

'\$'" AS A STATEMENT OF SIGNING

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Though the so-called Greg-Bowers conventions of bibliographical description achieved a general fixity after 1949 with the appearance and subsequent widespread acceptance of Fredson Bowers's *Principles of Bibliographical Description*, it ought not to be assumed that those conventions cannot be exposed to further consideration and hence possible modification or amplification. Indeed, both modifications and amplifications have been suggested in the past forty-odd years, notably by G. Thomas Tanselle,¹ so that today alternative methods are available for dealing with established phenomena and methods have been devised for coping with phenomena the significance of which to the bibliographical record was not in 1949 appreciated.

One area in which there has been further discussion is the use of '\$', treated by Bowers on pages 266-8. By 1949 '\$' was 'in common use', employed 'when we wish to make a statement that will apply to all the gatherings in a book, or all less only a few' - thus '\$4 signed' indicates that in the particular volume, the first four leaves in every gathering are signed. In this usage, '\$4' means 'in every gathering, every leaf up to and including the fourth', but '\$' is also used in a rather different way, to specify a particular leaf or page - thus, for example, 'the press figures customarily appear on \$1^v and \$8^v'; in other words, the precise meaning of '\$' is dependent on context. The 'awkwardness' of using one symbol for two different purposes has already been pointed out,² and it might be added that the conflicting usage is at odds with the general aim of precision in bibliographical description. Tanselle's recommendation, which he rightly judges to be 'scarcely more cumbersome', is to use a comprehensive statement of signing, as '\$1-4 signed', thereby making the two usages consistent. It may be supposed that Tanselle's expansion will eventually become the preferred method of reporting statements of signing, not only because it *does* achieve consistency, but also because it accords well with the aim of achieving precision.

A formulation such as '\$4' or '\$1-4' in the statement of signing presents no difficulties when the volume in question is entirely or substantially made up of gatherings of the same number of leaves, any variations to the norm being accommodated by the use of '+' or '-', as '\$1-4 signed (-A1,2 H4, +H5)'. Difficulties arise, however, when the volume is made up of gatherings of various numbers of leaves: using standard Greg-Bowers conventions, statements of signing may become lengthy and complex. Where the variation is regular, as in a twelvemo in alternating 8s and 4s, the convention may be extended quite readily - thus '\$1-4 signed in gatherings in 8s, \$1-2 in gatherings in 4s', or, in Tanselle's attractive modification, '\$1-4 in \$⁸ and \$1-2 in \$⁴ signed'. But there are more complex volumes, where there is no pattern at all, where the pattern is less straightforward or where the pattern changes within the volume and therefore where neither the Greg-Bowers nor the Tanselle formulation is particularly succinct. Such volumes may well be sufficiently rare as to make ac-

ceptable the extensive statement of signing which their make-up may require, but, by the same token, if a succinct formulation can be devised to accommodate them it will also cover volumes of the alternating 8s and 4s type, as well as of the more usual, straightforward type.

Such 'complex' volumes may be exemplified by Desprez de Boissy's *Lettres sur les spectacles; avec une histoire des ouvrages pour & contre les théâtres*, 5th edn, Paris, chez Butard; Boudet; Saillant & Nyon; la Veuve Desaint, 1774, which in the Monash University copy (*175.2 D473L, bound in two volumes),³ disregarding the numerous cancels, collates:

a¹⁰ A-2L^{8/4} χ² 2M-2Y¹² 2Z⁶ 3A-3D¹² 3E¹² (-3E12) 3F⁶ ¶²

In gathering a, leaves 2-5 are signed; in gatherings in 8s, \$1-4; in gatherings in 4s, \$1-2(-Q2); in gatherings in 12s, \$1-6; in gatherings 2Z and 3F, \$1-3(+3F4); and in ¶ only the first leaf. A statement of signing formulated according to strict Greg-Bowers conventions would probably follow much the same pattern as the summary just provided. Following Tanselle's modification we could write '\$1-4 in \$⁸, \$1-2 in \$⁴(-Q2), \$1-6 in \$¹², \$1-3 in \$⁶ (+3F4), a2-5, ¶1 signed'. But the characteristic common to all the signed gatherings - with three exceptions, one of them (a1) conventional and perhaps therefore not to be specifically noted - is that half the leaves are signed, regardless of whether the gatherings are in 2s, 4s, 6s, 8s, 10s or 12s.

The simplest solution, therefore, to the problem of how best (i.e. succinctly and intelligibly) to provide a statement of signing for volumes of this complexity would be to modify the convention even further by using '\$^{1/2}' to signify that in every gathering half the leaves are signed. In this system, the statement of signing for *Lettres sur les spectacles* would thus read simply '\$^{1/2} signed (-a1, Q2, +3F4)' or '\$^{1/2} signed (-Q2, +3F4)'. The attraction of '\$^{1/2}' lies not simply in its succinctness: it is also of wide application, holding for a large proportion of the printed books of the hand-press period (in that half the leaves in every gathering were normally signed). It is also capable of further modification to cope with 'oversigning', so that '\$^{1/2} + 1 signed' might represent, for example, a twelvemo in alternating 8s and 4s or an eighteenmo in alternating 12s and 6s where in every gathering one more than half the leaves are signed - and other formulations could also be imagined, like '\$^{1/2} - 1 signed'. While volumes with a general consistency in the number of leaves to a gathering may be equally well described in the traditional way it might be suggested that for volumes varying in the number of leaves to a gathering the formulation '\$^{1/2}' would be a useful modification.

A similar proposal was made nearly thirty years ago, by Willem Daniël Margadant in the introduction ('Descriptive Bibliography applied to Botany') to his *Early Bryological Literature*:⁴

To simplify the enumeration of signatures of unequal gatherings,
I propose an indication of the general method by using the
Greek letter γ (gamma) for the total number of leaves per gather-

ing. '\$½γ signed' means that half the number of leaves per gathering are signed, e.g. in the format 12° in 8s and 4s this means that leaves 1-4 in all gatherings with 8 leaves and leaves 1-2 in those with 4 leaves are signed; '\$½γ + 1 signed' means that one more leaf is signed than half the number per gathering, that is in the same example leaves 1-5 in odd numbered gatherings and leaves 1-3 in even numbered gatherings.

There are two reasons for reconsidering Margadant's proposal. The immediate one is that it was not made in a specifically bibliographical context, such as one of the specialised bibliographical journals, and therefore has probably remained unknown to most bibliographers. Any knowledge of it that they may have is likely to be as a result of Tanselle's typically exhaustive trawling of sources in writing his 'Title-Page Transcription . . .'; but even in Tanselle's article it has perhaps been lost to view by being relegated to a footnote (p.79, fn.79). The second is that Tanselle has perhaps not done justice to the proposal, simply asserting his preference for a different formulation:

[Margadant] goes on . . . to propose what seems to me an unnecessary elaboration: the Greek letter gamma to stand for the (variable) total number of leaves in a gathering, so that one can say "\$½ γ signed", meaning that half the total number of leaves in each gathering is signed, regardless of how the bulk of the gatherings varies. When a book has, for example, a regular alternation of eight-leaf and four-leaf gatherings, I see no objection to the slightly longer statement "\$1-4 in \$⁸ and \$1-2 in \$⁴ signed."

Tanselle's belief that the inclusion of 'γ' is an unnecessary elaboration does not take into account the difficulty facing Margadant in overcoming the issue of maintaining consistency in the statement of signing. Tanselle does not discuss the introduction of '\$½' without the addition of 'γ' to represent the total number of leaves in a gathering, a formulation which would, in fact, be creating yet another meaning for '\$' which was dependent on context, as it does not make sense in this case for '\$½' to mean 'in every gathering, every leaf up to and including ½'. Margadant introduces 'γ' to stand for the total number of leaves in a gathering in an attempt to overcome the the problem of using '½' in the statement of signing in the position which is normally occupied by figures representing specific leaves in a gathering. The fact that Tanselle does not discuss the utility of '½' itself is an unfortunate oversight, as the logic of the proposal has much merit.

The use of '\$^γ' as an alternative to Margadant's proposal does away with any confusion in using '½' to represent half the leaves in a gathering and does not require the introduction of a new symbol. The formulation also aligns with Tanselle's own practice of using superscript figures as a concise means of representing the number of leaves in a gathering – e.g. when a volume is made up of gatherings in 8s and 4s, as in Tanselle's example. A formulation such as '\$^γ' has much

to commend it in the description of complex volumes like *Lettres sur les spectacles*, and it is both succinct and of general application.

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NOTES

1. Among Tanselle's contributions to the topic of descriptive bibliography are, to go no further than his essays in *Studies in Bibliography*, 'A System of Color Identification for Bibliographical Description', 20(1967), 203-34; 'The Bibliographical Description of Patterns', 23(1970), 71-102; 'The Bibliographical Description of Paper', 24(1971), 27-67; 'The Description of Non-Letterpress Material in Books', 35(1982), 1-42; 'Title-Page Transcription and Signature Collation Reconsidered', 38(1985), 45-81; 'A Sample Bibliographical Description, with Commentary', 40(1987), 1-30.
2. By Tanselle, in 'Title-Page Transcription . . .', p.79.
3. Though the Monash copy is in two binder's volumes it constitutes only one bibliographically distinct volume, having continuous signatures and pagination (the 'title page' to 'volume two' is $\chi 1$).
4. Willem Daniël Margadant, *Early Bryological Literature; a descriptive bibliography of selected publications treating musci during the first decades of the nineteenth century and especially of the years 1825, 1826 and 1827*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Hunt Botanical Library, 1968 (Doctoral thesis, University of Utrecht), p.25.