

## PROBLEMATIC TITLE-PAGES: A CASE STUDY FROM THE 1880s

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The title-page of a book is usually regarded as its defining element, declaring the intellectual and physical genesis of the book.<sup>1</sup> However bibliographical history is full of questions about the accuracy of information that title-pages present. Sometimes they are deliberately falsified for pecuniary reasons or to avoid political or religious persecution.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes there are more egotistical motives. Thomas J. Wise, perhaps the most famous manipulator of title-pages in bibliographic history, seems to have been motivated as much by the desire to invent and claim possession of bibliographical rarities as to make money from his creations.<sup>3</sup> More typically though, problematic title-pages are comparatively innocent, being caused not by deliberate misrepresentation, but by changes in intention, misunderstandings between author, publisher and printer, or by adventitious circumstances involving perhaps outbreak of war, a shortage of paper, or the untimely appearance of a competing book. However, this innocence does not make them less puzzling. This article is concerned with one such problem, the publication of Mrs Campbell Praed's novel *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*. The problem can be stated thus:

The London publishing house Richard Bentley and Son, Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty, the Queen, signed an agreement with Praed on 15 May 1886 to purchase for £125 publication rights to *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* for thirteen months from 1 September 1886 to 30 September 1887, on the understanding that the manuscript would make two volumes, crown octavo.<sup>4</sup> Praed was prohibited from issuing a popular edition during the period, but did retain the right to publish serial versions in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* and the Melbourne *Age*. Profits from the sale of other serial rights or translations were to be divided equally between author and publisher. This contract meant that all publishing rights reverted to the author on 1 October 1887. Thus, with just over a year in which to make his profit, it would seem to have been in Bentley's best interest to publish *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* as soon as possible after 1 September 1886. However, the novel did not appear until mid-May the following year when there were only four and a half months left to run in

1. *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules: British Text* (London: Library Association, 1967), p.9.
2. See Michael Treadwell, 'On False and Misleading Imprints in the London Book Trade, 1660-1750' in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds., *Fakes and Frauds: Varieties of Deception in Print and Manuscript* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies; Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1989), pp.29-46.
3. John Carter, 'Thomas J. Wise in Perspective', in William B. Todd, ed., *Thomas J. Wise: Centenary Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), p.18.
4. Richard Bentley & Son, *The Archives of Richard Bentley & Son, 1829-1898* (Cambridge: Chadwyck Healey, 1976), L63, 115.

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the contract. Moreover, when it did appear five months into 1887, it bore on the title-page, '1886'. What had caused these anomalies? From the surviving records of the Bentley publishing house, Praed's own financial records, and correspondence between Bentley and Praed, the publication history of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* can be reconstructed to answer this question and to canvass the more general problems associated with publishing history it uncovers.

The most likely explanation for the delay in publication, despite Bentley's limited tenure on the rights, would be simply that the author was slow in delivering copy. Authors were, and are, notorious for tardy delivery, and Praed in 1886 was subject to ill health, family difficulties,<sup>5</sup> and a busy schedule.<sup>6</sup> This, however, was not the case with *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*. A substantial part of the book was in hand when the agreement was signed, and correspondence shows that it was completed before the end of June 1886.<sup>7</sup> Nor did the publisher require extensive changes, as he had done with Praed's earlier novel, *Policy and Passion* in 1881.<sup>8</sup> Although his acceptance of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* was 'subject to my seeing in it nothing to object to',<sup>9</sup> Bentley still had not read the complete book when it was eventually published in May the following year. When Praed wrote to thank him for copies of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*, she said that she would greatly value Bentley's literary opinion of the book if he had 'time to give her a glance ... because she was rather a new departure for me.'<sup>10</sup>

Bentley, then, had a complete and apparently satisfactory MS by 30 June 1886, two months before his publication rights commenced, which should have provided

5. Praed had a notoriously philandering husband and four children including a deaf daughter, Maud, for whom she sought innovative education. See Patricia Clarke, *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1999).
6. Praed completed three novels in 1886 and toured the United States with her husband and her co-author, Justin McCarthy. *Ibid.*, p.97-99.
7. Letter, Praed to Bentley, 21 June 1886.
8. Bentley sent a barrage of correspondence to Praed requesting extensive re-writes of passages in *Policy and Passion* that he considered unsuitable for his reading public saying, 'It is too plainly put....All the wine drinking and the temptations of her [Mrs Vallancy's] personal appearance are so realistic as to leave a very unpleasant impression.' See Praed Papers (John Oxley Library, Brisbane), 9/4/4, 9/4/6, 9/4/7, 9/4/8, 9/4/9, 9/4/10.
9. Praed Papers, 9/4/50.
10. Letter, Praed to Bentley, 24 May 1887. This was not the only example of a publisher accepting Praed's work sight unseen. In 1882 Fred Chapman of Chapman and Hall had sent the MS of *Nadine* direct to the printer without opening it. See 'My Literary Beginnings', *Brisbane Grammar School Magazine*, (Brisbane: Brisbane Grammar School, 1900):19, and Colin Roderick, *In Mortal Bondage: The Strange Life of Rosa Praed* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948), p.91. When Trishler Ltd negotiated for *The Soul of Countess Adrian* in 1889, but found the story too short, they offered Praed an immediate payment conditional on the story being expanded by about a third. Praed Papers, 9/1/4.

ample time for the book to be printed and bound. In fact, he had it typeset at that point. On 21 June 1886, Praed had written to Bentley that *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* would be finished in three days and commended the printer's promptness with the proofs of the early chapters.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the Bentley Ledger shows that the printer, Billing and Sons, was paid for printing 1000 sets of sheets by September 1886. The sheets were thus ready for binding by the Bentley licence date of 1 September 1886, but were held back.

The second possible cause of this delay was complication caused by serial publication. When Praed licensed the book to Bentley, she expressly reserved the rights for colonial serial publication specifying two newspapers, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* and the *Melbourne Age*, in which serialisations were to appear. These provisos may have been made on spec, since the only serial publication which resulted was one in the *Melbourne Leader*, the *Age's* weekly sister newspaper, the agreement for which was not signed until 12 June 1886. From the outset, though, Praed was negotiating with Bentley for advance sheets for the colonial serialisation.<sup>12</sup> Serial publication in the *Leader* ran from 7 August 1886 to 25 December 1886. The plan for a serialisation in Sydney appears to have come to nothing. Moreover, there is no evidence of serial publication in the United Kingdom itself, or for that matter in the United States.

Where his own publications were concerned, Bentley observed the common practice of delaying book publication until the serial had almost or entirely finished its run. Thus, when he published Praed's third novel, *Zéro: A Story of Monte Carlo*, it ran in *Temple Bar* from January to May 1884, appearing in book form only in April. Often such delayed publication was specified in the book contracts themselves.<sup>13</sup> In the present instance, however, there was no legal requirement for Bentley to have postponed the release of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* because of its serial publication in a weekly newspaper in a faraway colony, although it is possible that he delayed out of courtesy to Praed.

The publishing records throw further light on the production of the book. We have seen that the book was typeset at the end of June, possibly to allow Praed to supply sheets for colonial serialisation, and that Bentley's limited licence commenced on 1 September 1886. The sheets were printed by September 1886, so there should have been no impediment to the prompt binding and publishing of the book. In fact, however, the sheets were warehoused for several months, Bentley making no move to publish until December. At that time he sent 500 copies for binding, no doubt hoping to meet strong demand during the Christmas season.

11. Letter, Praed to Bentley, 21 June 1886.

12. Letter, Praed to Bentley, 24 May 1886.

13. Bentley bought the serial rights to *Zéro* stipulating it should not appear in book form 'until the appearance of the penultimate portion in *Temple Bar*'. *Praed Papers*, 9/4/33. In his agreement with Chatto and Windus for serial rights to *Red Spider* by Rev. S. Baring Gould, Bentley also states that this 'story is not to be issued in a complete form earlier than six (6) weeks before its conclusion in the *Temple Bar Magazine*.' *The Archives of Richard Bentley & Son, 1829-1898*, L63, 91.

In the meantime, Praed had been busy. On 20 August 1886 she signed an agreement with F.V. White for a new novel, turning to rather a different topic, the desperation of an unhappily married woman in contemporary London. This short novel, *The Bond of Wedlock*, which became Praed's most controversial work, was written swiftly – White released it in January 1887, the first reviews appearing around the 20th. Although normally aware of Praed's work, Bentley apparently knew nothing of this new book until he saw the preliminary advertising the month before it appeared. He wrote with mild annoyance on 12 December 1886 that the publication of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* would have to be delayed because of 'the announcement of another story by you', and that this was 'rather a blow to us'.<sup>14</sup>

One might say, of course, that he had only himself to blame. He had been in a position to publish from the beginning of September, when there had been no conflict of Praed titles in the market.<sup>15</sup> Why had he delayed so long? One possible explanation, as we have seen, is that he was willing to allow the colonial serial version to run its course first. A second possible explanation is a seasonal one. Despite his limited tenure on publication rights, Bentley seems to have been in no rush to publish. Praed was a popular novelist in the 1880s, but not the author of runaway best-sellers as Mrs Humphrey Ward was, so there was no special priority in getting her into print. Moreover, Bentley was a high-end fiction publisher whose normal practice was to print a modest edition of 750 or 1000 copies of a three-decker for the circulating libraries, which would yield a small profit. If the novel proved to be extremely popular he would consider a 6/- one-volume reprint. He did not, however, chase the mass market with 2/6 and 6d editions, and many of his novels appeared in three-decker editions only, allowing others to produce the cheaper editions.<sup>16</sup> Praed's novel would have been a significant, but non-stellar, item in the annual publication programme. Given the date of the licence, Bentley must have already decided that it was too late for the 1886 summer season, so probably always intended to publish it late in 1886 for Christmas sales – although if this were so he did have it imposed surprisingly early. Having sent the first batch of sheets for binding in mid-December, Bentley was confounded to discover that he had lost the Christmas window also, because of the announcement of Praed's other novel. *The Bond of Wedlock* was also a two-volume work, and although there were differences in setting and in the age of the heroine, Bentley clearly believed that its appearance would mar the sales of the book he was publishing. The next prime time to release such a novel would be early summer, even though that meant holding the book back for a further five months. And this is what he did. The publisher's ledger shows payments for binding in batches made from December 1886 to September 1887.

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14. Praed Papers, 9/5/2.

15. Praed had published *The Right Honourable* with Chatto and Windus in April 1886, but this had been a joint work with Justin McCarthy which was published anonymously.

16. *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* was republished in 1890 by Ward & Downey in a poorly-proofed yellowback edition.

While 500 copies were bound in the first batch in December 1886, the remaining sheets in the warehouse all bore the date '1886' on the title-page, but while Bentley could easily have ordered a new first sheet to correct the date, he did not do so. There are two possible reasons for this omission, both of them unspectacular. He may have decided that the circulating libraries and their patrons would not care, or perhaps even notice, that a May publication bore the previous year's date,<sup>17</sup> or he may simply have forgotten. Even if he did remember, the fact that some copies had already been bound with the old date might have tipped the balance against providing a revised first sheet for the edition.

The book was published on 12 May 1887 and received a mixed reception. While the *St James Gazette* lauded Praed's 'bright and clever' pictures of colonial society,<sup>18</sup> the *Saturday Review* felt Praed was trading on her name and declared roundly that 'as an anonymous story *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* would never have found a publisher.'<sup>19</sup> The stock of two-volume copies was not exhausted until the following year, but it is possible that Bentley uncharacteristically contemplated a one-volume edition of the novel. The *English Catalogue of Books* has two entries for *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*. Both editions are listed in 1887; the original two-volume crown octavo edition at 21 shillings, and a new edition at 3s 6d.<sup>20</sup> Since information in the *ECB* was supplied by publishers this may indicate an intention to republish, but that does not seem to have happened. There is no indication in the Bentley ledgers or Trade Book that such an edition was ever published, nor has any copy ever been located. The *Lists of the Publications of Richard Bentley and Son* records only the 21 shilling version, noting that 'a popular edition of the story was subsequently published in London elsewhere'.<sup>21</sup>

The one residual puzzle in the case is Bentley's apparent ability to disregard the time limits of the agreement. Absolute copyright of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* reverted to Praed on 1 October 1887, but Bentley continued to advertise and sell copies well into 1888. The Bentley ledger has a question mark beside the annotation 'To Rights 1 year' in the entry for *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*, but rather than this indicating any sort of possible extension, it probably simply notices the fact that the term on the Agreement was 13 months rather than the usual 12. In fact, Bentley's business dealings with Praed were far less precise than a 13-month agreement suggests. Typically, their agreements were arranged in a strikingly casual manner, with a most

17. The date is silently corrected in the review in the *Saturday Review* (9 July 1887, p.53).

18. *St James Gazette*, 7 July 1887, p.7.

19. *Saturday Review*, 9 July 1887, p.53.

20. *The English Catalogue of Books 1881-1889*, p.462. This *ECB* entry for a one-volume edition is puzzling. That the price announced was 3/6d rather than 6/- suggests, however, that the volume was intended for the colonial library, perhaps as a companion volume to Praed's *Longleat of Kooralbyn*, the 1887 Australian edition of *Policy and Passion*, which Bentley had re-published in one volume as long ago as 1881. If this was the intention, however, it was inexplicably abandoned.

21. Richard Bentley & Son, *The Lists of the Publications of Richard Bentley & Son, 1829-1898*. (Cambridge: Chadwyck Healey, 1975), frame 2054.

un-businesslike give and take. When Bentley published another of Praed's and Justin McCarthy's collaborations, *The Rebel Rose*, in 1888, he wrote to ask her what she thought they should be paid for it, as he couldn't predict sales.<sup>22</sup> In another letter he asked Praed to remind him about the verbal agreement they had made on a manuscript, *The Ladies Gallery*.<sup>23</sup> Such a relaxed approach to their business dealings suggests that Praed could have verbally agreed to Bentley continuing to sell *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* for an extended period, or even that Bentley would assume permission to continue indefinitely unless Praed had assigned the rights to another publisher. There is no mention in the publication agreement of how any remaining books were to be disposed of or divided up after the contract expired. As this is an important component that should be covered in an agreement to ensure conflict does not arise,<sup>24</sup> its absence implies that they did not consider such a clause necessary.

Praed's dealings with George Bentley show the complexities that can emerge in the author-publisher relationship. In their letters they regularly discussed whatever book Praed was working on, whether Bentley was its publisher or not.<sup>25</sup> Bentley could be both editor and censor, especially of the early novels. But the very informality of their relationship, which offers so much informative correspondence to the modern researcher, also creates problems in reconstructing the facts of the publishing. The extant correspondence is sometimes elliptical and offers only a partial record in two senses: it is itself an incomplete collection of the letters that must have been written, and it is only one facet of a longstanding dialogue which was partly written and partly spoken.<sup>26</sup> It is clear from the extant letters that Praed and Bentley had numerous social meetings, both alone and with mutual friends. Given the trusting casualness of their business relations, this raises the likelihood of undocumented verbal business arrangements such as the extension of the licence to publish *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*. Even though we have extensive supplementary evidence allowing us to chart accurately the chronology of the setting, printing, binding and publication of *Miss Jacobsen's Chance*, Bentley's motives in allowing the outdated title-page to stand – the real nub of the problem – can only be inferred.

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22. Praed Papers, 9/4/57.

23. Praed Papers, 9/4/58.

24. Royal A. Gettman, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960), p.90.

25. But not, as we have seen, *The Bond of Wedlock*.

26. Bentley and Praed corresponded sporadically for more than a decade. At times they wrote twice in one day but at other times not for months, depending upon their health and work commitments. The irregularity of their correspondence makes it more difficult to gauge how much of a gap exists in surviving records.