

George Washington University

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Author(s): Fredson Bowers

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ROBERT ROBERTS: A PRINTER OF SHAKESPEARE'S FOURTH FOLIO

By FREDSON BOWERS

THE link of bibliography with textual criticism, and through that with literary study, is nowhere better illustrated, perhaps, than in the necessary study which must be made of the printers of important texts. A printed text is but a second-hand report of the original lost manuscript, modified in various ways by printing-house practice and compositorial habits. Neither may be studied, with a view to restoring the purity of the manuscript text, until the printer is identified and his characteristics analyzed in other of his books besides the text with which one is concerned. It has never been suggested that any text in the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare (1685) possesses independent manuscript authority. Nevertheless, the history of the transmission of Shakespeare's text has a scholarly interest in itself. For this reason the fact that neither Polard nor any other historian of Shakespeare quartos and folios identifies the anonymous printers of the Fourth Folio has left a small gap in the information we should like to have. It is my purpose here to fill this gap, in part, by identifying the printer of the first section of the book as Robert Roberts.

Shakespeare's Fourth Folio, published in 1685, was printed in three sections, which almost certainly represent the work of three different printing houses. In the first section, sigs. A1-Z4^v (pp. 1-274), each play begins with a somewhat crudely cut floral initial. In the second section, sigs. 2B-3E8^v (pp. 21-328), the first play, *King John*, starts with a small initial "N" (completely different in design and size from those used before), but thereafter employs only display capitals. The third section, sigs. 3A-4B8^v (pp. 31-304), contents itself throughout with display capitals.

The printers' names are not given on any of the three forms of the title-page, and since the ornamental initial letters of the first section have not been assigned to any printer until very recently, and then I believe in error, the anonymity of the shops has been preserved. The shop which produced the third section will perhaps never be identified until we know everything there is to be learned about seventeenth-century types. That for the second must await some fortunate discovery from the single initial.¹ The set of initials used by the printer of the first part, however, appears in other books of the period and thus is susceptible to identification.

There are undoubtedly many other books which contain these initials, but I have observed the identical blocks of this section of the Fourth Folio in four other volumes. The first in point of date is *Parthenissa* by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, printed by T. N. (*i.e.*, Thomas Newcomb) for Henry Herringman

¹ This initial is reproduced as 42-N by C. W. Miller, "Thomas Newcomb: A Restoration Printer's Ornament Stock," *Studies in Bibliography*, III (1950). Dr. Miller's assignment of this second-section initial to Thomas Newcomb, Jr., on this single occurrence did not take account of the sectional printing of the Folio and was based on his original conjecture that the initials of the first section could be identified as Newcomb's, a matter discussed below.

in 1676. On this evidence, Dr. C. W. Miller has recently assigned the initials to Newcomb and has listed the Fourth Folio among the books Newcomb printed.² The second book is Beaumont and Fletcher's *Scornful Lady*, printed about July 1677 by A. Maxwell and R. Roberts for D. N. and T. C., and sold by L. Curtis. Here the block for the initial "B" is demonstrably the same as that which opens *The Tempest* on sig. A1 of the Fourth Folio.

We are here seemingly faced with a problem involving the use of blocks from the same set by two different printers only a year apart, and if this is indeed a fact, then no inferences can be drawn about the printer of the first section of the Folio. But the difficulty is not insuperable. In his very useful remarks about the pitfalls attending printer-identification from ornaments, Dr. Miller writes: "Ornaments in the text of a volume occasionally qualify or contradict the evidence of a printer's name in the title-page imprint. A number of large folios of this period were the work of two or more printers, but the imprint often carries only the name of the printer who ran off the title-page and the first or last portion of the volume."³ Since *The Scornful Lady* is a short quarto, clearly the work of only one printing house, it is necessary to examine the 1676 *Parthenissa* to determine whether Newcomb printed the whole volume, or only a portion. Such an examination indicates very definitely that *Parthenissa* was printed in two sections, and that the Fourth Folio initials appear only in the second section, which is almost certainly not by Newcomb.

The facts are these. *Parthenissa*, a folio, proceeds in order in 4's from its title-gathering through gathering 3E, which is followed by 3F in 2's to end Part III of the book with p. [404]. Part IV follows immediately, but it begins a new series of signings with a jump to sig. 3Q and p. [483]. This gap in signing and in numbering is suspicious in the extreme and is classic evidence for simultaneous printing of a book in two sections. When we survey the two different sections, we also see a number of typographical differences which establish the sections as the work of different printers. In the first section, Newcomb's positively identified factotums are found in profusion, a factotum being used to begin the text of each "Book" within a "Part." On the contrary, in the second section no factotums are used or any other block certainly identified as Newcomb's. Instead, the Fourth Folio initials are employed only to begin the "Parts," and display caps. are used for the "Books," except that an initial is found in the dedication to Part VI. Other differences appear, as for example the use of rows of type-ornaments above head-titles in the second section but not in the first. The type for the "Part" half-titles is preserved standing so that this same type appears in the first section in the half-title on sig. 2B4 and again on sig. 2Nr. The half-titles in the second section are in a different setting, from another and larger font, and in turn are kept standing for later use within the section. Moreover, the running-titles change their settings to correspond with

² I am in debt to Dr. Miller for the discovery that the 1676 *Parthenissa* contains the blocks later used in the Folio. It was unfortunate that his article was in print before I came upon the evidence from *The Scornful Lady* which led me to the investigation of Robert Roberts and of the printing of *Parthenissa*, evidence which leads to the conclusion that the attribution of the initials to Newcomb was mistaken. Dr. Miller has very generously accepted my arguments, and an errata slip corrects his article in *Studies in Bibliography*.

³ Pp. 161-162.

the break between the sections.⁴ Finally, although the type-page measurements for each section are the same within the limits of normal variation, the type-face itself (especially as determined by the italic) is different in each.

These typographical differences buttress the bibliographical evidence for two-section simultaneous printing. The total evidence, as a consequence, leads to the view—in the light of the initial in *The Scornful Lady* from another shop—that Thomas Newcomb printed only the first section of *Parthenissa* and therefore that his identification on its title-page cannot be used as evidence to assign the Folio blocks, in the second section, to him.

The natural candidates are the Anne Maxwell and Robert Roberts who printed *The Scornful Lady*. This evidence can be confirmed. The third book I have seen with an initial from this set is William Bedloe's *The Excommunicated Prince*, 1679, printed anonymously for Thomas Parkhurst, Dorman Newman, Thomas Cockerell, and Thomas Simmons. The initial "I" in this book appears in the Folio for *Much Ado* (H₃^v) and four other plays. That Maxwell and Roberts probably printed this book may be inferred with some confidence not only from the initial but also from Roberts' known connection with the publishers.⁵ Dorman Newman is the D. N. of *The Scornful Lady* imprint, and Cockerell is its T. C. Moreover, the first entry made by Roberts in the Stationers' Register, on 16 August 1677 (ed. Eyre and Rivington, III, 40) for *The Proverbs of Solomon* shows his name deleted subsequently and Thomas Parkhurst's substituted. Parkhurst, as will be seen below, also had business relations with Anne Maxwell.

To clinch the case, however, the initial "N" found for *Midsummer Night's Dream* on sig. L₄^v of the Folio appears in Walter Harris, *A Description of the King's Royal Palace and Gardens at Loo*, printed in 1699 by R. Roberts and sold by J. Nutt (Wing H-882). Since the same set of initials used by Roberts in 1677 is established as still in his possession in 1699, we may take it, I think, that they were always his or Maxwell's and that the two-section printing of *Parthenissa* disqualifies Newcomb's claims to the blocks.⁶

Lacking an index to the Eyre and Rivington transcript of the *Register*, and especially a printer-publisher index to Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue* like that recently compiled by Dr. Paul Morrison for the Pollard and Redgrave *STC*,⁷

⁴This is a general, not an exact, statement. Although the two sections of *Parthenissa* were simultaneously printed, beginning respectively with sigs. B₁ (or A₁) and 3Q respectively, Dr. C. W. Miller has shown that the final sheets 3C₁–3F₂ of the first section were printed by the compositor and press of the second section, doubtless because the uneven distribution permitted the second-section workmen to finish first and then to swing over to assist the workmen of the first section. See his "A Bibliographical Study of *Parthenissa* by Roger Boyle Earl of Orrery," *Studies in Bibliography*, II (1949), 134–135. Quite naturally, then, and later in his study of Newcomb's ornaments, he took it that the book had been printed in two sections within the same shop. The ornaments now, I think, disprove this thesis; moreover, there is no bibliographical difficulty in assuming that another shop took over the printing of the unfinished remainder of the first section. In doing so it would, of course, maintain the signing and numbering of the preceding pages.

⁵Miller, p. 162: "Finally, in attributing to a specific printer the presswork of an unsigned book, one is always on surer ground if he can buttress his evidence of the ornamentation with that derived from other reliable sources. One of the obvious sources is the printer-employment habits of the stationer publishing the book."

⁶If this line of argument is correct, then initials 9, 11, 14, 17, 34, 36, 41, 54, 65, and 71 must be deleted from Miller's original listing of Newcomb ornaments. To these we must also add 42, which is dependent on the identification of the above with Newcomb.

⁷Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1950.

one must rely on what scattered evidence is otherwise available about Anne Maxwell and Robert Roberts. The central problem is, of course, whether the two were associated at the time the Fourth Folio was printed. Plomer (*Dictionary, 1641-1667*, p. 125) lists Anne Maxwell as the widow of David Maxwell (1659-1665), and notes that in the survey of 29 July 1668 she was returned as having two presses, no apprentices, three compositors, and three pressmen. The dates 1665-1675 which he assigns to her, however, are definitely wrong.

In searching the Stationers' Register I have found only two books entered by Anne Maxwell: on 30 August 1667 (II, 381) she entered *The Life and Death of Mother Shipton*; and on 22 December 1668 (II, 394) the fifth book of Aesop (possibly Wing A-719). However, on 11 May 1682 (III, 109), Thomas Parkhurst entered Christopher Wase, *Methodi practicae specimen, An essay of a practical grammar* "by vertue of an assignment under the hand and seale of M^{rs} Anne Maxwell bearing date the tenth instant. . . ." As late as May 1682, therefore, Anne Maxwell was alive and apparently in business. Thereafter, I find no record of her in the sources available to me.⁸

For Robert Roberts, Plomer (*Dictionary, 1668-1725*, p. 255) lists what he states to be the first Term Catalogue mention in November (Michaelmas) 1685 as the printer of Clement Cotton's *The Mirror of Martyrs*, sixth edition, 1685 (Wing C-6405). Noting Hazlitt, III, 224, he infers (almost certainly correctly) that Roberts was the R. R. who with A. M. printed in 1679 *A True Relation of the Cruelties lately acted by the Rebels in Scotland*. Finally, he offers the dates 1679(?)-1699 for Roberts' activity. Again, these dates are inaccurate. The first mention of Roberts in the Term Catalogues is, instead, in June (Trinity) 1682 for the Collinges *History of Conformity* which he printed with Anne Maxwell. But his name appears much earlier in the Register, the first reference I have observed being that in 16 August 1677 for his entry of *The Proverbs of Solomon*, which Thomas Parkhurst took over. Roberts also entered books on 5 October 1677 (III, 46), 20 November 1677 (III, 48); but thereafter not until 2 May 1683 (III, 152), 2 [*i.e.*, 20] May 1683 (III, 157), 2 July 1684 (III, 245), 9 September 1684 (III, 251), 15 March 1685/6 (III, 300), and so on. These entries were all made in his name alone.

Certain facts begin to emerge about the partnership, even though the whole story cannot be known at present. Anne Maxwell's name appears alone in the imprint of Wing H-3045 in 1672, but with Roberts in the next edition of 1678 (Wing H-3046); alone in 1673 (H-3016), but with Roberts in the next edition in 1678 (H-3017); and alone in 1674 (H-3043). This book in 1674 is the last I happen to know about that she printed by herself, although I am confident that a systematic search through Wing would reveal later ones, for the first I have observed her printing with Roberts is *The Scornful Lady* of 1677.⁹ Sometime, then, between 1674 and 1677, on this evidence, the two seem to have entered

⁸ In the June (Trinity) 1682 *Term Catalogue* (I, 496), *The History of Conformity* by John Collinges (Wing C-5319, not entered in SR) was advertised by A. Maxwell and R. Roberts. Since the book bears a 1681 date on its title, this 1682 advertisement was presumably a late one and cannot be taken as evidence of her activity after May 1682. The next edition, in 1689, was by Roberts alone.

⁹ On the evidence at hand, it is impossible to tell whether the two were in partnership when one or the other of them printed the second section of the 1676 *Parthenissa*. At the moment, the prior history of these initial blocks is not known.

into a business association. The last book which I know of printed by them in partnership is Wing C-5319, *The History of Conformity*, in 1681, with another edition in 1689 by Roberts alone. But again it would not be surprising to learn that there were others later than 1681, in view of the *Register* reference to Anne Maxwell in May 1682.

Similarly, although the first book printed alone by Roberts that I have observed is *The Mirror of Martyrs* in 1685, followed by Wing C-1961, *The Character and Qualifications of an Honest Loyal Merchant* in 1686, it is very likely that he began printing by himself much earlier. In this connection, the gap in his entries for copy in the *Register* between 20 November 1677 and 2 May 1683 now becomes significant. The year 1677, in which Roberts' entries cease, contains the first observed book of the partnership, and 1683, when he re-resumes his entries, is only a year after the last mention in the *Register* of Anne Maxwell. The first date cannot be viewed too scrupulously, for the second issue of *The Scornful Lady* was advertised among the reprints in the Term Catalogue for 5 July 1677 (I, 285), and his first entries in the *Register* are all later in date in 1677. But on the evidence at hand, the partnership seems to have been in force at least as early as mid-1677,¹⁰ and probably extended into late 1682 but very likely early 1683, marked by his resumption of *Register* entries in May of that year, as if his circumstances had altered. I take it, therefore, that his *Register* entries and Term Catalogue advertisements—Plomer to the contrary—probably do indicate some publishing activity, which he began but dropped early in his association as a printer with Anne Maxwell and resumed after the dissolution of his partnership with her.

The enquiry into the precise history of these two is of some pertinence, for it determines that Robert Roberts, almost certainly alone, was the printer of the first section of the Fourth Folio in 1685, and that Anne Maxwell—as shown by the absence of her name from the imprint of the *Mirror of Martyrs* in the same year—was either retired or dead.

The one remaining question is that of the earlier history of this set of initial blocks used by the two together and later by Roberts. I have no information at the moment whether they originally belonged to Maxwell or to Roberts. All that is pertinent to the printer-identification in the Fourth Folio, however, is the fact that the initials appear at least as early as 1677 when the two were in partnership, and that—as shown by his use of a block from the set in 1699—on the dissolution of their partnership Roberts came into possession of them at some time before 1685. He is thus identified as the printer in 1685 of the first text section of the Fourth Folio.

A Note on the Device in the Fourth Folio

Prefixed to the text section printed by Roberts are two preliminary gatherings π^2 and π^4 . That Roberts printed the π^4 gathering, which begins with the dedication to Pembroke and Montgomery, may be demonstrated by the use of the same settings of box rules in this preliminary gathering as in the later text gatherings of his section. Moreover, the appearance of the box rules in π^4 in the same bent and sprung condition found in gathering Z (as $Z^2 = \pi^4$, and

¹⁰ This is the earliest date that can be safely assigned at present to the partnership: see footnote 9 above.

Z₄^r=^rA₂^r) demonstrates that this preliminary gathering was machined not at the start but after the printing of the final gathering Z in Roberts' part.

Unfortunately, this fact cannot lead to the automatic assumption that Roberts also printed the first unsigned gathering π^2 , containing the facing portrait and titlepage, and therefore that the unassigned device (McKerrow 263 β) on the two states of the original title¹¹ is his. The rules used to frame these states of the title cannot be identified with any of the rules used to box the text pages either in Roberts' section or the parts printed in the other shops. The measurements of the opening in the skeleton-forme which the title would take debar the printer of the second section as a candidate, but are about as applicable to the third section as they are to Roberts'.

We may note, however, that the size and font of type used to print the title letterpress containing the seven apocryphal plays seem to be the same as that used by Roberts to print the dedication in ^rA. Moreover, various display letters of the same size and font as were used to print the formal title also appear in the headings to the individual plays in the Roberts text but not in the third section. I cannot positively identify any of these letters as being the same individual sorts, although there is some reason to believe that the D in COMEDIES in the title may be the same as the D in the heading to the *Dream*.

Certainly this matter, therefore, must await the examination of an expert in types; and possibly, also, the results of a close examination of the watermarks in the paper of a number of copies.¹² In the meantime, and on a very tentative basis, it may seem plausible to infer that the use of the same fonts is in fact significant rather than fortuitous; that it is likely if Roberts printed ^rA he also would have printed π ; and hence that there are some slight grounds for the very tentative assignment of this device to him.¹³

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¹¹In the first state of the title the names of the following booksellers appear: Herringman, Brewster, Bentley. In the second state, R. Chiswell is added after Bentley. For the assignment of the order of these imprints, see G. E. Dawson, "The Copyright of Shakespeare's Dramatic Works," *Studies in Honor of A. H. R. Fairchild* (University of Missouri Studies, XXI, no. 1), p. 22 and n. 34. The device in question appears in both states of the title. Dr. Dawson, who has made a careful examination of the Folger collection of Fourth Folios, kindly writes me that the first state is definitely conjugate but from the two Folger copies of the Chiswell state nothing can be determined since both titles have been tampered with. In the third form of the title, the book is stated to be printed for Herringman and sold by Knight and Saunders. Instead of the device, this title contains a compound type-ornament, and in Dr. Dawson's opinion the leaf is a cancellans. This fact rules out the Knight-Saunders title from the present discussion.

¹²In the University of Virginia copy, the watermark of π differs from that in πA in the length of its cartouche. Dr. Dawson informs me that his study of the Folio has disclosed six related but clearly different watermarks in the complete volume, all presumably from the same mill since all bear the name DVAVLEGARD, but with differing crowns and shields. Since watermark evidence based only on one copy is too dangerous to meddle with, it is to be hoped that Dr. Dawson will some day publish a study of what the paper may reveal in the various Folger copies.

¹³It is perhaps no legitimate argument that a single printer for all the preliminaries would have imposed them in 6's instead of by 2 and 4. The need to engrave the portrait separately may well have had some influence in altering normal imposition. Moreover, since the text begins with A, there would seem to be no significance to the lack of signing in the first preliminary gathering and the signing of the second with A. The blank recto of the first leaf of the initial preliminary gathering would scarcely be signed when its verso contained an engraving, and the fact that the second leaf is the title normally precludes signing there. Under the circumstances, then, the signing of the second preliminary gathering is without significance.