



MR. DERRHAM on the CANTICLES.

I was of an y marriand, Gooep y we are & we at y fybers mouth y Gootame yid ut. lue

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## NOTES

### VERTICAL TITLES: 101 USES?

THE PLATE OPPOSITE shows p.246 (sig. li2<sup>v</sup>) of James Durham, *Clavis cantici*, the fourth edition, Glasgow, 1688.<sup>1</sup> Such vertical title-‘labels’, as they have usually been called, are a fairly familiar, though not everyday, sight to those who handle a large number of seventeenth-century English books. Perhaps — but this is a very rough guess — they survive intact in about one in every hundred extant books (I exclude pamphlets) printed in England between 1655 and 1690.<sup>2</sup>

The example shown is curious because the recto of the leaf on which it occurs contains the last page of the text of the book. Normally, vertical titles occupy one side of an otherwise blank leaf, usually at the beginning or end of a book but sometimes between its component parts, such as between preliminaries and text or before a final index. Theories about their function in the very few published accounts of these ‘labels’ rest on this fact. Of the two usual explanations, there seems slightly more ground for arguing that they were meant to be cut out and pasted either on unlettered spines or inside the cover to form a flap over the fore-edge, the latter in accordance with the then still frequent manner of shelving books fore-edge out.<sup>3</sup> The alternative rests on an unclear woodcut in the 1665 London edition of Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus* which shows a retail bookshop containing, apparently, labelled bins of current books in unbound sheets. Vertical titles could, excised, have been used to label the bins. However, if (as is suggested by Pollard, who reproduces the woodcut<sup>4</sup>) this way of identifying stocks of unbound sheets can largely explain the function of vertical titles, one might expect them to survive intact much more commonly than they now do. Only one title per consignment would, after all, have needed to be cut out.

The *Clavis cantici* example is not alone in suggesting that the purposes for which these ‘labels’ were meant were more various than has been suggested and that, on occasions at least, they could serve their function while still in place in the book. The Comenius woodcut is a lonely instance of one manner of storage, and one naturally thinks of situations in which sheets might be stored not in labelled bins but loose on racks or shelves in such a way that a transverse title, facing upwards, might be useful to the retailer or customer. It would, of course, save the title-page from dust and other wear-and-tear which would be suffered if sheets were stored title-page-up. So little is known about seventeenth-century bookshops that one is tempted to see the present example as representing a method peculiar to Glasgow (then a relatively isolated centre, even from the Scottish capital).<sup>5</sup> In fact an examination of a large number of other books from the press of the *Clavis cantici* printer, Robert Sanders the elder, reveals only three other vertical titles, all of them conventionally on otherwise blank leaves.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence of some Oxford books should be added, though it does not simplify matters. Madan describes 46 pre-1681 books which contain vertical titles<sup>7</sup>; three of these titles are on leaves which are not otherwise wholly blank<sup>8</sup>. Little pattern can emerge from so few instances, but it may be noted that all three

occupy either the first recto or the last verso of a gathering and of a pagination-sequence — though not (so far as one can calculate, somewhat uncertainly, from Madan's collations) the first or last page of a signature-sequence.<sup>9</sup> In one case (2378) the vertical title ('often torn off') occupies a recto with an index starting on its verso, in the other two a verso with indexes ending on the recto. This seems to suggest that the Oxford examples may be related to the identification of sheets while stored in the printing-house: an inference strengthened by the only other common fact about them. That is that they were all printed by the Halls — the first and third (dated 1658 and 1669) name Henry in the imprint, the second (1662) his son William — though all three are for different booksellers.

These observations are not made in order to dispute suggestions made in the past about the purposes for which vertical titles were intended and the uses to which they were put in seventeenth-century England. There is much more evidence still to be gathered. We ought to be grateful to Madan for noting and indexing the examples which he saw. It would obviously be very useful if more bibliographers were to record the sort of features (often of apparently peripheral interest) which Foxon, working in a later period, indexes under the heading 'Bibliographical notabilia'.<sup>10</sup> Many more examples of vertical titles would need to be investigated before firm conclusions could be drawn. But it can be said with some confidence that those conclusions would be much more diverse than the previous tentative accounts have allowed for, and that they would have a number of interesting things to tell us about seventeenth-century printing-house or bookselling or book-collecting practices — or all three.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wing D2804, Aldis 2756; copy in the State Library of Victoria. I am very grateful to Ms. Daria Fedewytch for pointing this example out to me.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Pollard, 'Changes in the style of bookbinding, 1550-1830', *Library*, 5th ser., xi (1956), p.91, n.5, notes an isolated eighteenth century example (1741) but otherwise suggests 1653-97. William A. Jackson, 'English title-labels to the end of the seventeenth century', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 2(1952) 222-9 has 1653-91; F. Madan, *Oxford Books*, iii *Oxford literature 1651-1680* (Oxford, 1931) has 1656-? for Oxford-printed books only. Pollard's terminal dates probably cannot be widened much.

<sup>3</sup> Illustrated respectively in Jackson's Pl. IIa, and in his Pls. Ia-b and Pollard's Pl. I(d). Both writers admit objections, however: Jackson's IIa, on a copy of Cotton's *Epitome of the art of husbandry*, 1669, cannot have been cut from an integral leaf and must have been printed separately for an early owner; his Ia-b are MS labels; and while Pollard's I(d) is compatible with his argument, he also cites an example in which a MS label has been supplied for the fore-edge while the *printed* 'label' remains intact within. 'If vertical title-labels ever were intended for use in binding', he says (p.92), 'this instance shows that at least one binder was not aware of it'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Changes', p.93, Fig.3.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson (p.226) notes a single Edinburgh example of 1689, conventionally placed, and no Glasgow ones.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell Library (Glasgow) copies of Wing B2927 (1666/7), G 1607 (1669) and F776 (1675). I am grateful to Ms Hazel Wright of the Mitchell Library for ascertaining this. All three of the Mitchell's copies of the 1688 *Clavis cantici* have the vertical title intact, as do all the other copies listed by Wing. Were this not so, we might imagine that its presence on the verso of a text-page was a (pressman's?) error and that it was still liable to excision for whatever conventional purpose.

<sup>7</sup> *Passim*; indexed p.493-4.

<sup>8</sup> Madan 2378, 2606, 2821.

<sup>9</sup> It will be clear that I have not been able to examine these books first-hand.

<sup>10</sup> D.F. Foxon, *A catalogue of English verse 1701-1750* (Cambridge, 1975), ii, 203-12.

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