SHEET NUMBERS, 'CONSTABLE'S MISCELLANY' AND *IRMA*

B.J. McMULLIN

THE PURPOSE OF SIGNATURES is to act as a guide to members of the booktrade, so that when a volume is bound its gatherings — and, within the gatherings, its leaves — fall in the correct order. Once the pages have been correctly imposed and the impression worked off, the printed sheets need to be warehoused until sets are 'gathered' and 'collated' (that is, assembled and their completeness and order verified) before distribution to bookseller or binder. Since signatures follow the predictable sequence of the alphabet (usually in its 23-letter form) or — beginning towards the end of the eighteenth century — of cardinal numbers, for the most part they serve their purpose admirably. But some categories of publication present problems, and this note is designed to draw attention to a number of instances from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in which conventional signatures were recognized as being inadequate for their intended purpose and therefore as requiring supplementing by another device which would confirm for the warehouseman and the binder that they did indeed have a complete set of sheets, a device which I have chosen to call a 'sheet number'.

Difficulties might arise in the warehouse or the bindery for a variety of reasons. For example, confusion might result from the manner of signing the prelims or addenda, particularly when it replicated that of the main body of the work. More serious difficulties, however, were likely to be caused by those volumes in which — for any one of a multitude of reasons — the signature sequence was disturbed; on occasion the disturbance might be so serious as to require the printing of instructions to guide the binder. But such instances were unpredictable, reflecting a disturbance of the normal pattern, and since they *were* unpredictable there was no generally accepted way of dealing with them.[1] Of more immediate interest are those 'predictable' volumes in which the signature sequence is normal but in which there is no equation between sheet and gathering and where, therefore, there might appear to be at least a potential difficulty in assembling a complete set of sheets. On the one hand are quired volumes — that is, ones in which a gathering is made up of more than one sheet — notably folios, in fours, sixes, etc., but also (especially in the bible trade) quartos in eights. On the other are those volumes in which one sheet comprises more than one gathering — that is, ones in which the sheet needs to be divided into its two or more constituent gatherings before binding — notably twelvemos designed for gathering in sixes, but also octavos in fours. In neither instance can such volumes have produced too many problems in the warehouse or bindery. In the former I assume that the signature of the first recto of the sheet (\$1, \$2, \$3 in a folio in

sixes; \$1, \$3 in a quarto in eights) would have been a sufficient guide. In the latter I assume that the vast majority of half-sheets were printed according to a 'work-and-turn' imposition scheme, each sheet producing two copies of the one gathering, and therefore that the sheets were divided in the warehouse, thus producing heaps of half-sheets indistinguishable from whole sheets, in the sense, that is, that each half-sheet represented a gathering.

The potential for confusion in the warehouse or bindery was clearly much more serious, however, when handling eighteenmos. Casual observation suggests that eighteenmos were rarely gathered in eighteens, no doubt primarily because of the difficulty of sewing through nine thicknesses of paper. Additionally eighteenmos were unsuited to half-sheet imposition, since such a method of printing would create gatherings with an odd number of leaves, thereby producing yet another difficulty for the binder.[2] Consequently — unlike twelvemos, which, when imposed so as to produce two gatherings of six leaves, produced *two* copies of the *one* gathering — eighteenmos were commonly imposed so as to produce from the one sheet a *single* copy of *two* or *three* consecutive gatherings. And I assume that — again unlike the twelvemo in sixes — the division of the eighteenmo sheet into its constituent gatherings was done not in the warehouse but in the bindery. Though imposition in eighteenmo so as to produce one gathering of eighteen leaves or two gatherings of nine might be eschewed, there were still two ways of imposing an eighteenmo:

(i) so as to produce gatherings in alternating twelves and sixes — that is, *two* gatherings to a sheet;
(ii) so as to produce gatherings in sixes — that is, *three* gatherings to a sheet.

In other words, since it was possible to have two *or* three gatherings to a sheet there might be some doubt in the warehouse whether a complete set of sheets had been assembled. Hence the need for a system of notation which, more obviously than the signatures, would serve to identify the *sheets* (as opposed to the *gatherings*). In essence that system consisted of placing a number (1, 2, 3 . . .) in the direction line of \$1^{r} of the first gathering contained in the sheet (except that 1 was frequently omitted, the presence of the title page presumably serving to identify the first sheet). Thus:

(i) in an eighteenmo gathered in alternating twelves and sixes the incidence of sheet numbers is: A1^{r}:1; C1^{r}:2; E1^{r}:3; G1^{r}:4; I1^{r}:5; etc.
(ii) in an eighteenmo gathered in sixes the incidence of sheet numbers is: A1^{r}:1; D1^{r}:2; G1^{r}:3; K1^{r}:4; N1^{r}:5; etc.

The practice of inserting sheet numbers confirms that difficulties did in fact exist in handling eighteenmos imposed for gathering in anything other than eighteens, and yet their introduction appears, from my observation, to date from many years after the eighteenmo itself had become commonplace. The

realisation that sheet numbers had the import attributed to them in this note occurred during work on Sir Walter Scott, his publisher Archibald Constable, and his printer James Ballantyne;[3] therefore, it can be only a tentative conclusion that the use of sheet numbers was confined to a handful of Edinburgh printers at work in the 1820s and early 1830s; further exploration may serve to extend the incidence both geographically and temporally.

The first Edinburgh uses of sheet numbers that I have noted are in the 12-volume *Novels and Tales of the Author of Waverley* and the 10-volume *Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott,* both dated 1823, printed by Ballantyne, and gathered in alternating twelves and sixes. Further eighteenmos printed by Ballantyne, dated 1824[4] and 1825,[5] all of them gathered in alternating twelves and sixes, have been noted; the first volumes noted printed by Ballantyne and gathered in sixes are the first three volumes of 'Constable's Miscellany', Captain Basil Hall, *Extracts from a Journal, Written on the Coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico, in the years 1820, 1821, 1822,* dated 1826 and with a sheet number on the first recto of every third gathering, with the exception of A1^{r} in volume 3.

Seventy-four volumes in 'Constable's Miscellany' appeared at the rate of a dozen or so per year until 1831 before limping to a close with volume 81 in 1835 under the imprint of Whittaker & Co., London (volumes 75 and 76 were printed in Edinburgh, 77-81 in London). Of the 76 volumes printed in Edinburgh only the first 54 are eighteenmos, all of them gathered in sixes; the remaining 22 are sixteenmos gathered in eights. Of those 54 J. Hutchison (for the heirs of D. Willison) printed 32, Ballantyne 19, Anderson & Bryce 2, and Andrew Shortreed 1; 43 have sheet numbers, the 11 without being the work variously of Hutchison (5, dated 1829-30), Ballantyne (4, dated 1827-9), and Anderson & Bryce (2, dated 1827). The 43 volumes with sheet numbers exhibit a range of variations: A1^{r} is often not numbered; where they are less than a sheet in extent the prelims are usually excluded from the numbering sequence, the main text starting with signature A, A1^{r} containing sheet number 1; and in the copies seen (i.e. the set in the State Library of Victoria) sheet numbers are often lacking — the most extreme example is volume 18, *The Historical Works of Frederick Schiller,* volume 1, 1828, printed by Hutchison, where only two of the anticipated seven numbers are present (D1^{r}:2; Q1^{r}:6).

Why the Edinburgh printers involved in 'Constable's Miscellany' should produce some volumes with sheet numbers, some without, cannot be hazarded. Clearly — as the long prior experience of producing eighteenmos without sheet numbers confirms — it was perfectly possible to produce bound eighteenmos with the gatherings in the correct order, however many leaves they comprised, though whether the warehouseman or binder had difficulties in carrying out his functions cannot be known. In theory sheet numbers are an obviously useful device, but in practical terms their utility is perhaps not so obvious. Not only did the vast majority of printers and their warehousemen,

and subsequently booksellers and binders, manage without them: even when a sheet number was present it might not prevent an error in binding being perpetrated, as in the VSL copy of volume 20 of 'Constable's Miscellany', Richard Thomson, *Illustrations of the History of Great Britain,* volume 1, 1828, printed by Hutchison, which collates π^6 ⁷A-I⁶ K1-3; A-O⁶ P⁴. The sheet numbering begins with ⁷A, though no number is actually present on ⁷A1ʳ. In this copy ⁷D-F (sheet 2) has been replaced by a second copy of D-F (sheet 5, numbered thus on D1ʳ), which in turn is followed by ⁷G-I (sheet 3, numbered thus on ⁷G1ʳ) — in other words, the presence of a sheet number did not deflect the binder from his normal practice of following the signatures. Perhaps the sheer novelty of the device made its recognition a matter of chance.

To this point I have considered only eighteenmos. However, the later volumes in 'Constable's Miscellany' demonstrate that sheet numbers might also on occasion be used in other formats, specifically sixteenmos imposed for gathering in eights. Of the 22 sixteenmos printed in Edinburgh Hutchison printed 9, Ballantyne 2, and Shortreed 11, among Shortreed's 11 being four containing sheet numbers: volumes 69-71, Alexander Wilson and Charles Lucian Bonaparte, *American Ornithology,* volumes 2-4, 1831 (volume 68 [i.e. volume 1] does not contain sheet numbers) and volume 72, John S. Memes, *Memoirs of the Empress Josephine,* 1831. All four volumes are gathered in eights, with a sheet number on the first recto in every second gathering. Whereas there was clearly potential for error when handling eighteenmos, in that the sheet might require division into either two or three gatherings, one would think that the sixteenmo designed for gathering in eights — like the twelvemo designed for gathering in sixes — would present no problems: one would imagine that the sheets were printed by a work-and-turn process and then divided in the warehouse. But the fact that Shortreed employed sheet numbers in some of his sixteenmos and not in others may perhaps imply that they were not printed according to a uniform imposition scheme: one might guess that seven volumes were probably printed by a work-and-turn scheme, the other four more certainly in the way of eighteenmos — that is, by a scheme which produced not two copies of the one gathering but one copy of two successive gatherings (indeed I take it that the presence of sheet numbers actually confirms that conclusion).

The utility of sheet numbers is perhaps most graphically illustrated from the example of Sir Walter Scott's 9-volume *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte, Emperor of the French,* 1827, an *octavo* in eights, printed by Ballantyne. Bibliographically speaking, the most noteworthy feature of this publication is the extensive cancellation: there are 130-odd instances where a leaf was cancelled in order to correct an error of fact or of grammar. So extensive was the cancellation that most of the cancellantia were imposed together in 15 sheets. In the case of these 15 sheets the warehouseman and the binder would

have had no means of knowing whether they had a complete set or not except that printed instructions were provided (of which I know of no surviving copy) and that Ballantyne placed the numbers 2-15 in that page of the sheet located at the near right corner of the 'outer' forme (the number 1 was omitted, as often in the eighteenmos, though obviously much less justifiably, unless the warehouseman and binder understood that an un-numbered sheet simply *had* to be the first).[6]

All the volumes so far referred to were printed in Edinburgh in the period 1823-31, but since the sample was actually limited to Edinburgh in the first four decades of the nineteenth century one should be hesitant in concluding, as already suggested, that these are the geographical and temporal limits to the incidence of sheet numbers — that is, in concluding that sheet numbers have the capacity to 'localize' volumes containing them.[7] Indeed, the realization that sheet numbers occur in a French novel of the end of the eighteenth century is sufficient to suggest that a sample with different geographical and/or temporal limits might well produce further examples of the phenomenon (or perhaps confirm this French example as a sport or even as having a false imprint). The novel in question is *Irma,* by Elisabeth Guénard, Madame Brossin de Méré. Since the status of the only set seen (Monash University, *840.6 G926 A6/I v.1-4) is uncertain, details are provided here in the hope that they may aid in the elucidation of the early publishing history of the novel. The title pages of Volumes 1 and 2 are in one setting, those of Volumes 3 and 4 in another — see the reproductions of the title pages of Volumes 1 and 3. (In Volume 2 the only change is 'TOME SECOND', whereas in Volume 4, as well as 'TOME QUATRIEME', the ampersand in the imprint is replaced by 'et'.) Physically the volumes may be described thus:

18°; (v.1) A-P^{6} [D3 not signed], (v.2) A-P^{6} [C2 signed C3], (v.3) A-N^{6} O^{6}, (v.4) A-N^{6}; pp.(v.1) [1-3] 4-180, (v.2) [1-3] 4-179 [*1*], (v.3) [1-7] 8-167 [*1*], (v.4) [1-3] 4-156.

Sheet numbers occur on (v.1) D1^{r}:2; G1^{r}:3; K1^{r}:4; N1^{r}:5; (v.2) D1^{r}:7; G1^{r}:8; K1^{r}:9; N1^{r}:10; (v.3) D1^{r}:2; G1^{r}:3; K1^{r}:4; N1^{r}:5; (v.4) B1^{r}:6; E1^{r}:7; H1^{r}:8; L1^{r}:9; N1^{r}:10.

In Volume 1 there is a frontispiece representing 'Irma'. A1^{r} in Volume 3 is a half-title, 'SUITE | D'IRMA. | TOME III.'

Volumes 1 and 2 are on a paper watermarked 'GEOFROY | A | GADAGNS' [?], no countermark; Volumes 3 and 4 are on a paper without any marks except that in Volume 4 the two sheets DEF and GHI have a watermark which appears to read 'J & J ASSOT | AVAOCIVSE'.

As far as I have been able to establish, the edition represented by the Monash set of *Irma* is not otherwise known. Various editions are listed under 00.106 in Martin-Mylne-Frautschi[8] and in columns 335-6 of volume 5 of

IRMA,

OU

LES MALHEURS

D'UNE

JEUNE ORPHELINE,

HISTOIRE INDIENNE,

Avec des Romances,

Publiée par la Ce Gd.

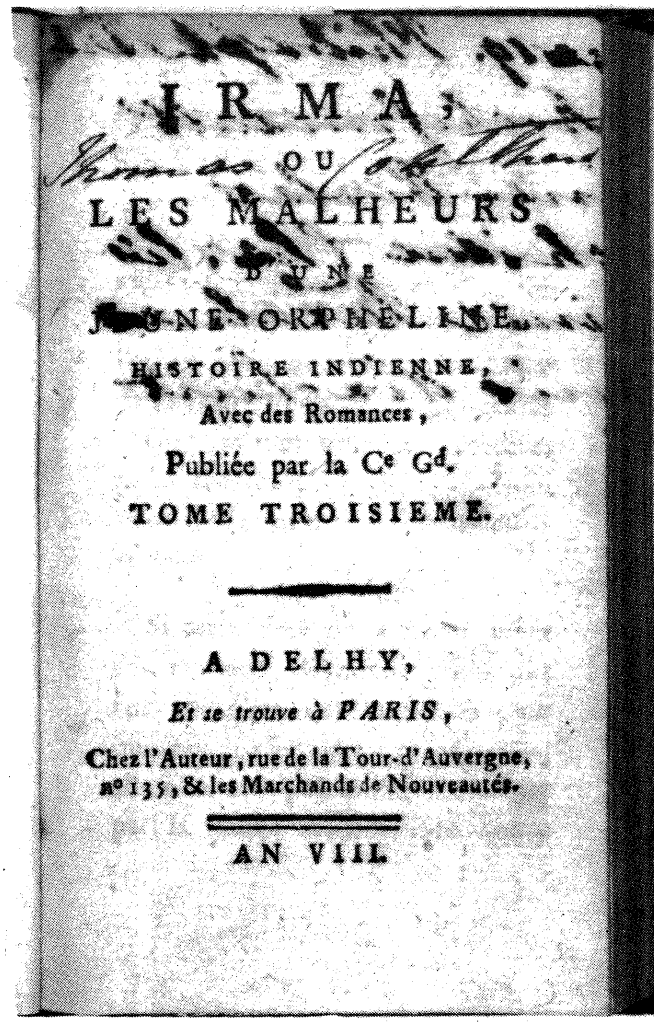
TOME PREMIER.

A DELHY.

Et se trouve à PARIS,

Chez l'Auteur, rue de la Tour-d'Auvergne, n°. 155, et les Marchands de Nouveautés.

AN VIII.



IRMA;

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AN VIII.

Monglond.[9] The two bibliographies are in agreement (both base their descriptions on the sets in the Bibliothèque Nationale) in describing the first edition (dated An VIII) as being a twelvemo in two volumes, the first comprising 218 pages, the second 226, and in describing the expanded though undesignated second edition (also dated An VIII) as being an eighteenmo in four volumes, comprising respectively 216, 226, 196 and 195 pages.[10] The imprint of the two-volume edition, as given by Monglond, is the same as that in the Monash set, but that of the four-volume edition is given by him as 'A Delhy, et se trouve à Paris, chez Lerouge, imprimeur, passage du Commerce, Cour de Rohan; L'Auteur, rue de la Tour-d'Auvergne, N°135, an VIII'.[11] Moreover, the author's name — 'M^me^ Guénard' — appears on the title pages of the eighteenmo. (I have disregarded the frontispieces on the grounds that their absence in a particular copy may be no more than an accident of binding.) The readiest explanation for the Monash set is that it represents an edition intermediate between the two known editions of An VIII — that is, it agrees with the first edition in the form of the imprint and in not having the author's name spelt out and with the supposed second edition in format and in number of volumes.

Why then the sheet numbers in this edition of *Irma*? Were they inserted for the same reason that the Edinburgh printers were to use them 20-odd years later? — that is, as a guide to warehouseman and binder in dividing an eighteenmo sheet into its constituent gatherings. Here it might be noted that the French practice of gathering twelvemos in alternating eights and fours may have led warehouseman and binder to expect an eighteenmo designed for gathering in alternating twelves and sixes, not in sixes — hence the sheet numbers. And it might also be noted that the late-eighteenth-century French practice of signing in arabic numbers may well have suggested what is essentially a dual system of signatures. Or were they used to distinguish the sheets of the eighteenmo from those of the twelvemo? But why then insert sheet numbers in volumes 3 and 4? Actually the numbering afresh of the sheets of volumes 3 and 4 (the 'Suite') — plus the different setting of their title pages and their different paper — may be taken to imply that they were issued separately, thereby implying further that in the one year there were *five* editions: (i) two volumes, twelvemo; (ii) two volumes, eighteenmo; (iii) volumes 3 and 4, eighteenmo; (iv) four volumes, eighteenmo, 'chez Lerouge'; (v) four volumes, twelvemo, 'Publiée par la cit. Guénard. Nouvelle édition . . . chez l'auteur'.[12] To confuse matters further, the *National Union Catalog, pre-1956 Imprints* reports a set dated An VIII at Princeton, *three* volumes bound in one, 14cm. [=18 mo?].

Since I have not seen the other editions of *Irma* I do not know whether any of them contain sheet numbers. Until that possibility can be excluded it would be premature to suggest that the sheet numbers in one of the editions of *Irma* are an indication that it is an unauthorised one, printed elsewhere

than Paris and perhaps later than the title pages would suggest. (One would find it difficult, certainly, to discover a motive for assigning it to Edinburgh in the 1820s.) I take it that the 'Delhy' of the title pages is not meant to deceive but is part of the 'Indian-ness' of this *roman à clef*, that the Paris details of the imprint are accurate — at least for those editions which are demonstrably authentic. The Monash set of *Irma* was acquired recently from a Sydney dealer, but its previous history is unknown. Its present binding — in undistinctive green straight-grained morocco — appears to date from the late nineteenth century and, to judge from the folding and cropping of the manuscript key, is probably the third that the set has had. It may be merely coincidence that the Monash *Irma* has an 'English' provenance: Thomas Coulthard (the original owner?) has signed all four volumes, and the key is written in what is apparently another 'English' hand (which writes 'England', 'Spain', 'Germany' and 'The Pope' but 'L'Italie'). The volumes also have the modern bookplate of Harry Austin Brentnall. On the other hand, given the sheet numbers and the absence of this edition from the standard French bibliographies, the 'English' provenance may after all suggest an 'English' origin.

Whatever the precise extent of sheet numbering, I assume it to have been a device little employed, and I would guess that this assumed rarity is due to its regularity being at odds with the inherent potential for irregularity exhibited by the printing house in the hand-press period. This contention may be illustrated by reference to volume 70 in 'Constable's Miscellany' (volume 3 of *American Ornithology*), where there is an apparent excess of sheet numbers. The body of the work collates A-U^{8} — that is, it comprises twenty gatherings, or the equivalent of ten sheets — but there are *eleven* sheet numbers. The sheet numbering proceeds regularly to 9 (R1^{r}), but S1^{r} is numbered 10 and U1^{r} 11, implying at least that gatherings R and S were not imposed together. Since the purpose of the numbers can only have been, it seems to me, to identify *sheets* for the benefit of warehouseman and binder R is unlikely to have been imposed with a gathering from another work, and yet there is no 'stray' gathering in another volume of *American Ornithology* with which it could have been imposed (indeed, the final gatherings of volumes 2(X) and 4(Z) are both numbered, thereby compounding the difficulty). One can only conclude, I think, that R (and U, as well as X in volume 2 and Z in volume 4) was imposed for printing by a work-and-turn scheme. Here we seem to have an impossible situation: with most sheets imposed so as to produce a single copy of two consecutive gatherings but the occasional one imposed so as to produce two copies of a single gathering how could the warehouseman assemble a set of sheets for the bookseller or binder? The answer may lie in changes in publishing beginning in the 1820s, when responsibility for binding became the publishing-bookseller's not the retailing-bookseller's — that is, with the advent of *edition*-binding as opposed to single-copy binding), we need perhaps

to think in terms of the total impression (not the individual copy), a situation which would more easily accommodate irregularities of sheet numbering. Edition binding would even seem to obviate the need for numbering too. Moreover, wrong sheet numbers are not particularly rare, suggesting that — perhaps like press figures and paper-quality marks — sheet numbers were not always regarded as important by those who were required to insert them.

The practice of numbering sheets in volumes where the printed sheets need dividing into their constituent gatherings before binding is one which appears not to have been noted by modern bibliographers; nor have I found reference to it in English printers' grammars of the early nineteenth century. I suggest that sheet numbers are of some interest in the history of the workings of the trade in the later hand-press period: they provide yet another instance of the practice of loading the direction line with various pieces of information of no consequence to the reader but of use to members of the trade in controlling the passage of sheets through the printing house, the warehouse and the bindery. The Edinburgh practices serve to identify the arabic numbers in the direction line as indeed sheet numbers and not press figures (they occur in arithmetic progression and result in three numbers per sheet when the sheet is figured in both formes) or part numbers (there is no evidence that any of Ballantyne's printings — like the Scott editions of 1823-5 — were issued in parts, and the fact that some volumes in 'Constable's Miscellany' do not have numbers in the direction line of the first recto of every second or third gathering while others do indicates that the numbers are not part numbers; often, too, they appear not at the inner end of the direction line but between the signature and the outer end). Sheet numbers — once recognized as such — are useful in bibliographical description, in that they can reveal format independently of any other criterion: sheet numbers every third gathering, gatherings in sixes = eighteenmo; sheet numbers every second gathering, gatherings in alternating twelves and sixes = eighteenmo (actually the number of leaves in the gatherings is sufficient here to determine format); sheet numbers every second gathering, gatherings in eights = sixteenmo; sheet numbers every fourth gathering, gatherings in sixes = twentyfourmo (no such example has been seen, but the principle remains); and so on. Once a larger sample has been examined it may turn out that sheet numbers do have the capacity to localize volumes containing them, thus confirming or disproving the veracity of the imprints on their title pages. *Irma* remains a puzzle perhaps not to be resolved until the incidence of sheet numbering in French publications and the relationship of the early editions have been established.

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NOTES

1. For a range of responses to the problems caused by disturbances to the signature (and pagination) sequence see B.J. McMullin, 'Variations by Hansard on an unconventional theme', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 9(1985), 31-4.
2. See Brian Hubber, 'Eighteenmo in nines: an experimental technique', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 7(1983), 183-6.
3. See Nan Jaboor and B.J. McMullin, *James Ballantyne and Press Figures*, forthcoming.
4. The first three volumes of *Historical Romances of the Author of Waverley*; the remaining three volumes were printed in London by James Moyes and contain neither press figures nor sheet numbers.
5. The 7-volume *Novels and Romances of the Author of Waverley*.
6. On Scott's *Napoleon* see William Ruff, 'Cancels in Sir Walter Scott's "Life of Napoleon"', *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions*, 3(1948-55), 137-51, and B.J. McMullin, 'Notes on Cancellation in Scott's *Life of Napoleon*', *Studies in Bibliography*, 45(1992), 222-31.
7. On localization see R.A. Sayce, 'Compositorial Practices and the Localization of Printed Books, 1530-1800', *Library*, 5th ser., 21(1966), 1-45. (Reissued 1979 with addenda and corrigenda as Occasional Publication no.13 of the Oxford Bibliographical Society.)
8. Angus Martin, Vivienne G. Mylne and Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français 1751-1800* (London: Mansell; Paris: France Expansion, 1977).
9. André Monglond, *La France révolutionnaire et impériale; annales de bibliographie méthodique et description des livres illustrés. Tome V: années 1800-1802* (Grenoble: B. Arthaud, 1938).
10. On the authority of Quérard (*La France littéraire*) Martin-Mylne-Frautschi also list editions of 1801 in twelvemo (two volumes) and eighteenmo (four volumes), but these 1801 editions are presumably ghosts resulting from Quérard's conversion of An VIII into 1801 rather than 1800.
11. In citing BN shelf marks Monglond also draws attention to an oddity in the library's published catalogue: the twelvemo edition is recorded there as being in four volumes (**Y²**.40499-40502), the eighteenmo as being in four volumes in two (**Y²**.40503-40504). Monglond's re-assignment of shelf marks does not, however, clear up the difficulty: the twelvemo he records as being in '(2?)' volumes, assigning it the shelf-marks **Y²**.40499-40500, the eighteenmo as being in '4 tomes en 2 vol.', assigning it the shelf-marks **Y²**.40501-40504. Are there four binder's volumes or six, and what does each contain?
12. Recorded in both Martin-Mylne-Frautschi and Monglond (BN, **Y²**.40505-40508; the *National Union Catalog, pre-1956 Imprints* reports sets of what are probably this edition (18cm.) at Yale and the Newberry).