

GATHERINGS SIGNED WITH TWO LETTERS

THE PRACTICE OF DIVIDING PRINTER'S COPY INTO 'TAKES' to allow two or more compositors to set sections of the same text simultaneously involves a certain risk: if there has been a miscalculation or a misunderstanding, or where the amount of copy in any but the last take has been varied after setting has started, the regular sequence of signatures will be upset, because the compositor will have either not enough or too many letters of the alphabet with which to sign his final gathering(s).

The first category — where not enough letters are available — need not detain us: suffice it to observe that an 'offending' gathering may be either left unsigned or signed in various ways to guide the binder in placing it in sequence. What is of greater interest in the present context — since it provides a setting for the ensuing discussion — is the converse, where the compositor has available to him more letters than he needs. Again the situation may be met by ignoring the discrepancy, so that a gap in the alphabetic sequence results. But occasionally two or more letters of the alphabet may be assigned to a single gathering, the intention clearly being to account for all letters of the alphabet, thus confirming for the warehouseman and the binder — and perhaps even for the purchaser and any subsequent reader — that the set of sheets in hand indeed makes up a complete exemplar of the edition.

An apparently simple instance of assigning two letters to one gathering is that cited by Fredson Bowers in the course of his discussion of missignings and misprinted signatures and the various ways of accommodating them in collation formulas.¹ It is Phineas Fletcher's *The Purple Island, or The Isle of Man: together with Piscatorie Eclogs and other Poeticall miscellanies* (Printed by the Printers to the Universitie of Cambridge. 1633. 4°). That section of the volume which comprises *Piscatorie Eclogs* etc. collates ('conservatively') ${}^2\pi^2$ A-M⁴ O-R⁴, ${}^2\pi^1$ being blank and ${}^2\pi^2$ the title leaf.² The text is continuous, and the assumption must be that there was a miscalculation due to 2 O having been set before the preceding sequence of gatherings. Either (i) the earlier gatherings were originally intended to number 13 (A-N) rather than 12 (A-M) and O-R are 'correctly' signed (Bowers's explanation), or (ii) the earlier gatherings were always intended to number 12 and the final four gatherings should have been signed N-Q, the error, and therefore the imperfect dovetailing, being due to a miscalculation or misunderstanding. Whatever the cause of the irregularity, and presumably in order to confirm for the warehouseman and the binder that nothing was omitted between M and O, the four leaves of gathering 2 M were signed 'M'. 'M2'. 'N'. 'N2'. Bowers, following Greg, suggests that the aberrant gathering be represented in the collation formula as '(MN)⁴'. There is, however, an added complication — one not germane to Bowers's illustration — in that the gap in pagination is not eight but four: M⁴v — or, to follow Bowers's suggested notation, (MN)⁴v — is numbered 96, while O¹r is numbered 101; so, instead merely of a simple misunderstanding or miscalculation in signing, there is an added

miscalculation in pagination, a miscalculation for which the only obvious explanation is that the number '101' was arrived at by including the four pages of π , which in the event were not included in the page count. Nonetheless, whatever the *reason* for the imperfect dovetailing the purpose of the particular signing is clear enough.

Sometimes the imperfect dovetailing results not from miscalculation or misunderstanding but from the practice of starting takes at the beginning of intellectual divisions of the text ('volumes', 'parts', 'sections' etc.) and signing the first gathering of such takes 'Aa', '3A' etc. An example of this practice which results in a gap in the alphabetic sequence is afforded by John Hawkesworth's *An Account of the Voyages undertaken . . . by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, . . . drawn up from the Journals kept by the several Commanders* (3 vols.; London: printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell. 1774. 4° in fours). Vol.1 contains the text of the journals of Byron, Wallis and Carteret, compositorial stints apparently starting at B (Byron) and 3A (Wallis). But Byron's journal occupies only 17½ sheets, so that there is only one half-sheet between S4 and 3A1; this half-sheet is signed on its first recto 'T-Zz' and numbered on its third page '139-360' (the fourth page is blank). The volume may be represented formulaically:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{A}^4 \text{ a-e}^4 \text{ B-S}^4 \text{ (T-2Z)}^2 \text{ 3A-4Q}^4 \text{ 4R}^2 \\ \text{or, conservatively: } \text{A}^4 \text{ a-e}^4 \text{ B-S}^4 \text{ T}^2 \text{ 3A-4Q}^4 \text{ 4R}^2 \end{array}$$

The reason for assigning more than one alphabetic letter to a single gathering in this manner is readily understood: it serves merely to forestall any suspicion that the text is incomplete. But I have encountered two instances of volumes in which two alphabetic letters have been assigned not to an *isolated* gathering but to *every* gathering in the volume — i.e. in which the unusual form of signing was intended from the outset rather than resulting from a subsequent imperfect dovetailing. Discussions of these two instances follow.

(1) *The Parliamentary Debates, during the second session of the second parliament of the United Kingdom of Great-Britain and Ireland and of the Kingdom of Great-Britain the nineteenth. Vol.I. Comprising the period between 22nd November, 1803, and 29th March, 1804.*

London: printed by Cox and Baylis, Great Queen Street; and sold by R. Bagshaw, Bow Street, Covent Garden; J. Budd, Pall Mall; and H.D. Symonds, Pater-Noster Row. 1804.

(Exemplar described: State Library of Victoria, s328.422)

This volume is printed on wove paper (without watermarks) and comprises 38 gatherings, all but three of them in eights. The first two leaves of each gathering are signed, the signing taking the form of two letters of the alphabet plus conventional arabic number — i.e. 'AB', 'AB2', 'CD', 'CD2'. etc. Formulaically,

therefore, the volume is to be represented thus, with or without parentheses:

ab⁸ cd² AB-3XY⁸ 3Z4A⁶ 4B⁴

The system is obviously cumbersome for purposes of reference, particularly in the twelfth and thirty-fifth gatherings, where the second leaf is signed 'Z2A2' and '3Z4A2' respectively. But why employ such a system in the first place?

The answer, I am convinced, is related to the publication history of *The Parliamentary Debates*. The attempt to provide a record of proceedings in parliament was instituted by William Cobbett, the first volume appearing on 7 June 1804,³ under the title *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates*. Until 1812 (with vol.22) it appeared under this title, having been printed for Cobbett from vol.10 (1808) by Thomas Curzon Hansard. In 1812 — after Cobbett had suffered a series of misadventures⁴ — ownership of the publication passed to Hansard (whence its subsequent unofficial and then official title), so that with vol.23 (1812) Cobbett's name was dropped from the title. The exemplar under consideration is therefore patently a reprint: the omission of '*Cobbett*' from the title could not have occurred before 1812 and so the '1804' imprint, which reproduces in all details that of the original 1804 edition, is false. The omission of '*Cobbett*' is presumably to be explained by reference to the fact that most (if not all) the first 22 volumes had already been reissued by Hansard with cancel title leaves bearing the new title, *The Parliamentary Debates* (though with new imprints, dated 1812, rather than, as here, with imprints reproducing those of the original publication).

Evidence for the existence of a reprint of vol.1 is afforded by a note in the prelims ([A]3^r, p.v) of the *General Index to the First and Second Series of Hansard's Parliamentary Debates forming a digest of the recorded proceedings of Parliament, from 1803 to 1830* (London: Baldwin & Cradock . . . & T.C. Hansard. 1834). The note reads in part (a propos 'the first volume of the first series of the Work'): 'and, further, upon the reprinting of the volume to complete the few sets remaining on hand, (which must be very shortly done)' Though the *General Index* was published in 1834 it had been in the press for a number of years,⁵ so that the reprinting of vol.1 may well have preceded the appearance of the *General Index*, even by several years. There is also a piece of bibliographical evidence which points to the reprinting of vol.1 having been done no earlier than 1827: that was the year in which Hansard first printed a volume of the current series (new series, vol.16) gathered in eights — hitherto all volumes had been printed for gathering in fours.

Herein, I suggest, is also the explanation for the peculiar method of signing: it was an attempt to transform a volume originally produced in gatherings of four to one which, because of changed methods of production (perhaps determined by the introduction of new machinery), could be produced only with gatherings in eights.⁶ The accommodation was achieved by signing the gatherings in such a way as to emphasise the agreement in content between the two editions — i.e. by having

them finish with the same signature despite the difference in the number of leaves per gathering. In fact the original vol.1 of *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates* (exemplar examined: Melbourne University, BX 328.422) collates $\pi A^4 b^4 c^2 A-4F^4$: the correspondence is not exact — the reprint occupies 18 fewer leaves and finishes with $4B^4$ — but I suggest that it is close enough to support my contention about the method of signing the reprint.

(2) *M. Minucii Felicis Octavius.*

Cantabrigiæ: ex officina R.D. almae academiae typographi. Ann. Dom. 1643.

(Exemplars described: University Library, Cambridge, Cam.e.643.2 and Cam.e.643.3(1))

In the Cambridge Minucius Felix two letters of the alphabet are again assigned to each gathering, but in a manner quite different from that employed in *The Parliamentary Debates*. The volume is a sixteenmo, whose collation is perhaps best represented by a non-alphabetic formula, thus:

1 - 3¹⁶ 4⁴ (-44, blank?)

The actual signings are these:

11 : -	21 : C	31 : E	41 : G
12 : A2	22 : C2	32 : E2	42 : G2
13 : A3	23 : C3	33 : E3	43 : G3
14 : A4	24 : C4	34 : E4	
15 : A5	25 : C5	35 : E5	
16 : -	26 : -	36 : -	
17 : -	27 : -	37 : -	
18 : -	28 : -	38 : -	
19 : B	29 : D	39 : F	
110 : B2	210 : D2	310 : F2	
111 : B3	211 : D3	311 : F3	
112 : B4	212 : D4	312 : F4	
113 : B5	213 : -	313 : F5	
114 : -	214 : -	314 : -	
115 : -	215 : -	315 : -	
116 : -	216 : -	316 : -	

The tabulation illustrates the essential characteristic of this method of signing: the two halves of each gathering are signed as if each half were a separate gathering of eight leaves. The immediate assumption is that what we have is a reimposition for gathering in sixteens of type pages originally imposed for gathering in eights (in no-matter-what format), the signatures not being altered to reflect the new imposition.⁷ However, I have not found an exemplar of this edition gathered in eights: one may well await discovery, but a decision to reimpose

— all the (very slight) text being in type — could equally well have been made without any sheets being printed off from the original imposition.

An alternative suggestion for the method of signing might be that the Cambridge Minucius Felix is a page-for-page resetting of an edition gathered in eights, even though it must be allowed that page-for-page resetting which extends to reproducing the signatures of a superseded imposition scheme is an inherently unlikely procedure. As far as I have been able to establish there is no eligible edition of Minucius Felix (one collating A–F⁸ G⁴ (–G4?)): the closest I have come is an octavo edition printed at Heidelberg ‘ex officina Lv dovici Lucij’ in 1560, where, after a lengthy introduction, the text collates a–f⁸. But such proximity is not close enough to explain the Cambridge edition as a resetting of the Heidelberg.

Nor does the Minucius Felix signing seem to be characteristic of Cambridge printing in the early 1640s.⁸ For example, one of the ULC exemplars (Cam.e.643.3(1)) is bound, in a contemporary binding, with another Roger Daniel Cambridge sixteenmo dated 1643: *Introductio ad sapientiam: enchiridion repurgandis seculi hujus vitiiis accommodatissimum*. The two sixteenmos are related not only temporally but also typographically, but whereas the Minucius Felix is gathered in sixteens the *Introductio ad sapientiam* collates A⁸ B⁸ C⁶ D⁸ E⁸ F⁶ G⁸ H⁴ (–H4, blank?) (G and H have vertical chain lines, the remainder horizontal). The *Introductio ad sapientiam* presents its own problems — why the two gatherings in sixes, for example? — but insofar as its signatures are perfectly orthodox it highlights the puzzle presented by the Minucius Felix.

If the Minucius Felix signing is not typical of its printer, if there is no edition of which it could be a page-for-page reprint, and if reimposition in the manner implied is inherently unlikely, what then is the explanation for it?

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NOTES

¹ Fredson Bowers, *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (Princeton, 1949), pp.222–225 (*‘Missignings and Misprints’*).

² Bowers (p.223) represents the volume in a ‘conservative’ formula as: ¶–2¶⁴ A–Z⁴ χ², ²A–M⁴ O–R⁴. But since the two unsigned leaves are textually related to what follows the better course is to regard them as beginning the duplicated alphabetic sequence, i.e. to represent the volume: ¶–2¶⁴ A–Z⁴, ²π² A–M⁴ O–R⁴.

³ See M.L. Pearl, *William Cobbett, a bibliographical account of his life and times* (London, 1953), p.76.

⁴ Most recently related in George Spater, *William Cobbett, the poor man’s friend* (Cambridge, 1982), especially pp.171–173 and 252–254.

⁵ On H6^v of the *General Index* is this note: ‘*The Second and Third Sheets of this General Index having gone to Press prior to the Publication of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Volumes* [i.e. 1830], *the Chronological Order of Debates of the House of Lords in those Volumes, is unavoidably inserted out of its place.*’ Then follows (H7^r–8^r; 8^v blank) ‘CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF DEBATES, HOUSE OF LORDS. *Concluded from page 26.* [i.e. C5^v].’

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