

GATHERINGS SIGNED 'J'

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IN HER REPORT on three further instances of the letter W used as a signature (derived from a sample of 1000 eighteenth-century British books) Daria Fedewytsch-Dickson has noted the absence of examples of signature sequences containing both I and J, both U and V.¹ It is proper to ask, as she does: If W is added to the conventional 23-letter signature sequence why not J (which seems never to be used *instead of I*²) and U/V,³ thus producing a 26-letter sequence? The answer probably lies in the conservatism of the printing trade: that I/J and U/V continued to be regarded as merely graphic variants (if indeed any thought at all was given to the topic) long after they had assumed their modern distinctions, whereas W was recognized as a separate letter.

Nonetheless J (*in addition to I*) is occasionally found in eighteenth-century British books. In handling bibles of the period I have noticed two instances, both of which suggest, however, that the use of J is an 'aberration', that its appearance has no utility in localizing the volumes in which it is found. The two are:

1. *The Holy Bible*. London: Charles Eyre and William Strahan, 1772, 2°. The only J signature in the whole work is 2J in the Old Testament, which extends to 8A. The explanation for this isolated instance is probably that there was a miscalculation, in which 2K was signed '2I' and printed off before 2I was ready for the press, '2J' fortuitously being available for signing what should have been '2I'. This assumption is supported by the earlier sequence in the Old Testament . . . 2A '[2B]' 2B . . ., which is to be explained only by 2C being mis-signed '2B' and printed off before 2B, which was then signed '[2B]', no free letter in this case being available.

2. *The Holy Bible*. London: I. Moore and Co., v.2 (of 5), 1774, 4°. [Re-issued 1777, with cancel title leaf bearing 'J. Fry and Co.' in the imprint and with 'eminent divines' replaced by 'eminent authors' – Joseph Fry was a Quaker.] The first four volumes have five complete alphabets, and W is included in every one except the fourth in v.2. Since the fifth alphabet in v.2 is the only one to contain J perhaps again its presence is to be explained as a mechanism for correcting an earlier miscalculation, albeit a dozen gatherings earlier in the volume. (Indeed, the W/J signatures may even be taken to demonstrate that 5K was printed before 4W (signed '4X').

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NOTES

1. Daria Fedewytsch-Dickson, 'Three further instances of W', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 17(1993), 125-6.

2. The only instance of J. used instead of I that I have noticed is a modern one, in the Munn-Pitt Report: Ralph Munn and Ernest R. Pitt, *Australian libraries: a survey of conditions and suggestions for their improvement* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1935).
3. According to Sayce (pp.18-19), in the eighteenth century U is characteristically British or German, V being used elsewhere – see R.A. Sayce, 'Compositorial practices and the localization of printed books, 1530-1800', *The Library*, 5th ser., 21(1966), 1-45 (reprinted with addenda and corrigenda as Oxford Bibliographical Society Occasional Publication no.13, 1979).

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