

Neil Harris

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Neil Harris (full name Neil Anthony Cameron Harris) was born at Arua in Uganda, 20 December 1957, and lived in Africa up to the age of five. He subsequently went to school in England and read English at Balliol College, Oxford (B.A. 1980). After a period abroad, in which he received a grant from the Italian Foreign Ministry to study in Florence (1981-82), he was awarded a British Academy grant for a Ph.D. in comparative literature at the University of Leicester, which he obtained in 1986 with a thesis on *Paradise Lost* and its Italian Renaissance models (*Milton's "Sataneid": The Poet and the Devil in Paradise Lost*; supervisors Gordon Campbell, Jane Everson). In the same year he entered the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, where in 1990 he defended a *perfezionamento* thesis (equivalent to a Ph.D.) on the bibliographical tradition of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* (*La storia bibliografica dell'Orlando Innamorato di Matteo Maria Boiardo e del Rifacimento di Francesco Berni nel Quattro e Cinquecento*, supervisor Alfredo Stussi). From 1988 to 1992 he worked as a language assistant (*lettore di lingua straniera*) at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Florence, where as well as translation and advanced language skills, he also taught metrics and stylistics.

Academic Career and Activities

In 1992 Neil Harris was appointed Associate Professor of Bibliography and Library Studies in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Udine, where he has since principally taught the course on material bibliography (Bibliology), as well as teaching courses on Bibliography, on the History of the book, and on the Theory and practice of cataloguing and classification. From 1994 to 1998 he also taught the course of bibliography and library studies at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Florence. In 2002 he was promoted to "straordinario" and was awarded a full chair in 2005. During the existence of the faculty he looked after international relations, with particular responsibility for the Erasmus exchanges, and has continued in this role in the department, especially in running the bilateral degree with the Université Blaise-Pascal (now Université de l'Auvergne) at Clermont-Ferrand.

In 2008 he was elected Director of the Department of History and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage (DIBE) for a four-year term, while from 2009-13 he was in charge of the university archive. University reorganisation in Italy, which in 2011 eliminated the faculties and transferred many of their functions to the departments, made the role of director more important, including a seat in the university senate. In 2012 he was re-elected Director for a further three-year term, extended to the end of 2015 and the merger of the Department with other structures to create the new Department of Humanities and the Cultural Heritage. After which date he returned to the lowly status of professor, though from 2017 to 2022 he acted as representative of the DIUM on the University library commission and from 2019 to 2024 on that for the Scuola Superiore. From 2015 he has also been part of the Conseil scientifique of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, a joint research structure of the universities of Orléans and Tours, which among other things is responsible for the Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance (CESR). In 2020 he entered the Incunabula Working Group of the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL).

He has collaborated with the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento in Florence, where he has given courses for the students of the *perfezionamento* (Ph.D.) and where he has organised conferences on the printing variant (2003) and on the figure of Jacopo Corbinelli (2008). He has also worked regularly with the Institut d'Histoire du Livre in Lyon, for whose rare book school he has taught a course on material bibliography in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, on paper as bibliographical

evidence in 2009, 2010, 2015, on the Italian Renaissance book in 2016, on teaching bibliography in 2017, and on Briquet and the history of filigranology in 2018 (together with Ilaria Pastrolin). On the IHL web-site he has published two helpmeets: *Analytical Bibliography: An Alternative Prospectus* (2002, revised in 2004, 2006) and *Paper and Watermarks as Bibliographical Evidence* (2010, second revised edition in 2017). In 2010 he gave a course on the Italian Renaissance book for the Australasian Rare Book School in Melbourne. From 1986, for the journal of the Bibliographical Society, *The Library*, as part of the “Recent books” rubric, he has written numerous short notices about the more interesting and useful publications on bibliography and the history of the book to appear in Italy, as well as also reviewing regularly for the same journal. He has moreover contributed as “Associate editor” to the *Oxford Companion to the Book* (2010) and has advised on the project of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Manzoniani for a critical text of the first edition of Manzoni’s *Promessi sposi* (1825-26). He is part of the editorial committees of journals such as *Ecdotica*, *The Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, *Rinascimento*, *Tipofilologia*, and *L’illustrazione*.

In September-October 2017 he was a visiting scholar, as part of the “Directeurs d’Études Associés” programme (DEA), at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris; in March-May 2018 he was beneficiary of the H. P. Kraus Fellowship in Early Books and Manuscripts at the Beinecke Library, Yale University; and in January-February 2019 he was a visiting scholar at the Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance (CESR) at the University of Tours.

Research

Neil Harris is best known as a scholar of the Italian printed book of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, in particular as author of the *Bibliografia dell’«Orlando innamorato»* (1988-91) and other bibliographical studies on the Italian chivalric romance (1993-94, 2016), including the *Morgante* (2006, 2007, 2019) and the *Orlando furioso* (1997, 1998, 2010, 2018), as well as for more recent work on Renaissance Venetian publishing and on the Aldine *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499 (1998, 2002, 2004, 2006). His early research on Milton has remained largely in abeyance, although he has published on the Miltonic simile in its relationship to Italian themes, such as the “Tuscan artist”, Albracca, Vallombrosa, and Fontarabbia (1985, 1989, 1991, 2009), and also explained Milton’s reading of the *Orlando innamorato* (1986). Following the example of Conor Fahy, he has written on the history of the Anglo-american bibliographical tradition and its applications to the Italian book, especially in the introduction to the translation by Luigi Crocetti of G. Thomas Tanselle’s *Literature and Artifacts* (2004), as well as signing the article on the history of the book in Italy for the *Oxford Companion to the Book* (2010). Much of his more recent work – for instance that on the *Vaticinia* of Giovannini (2007), on the edition of Beaziano’s verse (2008), on Giolito’s miniature editions of Petrarch (2015), and on the Gospels in Arabic of the Medici Oriental Printing shop (2015) – looks at how “variants” affect the bibliographical description of early Italian printed books; he has, however, also discussed textual implications, for instance in deciding the order of the two settings of gathering D of Giordano Bruno’s 1584 *Cena de le ceneri* (2007) and the interpretation of the *cancellantia* in the first edition of Manzoni’s *Promessi sposi* (2016). In more abstract terms he has ruminated on the survival/destruction of books, where the primary destroying force is use, or reading (1993-94, 2007, 2022, 2024), and discussed the significance of the literary ‘canon’, defined in three tenets: uselessness, inaccessibility, invisibility (2010).

In a more direct application to the world of libraries, he has looked at the practical relationship between early-book cataloguing and bibliographical research with articles on the “Fingerprint”, a device that harnesses settings of type to electronic searching (2006), and on the ongoing census of Sixteenth-century Italian books (2007). In subsequent work he has also produced suggestions about ‘rules’ for the description of copy-specific evidence in early printed books and discussed the copy-census as a bibliographical genre (Copernicus in 2006 and 2011; Cortesi in 2007; Piccolomini in 2007). He has written introductions and essays for the catalogue of Sixteenth-

century books in the Laurentian Library in Florence (ed. Sara Centi, 2002), for the catalogue of Fifteenth and Sixteenth-century book in the Capuchin Library in Florence (eds. Antonella Grassi and Giuliano Laurentini, 2003), for the catalogue of the Seventeenth-century books in the Library of the Bishop's Seminary in Treviso (ed. Sandra Favret, 2006), for the catalogue of Fifteenth and Sixteenth-century books of the City Library of San Gimignano (ed. NH, 2007), for the incunabula of the Franciscan libraries in Florence (eds. Chiara Razzolini, Elisa di Renzo, Irene Zanella, 2012), for the incunabula of the Laurentian Library (Ida Giovanna Rao, 2019), and – in a more ambitious project involving several essays and different collaborators – for the incunabula in the collections of the city of Udine (2026). The experience has led to reflections on the relationship with online bibliographical repertoires dedicated to early printed material such as the GW and ISTC (2024, 2026). He has also written introductions to the books by Elisa di Renzo on the 1966 Florence flood and the city's National Central Library (2009), by Mariachiara Mazzariol on the Nineteenth-century Venetian publisher, Ferdinando Ongania (2011), and to the edition of the *Quaderneto*, a list of books in 1480 sent to Padua by the bookseller-publisher Antonio Moretto, transcribed with a commentary by Ester Camilla Peric (2020). In 2012 he contributed to the organisation of an exhibition on the history of the Medici Oriental Printing Shop at the Laurentian Library in Florence, he has been involved with the project on Daniele Barbaro conducted by the University of St. Andrews (2014-16), and he has also had an active role in conferences, lectures, and publications for the Aldine Quincentenary in 2015 (2016) and for the five-hundredth anniversary of the first edition of the *Orlando Furioso* in 2016 (2018).

His interest in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* led to wider considerations on the figure of Aldus and on his contribution to the history of Western printing and culture, initially published in the several conference acts for the Quincentenary (2016), and now brought together in a volume together with an essay by Martin Davies (2019), followed by articles on Aldus and money and on the history of the Aldine mark (2020). In recent years he has collaborated regularly with the international group of researchers, *Sammelband 15-16*, coordinated by Malcolm Walsby, who work on the history of the miscellany. In particular, he promoted three meetings of the group at Udine (2021), Trieste (2023), and San Daniele (2025), as well as the publication of a collection of studies edited by Amandine Bonesso (2024). Research on paper and watermarks involving the material support in early printed books had its beginnings in teaching, leading to the publication of the helpmeet published online on the site of the IHL (2010, second ed. 2017). Subsequently, other work has appeared, including a “Guest editorship” on the website of the periodical *The Library* (2024), a review-article of the book by Orietta Da Rold documenting Medieval paper in England (2024), and an essay on the paper in the incunabula in the libraries of Udine (2026). A very special commission was the request from the publishing house Tallone in Alpignano for a short monograph on paper and watermarks, printed with hand-set type and a limited press-run (2026).

Ongoing Research

Albeit slow and never straightforward, work in progress includes the collation of the text and images – using a McLeod collator – and census of the surviving copies of the 1499 Aldine *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*; bibliographical research on the publishing of poetry in Renaissance editions, especially the pocket-sized Petrarchs printed by Rouillé in Lyon and Giolito in Venice; the reconstruction of the critical and publishing activity of a Florentine exile in Sixteenth-century Paris, Jacopo Corbinelli (1535-c. 1590), in particular his edition of *La Bellamano* by Giusto de' Conti; the textual problem of the 1584 edition of the *Cena de le ceneri* by Giordano Bruno; studies on printing on parchment in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, including an analysis of the vellum copies of the Gutenberg Bible; and work on the controversial matter of the “Deo Gratias” printing shop, contested between Florence and Naples, with an especial attention for the early Florentine printer, Nicolaus Laurentii (2021). After the death of Conor Fahy in 2009, he described the archive of working papers donated to Cambridge University Library, and edited some unpublished material

(2009, 2010, 2011), as well as projecting a collection of Fahy's articles. Nearing publication are a second catalogue dedicated to the incunabula in the libraries of the Friuli (mainly the Biblioteca Guarneriana at San Daniele and the Museo archeologico at Cividale), the catalogue of Orfea Granzotto dedicated to the printed artefacts in the diaries of the Venetian chronicler, Marin Sanudo (in collaboration with Sabrina Minuzzi), and a collection of all the Aldine catalogues (in collaboration with Shanti Graheli and Ester Camilla Peric).

In collaboration with the *Bernstein. Memory of Paper* database run by the Austrian Academy for the Sciences in Vienna he is adventuring on a new project involving the history of paper, in particular the watermarks of the Medieval and Renaissance archive of the city of Udine and the figure of Charles-Moïse Briquet. Entitled *Briquet Reloaded*, the research returns to the libraries and archives visited by Briquet over a century ago in order to find the original watermarks he traced and translate them into a digital format. The project also involves recovering and studying Briquet's original tracings held at the Bibliothèque de Genève in Geneva. Together with Andrea Nanetti and Ilaria Pastrolin, he is working on a monograph on the Bologna stone, whose 'discovery' is owed to Briquet in 1907. A fascinating opportunity was provided by a request to study the paper and watermarks in the Arundel manuscript 263 at the British Library, containing notes by Leonardo da Vinci: the two articles that ensued are in course of publication in the acts of the 2023 conference edited by Juliana Barone and Andrea Clarke.

His main project otherwise, in collaboration with Cristina Dondi of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", is the transcription and publication of the *Zornale* of the Venetian bookseller, Francesco de' Madiis. This remarkable document, held by the Marciana Library in Venice (press-mark: Ital. XI,45 (7439)) and in the past object of study by scholars such as Horatio Brown and Martin Lowry, records the activity of a bookshop somewhere near the Rialto from 17 May 1484 to 15 January 1488, in which time it sells numerous books. Four preparatory joint-signed articles have already appeared (2013, 2013, 2014, 2016), as well as a further item on the costs of rubrication and illumination in incunabula (2020). A fundamental aspect of the project has been the work to see at least one copy of every edition – over a thousand – that, with different degrees of probability, are recorded in the pages of the document. This verification conducted book-in-hand, which among other things aims to identify the original sheet-size, the provenance of the paper, and the sort of press employed for the impression, has ensured that numerous corrections have been sent to the GW and the ISTC.

Leisure activities

For the last forty years he has lived in Italy, mostly Florence, and for the last decade at Udine. Following on from learning to row in an eight at Oxford, he joined rowing clubs at Pisa and Florence and became a reasonably competent sculler. He has also taken part in the Vogalonga at Venice (rowing in eights, fours, pairs, and also in a double scull) and the Vogalunga on the Po. From 2005 he took long-distance running more seriously and competed in about a dozen marathons, obtaining best times of 3.21.41 (Florence 2011), 3.13.27 (Florence 2012), 3.11.45 (Toronto 2013); and, over the shorter half-marathon, 1.33.32 (Udine 2012) and 1.30.07 (Udine 2013). A knee injury in 2016 put an end to training for competitive racing, but it was good while it lasted. Light jogging remains possible.