

Shared Printing: James Flesher's part in  
Matthew Poole's *Synopsis Criticorum*, vol. 1 (1669)

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Shared printing—where a publication is set (and most likely worked off) in two or more printing houses—is a peculiarity of the hand-press period in England (and probably beyond, in time and place). But just how extensive the practice was is impossible to determine with any confidence, given that few printers' records for the period have survived to provide documentary evidence.

Where records *do* exist for a particular printer specific instances of shared printing may indeed be identified. For example, Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, in the "Topical Index" to their edition of the Bowyer ledgers,<sup>1</sup> list just over seven hundred publications (from a grand total of nearly 5,200) for which the house printed only a part—sometimes only one sheet—amounting to something like one in fourteen or fifteen of the house's output, or an average of about ten publications a year between 1699 and 1777. Confining himself to publications of 1715–59, the period of the Bowyers' greatest activity, Maslen raises that average to twelve a year.<sup>2</sup> But how typical the Bowyer establishment was again cannot be determined (i.e., we cannot necessarily assume that at least one in twelve of all publications, even from London in the eighteenth century, resulted from shared printing).

In the general absence of printers' records various forms of "internal" evidence may be brought to bear on the topic, though such evidence should be used with caution, in that certain of the differences may just as well reflect the practices of different agents within the one printing house. The forms of evidence include: differences in typography (sections being printed from type exhibiting distinctive characteristics); differences in lay-out (including sections set to different measures or with different skeleton formes, as well as other aspects of styling); differences in the employment of press figures (at its most obvious an absence in one section, a presence in another); and differences in ornaments (ornaments that are known to be part of the stock of particular printers). Maslen's 1952 identification of the printers of the 1719 editions

<sup>1</sup> Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, eds., *The Bowyer Ledgers. The Printing Accounts of William Bowyer Father and Son Reproduced on Microfiche, with a Checklist of Bowyer Printing 1699–1777, A Commentary, Indexes, and Appendixes* (London: The Bibliographical Society; New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 1991), 609–10. For a discussion of shared printing see K. I. D. Maslen, "Shared Printing and the Bibliographer," in R. F. Brissenden and J. C. Eade, eds., *Papers Presented at the Fourth David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar, Canberra, 1976* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1979), 193–206. For the application of an understanding of the practice to the study of a particular text see especially K. I. D. Maslen, "The Printers of *Robinson Crusoe*," *The Library*, 5th ser., 7 (1952): 124–31. Both articles are reprinted in Keith Maslen, *An Early London Printing House at Work: Studies in the Bowyer Ledgers* (New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Maslen, "Shared Printing" (1993), 157.

of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* resulted from the pursuit of several of these lines of enquiry, his conclusions being subsequently confirmed following the rediscovery of the Bowyer Ledger A in 1963.<sup>3</sup> The results of most lines may individually be inconclusive, but when several lines converge truth may be at hand, even if only in the recognition that shared printing is involved without the capacity to name the printers responsible.<sup>4</sup> Even the association of particular ornaments with particular printers—regarded as one of the stronger demonstrations of shared printing—is not without its limitations: metal ornaments, despite being cut by hand rather than cast (and therefore unique), could be copied and could change hands, being lent, sold or otherwise transferred to a second printer.<sup>5</sup>

Given the difficulties of recognising shared printing or of assigning shares to particular printers, it is therefore surprising to find a printer actually announcing on the title page the extent of his share in a volume of which he printed only a part. The publication is: Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturæ Interpretum. Volumen I. Complectens Libros Omnes à Genesi ad Jobum, Divisum in Duas Partes. Operâ Matthæi Poli Londinensis*.<sup>6</sup> The imprint reads (square brackets in the original):

Londini, Typis J. Flesher [usque ad I. Sam deinde à II. Reg. inclusive ad finem Voluminis] & T. Roycroft. Prostat apud Cornelium Bee in vico Little-Britain. Anno Dom. M DC LX IX.

That is, one of the printers of the volume, James Flesher, claims responsibility for that part of the volume “right up to 1 Sam. then from 2 Kings inclusive to the end of the volume.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, and “The Printers of *Robinson Crusoe*,” as also K. I. D. Maslen, *The Bowyer Ornament Stock*. Occasional Publication, no. 8 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1973) and “A Supplement to *The Bowyer Ornament Stock*,” in Maslen, *An Early London Printing House*, 235–43. Further catalogues of ornaments include: Richard J. Goulden, *The Ornament Stock of Henry Woodfall 1719–1747; A Preliminary Inventory Illustrated*. Occasional Publication, no. 3 (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1988) and J. C. Ross, *Charles Ackers' Ornament Usage*. Occasional Publication, no. 21 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Rosemary Thomson, “The Evidence for Shared Printing in an Unusual Method of Signing: Fleetwood's *Sermons*, 1737,” *BSANZ Bulletin* 6 (1982), 149–51. On the basis of the styling of the signatures, the distribution of press figures, the forms of running title and the use of dashes Thomson was able to identify the four bibliographical sections making up the volume but did not attempt to ascribe them to particular printers (there are no ornaments).

<sup>5</sup> For a recent application of ornaments to the resolution of a bibliographical problem see K. I. D. Maslen, “Fielding, Richardson and William Strahan: A Bibliographical Puzzle,” *Studies in Bibliography* 53 (2000): 227–40.

<sup>6</sup> The five volumes are dated 1669, 1671, 1673, 1674 and 1676 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> The full imprint translates: “London. Printed by J. Flesher [right up to 1 Sam. then from 2 Kings inclusive to the end of the volume] and T. Roycroft. Sold by Cornelius Bee in the street Little Britain.”

Poole's *Synopsis* is a folio in five volumes, but Flesher's involvement is limited to the first volume, the remainder being printed after his death in 1670 by his widow, Elizabeth Flesher, the daughter of Cornelius Bee, bookseller-publisher of the *Synopsis*. Volume 1 collates:

Part 1: <sup>1</sup>A<sup>6</sup> a<sup>2</sup> B-3G<sup>6</sup>; Part 2: <sup>2</sup>A-2N<sup>4</sup> 2O<sup>2</sup> 2P-3H<sup>6</sup> 3I<sup>8</sup>.

The text proper begins at <sup>1</sup>B1r with Genesis and ends on <sup>1</sup>3G6v with the completion of Ruth; after a divisional title leaf to Part 2 the text resumes on <sup>2</sup>A2r with 1 Samuel and ends with the completion of Esther on <sup>2</sup>3I8v. As the collation suggests, Part 2 comprises two bibliographical sections: (i) <sup>2</sup>A-2O (the section gathered in fours), 1 Samuel to 1 Kings; and (ii) <sup>2</sup>2P-3I (the section gathered in sixes), 2 Kings to Esther.

The bibliographical distinction (gatherings in sixes vs. gatherings in fours) may be taken to signal the likely presence of two printers (from the imprint Flesher and Roycroft) and hence serves to confirm Flesher's claim, indeed to clarify it: "usque ad I. Sam." must mean "up to but *excluding* 1 Sam.,"<sup>8</sup> and "inclusive" must refer only to the second component, 2 Kings to Esther. Nonetheless, the bibliographical confirmation does not lead to an understanding of Flesher's motive in announcing his share. Was he seeking to advertise his skills in setting a particularly complex text, which required the use of various languages and exotic scripts? Conversely, was he seeking to distance himself from Royston's share, implicitly inferior? Or can it have had something or other to do with the fact that the publisher, Cornelius Bee, was Flesher's father-in-law?

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<sup>8</sup> Just as the title-page "Genesis to Job" must mean "up to but excluding Job," which is the first book of the second volume.