdin's scholarship. On the other, it reveals his perfectionism and his penchant for high-end, luxury publications, richly illustrated no matter the cost. The question of Dibdin's scholarship is a troubled one, constituting one of the more fascinating and baffling elements of his biography. Through his eloquence and his enthusiasm, he managed to beguile any number of erudite book-collectors, including Spencer, impressing them with the apparent breadth and depth of his knowledge. There was not a rare book, not an early edition – known through many copies or even just one – on which Dibdin could not wax lyrical. He was acquainted with all the great collections and collectors of his epoch – and also of times past. He dispensed this knowledge generously during discussions in lecture halls, in booksellers' shops, in auction rooms, over dinner, in the library of a duke or of an earl. Most importantly, he never shied away from displaying and sharing his learning in one of his many publications. But all too often his enthusiasm outstripped his erudition. From edition to edition, texts grew exponentially: the *Introduction* grew from 63 to 570 pages. The

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16 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *An Introduction to the Knowledge of Rare and Valuable Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics: being, in part, a tabulated arrangement from Dr. Harwood's View, &c. With notes from Maittaire, De Bure, Dictionnaire bibliographique, and references to ancient and modern catalogues* (Gloucester: Printed by H. Ruff, 1802); id., *An introduction to the knowledge of rare and valuable editions of the Greek and Latin classics, to which is added a complete Index analyticus, The whole preceded by an account of Polyglot Bibles* (London: for W. Dwyer, 1804). This was followed by several other editions.

17 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliotheca Spenceriana; or a Descriptive catalogue of the books printed in the fifteenth century, and of many valuable first editions, in the library of George John Earl Spencer, etc.*, 4 volumes (London: Printed for the Author, 1814-1815); id., *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Books printed in the Fifteenth Century, lately forming part of the library of the Duke di Cassano Serra, and now the property of George John Earl Spencer, K.G. With a general index of authors and editions contained in the present volume, and in the Bibliotheca Spenceriana and Ædes Althorpianæ* (London: Printed for the Author, 1823); id., *Aedes Althorpianae; or an Account of the mansion, books, and pictures, at Althorp; the residence of George John Earl Spencer. To which is added a supplement to the Bibliotheca Spenceriana*, 2 volumes (London: Printed by W. Nicol; sold by Payne & Foss, etc, 1822).

chapters of his books are replete with ungainly digressions and seemingly never-ending footnotes extending over several pages and ostensibly replete with erudition. All too often, however, the scholarship is wanting. Henry Richards Luard, who wrote the biography of Dibdin that appeared in the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, famously commented that Dibdin could not even read the Greek characters of the titles that he was cataloguing in the Spencer library.[18] Luard was writing some years after Dibdin's death, but his shortcomings had already been identified during his lifetime. *A Bibliographical Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour* published in 1821 offers readers a familiar antiquarian tour in epistolary form abounding with erudite dissertations on printers, bookshops and libraries in the various towns Dibdin visited during a tour of France and Germany.[19] The book is sadly riddled with errors, and French scholars did not hesitate to point this out: they excerpted and translated various parts of Dibdin's text, annotating the text and pointing out all the inaccuracies that spoiled it.[20] Their opinion was often confirmed by Dibdin's compatriots. For example, Alexander Dyce, the editor and literary scholar who was a contemporary of Dibdin, wrote of him some years later that he was "an ignorant pretender without the learning of a schoolboy, who published a quantity of books swarming with errors of every description."[21]

Careless and sloppy Dibdin may have been in terms of the intellectual contents of his works. However, the layout, the quality of the paper and of the facsimile illustrations and the typography could not be faulted. When it came to the production of his books, he was a perfectionist and an aesthete. This habit was to prove ruinous. Earl Spencer generously covered the cost of the printing of the catalogue of his library, even when the project went vastly over budget. Unfortunately for Dibdin, this was an anomaly: he never managed to find another patron generous enough to stump up such large sums of money. As seen above, the *Introduction* earned him several hundred pounds, and he must have hoped to repeat that success on his later projects, thereby guaranteeing a steady supplementary revenue. Sadly, nothing could

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18 Luard in his biography of Dibdin in the 1888 edition of the Dictionary of National Biography.

19 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *A bibliographical, antiquarian and picturesque tour in France and Germany*, 3 vols. (London: Shakespeare Press, 1821).

20 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Lettre neuvième relative à la bibliothèque publique de Rouen. Traduite… avec des notes par M. Théodore Licquet*, Paris: de Crapelet, 1821; *id.*, *Lettre trentième concernant l'imprimerie et la librairie de Paris; traduite de l'anglais, avec des notes, par G. A. Crapelet, imprimeur* (Paris: Crapelet, 1821); Mathurin-Marie Lesné, *Lettre d'un relieur français à un bibliographe anglaise* (Paris: Crapelet, 1822); Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Notice sur les Heures de Charlemagne, mss. de l'an 781, de la Bibliothèque particulière du roi, au Louvre, tirée de la 29e lettre du "Voyage bibliographique, archéologique et pittoresque de M. T. F. Dibdin, en France et en Allemagne", précédée d'un jugement sur l'ouvrage anglais et d'un aperçu de cette bibliothèque, formée en 1814, par M. Barbier* (Paris: Plassan, 1823).

21 Dyce is quoted by Luard in his biography of Dibdin in the 1888 edition of DNB. Before that, the comment appeared in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, …* John W. Hales *et al.* ed., 4 vols. (London: N. Trübner & Co, 1867-1868), I, p. liv, note 1.

have been further from the truth. His penchant for working with the best printers and illustrating lavishly his texts proved exorbitant. This extravagance was on occasions compounded by his actions, seemingly those of a man who enjoyed flirting with, almost inviting on himself financial ruin. One anecdote can serve to exemplify this financial recklessness. In 1817, he published his *Bibliographical Decameron*, generally reckoned to be his best work. In this text, a series of staged discussions and debates purportedly held over a period of ten days between six learned friends – Lysander, Belinda, Philemon, Lorenzo, Almansa and Lisardo – allowed Dibdin to demonstrate the mass of bibliographical knowledge that he had been accumulating over the years. The fictitious conversation covers book illustration, printing, book binding, book sales and the history of bibliography, all accompanied by a trove of bookish anecdotes.[22] The literary conceit is clear, but the author manages to pull it off surprisingly well. The book, published in three volumes, is illustrated with a series of wood-block illustrations prepared by the Byfield siblings – Ebenezer, John and Mary – and by William Hughes at considerable cost to Dibdin. A celebratory dinner was held to mark the book's publication, during which Dibdin distributed the original woodblocks to the assembled company; he then enjoined his guests to burn the blocks. Inevitably, no reimpression or new addition of the book would ever be possible, and Dibdin's investment in the materials literally went up in smoke, accompanied by any hope of future profits from a second edition.[23] Admittedly, this is an extreme example of his imprudent attitude to money. Even so, he often lost money on his publications. In a recent article, John Sibbald quite appositely compares Dibdin with a problem or addicted gambler chasing his losses: each new publication was viewed as the chance to recoup his losses on the last one.[24] Needless to say, the much yearned for win never occurred.

In many ways, few people were as well suited as Dibdin to write a text on bibliomania. It is true that his slender means did not allow him to indulge in book collecting on a large scale; he did possess a reference library, that included an impressive number of annotated sale catalogues. But he was afflicted by the condition in many other ways: knowledge about and a passion for books, a need to work with them. It is maybe this fact – that he was passionate about books and about knowledge about them but not consumed by the acquisition of them – that enabled him to write

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22 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Bibliographical Decameron or Ten days pleasant discourse upon illuminated manuscripts and subjects connected with early engraving, typography and bibliography*, 3 vols. (London, G. and W. Nicol, 1817).

23 Stoker, "Thomas Frognall Dibdin", *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 77, citing Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Reminiscences of a literary life*, 2 vols (London: J. Major, 1836), II, 625-630.

24 John A. Sibbald, "Book Bitch to the Rich—the Strife and Times of the Revd. Dr. Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847)," in *Buying and Selling: The Business of Books in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Shanti Graheli (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 489-521, 498. Dibdin, *Bibliomania*, Danckwerts ed., *op. cit.* (note 8), xxiii.

about the condition as an observer, albeit not entirely dispassionate, and to offer a rather idiosyncratic take on the question.

Much like the *Introduction*, the *Bibliomania* increased considerably in length between the first and the second editions, passing from eighty-seven to more than 780 pages. In fact, the changes are extensive: in the second edition the author adds much extra material, recasts the text almost entirely and also changes the title. The first edition bears the subtitle "history, symptoms and cure of this fatal disease", whereas the second describes itself as a "bibliographical romance in six parts". Accordingly, the first edition is cast as a scholarly dissertation, laid out in three main parts while the second takes the form of a dialogue between six personages – Lysander, Belinda, Philemon, Lorenzo, Almansa and Lisardo – who would later figure in a similar staged dialogue in the *Bibliographical Decameron*. The text in this second edition is organised in six parts, each one set in a recognisable locus for activities relating to books or for discussions on books.[25] This second edition, in its attempt to explain book collecting errs on the side of Dibdin's frequent frailty, namely the tendency to drown his main argument in an ocean of superfluous fact that serves often to deter the reader. This edition in particular attracted the ire of commentators. The reviewer of the *Bibliomania* writing in the *Monthly Review* issued a "most strenuous protest against the heaviness of his text", encumbered as it was by a passion for "notification" (or notes), and felt obliged to mention some but not all of the "numerous list of criticisms that force themselves on almost any reader of the volume".[26] Above all, in this second edition the main tenet of the text, the discussion of the affliction, is almost lost, drowned in superfluous matter. For that reason, the first edition will be studied here.

Interestingly, not once over the eighty-seven pages that he devotes to his subject, does Dibdin define 'bibliomania'. The closest that he comes to a definition is probably one of his assertions in the opening pages of his work when he explains his choices. Here he speaks of "an excessive attachment to any particular pursuit" and then offers a number of comparisons – "horses, hawks, dogs, guns, snuff boxes, old china, coins, or rusty armor".[27] Only a few pages later, the designation of the affliction changes. From an "excessive attachment", an epithet that suggests a rather endearing trait, compulsive perhaps but ultimately benign, bibliomania has now become something more dangerous, a disease. In Dibdin's view, there is one raw truth that needs to be addressed as soon as possible: England is suffering, is in the throes of an illness. "A nation thus glorious, is, at this present eventful moment, afflicted not only with the Dog but the Book disease."[28] Since the illness is prevalent, immediate action is required and Dibdin claims to be able to rise to the situation and offers this short text.

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25 The evening walk, The Cabinet, The Auction Room, The Library, The Drawing Room, The Alcove.

26 "Art. VI; Bibliomania or Book madness," *Monthly Review* (September-December 1811), 270-283, 271, 279.

27 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 4-5.

28 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 14.

His treatise is couched in medical language, albeit in terms that can easily be understood by laymen, and the text is laid out along the lines of a medical dissertation; three main sections deal with, successively, the history of the illness, its nature and symptoms, then its cure.[29] The structure and the reasoning would have been familiar to anyone who had read treatises such as Richard Manningham's text on Febricula.[30] Further to reinforce the impression that this is an essay that could take its place among the ever increasing corpus of medical literature at the time, Dibdin chooses to conclude it with a synopsis, a device that was a common feature at the end of Renaissance medical texts and inspired by the Ramist tradition.[31] Dibdin explains his decision to use it by reference to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* ("after the manner of Burton, as prefixed to his 'Anatomy of Melancholy'), a compendium of knowledge concerning mental afflictions, first published in 1621 that had come into fashion again at the end of the 18th century.[32]

In the first section, he offers a brief history of book madness or bibliomania, identifying a number of those afflicted with the condition over the last half millennium. More than forty people are introduced here, from Richard de Bury (author of the *Philobiblon*), Henry VII, Sir Thomas More, to a number of Dibdin's near contemporaries. The litany of names draws to a close with that of Reed, presumably the Shakespeare editor and book-collector Isaac Reed who died in 1807. Dibdin scrupulously avoids any mention of a living contemporary, even if the *Bibliomania* is dedicated to Richard Heber, one of the foremost book collectors of the age.[33] The desire to avoid naming his contemporaries becomes more and more understandable as the reader advances through the historical survey. Not once is a collector praised for his efforts, rarely are the beauties or the merits of a collection

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29 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 14.

30 Richard Manningham, *The symptoms, nature, causes, and cure of the febricula, or, little fever: commonly called the nervous or hysteric fever; the Fever on the Spirits; Vapours, Hypo, or Spleen* (London 1760); Isbrandus de Diemerbroeck, *A Treatise concerning the Pestilence: describing its particular causes, various symptoms, and method of cure … abridg'd, and translated … by Thomas Stanton* (London: J. Downing, T. Warner, 1722); Henry Ibbeken, *A treatise on rheumatisms: wherein the nature, causes, and symptoms of rheumatic complaints are explained, and the method of cure laid down* (Dublin: printed by H. Fitzpatrick, 1796); Alun Withey, "Household medicine and recipe culture in eighteenth-century Britain," in *Late Modern English Medical Texts: Writing medicine in the eighteenth century*, eds. Irma Taavitsainen and Turo Hiltunen (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019), 113-128; Roy Porter, *Bodies politic: disease, death and doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); C. Lawlor, "Introduction: Literature and Medicine in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *Literature and Medicine: The Eighteenth Century*, eds. C. Lawlor & A. Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-20.

31 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 82; David Renaker, "Robert Burton and Ramist Method", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 24, no. 2 (1971), 210-220.

32 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 81.

33 A. Sherbo, "Heber, Richard (1774-1833), book collector," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed May 15, 2023, https://www-oxforddnb-com.bnf.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12854.

sung; throughout this litany of names, the tone is one of doom as opposed to triumph, resembling a series of cautionary medical tales rather than a history of great English book-collectors. Richard de Bury was "infected with this disease"; Henry VII was a "notorious example of the fatality of the Bibliomania"; John Leland and John Bale did not manage to "escape the contagion"; Spenser was seized with the disorder; it claimed as a victim Harley, Earl of Oxford; Richard Mead's "unrivalled medical skill" could not save either Harley or indeed himself, since he died of the complaint some years after his erstwhile patient.[34] The narrative on countless occasions spills over into the footnotes, where Dibdin bolsters his theory, quoting catalogues, memoirs, savant treatises and gossipy anecdotes in an attempt to prove the devastating ravages of the illness called Bibliomania.

Having offered this interesting but also rather tragic and ominous list of victims, Dibdin then turns in the second section to more practical matters. How does one know if one has succumbed to this condition? A French author, Gabriel Peignot, in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de bibliologie* (1802-1804) suggested that bibliomania is a passion for possessing books and that it amounts to little more than a passion for owning them rather than for reading them.[35] Dibdin considers this far too vague. In his pseudo-medical view, since this is a disease, an illness and not a simple passion, it is indispensable to identify and enumerate the symptoms. He names eight, each of which constitutes an irrefutable sign that the sufferer has indeed contracted bibliomania. They are a desire to own: large paper copies; uncut copies; illustrated copies; unique copies; copies printed on vellum; first editions; true editions; editions printed in black letter.[36] Each of these symptoms is elucidated in greater detail over the course of the following pages. After explaining what a large-paper copy is, Dibdin offers a list of several examples, so that "the sober collector may avoid approaching them". In his view, the passion for large paper copies is a "general and violent" symptom and could well become more prevalent since many books are still published in this form.[37] The other symptoms are then described following this same pattern. Whereas some of them – such as the need to acquire copies printed on vellum – are centuries old, others – for instance the interest in illustrated copies, by which he means the passion for grangerisation, and above all an unmoderated desire to acquire black letter books – are very recent, having spread only in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Many of them can be treated, and if so can be kept in check. The most dangerous, he feels, if not treated quickly and judiciously, is the mania for black-letter copies.[38]

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34 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 16, 17, 20-21, 28, 29-31.

35 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 57-58; Gabriel Peignot, *Dictionnaire raisonné de bibliologie*, 3 vols, (Paris: Chez Villier, 1802-1804), I, 51: "La bibliomanie est la fureur de posséder des livres, non pas tant pour s'instruire que pour les avoir et pour en repaitre sa vue."

36 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 58.

37 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 58-60.

38 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8).

After this lengthy and carefully list of symptoms, corroborated by reference to cogent examples, he turns his attention to a possible cure, or cures. As if to appease his readers, he here adopts a more optimistic tone, mulling over the various ways in which the nation can hope to forestall the disease. Despite the fact that "this is a disorder of quite a recent date, and [...] its characteristics, in consequence, cannot be yet fully known or described", he believes that there are five possible antidotes.[39] Rather surprisingly, his first suggestion is that people should actually read more, but only "useful and profitable" works.[40] The idea may seem imprudent, pushing people towards their addiction, but Dibdin feels otherwise. In his view, this will offer an immediate cure to bibliomania as defined by Peignot and by others before him, namely a disease that privileges acquisition over reading of books. In a similar vein, Dibdin suggests that the crazed bidding at auctions could be substantially curbed if rare and useful ("intrinsically valuable") titles were reprinted and if new editions of the best prose authors and poets of the past were to be readily available. His fourth antidote is probably the most interesting, although he glosses over it rather rapidly. He states that the establishment of public institutions can be a powerful remedy, and he indicates the Royal Institution, the Surrey Institution, the London Institution and the Russell Institution, all of which offer their members access to "large libraries of useful books".[41] Finally, and in close relation with these libraries, he recommends that qualified librarians and bibliographers should be appointed, who could select useful books for the libraries and advise and counsel readers.[42] After enumerating and explaining these five antidotes, Dibdin concludes his text with a few sweeping and encouraging comments. While the disease is serious, it is less devastating to the human condition than are many others: "the present one under consideration has the least moral turpitude attached to it" of all the afflictions of human life. His heartfelt hope is that "attending closely to the symptoms of this disorder as they have been described and practising such means of cure as have been recommended, we may rationally hope that its virulence may abate, and the number of its victims annually diminish."[43] He closes the text with the aforementioned synopsis.

It is difficult to know what to make of this text. It has been described correctly as a "slim mock-treatise" that belongs to a "venerable tradition of literary satire".[44] Is it therefore merely a "light-hearted skit" that incited some to join the ranks of the bibliomaniacs, more dangerous than helpful?[45] From there it is easy to dismiss it rapidly, to view it as merely one of several instances of bibliomania, that was

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39 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 75.
40 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 76.
41 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 78.
42 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 78-79.
43 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 81-82.
44 Ferris, *Book-men, book clubs*, *op. cit.* (note 13), 33.
45 Purcell, *The country house library*, *op. cit.* (note 6), 167.

itself, as Jon Klancher has observed recently, a phenomenon "[l]ong considered a rather clownish sideshow to British literary history".[46] Dibdin's role in bibliomania and more generally bookishness has been much discussed over recent years. There is certainly a satirical tone to the text in places, particularly in the catalogue of illustrious victims in the first part. This is continued to a certain extent in the second and third parts, although here a more censorious attitude becomes evident, betraying the moral and didactic intentions of the author, as is correct for satire. As James Raven has pointed out, the 1809 *Bibliomania* offers some "serious suggestions for 'cures'".[47] It is for that reason that Dibdin's contribution to the debate on bibliomania appears more constructive than, for example, John Ferriar's text that appeared almost contemporaneously.

In his essay, Dibdin refers to only three other texts on the question. On the titlepage he employs an emblematic figure, a vignette showing the book fool famous from Brant's *Ship of Fools*, beneath which are four lines from Alexander Barclay's English translation published by Pynson in 1509.[48] As mentioned above, he quotes Peignot's entry on 'Bibliomanie' in his early nineteenth-century *Dictionnaire*. And there is one further reference to a text on the question, one that had been written and published only a matter of weeks before Dibdin's own text and that was also dedicated to the same bibliophile and book collector, Richard Heber. When informing his readers of his reasons for writing his essay, Dibdin claims that the subject has escaped the attention of all authors except for Dr. John Ferriar.[49] Ferriar, a Scottish poet and physician, published his contribution to the subject in iambic pentameter rhyming couplets in April 1809; Dibdin's text appeared in June 1809.[50] We are to conclude that Dibdin has therefore produced this first version of his text at considerable speed. He admits that when he first saw Ferriar's text he felt simultaneous fear and hope. Fear that he would be one of the principal culprits identified by Ferriar – this feeling of guilt, anticipating some type of moral judgment, would prove to be a very important element in Dibdin's work. Hope, on the other hand, that Ferriar would offer a solution to this debilitating condition. When he read the text, both his fears and his hopes were dissipated.[51] Not only did Ferriar not blame him, he did not even overtly mention

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46 Klancher, *Transfiguring the arts and sciences*, *op.cit.* (note 13), 87.

47 James Raven, "Debating Bibliomania and the collection of books in the eighteenth century," *Library and Information History* 29, no. 3 (2013), 196-209, 200.

48 Sebastian Brant, *Shyp of folys of the worlde, Stultifera navis*, Alexander Barclay transl. (London: Printed by Richard Pynson, 1509).

49 John Ferriar, *The Bibliomania, in Epistle to R. Heber* (London, 1809); he republished it in 1812, with a series of other texts. See *The bibliomania by John Ferriar. Bibliography by Thomas Frognall Dibdin: with a synopsis of the symptoms of the bibliomania and a key to Dibdin's "romantic names": two poems edited by Marc Vaulbert de Chantilly* (London: Vanity Press of Bethnal Green, 2001).

50 The dates are to be found in *The Librarian* by James Savage, vol. II, no. 11, 1st May 1809, p. 239, and vol. III, no. 1, 1st July 1809, 46.

51 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 1.

him; nor did he offer any solutions. Dibdin immediately identifies one blatant flaw in Ferriar's text, namely that he has a "pretty strong foresight of the Bibliomania which rages at the present day", but that he does not try to establish any rules for the subject.[52] Ferriar's "persuasive panegyric", he says, is "unmixed, however, with any rules for the choice of books, or the regulation of study".[53] In short, Ferriar does not really offer any answers to the ills of bibliomania. It is true that his verse, while full of references and allusions to many of the great texts, authors and printers, offers a far less measured and reasoned account than does Dibdin's. In effect, he identifies only a few of the symptoms. Above all, he offers no advice, no treatment, no antidotes, or cures; his work is little more than a flight of fantasy. He subscribes to the theory that this is merely a form of madness.

Dibdin mentions only three other texts on bibliomania. Given his extensive, one is almost tempted to say exhaustive, bibliographical knowledge, this may well seem a little disingenuous, since texts there certainly had been over the course of the preceding decades and even centuries. It is true that little had been written on the subject in English before Ferriar and Dibdin, at least nothing of comparable length dealing with the subject in such detail.

Nevertheless, as some authors have recently observed, the word was not completely unfamiliar by the end of the opening decade of the nineteenth century.[54] The word seems to have been employed in English by Thomas Hearne as early as 1734, no doubt coined after the French term 'bibliomanie', apparently first employed by Guy Patin in 1654. Occasional occurrences are to be found, but the word gained greater parlance during the closing decades of the eighteenth century. In England, Edward Harwood offered a definition of it in his work on Greek and Roman literature (1775), saying that: "The knowledge of books, like the knowledge of every art that is arduous and useful, must be purchased at a high price; and can only be acquired by an assiduous and judicious application to this pursuit for a considerable number of years. Some, indeed, whom God has blessed with more opulence than understanding, burn with an insatiable ardour of enjoying every beauteous form of a favourite book that hath ever been exhibited in any country since the invention of the typographical art; and others have the Bibliomania in so dire and frantic a degree, that those rare Editions, which they despair of securing by their wealth, they will not hesitate about secreting from libraries by their ingenuity."[55] In 1791, Isaac Disraeli warned that bibliomania, "the collecting an enormous heap of books" has

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52 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 9.

53 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 2.

54 McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books*, *op. cit.* (note 5), 250-268: Books in Turmoil, 250. Raven, "Debating Bibliomania", *op. cit.* (note 47); Connell, "Bibliomania", *op. cit.* (note 7).

55 Edward Harwood, *A view of the various editions of the Greek and Roman classics, with remarks* (London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790); p. v. Dibdin's own 1802 bibliography of classical authors owed much to Harwood, and he acknowledged his debt to his predecessor in the title.

been "the rage with some who would fain pass themselves upon us for men of vast erudition".[56] A short article on the books from the Strawberry Hill Press appeared in *The Monthly Mirror* in July 1798 under the title of 'Bibliomania'.[57] There were also other texts that included the word, usually explaining it with a desultory reference to the desire to acquire may books during this same period.

European authors were more prone to write on the question.[58] The bibliomaniac figured, of course, in Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, as the person who keeps useless books but knows nothing about their contents, establishing in the European tradition the figure of the person crazy to acquire and possess books, however useful or useless they may be. The eighteenth century witnessed a number of texts on the subject, some of which addressed the topic in considerable detail. In 1761, Louis Bollioud de Mermet, a musicographer from Lyons, published under the address of The Hague a text devoted to bibliomania.[59] The treatise extends to 111 octavo pages, making it the longest text on the question that had appeared to that date. Mermet opens with an observation that sets him firmly in the tradition of Brant's comments on the Book Fool, namely that bibliomania is a desire to possess books, even if they will never be read. Over the course of the treatise he does, however, develop a number of ideas that would also find a place in later texts including, notably, Dibdin's. Far from contenting himself with vague enunciations about the dangers of a passion for books, he attempts to enumerate the various manifestations of the passion for books, identifying a desire to acquire incunabula, rare or unique copies, uncut copies, large paper copies, unusual copies, different formats of the same text, richly illustrated books and opulent bindings. Many if not all of the categories that he mentions prefigure those identified by Dibdin. Furthermore, Mermet inserts a passage on the importance of libraries, explaining how they can offer scholars the possibility to acquaint themselves with books on many subjects without ruining themselves. He also rounds off his text with a series of recommendations, or "précautions" as he terms them. These are not as pointed and constructed as are Dibdin's cures; they can be encapsulated in the advice to read less and to read more profitably. Contrary to Dibdin's *Bibliomania*, Mermet's text is by no means what could be described as satirical. His tone is far more serious, verging regularly on the censorious and moralistic; his chief complaint is that people are ruining themselves and that they have abandoned any show of moderation and restraint. He is highly critical of his

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56 Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of literature: Consisting of anecdotes, characters, sketches, and observations, literary, critical, and historical* (London: printed for J. Murray, 1791), 19.

57 "Bibliomania", *The Monthly Mirror*, vol. 6, July 1798, 297.

58 See especially, Alexander Košenina, *Der gelehrte Narr: Gelehrtensatire seit der Aufklärung*, Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2003, pp.133-152: Bibliomanie oder der gelehrte Wahn; Alberto Castoldi, *Bibliofollia*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2004; Ugo Rozzo, *Furor bibliographicus, ovvero la bibliomania* (Macerata: Biblohaus, 2011).

59 Louis Bollioud de Mermet, *De la bibliomanie*, (La Haye), 1761; a reprint appeared in 1765.

contemporaries, and describes their descent into immoderate book-buying, soon followed by "honteuse déroute", their shameful utter defeat.[60] Interestingly, he does from time to time in his text offer a slight variation on this theme, stating that his contemporaries are victims of or even "martyrs" to an illness, that he equates with hydropsy, remarking at one point that "Il me semble de voir un hydropique que rien ne désaltère".[61] The image is striking, since Dibdin would also employ a similar image of physical illness in his discussion of the affliction.

Mermet was not alone in devoting a lengthy text to the question of bibliomania. Three university dissertations appeared on the question during the eighteenth century.

In 1715, Johann Jacob Rohde presented a dissertation at Königsberg on the question of scholars who had bought and collected too many books.[62] Rohde quotes many examples of such figures, and concludes that libraries are very useful, while maintaining that careful selection of books is necessary and that they should be assembled for study purposes rather than for show or personal glory.[63] Rohde does not employ any medical language, nor does he speak of a craze or an illness. Above all, the word 'bibliomania' is absent from his text. Some years later, the word was to the fore when, in 1739, Johann Friedrich Reitz, a doctor in literature and medicine who became professor of history and rhetoric at the University of Utrecht, gave a speech in Utrecht on Bibliomania.[64] He identified it as an endemic disease, defining it as the "frenzy for books" or "the insatiable urge to possess or to write many books."[65] His medical training encourages him to approach this scientifically and he therefore proposes to examine the causes, the symptoms, the prognosis and the treatment, much as Dibdin would do some seventy years later. The causes are twofold: people believe that books contain all the knowledge that they will ever need, and booksellers encourage people to buy. There are several symptoms, including spending more time visiting bookshops than sitting in libraries, an irrepressible urge to read book catalogues and to identify desiderata, an urge to purchase books even if one is of an advanced age and will have to dispose of them very soon. The prognosis is less than rosy, all the more so because it is always harder to treat people who are afflicted with

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60 Mermet, *Bibliomanie*, *op. cit.* (note 59), 85.

61 "I get the impression that I see someone afflicted by hydropsy, who cannot slake his thirst": Mermet, *Bibliomanie*, *op. cit.* (note 59), 57.

62 Johann Jacob Rohde, *Dissertatio Historico-Moralis, De Eruditorum Nimio Libros Coemendi Congerendique Studio, Sive: Von dem unmäßigen Bücher-Kauff der Gelehrten : A. R. S. MDCCXV. ad diem X. Jul.*, Königsberg: Reusner, 1715.

63 Rohde, *Dissertatio Historico-Moralis*, *op. cit.* (note 62), 26-27.

64 Johan Frederik Reitz, *Joan. Fred. Reitzii Oratio de bibliomania habita a. d. 7 id. septembr. 1739 quum… Carolus Richard ac Theodorus van Romondt ad academiam dimittendi pro venatione et in venationem pro concione essent dicturi* (Utrecht: A. Van Megen, 1739); K.A. Manley, "Blurred lines in the history of domestic libraries in the age of Dibdin's Bibliomania," in *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600-1900*, eds. Annika Bautz, James Gregory (New York: Routledge, 2018), 231-245, 234.

65 Reitz, *Oratio*, *op. cit.* (note 64), 3 (endemic), 4 (frenzy).

a disease of the mind or spirit rather than a physical one. As for the cure, it is based on two actions. First, potential sufferers should learn to distinguish between useful and useless books. Secondly, they should beware the tricks of booksellers.[66]

Reitz speaks about a disease but situates it in the mind or the spirit. Twenty-three years later, Andreas Wallin offered his contribution to the question in a thesis that he defended at Uppsala.[67] He adopts a more etymological approach in his work than Reitz, and also draws far more heavily on Early Modern authors who have written on studying and on books. He defines bibliomania as "an intemperate lust for accumulating books, akin to madness", and feels that very often the books are not used. The term can also be extended to reading, writing as well as collecting books.[68] Wallin offers advice on reading – suggesting that people should read well rather than a lot.[69] He devotes several pages to a discussion of the use that can be made of good libraries. On the other hand, his text offers less in the way of identification of the symptoms and the possible cure for what is, in his eyes, a form of madness. In 1802, in his dictionary, Peignot codifies much of the earlier thought on bibliomania, although he does not reveal any interest in the medical approach to the condition. He offers as we have seen a definition of bibliomania that once again highlights the immoderate desire for acquisition and possession.[70] He even describes the mania as ridiculous. Notably, he identifies very few bibliomaniacs, and only people living in ancient times.

Several texts addressing bibliomania had been published in the eighteenth century. Quite how far these had circulated is not entirely clear, and it is maybe unfair to imagine that Dibdin could have had access to all or even some of them, despite his impressive bibliographical knowledge. There is, however, one text that Dibdin did not mention although he could have been expected to know it. In Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* feature two articles, one on the figure of the bibliomaniac and one on the condition known as bibliomania. The bibliomaniac, says the author of the article, familiar to us from La Bruyère's *Caractères* (quoted at length in the article) is possessed by a craze or madness that leads him to buy books without needing them: "Il a des livres pour les avoir, pour en repaître sa vûe."[71] The article on bibliomania does not go so far as to propose a cure, but does observe that there are only two justifiable reasons for purchasing books. The first of these is to

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66 Reitz, *Oratio*, *op. cit.* (note 64), 9.

67 Andreas J. Wallin, *Dissertatio Academica, De Bibliomania, Quam, Venia Incliti Collegii Philosophici, Ad Regium Upsaliense Lyceum, Sub Præsidio Mag. Petri Ekerman, Eloqu. Profess. Reg. Et Ord. Publico Examini Offert Alumnus Regius, Andreas J. Wallin, Sudermannus. In Aud. Carol. Maj. Ad Diem III. Aprilis, Anni MDCCLXII*, Uppsala, 1762.

68 Wallin, *De Bibliomania*, *op. cit.* (note 67), 4.

69 Wallin, *De Bibliomania*, *op. cit.* (note 67), 5.

70 Peignot, *Dictionnaire raisonné*, *op. cit.* (note 35), I, 51-52.

71 Article "Bibliomane", in Denis Diderot & D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1751-1780), II, 228. The phrase was then reused by Peignot in his *Dictionnaire*.

buy them because of what they contain, and to be able to read them accordingly, using what is intelligent and useful and laughing off what is foolish or incorrect. The second of these is to purchase a large number of books and to allow other people and scholars to read and consult them.[72]

Some years later, and only two years before Ferriar and Dibdin published their texts, another contribution to the debate had appeared, this time in Italian. The author was a great book collector, the Count Leopoldo Cicognara.[73] Cicognara had not only read Diderot and D'Alembert's text, but he also drew on it considerably in his essay. The circumstances of this essay are interesting. Cicognara recounts that he had managed to find an extremely rare opuscule, the *Vita di S. Lazzaro Monaco e Pittore* first published in 1681. Knowing that many people were looking for a copy of the work, he at first decided to publish a counterfeit version of it. However, he thought better of this and finally chose to republish it with a lengthy preface on the nature and the dangers of bibliomania. In effect, Cicognara draws heavily on the Encyclopaedists' articles, and stresses that the use that can be made of books should be more important than the mere fact of owning them. He speaks vaguely about bibliomania as an illness, but does not couch his essay in medical terms. He does not identify 'symptoms' although he does explain the various types of books that bibliomaniacs want to purchase. Above all, he insists on the fact that books should be chosen carefully and should be used. He may not use the word 'bibliophile', but his general meaning is much the same as Peignot's (and the Encyclopaedists' before him): purchasing books, even beautiful and precious ones, is permissible, as long as they are going to be used by the purchaser or by someone else.

As this rapid survey shows, there had certainly been literature on the subject before Dibdin set about writing his text, only some of which we can be sure that he knew. Various authors had set out a range of theories on bibliomania and of possible responses to the condition. Some, such as Mermet, preferred to occupy the moral high ground, while others, such as Reitz, took a more dispassionate, mock medical approach to it. In the light of this, Dibdin's choices inspire comment. One interesting feature sets the British contributions – not only Ferriar and Dibdin's, but also those of their predecessors – apart from the more recent European literature. The article immediately following 'Bibliomanie' in Peignot's dictionary is entitled 'Bibliophile'.[74] Here, the author explains that it would be judicious to distinguish

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72 Article "Bibliomanie", in Denis Diderot & D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1751-1780), II, 228.

73 Leopoldo Cicognara, *Vita di S. Lazzaro, monaco e pittore (pubblicata da Lazzaro Baldi), preceduta da alcune osservazioni sulla bibliomania*, Brescia: N. Bettoni, 1807. Cicognara's collection books is known through the catalogue: Leopoldo Cicognara, *Catalogo ragionato dei libri d'arte e d'antichità posseduti dal conte Cicognara*, 2 vols. (Pisa: N. Capurro, 1821). See Elena Granuzzo, "Leopoldo Cicognara and his library: Formation and significance of a collection (I)," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 27 (2022), 1-45.

74 Peignot, *Dictionnaire raisonné*, *op. cit.* (note 35), I, 52-53.

between the bibliomaniac and the booklover since the latter seeks out useful books, that will be useful for their studies, and is guided by intellectual considerations rather than by a blind passion for acquisitions.[75] The distinction is made clearly and is explained well.

It is thus all the more surprising that Dibdin did not attempt to exploit the semantic opportunities proposed by the French language and explained by Peignot and try to soften his voluble criticism of bibliomaniacs by pointing out that there is a milder, tamer version of the love for books and the desire to possess them that can be qualified as bibliophily. It is true that Dibdin did employ the word book-lover in his treatise, but he immediately subsumed it into the category of bibliomaniacs, thereby effectively negating its use as a word referring to commendable consumers of the written word: "It may be expected that I should notice a few book-lovers, and probably Bibliomaniacs, previously to the time of Richard De Bury."[76] In fact, the word bibliophile (and bibliophilism) does not enter the English language until 1824 in a text by Dibdin, referring to the French society of book-lovers (Société des bibliophiles).[77] Dibdin's decision to turn a blind eye to this term is all the more intriguing since the bibliophile would seem in many ways to correspond to the reasonable figure who adopts a more measured attitude to books as presented in the last part of his *The Bibliomania*.

Book-collecting as it was practised in England at the turn of the nineteenth century would appear, in the texts written by Ferriar and Dibdin, to be considered to be a reprehensible activity. Dibdin knew the collectors of his time well, and the list of symptoms that he gave was accurate. Large paper, first editions, illustrated copies and black letter texts were becoming more and more sought after. However, and this is a further intriguing element of Dibdin's theory, that marks him off from not only the British but also the European authors who wrote on the question, he does seem reluctant to attribute too much blame to the bibliomaniacs. He does not diminish their guilt by suggesting that they are bibliophiles rather than bibliomaniacs. What he does do, rather, is to plead mitigating circumstances, explaining that they are not entirely responsible for their actions. He shifts the onus from them and their personal guilt to an unidentified but potent external force, by stating that bibliomania is an illness, but a physical rather than a mental one.

The phrase in which Dibdin explains his theory is all too easily missed: "A nation thus glorious, is, at this present eventful moment, afflicted not only with the Dog but the Book disease."[78] The author is no doubt referring to English nation's

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75 Peignot, *Dictionnaire raisonné*, *op. cit.* (note 35), I, 52: "celui qui, dirigé par le seul désir de s'instruire, aime et se procure les bons ouvrages, qu'il croit les plus propres à composer une collection intéressante par le nombre et par la variété des articles."

76 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 16.

77 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Library companion, or the Young man's guide and the old man's comfort, in the choice of a library* (London: Harding, Triphook, and Lepard, 1824), 4.

78 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 14.

infamous fondness for dogs as pets; this reading seems all the more likely given that earlier in the text, when defining bibliomania, he stated that it corresponds to "an excessive attachment to any particular pursuit" and then offers a number of comparisons – "horses, hawks, dogs, guns, snuff boxes, old china, coins, or rusty armor".[79] But Dibdin is in fact thinking of something very particular, as he indicates in the corresponding footnote where we find a reference to a recent dissertation by Benjamin Moseley on Hydrophobia – or rabies.[80] Little was known for sure about the illness at the time, and it inspired some colourful theories on the nature and origins of the condition.[81] Moseley, examining several cases, tried to establish the causes, the symptoms and the possible cure.

By means of this simple allusion to rabies, Dibdin disculpates the bibliomaniacs. Bibliomania is not a psychological condition, in any way self-induced, but a physiological one. The bibliomaniac is not a culprit but an innocent victim: attacked by an external organism, akin to a bacterium. Dibdin does not explain how it is transmitted – whether by the bite of a dog, or another animal, or whether it is airborne. What is certain, however, is that Dibdin the clergyman, by means of this comparison with the dog disease, managed to a great extent to exonerate his fellow bibliomaniacs. Impulsive and excessive collecting, the unruly passion, was here compared with animalistic impulses.[82] The book fool described in Brant's *Ship of Fools* – featuring in the vignette on Dibdin's title page – was, by means of some sophistic pseudo-medical reasoning transformed into the human equivalent of a rabid dog.

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79 Dibdin, *The Bibliomania* (1809), *op. cit.* (note 8), 4-5.

80 Benjamin Moseley, *On Hydrophobia, its prevention and cure. With a description of the different stages of canine madness. Illustrated with cases* (London: Longman, 1808).

81 Lise Wilkinson, "Understanding the Nature of Rabies: An Historical Perspective", in *Rabies*, J.B. Campbell & K.M. Charlton eds. (Boston: Springer, 1988) (Developments in Veterinary Virology, vol 7), 1-23; Bill Wasik & Monica Murphy, *Rabid: a cultural history of the world's most diabolical virus* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

82 Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: an unruly passion: psychological perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).