

## Dawson Described

B. J. McMULLIN

Among recent articles in these pages I have found of especial interest Robert Dawson's "Notes on Press-figures in France and the Localization of Books during the later 18th Century"<sup>1</sup>—of interest not just for its subject matter but also for the manner of its presentation, specifically for the conventions employed in describing the items under discussion. These conventions will be unfamiliar to many readers, given that they are apparently peculiar to Dawson: as far as I have determined, hitherto they have been employed only in articles by him in volumes from the series "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century."<sup>2</sup>

What is noteworthy about "Notes on Press-figures in France" is that it has been published in a periodical the province of which is bibliography, not literature, history or any other topic which might be subsumed under the rubric "culture"; it will therefore be seen primarily as an example of bibliographical scholarship, rather than perhaps as an appendage to a literary-historical work, even though, as it happens, the subject may be an aspect of the workings of the book trade. This extension into a specifically bibliographical periodical prompts the question whether the Dawson conventions—so novel in various respects—offer advantages not provided by practices more familiar to readers of recent bibliographical scholarship.

The mere fact of their employment here, certified by an editor and, I assume, a referee, may suggest that they have been considered as having some standing as an alternative system, one which could be taken up by other bibliographers—as far as I have determined none have. The purpose of the present commentary, therefore, is to consider the Dawson conventions in an attempt to establish whether in fact they do offer advantages over currently-accepted practices in the description of books, more particularly books of the hand-press period. I expect that readers perhaps less committed to current practices may wish to argue the case differently.



For the past half-century or so analytical and descriptive bibliographers of hand-printed books (and often enough of machine-printed) working in the Anglo-American tradition have employed as their *lingua franca* what have come to be known as the Greg-Bowers conventions. These are essentially the practices and recommendations of Sir Walter Greg and other British bibliographers of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, such as A. W. Pollard and R.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Dawson, "Notes on Press-figures in France and the Localization of Books during the later 18th Century," *BSANZ Bulletin* 28.3 (2004), 97–121.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Robert Dawson, "Notes on Recording Eighteenth-century French Books," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 304 (1993), 956–63.

B. McKerrow, brought together and elaborated on by Fredson Bowers in his *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (1949).<sup>3</sup>

Despite Bowers's *Principles* being generally regarded by bibliographers as their Cocker or Hoyle it does not exhibit the rigidity that might be expected of a code. Often enough provision is made for alternative ways of reporting particular elements, such as the contents of publications. In addition a number of further alternatives have been proposed by subsequent bibliographers, notably G. Thomas Tanselle, who in a number of articles, many of them published in *Studies in Bibliography*, has subjected various elements of Greg-Bowers to close examination. In certain instances Tanselle's proposals have been accepted by at least some bibliographers, as with his more logical and consistent way of describing and referring to insertions, deletions and cancellantia.<sup>4</sup> Also the efficacy of certain of the conventions has been questioned—as, for example, in David Foxon's study of title-page transcription.<sup>5</sup> And the conventions have had to be extended in order to devise methods of accommodating and describing aspects of book making not widely recognized or understood in 1949; for example, W. B. Todd's dissertation of that year<sup>6</sup> established the extent and significance of press figures in British publications of the eighteenth century, thus necessitating a discussion of how to record their incidence.<sup>7</sup> None the less, despite these qualifications, the Greg-Bowers conventions have won near-universal acceptance, being considered as fundamental to bibliographical description and to be departed from or modified only with good cause. With all their "allowable" variants and subsequent refinements they would seem to have reached a state in which they are able to provide a method for describing all but the most recherché of phenomena.

In this light any conventions based on different principles will almost certainly have difficulty in establishing themselves, and their proponents can be expected to justify their practices by demonstrating their superiority, in terms of intelligibility, precision, conciseness, consistency, efficacy or whatever. Since Dawson has not provided his own comprehensive "Principles" his conventions will need to be derived from their implementation in, for example, the *Bulletin* article: Do they in fact offer any advantages over the practices embodied in the existing *lingua franca*? And is the Dawson system an acceptable alternative to the Greg-Bowers?

<sup>3</sup> Fredson Bowers, *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949). Bowers' *Principles* have been reissued several times by Russell & Russell (New York) and, more recently, by Oak Knoll (New Castle, DE).

<sup>4</sup> G. Thomas Tanselle, "Title-page Transcription and Signature Collation Reconsidered," *Studies in Bibliography* 38 (1985), 45–81 (especially 65–81).

<sup>5</sup> David F. Foxon, *Thoughts on the History and Future of Bibliographical Description* (Los Angeles: School of Library Service; Berkeley: School of Librarianship, University of California, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> W. B. Todd, "Procedures for Determining the Identity and Order of Certain Eighteenth-century Editions" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1949).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, G. T. Tanselle, "The Recording of Press Figures," *The Library*, 5th ser., 21 (1966), 318–25.



As observed in the "Notes on Press-figures in France," Dawson outlined his "methodology" in his study *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777* (1992).<sup>8</sup> In the page-and-a-half outline he expresses his debt "to Bowers, Gaskell and to so many others" but cautions that "Because I have not followed norms concerning descriptive bibliography ... the reader should not think that what scholars have proposed have been disregarded." He does little to argue for his system beyond proposing (i) that in its simplifications it will be "readily comprehensible to bibliologists as well as to those not expert in the many fields involved" and (ii) that his method of recording "collational statements for the signatures" may provide "crucial clues regarding place and date of printing," concerns which "bibliographers have usually neglected to take into account."<sup>10</sup> Since the Dawson's outline offers only a sketchy account, the fact that it will not be readily available to all interested readers is not a serious drawback. What follows, then, is my explication of the conventions based essentially on their exemplification in the recent article.

The purpose of the "Notes on Press-figures in France" does not call for a quasi-facsimile transcription of title pages, which are in any case reproduced, albeit much reduced. However, in *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777* Dawson does transcribe title pages, many of which are reproduced apparently to scale, and, apart from the use of the solidus (the "/") to indicate the ends of lines—hardly a problem in the eighteenth century—the transcriptions have been constructed along Greg-Bowers lines. In neither publication does the description include a record of contents as such, leaving the "technical description" as my sole concern here.

For convenience I have taken as my primary source for a discussion of the Dawson conventions the description of Anon.,<sup>11</sup> *La Liturgie* (Londres: Nourse & P. Elmsly, 1776).<sup>12</sup> Note that I have not seen a copy of the volume itself and therefore have not been able to resolve any uncertainties; on the other hand, one might expect the description not to give rise to any uncertainties. Dawson's entry reads:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Notes on Press-figures in France," 108, citing Robert Dawson, *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777: Copyright and Public Domain, with an Edition of the Permit Registers* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Tylorian Institution, 1992), 229–30. *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 301.

<sup>9</sup> *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Properly, the Church of England.

<sup>12</sup> "Notes on Press-figures in France," 109–10.

<sup>13</sup> Rather than quotation marks, which, as well as giving the text a fly-spot appearance, have a specific use in bibliographical description of the Greg-Bowers variety, in what follows I have used bold to indicate quotation from *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777* or from the above description, as well as my own suggestions. And where I have suggested an alternative it is to be assumed that it is provided for in the Greg-Bowers conventions.

In-12: 2pl + [iii]-vi, VII-XIII, xiv-xv [or xiv, XV], XVI-XLIX, [L] + [1]-438p.; 373=374

Sign.: 2pl + \*[1]-\*6, [\*7-\*12] to [\*\*12] + A-A7, [A8-A12] to [S12], T-T3; \*4=4, P7=[P7], Q6=6, Q7=[Q7], R7=[R7], S7=[S7]

Press-figures: \*4/X=9; \*5/XII=10; S8/423=10; S12/432=9

In this entry In-12 is not incorrect, being the French equivalent of 12°, but it does seem incongruous used in an “Anglo” journal.<sup>14</sup>

The 2pl. indicates two preliminary leaves, invariably half title- and titleleaf, the verso blank in so far as pagination is concerned,<sup>15</sup> but since the statement of extent is otherwise expressed in terms of *pages* a statement couched also in pages would seem called for, as 4pp. (with a record of their contents specified in another part of the description). Here, however, the third and fourth preliminary pages should presumably be associated with the following sequence, and inferred as beginning that sequence—thus 1pl + [i-iii]-vi. But this last formulation does not unambiguously indicate that the first numbered page is indeed iv, as seems likely/intended; for absolute clarity I should prefer 1pl + [i-iii] iv-vi. There is also a general principle involved here, regardless of the conventions being employed: that (at least ideally) nothing should be left to inference, specifically that where the actual numbering resumes after an inference the resumption should be made explicit. The only way of unambiguously describing the un-numbered preliminary pages is, it seems, [2] {i.e. a total of two unnumbered pages about the numbering of which no inference can be made},<sup>16</sup> resulting in [2], [i-iii] iv-vi.

Dawson notes that “The letters forming the page numbers of the preliminaries are of the same size. They differ in the transcription in order to show the different styles. Thus there is no way of telling whether ‘XV,’ for example, was meant to be perceived as ‘xv’ or ‘XV.’”<sup>17</sup> The “problem” here is that the elaboration of the record of pagination incorporates peculiarities of styling; on the other hand actual errors are noted separately, as 373=374 {i.e. 373 is mis-numbered 374}. A more explicit statement might regard the preliminary sequence as being throughout in roman caps, with the exceptions being noted, so that a revised pagination might read:

<sup>14</sup> It could be claimed that Dawson is not working within the Anglo-American tradition, but I think that the appearance of his article in a journal published in a country whose bibliographers by and large would locate themselves in this tradition justifies subjecting it to the present scrutiny. Moreover the title obscures the fact that the article itself deals with French and British publications.

<sup>15</sup> Dawson uses “pagination” when he intends “contents”; in this he is not alone (see for example, William B. Todd and Ann Bowden, *Sir Walter Scott: A Bibliographical History 1796-1832* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 1998), but there is no obvious reason why the one term should serve two purposes when separate unexceptionable terms are available.

<sup>16</sup> The “curly” brackets are mine, square ones Dawson’s.

<sup>17</sup> *The French Booktrade and the ‘Permission Simple’ of 1777*, 110.

[2], [I-III] IV-XLIX [L], [1] 2-438 (IV-VI XIV in lower case; 373  
mis-signed 374)

A collation formula for a volume is intended to (i) list the sequence of signatures; (ii) report the number of leaves in each gathering; (iii) indicate the make-up of the gatherings (i.e. to reveal the conjugacy—or lack thereof—of the leaves within the gatherings); (iv) provide an unambiguous system of reference (independent of the pagination). The Dawson system copes satisfactorily with (i) and (ii), less clearly with (iv), and not with (iii).

There is a decided problem afforded by 2pl: presumably the two leaves are unsigned, but are they conjugate?, and how are they to be referred to? The accepted way of designating unsigned preliminary leaves is to refer to them as  $\pi$ , so that here we could expect  $\pi 2$  (if conjugate) or  $\pi 1 2\pi 1$  (if disjunct), reference being to  $\pi 1$  and  $\pi 2$  in the first instance and  $\pi 1$  and  $2\pi 1$  in the second.

The gatherings run \*, \*\*, A-S in twelves, implicitly of normal conjugacy. T, however, is an oddity: it consists of three leaves, but of unstated conjugacy; if we assume that T2 and T3 are conjugate the make-up could be expressed, depending on the status of the remaining leaf, as T4(-T4) or T4(-T1), and the collation formula would read:

$\pi 2, * - ** 12, A-S 12 T4(-T4) \{ \text{or } T4(-T1) \}$  {some bibliographers  
would prefer 2\* to \*\*}

The Dawson system uses brackets to indicate that particular leaves are not signed (here in a generally consistent pattern), as A-A7, [A8-A12] to [S12]; that is, in every gathering in twelves the first seven leaves are signed. As with the statement of pagination, there is ambiguity (or perhaps "some uncertainty") in the statement of signing: presumably \*2 is signed, for example. The use of brackets here is unfortunate, since they are also used for inference, as in the pagination record. It is also an unnecessary practice, since there already exists an accepted shorthand method of indicating how many leaves in a gathering are signed: \$ {i.e. in every gathering (the following holds true)}<sup>18</sup>—thus:

$\pi 2, * - 2 * 12, A-S 12 T4(-T4) (\$ 7 \text{ signed } [- * 1, * 7, 2 * 7, P 7, Q 7, R 7, S 7; * 4 \text{ mis-signed } 4, Q 6 \text{ mis-signed } 6])$

The use of "=" is a handy shorthand device, suggested by Tanselle, if one remembers the order of elements: P7=[P7] means that the leaf P7 is actually (unlike the seventh leaf in the generality of gatherings) unsigned.

Again as an argument for precision—this time in reference systems—I would suggest that a distinction should always be made between leaf and page, rather than allowing a reference designating leaf to stand for its recto in certain situations (this

<sup>18</sup> In actual fact Tanselle's recommendation is to be preferred: that in statements of signing the *extent* of the signing should be indicated, as \$1-7 signed, thus distinguishing this usage from others, such as the press figures invariably appear on \$8v.

is a practice of bibliographers such as Philip Gaskell).<sup>19</sup> For example, a record of contents may be found beginning  $\pi 1$  half-title; A1 title page;...rather than  $\pi 1r$ ... A1r..., without introducing any uncertainty, on the grounds that half-titles and titles are to be understood as being always on rectos (unless, in unusual circumstances, explicitly on a verso), as Dawson stipulates; none the less, I suggest that it is preferable to specify that a particular page is blank, wherever it appears in the volume, on the grounds that the copy in hand may deviate from the published ideal by having text there. In the record of press figures Dawson extends this practice, perhaps in order to eliminate altogether the use of superior r and v to indicate recto and verso (they are nowhere used in the article).<sup>20</sup> He *does* use ro and vo,<sup>21</sup> which are near enough, as in On p.400 (S12vo leading to T1ro), even if the final o is an unusual usage. In the record of press figures here S8 (in S8/423=10) is more precisely S8<sup>r</sup>, and S12 (in S12/432=9) is more precisely S12<sup>v</sup>, equations which can be made on the basis that rectos bear odd numbers (423), versos even (432). But what if a page is misnumbered?, and not just odd to even or even to odd.

Fundamental to the Greg-Bowers conventions is an understanding that a properly constructed collation formula is, among other things, essential for purposes of reference, which is to be made according to signature (as S12<sup>v</sup>). Such a reference is *locational*—i.e. it takes no heed of whether the page/leaf is signed or not or whether, if signed, the signing is correct. In modern books reference by page number is customary, since the volume may well be unsigned (and “perfect bound”) and the pagination is likely to be correct; but in books printed during the hand-press period the pagination may be inaccurate and thus unreliable as a system for reference. Moreover, reference by signature enables the phenomena being described to be related to the structure of the volume (as with press figures). Since he uses page references (but not consistently) Dawson has difficulty in his *Commentary* in describing the precise location of catchwords, as: pp.397–406 each have one (part of the second half of g.P).<sup>22</sup> In this instance not only is the relationship between pagination and structure not stated: on the evidence of the pagination statement P should perhaps be R.



I have not extended my survey to include the details of other descriptions in the “Select Bibliography” appended to the “Notes on Press-figures in France.” In passing, though, I might note the designation of the opening gatherings in the formulas

<sup>19</sup> The practice is exemplified in his *Bibliography of the Foulis Press*, 2nd ed. (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> He writes *The verso of f.C3* (where f. denotes leaf), rather than the expected C3<sup>v</sup>. See *The French Booktrade and the 'Permission Simple' of 1777*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>22</sup> Here, g indicates *gathering*, an un-necessary usage I would think, since P alone cannot really be understood in any other way than as *gathering P*.

for Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters* (Paris: Barrois, 1790)<sup>23</sup> and Thomas Nugent and J. S. Charrier, *The New Pocket Dictionary of the French and English Languages*, 3rd ed. (London, 1781).<sup>24</sup> The former begins 2pl + a3, [a4-a6], the latter tl + a, aij, [a3, a4], b, [b2, b3]; the reader might suppose that the underlining represents italic as an alternative to brackets in indicating inference, but, explicitly in the Nugent, the signatures are themselves italic. Better I suggest, to ignore the fount in the formula itself, reserving to a note the precise form of the signatures and always referring to the leaves as if signed in roman—thus (Nugent), tl + a4...{the make-up of b is uncertain} (a and b signed in italic).<sup>25</sup> And is a distinction being drawn between the two collations according to the extent of the underlining?<sup>26</sup> A similar course of action seems called for in the second volume of the Nugent, where, without the explanation in the Commentary that the signatures are actually enclosed in brackets the notation [[A]], [[A2]], [A3-A6] would challenge comprehension.

(The intention of the foregoing discussion has been to explicate and assess Dawson's conventions. Inevitably, however, it has also involved consideration of (i) certain general principles, applicable to whatever system of description, and (ii) Dawson's application of his own conventions.)



Perhaps not unexpectedly from a would-be son of Fred my conclusion is that, in a published bibliography, the Dawson "methodology" has little to recommend it, specifically in terms of offering a set of conventions to be adopted in preference to the Greg-Bowers. Dawson's practices may *appear* to be simple, appealing to "those not expert," but I imagine that such people would not in fact find them all that simple, that the conventions require an effort to master them; those not expert would, I believe, be better advised to make the effort to master the currently accepted conventions, rather than the idiosyncratic ones employed by Dawson. Rather than Bowers's *Principles*, which can be overwhelming taken neat, the Greg-Bowers conventions may initially perhaps be most easily approached, in my view, via the distillation provided by the relevant chapters in E. W. Padwick's *Bibliographical Method: An Introductory Survey* (Cambridge & London: James Clarke, 1969).

Where, however, there may be a use for many of Dawson's practices is in note-taking preparatory to translating the notes into the lingua franca; thus a series of notes recording signatures, gathering by gathering, in the form A-A7, [A8-A12] would provide useful confirmation, when "writing up," of the practice of the volume. But the notes should not then find their way into the published description.

<sup>23</sup> "Notes on Press-figures in France," 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> In the Montagu the first six leaves could well constitute a normal gathering of six, with only the third leaf signed.

<sup>26</sup> There is a certain confusion or inconsistency: the un-signed leaves in the Montagu are assumed to be in italic, in the Nugent not, and in the latter the un-signed leaves, if they are to agree with the example of Montagu, should presumably be aijj, aiiij {or might it be aiv?}.