

## THE IMPOSITION OF EIGHTEENMOS IN SIXES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRANCHEFILES

THE DETERMINATION OF 'SMALL' FORMATS is notoriously difficult: for anything less than duodecimo the bibliographical handbooks usually observe that there are numerous alternative imposition schemes, but offer no practical assistance in identifying them on the basis of the printed volume.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty is particularly acute in the eighteenth century, where, as the century progresses, small volumes gathered in sixes become increasingly frequent. The difficulty is further compounded in the second half of the century as wove paper becomes more common and therefore the normal tests for determining format less useful; wove paper, however, is possibly intractable and is outside the scope of this present note.

The use of the 'normal' tests can be illustrated from an uncut and partially unopened copy of the *Prolegomena to the Dramatick Writings of Will. Shakespere*, London: printed for, and under the direction of, John Bell, British Library, Strand, 1788. (Monash University \*820.33 Z P964) The volume collates [A]<sup>2</sup> B-3A<sup>6</sup> 3B<sup>2</sup> and is printed on laid paper, with vertical chain lines. All the classic evidence is there for determining format: deckles and cut edges; chain lines 'meeting over the top'; and the appearance of watermark or countermark (fleur de lys/WS) in the middle of \$2 or \$5 in two thirds of the gatherings — i.e. the volume is an instance of Savage's 'Sheet of eighteens with three signatures, as three half sheets of twelves. No.2.'<sup>2</sup> (This imposition scheme is illustrated in figures 1 and 2, with chainlines, watermark and countermark — in alternative positions — superimposed as they would appear in the printed sheet; solid lines between type pages denote cuts, dotted lines folds.) The triplets D-F, G-I, K-M etc. were imposed together so that the middle gathering (E,H,L etc.) has neither watermark nor countermark; the one exception is 2H-2K, where 2H was imposed between 2I and 2K. As if the other evidence were not sufficient, Q-S are on unmarked wove paper — i.e. three gatherings of six leaves constitute one sheet. As Savage's title indicates, the result of imposing in this manner is the equivalent of three half sheets of duodecimo, and it is interesting to note that, like the duodecimo, the point-holes are offset (one alternative pair indicated by 'O' in figures 1 and 2) — i.e. they fall not in the fold between B1.6 and B3.4 but on the cut between A and B or B and C. Gaskell (p.107, Note E) comments that 'common 12° always had offset point-holes' but does not suggest why it should be so. The reason is a mechanical one which holds for the eighteenmo with three signatures too. The chase needs a cross piece, which normally joins the middles of the longer sides, in order to brace it when the forme is locked up, and there are grooves in the cross piece to take the points at the time that the pressure is being exerted via the platen. With small formats the combined width of the inner margins of conjugate leaves is unlikely to be sufficient to take the cross piece and therefore an alternative position must be found for it, between two outer margins

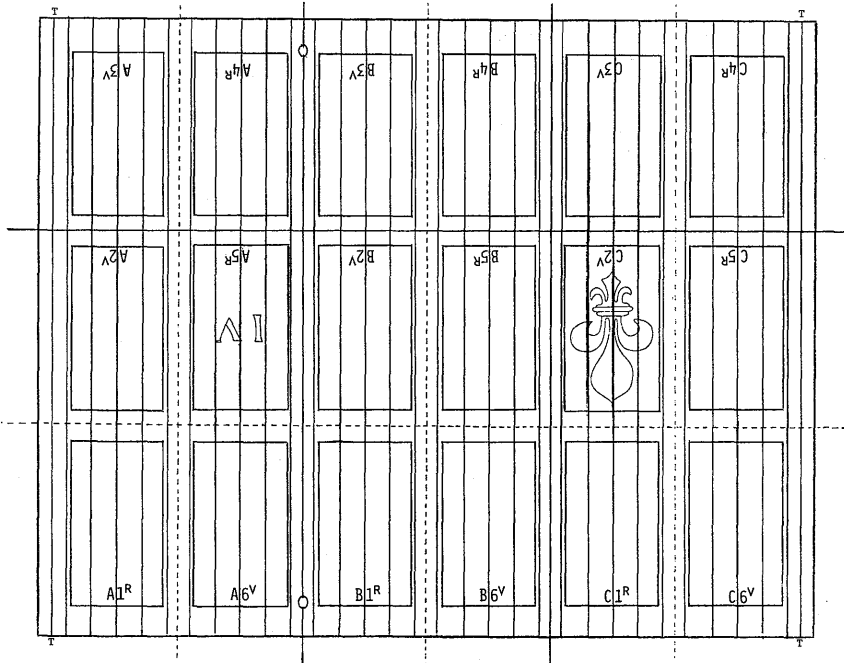


Figure 1: Imposition of Bell's Prolegomena: outer forme

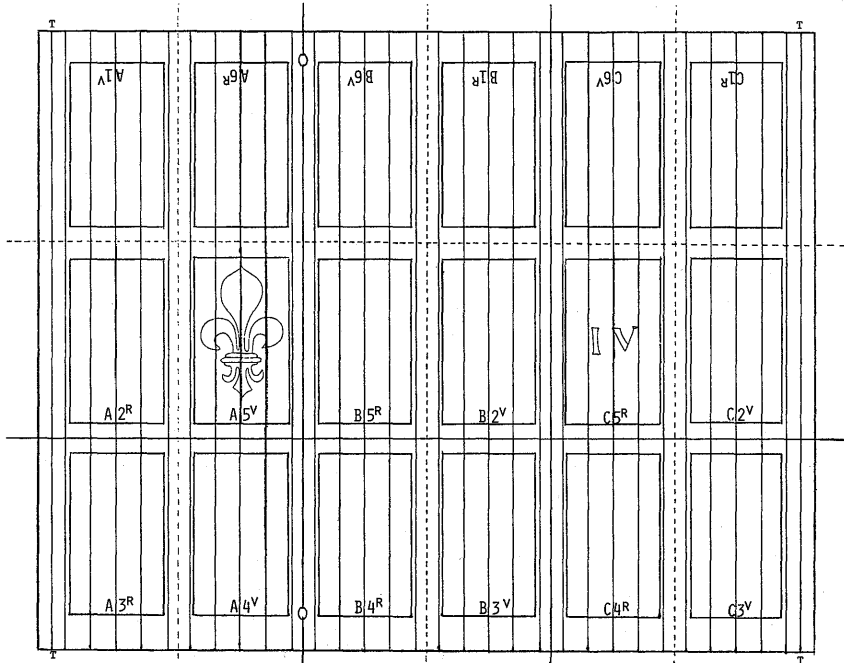


Figure 2: Imposition of Bell's Prolegomena: inner forme

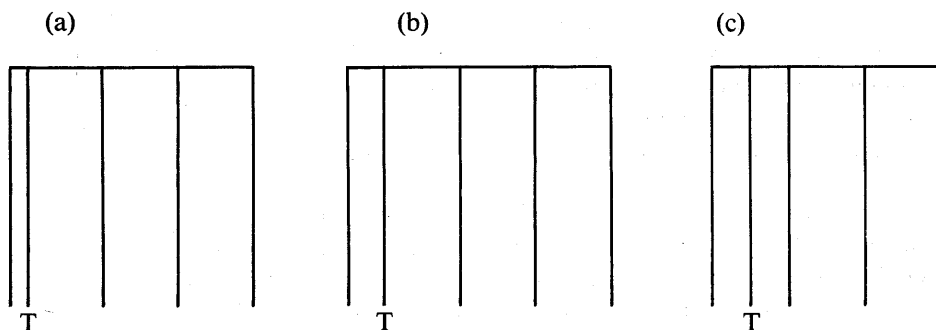
or two lower margins — i.e. a third from one end of the chase. These facts can be graphically illustrated by plates VI–XII of *‘Imprimerie’* in the *Encyclopédie*,<sup>3</sup> where the grooves are plainly visible, and by plate 2 and the accompanying text in Moxon,<sup>4</sup> where the dove-tails to accommodate the alternative positions of the short cross piece are described.

If any volume is uncut it ought to be possible to determine its format on the basis of deckles and cut edges alone. Relatively few copies of early printed books, however, are found uncut, but an equally critical piece of evidence — evidence which seems to have been seldom made use of<sup>5</sup> — is the tranchefiles in laid paper. Where present in a cut volume, the tranchefiles are as good as deckles for the purpose of determining format.

Tranchefiles attract little comment in the handbooks: McKerrow mentions them not at all, and Gaskell (p.61) merely notes that ‘half a chain’s width in from the shorter edges there is usually an extra chain on each side without bar shadows, called tranchefiles.’<sup>6</sup> Labarre is more informative about their purpose; his entry **Water-bar** reads:<sup>7</sup>

Also called ‘suction-bar’ a thin lath, formerly (in Lalande, 1762) a stout wire, placed under the cover or backing of the mould, parallel with the last rib on either side of the mould. It has been so called apparently because it is added to assist in drawing the water away at the edge of the sheet. Its position is immediately under and corresponds with the edge of the deckle, where it cuts or terminates the paper. *Fr.* Tranchefil(e). . . .

As Gaskell notes, not all laid paper had tranchefiles. Our examination of eighteenth-century papers suggests that in fact where the outermost chain is concerned there are three situations: (a) where the first chain appears close to the deckle and is normally lost in ploughing; (b) where the first chain appears about half the normal interval from the deckle; and (c) where there is a tranchefile fitting Gaskell’s description. The three situations might be illustrated thus:



(T = tranchefile)

In (b) the outermost chain may survive ploughing, but there is nothing to show that it was once the chain closest to the deckle. It is only when in (c) the tranche-file survives that the juxtaposition of tranche-file and the outermost chain shows where the deckle originally was.

In passing, we might observe that the term 'tranche-file' appears to be wrongly used to describe a wire in a papermaking mould (and by extension the impression that it creates in the paper made from the mould). In French (both modern and eighteenth-century) it is a book-binder's term equivalent to the English 'headband' or 'tailband' — the *Encyclopédie* defines it thus:

TRANCHE-FIL, s.m. *terme de Relieur*, petit ornement de fil ou de soie, que les Relieurs mettent au dos des livres qu'ils relient sur le haut & le bas de la *tranche*. Il sert aussi à tenir les feuilles en état.<sup>8</sup>

At least in the *Encyclopédie* (PAPETERIE, column 11 and Plate IX, figs. 6 and 8) the appropriate term is *transfil*:

Les quatre autres trous qui sont vers les extrémités des longs côtés [du châssis], servent de même à fixer par une petite cheville de bois un fil de laiton, qu'on appelle *transfil*, qui est fortement tendu dans le milieu du vuide qui est entre un des petits côtés & le pontuseau le plus prochain.<sup>9</sup>

We have not been able to establish precisely when 'tranche-file' supplanted 'transfil', though while the Larousse *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Vol. XV, Paris, 1876) makes the traditional distinctions, in *Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Vol. VI, Paris, 1933) 'transfil' is regarded as 'Syn. de tranche-file.' No matter what the source of the confusion, where a volume has not been so savagely ploughed as to remove them the tranche-files afford incontrovertible evidence as to which leaves were imposed with their outer edge lying along the shorter edge of the sheet of which they were once a part. Therefore, the format of a volume printed on laid paper can be determined by an examination of the tranche-files.

This assertion can be illustrated by reference to the six-volume *The Works of Spenser*, London: printed for J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper in the Strand, 1750. (Monash University \*820.3 S748 A1/H) Like the *Prolegomena*, these volumes are printed on laid paper, with vertical chain lines; but unlike the *Prolegomena*, the paper is unmarked and the volumes have been cut. However, the tranche-files — of type (c) — have for the most part survived ploughing, and the method of imposition can be reconstituted with some confidence.

The six volumes appear to fall into two units: vols I, V and VI constituting one unit, vols. II-IV the other (for example, II-IV have press figures, while I, V and VI do not). The evidence of tranche-files is the same throughout, but it is more illuminating to consider vols. II-IV, which collate B-2H<sup>6</sup>; A-2C<sup>6</sup>; A-2C<sup>6</sup>. Tranche-files can be observed at the outer edge of \$1,2,3 of:

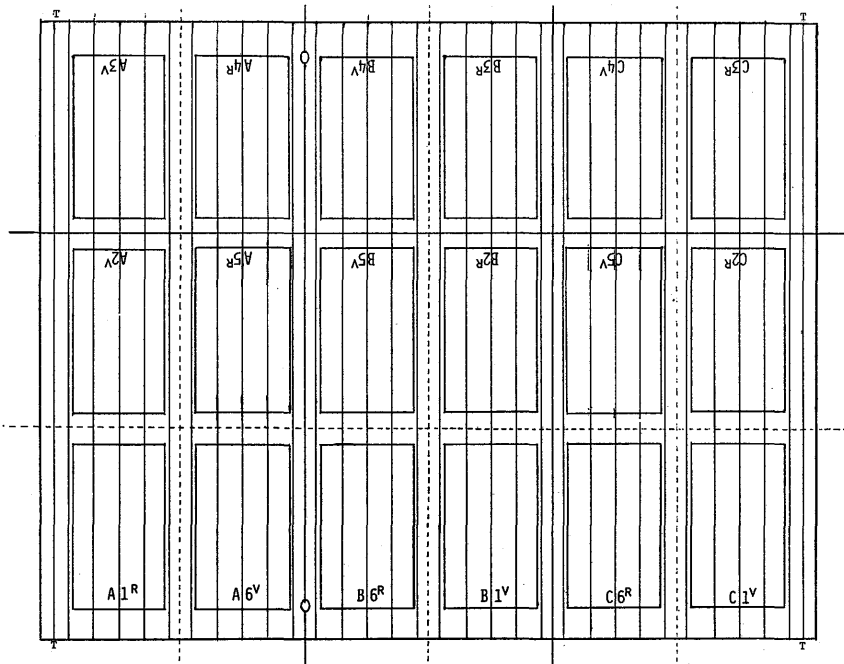


Figure 3: Imposition of *Spenser*: typical 'outer' forme

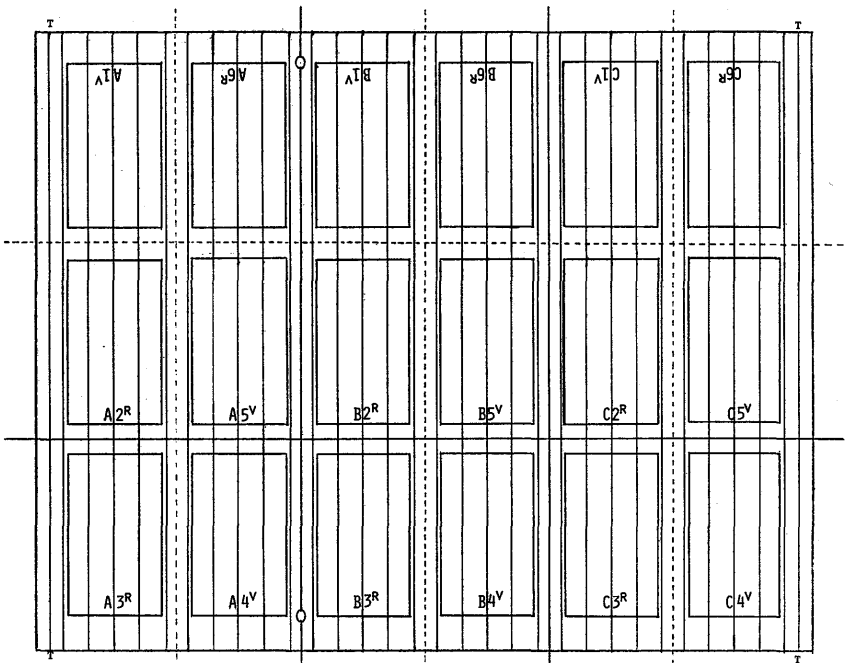


Figure 4: Imposition of *Spenser*: typical 'inner' forme

Vol.II: B+D, E+G, H+K, L+N, O+Q, R+T, U+Y, Z+2B, 2C+2E,  
2F+2H

Vol.III: A+C, D+F, G+I, K+M, N+P, Q+S, T+X, Y+2A, 2B

Vol.IV: A, B+D, E+G, H+K, L+N, O+Q, R+T, U+Y, Z+2B  
(2C has horizontal chain lines).

As the arrangement of gatherings above suggests, we have concluded — on the basis of the incidence of tranchefiles — that this is another 'eighteenmo with three signatures', three successive gatherings being imposed together, the first and third flanking the second. That at least vols. III and IV constitute a unit is shown by the fact that the final two gatherings of III and the first gathering of IV were imposed together, whereas the final gathering of IV was not imposed with any other gathering in the entire set.

Reference to figures 1 and 2 will reveal, however, that the Spenser volumes were not imposed in the same way as the *Prolegomena*: had they been, the tranchefiles would have appeared in \$1,2,3 in one outer member of each triplet and in \$4,5,6 in the other. The imposition is curious in that the only requirement seems to have been to have the deckles appear at the outer edges of \$1,2,3 in those gatherings in which they are present, rather than \$4,5,6. There is probably a reason why printers or binders preferred this consistency: it would be an aid in folding, but these volumes *are* signed \$3 and so the explanation probably lies elsewhere. Apart from this requirement a number of schemes were employed. Basically A1<sup>r</sup> B1<sup>v</sup> and C1<sup>v</sup> fell in the same forme, and usually A3<sup>r</sup> B3<sup>v</sup> C3<sup>v</sup> (see figures 3 and 4, — note, that the Spenser volumes have no watermarks or countermarks), but the incidence of press figures suggests that the cut-offs were sometimes interchanged and reversed and even that whole signatures were inverted and reversed, so that, for example, A1<sup>r</sup> and C1<sup>r</sup> may be in the same forme.

Though the precise imposition schemes for the Spenser volumes may not always be determinable, one thing remains constant: the appearance of tranchefiles in two thirds of the gatherings. In using the tranchefiles in these volumes we have also realised that there is a fixed relationship between the format of a volume and the *proportion* of its gatherings with tranchefiles, a relationship particularly useful in volumes printed on unwatermarked paper.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, if tranchefiles occur in two thirds of the gatherings in a volume gathered in sixes, with vertical chain lines, it will almost certainly be an eighteenmo.

Annemie Gilbert,  
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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972), p.107: Note F: *Impositions for small formats*.

<sup>2</sup> William Savage, *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing* (London, 1841), p. 354. In his note on p.404, Savage observes: 'This is now the usual method of imposing a sheet of eighteens; it cuts up equal to three half sheets of twelves, and is the most convenient mode both to the pressman and bookbinder, as it is in the regular way of business.'

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most readily accessible in *Book Making in Diderot's 'Encyclopédie': a facsimile reproduction of articles and plates*, ed. G.G. Barber (Farnborough, 1973), though the reproduction of the plates is not always satisfactory. All subsequent references are to this facsimile.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises on the whole Art of Printing (1683-4)*, ed. Herbert Davis & Harry Carter, 2nd. edn. (London, 1962), pp. 43-44, 'Of Chases'.

<sup>5</sup> The evidence of tranchefiles (not so described) is used for example by Edward Heawood in 'The Position on the Sheet of early Watermarks', *The Library* 9 (1929), 38-47 in his demonstration (p. 45) that Cluver's *Introductio ad universam geographiam* (Amsterdam, 1696) was printed partly on paper with turned chain lines. D.F. Foxon also uses the evidence of 'an additional closely spaced chain-line at each end' to demonstrate a method of imposing a twentyfourmo employed by Henri Estienne in 1569 — 'Some Notes on Agenda Format', *The Library* 8(1953), 163-173 (p. 166).

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey A. Glaister, *Glossary of the Book* (London, 1960) has a similar account: 'tranchefile: extra wires parallel to the chains at each end of the paper-making mould, and spaced a short distance from them. They leave an impression in the paper about half-way between the outer chain lines and the edges of the sheet. These are particularly noticeable in certain French papers.' No reason is suggested for their use.

<sup>7</sup> E.J. Labarre, *Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Paper and Paper-Making*, 2nd. edn. (Amsterdam, 1952), p. 327.

<sup>8</sup> Tranche-fil, noun (masc.), binder's term: a small embellishment of linen or silk that binders put on the spines of books they bind on the top and bottom edges. It is also used to keep the leaves in good condition.

<sup>9</sup> The other four holes which are towards the ends of the long sides [of the mould], are likewise used to anchor, by means of a small wooden peg, a brass wire, called a *transfil*, which is tightly stretched in the middle of the gap between one of the short sides and the closest rib.

<sup>10</sup> The earliest use in English that we have noticed is in K. Povey and I.J.C. Foster, 'Turned chain-lines', *The Library* 5(1951), 184-200 (p.199), where they use the term 'tranchefile' as if they are introducing it to bibliographical discourse. They refer to the *Encyclopédie* as their authority in a manner which suggests that they had no other source, but it would seem that they had referred to a more recent French text.

<sup>11</sup> It would be clearly impossible with some of the more exotic formats for which Savage gives imposition schemes, though we would suspect that they were particularly rare in the period when laid paper had yet to give way to wove. Likewise turned chain lines and half sheets of double paper will present problems.

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