

Rubrication
in American Books of the
Eighteenth Century

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IN Lawrence Wroth's *The Colonial Printer*¹ there is a short section of four pages devoted to 'Rubrication,' the term applied to the use of red ink in printing. Rubrication was first practiced in early manuscripts to mark the beginning of chapters, paragraphs, or even important sentences. This served as an aid to the readers, and also permitted considerable economies in space. Many of the books of the latter half of the fifteenth century were similarly treated, and it was an extension of this practice which produced printing in two colors.² No less a figure than Johann Gutenberg experimented with the use of red ink in the Bible of 42-lines of text in two columns which is associated with his name. A number of the early trial leaves are known in which the incipits or headings are printed in red, but the practice was soon abandoned. Others who followed Gutenberg successfully completed those experiments, and as early as 1457 we have the great Psalter, produced by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer, which was printed in black, red, and blue. The rubrics and the colophon were printed in red, the text in black, and a number of handsome capitals in two colors in varying combinations of red or blue, and black.

¹Wroth, Lawrence C., *The Colonial Printer* (Portland, Me., 1938), pp. 280-283.

²Haebler, Konrad, *The Study of Incunabula* (New York, 1933), pp. 127-134.

The earliest example of rubricated title pages that has come to our notice is the *Kalendarium* of Johann Regiomontanus published in two editions at Venice in 1476 by Erhard Ratdolt, Bernard Maler, and Peter Löslein.³ It is a most handsome title page with the initial letter A and the three printers' names in red. In the Italian version of the same year the initial letter is Q. The text of both editions is attractively framed within woodcut foliated borders at the top and sides, with two identical smaller ornaments placed at either side of the three printers' names to form the border at the bottom. Since that early time in Venice thousands of books with title pages brightened with accents of red have appeared in European books. English books of the late 17th century in particular were frequently embellished with rubricated title pages.

The colonial printers in America who established their presses in this country generally seem not to have adopted the practice for reasons of cost, and the 'particularity of the process.' Rubricated title pages had to be put through the press twice, and exact register had to prevail if the press work was to be harmonious and precise. Citing Joseph Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises* as his authority, Mr. Wroth carefully explains the proper procedure for a two-color page and suggests that the portions in black were printed first and the red-inked words secondly. In the fifteenth century the practice was reversed since evidence is overwhelming that the red sections were first imposed, and there are a number of instances that will be mentioned later which prove that, despite Moxon, Benjamin Franklin appears to have observed the practice of imposing the red portions first.

In Mr. Wroth's presentation he mentions four eighteenth-century books with rubricated title pages, namely Samuel Willard's *Compleat Body of Divinity*, published at Boston by Bartholomew Green and Samuel Kneeland in 1726; Edward Holds-

³Redgrave, Gilbert R., *Erhard Ratdolt and His Work at Venice* (London, 1899), pp. 6-7.

worth's *Muscipula*, printed by William Parks in Annapolis in 1728; the *Laws of South Carolina* produced at Charles-Town by Lewis Timothy in 1736, and the edition of *Cato Major*, which issued from Benjamin Franklin's press in 1744. We shall have occasion to refer to all of these a little later.

In the course of this survey twenty-two other rubricated title pages have been noticed. A total of twenty-six titles, and this figure, of course, is subject to revision upwards, represents a minuscule percentage of the 48,000 American imprints recorded before 1801, but for the very reason of rarity they deserve more detailed study.

The earliest rubricated title page in an American book to come to our attention is found in William Keith's *Letter to His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Chester*; this was printed at Philadelphia by Andrew Bradford in 1718 (Evans⁴ 1960). Hildeburn made the comment: 'This is the earliest American example of printing in two colors I have met with,'⁵ and we corroborate this. Philadelphia may now claim another first in the annals of American printing. The volume is a quarto of twelve pages, and the only surviving copy that is recorded is owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Apparently no other work from Bradford's press contains a rubricated title page. Governor Keith's letter stands as a solitary instance, and the reasons for this trial experiment remain unexplained. The text of the letter is, of course, official, and Bradford may either have emulated the English practice or may have simply wanted to try his hand at two-color imposition. In the words of Edwin Wolf, 2nd: 'While Bradford may have intended the color to be red, it is actually a very deep brown. It can hardly be said to have been successful.'⁶

The next two examples of rubricated title pages belong to the year 1726. One of these was mentioned by Mr. Wroth, and

⁴Evans, Charles, *American Bibliography* (Chicago, 1904-1934).

⁵Hildeburn, Charles R., *A Century of Printing; the Issues of the Press in Pennsylvania 1685-1784* (Philadelphia, 1885-1886), I, 51.

⁶Personal letter to the writer, dated December 27, 1968.

that is Samuel Willard's *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, printed at Boston by Bartholomew Green and Samuel Kneeland for Benjamin Eliot and Daniel Henchman (Evans 2828). Evans tells us 'it is the first folio volume, other than Laws, and the largest work up to this time printed in the United States. Owing to the fact of the printing being done by several presses, a number of pages are numbered twice, the text making just one thousand pages. Besides a catalogue of the Author's works published in his lifetime, it contains a list of names of about five hundred subscribers. When the time, and the subject, extent, and size of the work are considered, this list is a remarkable tribute to the memory of the distinguished Author from his contemporaries; and has large genealogical value as representative of the helpful, public-spirited citizenship of the period.'⁷ It is not surprising that Green and Kneeland decided to print a title page of special significance to preface such an important book. Nine lines are partially or completely in red. The sheer bulk of the book guaranteed the survival of numerous copies, the National Union Catalog recording no less than fifteen owning institutions.

The other imprint of 1726 with a rubricated title page is Peter Van Driessen's *De Aanbiddelijke Wegen God* (The Adorable Ways of God), which is regarded as the second book printed at New York by John Peter Zenger (Evans 2820). Six lines on the title and imprint are in red on this well-designed, attractive title page. In addition the 5-line quotation on the verso of the title is also in red. That the title page is a cancel is proved by the location of the watermark which is visible in the outer right hand margin of the page; ordinarily in a quarto volume such as this the watermark would appear in the center of the inner margin as is the case throughout the remainder of the volume. The handsome Dutch watermark itself of a rampant lion within a circle appears to correspond closely to that appearing on plate 115 in William Churchill's

⁷ Evans, *American Bibliography*, I, 365.

Watermarks in Paper in Holland, England, France, etc. in the XVII and XVIII Centuries (Amsterdam, 1935). He cites the date of 1698 for the use of this paper. The original Dutch edition of Peter Van Driessen's three sermons appears to be quite rare since only two copies are recorded, respectively in the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library. Zenger also printed in the same year, 1726, an English translation of these sermons, but the title page is entirely in black. Zenger never again attempted to compose a rubricated title page.

In the present chronology William Parks is the next American who experimented with a rubricated title page, and this too appears to be his solitary endeavor in printing with red ink. The book in question, the second entry in Mr. Wroth's list, is Edward Holdsworth's *Muscipula or The Mouse Trap*, which issued from Parks' press at Annapolis in 1728 (Evans 3038). Textually as well as typographically this is an exceptionally interesting book since it is described in the dedicatory verses as

This First Essay
Of *Latin Poetry*, in *English Dress*
Which MARYLAND hath publish'd from the Press.⁸

Three copies are recorded: Library of Congress, Huntington Library, and the imperfect copy in the Maryland Historical Society, which lacks its title pages. The use of the plural is correct since there are two facing title pages, one in Latin and the other in English, and both are rubricated. On the page in Latin William Parks evidently intended to quote from Homer's *Battle of the Frogs* in the original Greek, but he didn't have any Greek type, and the text itself may not have been available to him. He has used Roman capitals to transliterate the three Greek words which are printed. This omission of the

⁸For a further discussion of the text, see Lawrence C. Wroth's *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland* (Baltimore, 1922), pp. 64-66.

DE AANBIDDELYKE
WEGEN GODS

in zyne

Souveraine Bestieringe,

Befonder over

DE

MACHTEN deser **WEERELD,**

Verklaart en toegepast

IN

DRIE PREDICATIEN,

DOOR

PETRUS VAN DRIESSEN, V.D.M.

Te **NIEUW-ALBANIA.**



Te **NIEUW-YORK**

Gedrukt by **J. PIETER ZENGER, MDCCXXVI.**

Peter Van Driesen, *De Annbiddeijke Wegen God*
(New York, John Peter Zenger, 1726).

MUSCIPULA,

SIVE

KAMPOMYOMAXIA.

Autore E. HOLDSWORTH,

E. Coll. Magd. Oxon.

ΟΜΗΡΟΥ ΒΑΤΡΑΧΟΜ

ANNAPOLIS:

Impensis R. L. Typis W. P. M.DCC. XXVIII.

THE
MOUSE-TRAP,

OR THE

Battle of the CAMBRIANS
and MICE.

A POEM.

Translated into *ENGLISH*,

By R. LEWIS.

*Men merciless of Heart,
Invention of new Mischief, have with Art
A WOODEN ENGINE built, A TRAP for MICE,
Full of Destruction is the dire Device.*

Homer's Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

*'Tis true, Composing is the nobler Part,
But good Translation is no easy Art:
For tho' Materials have long since been found,
Yet both your Judgement and your Hands are bound.*

Reform. Ed. Transf. Verse

ANNAPOLIS:

Printed for the *AUTHOR*, by W. PARKS, M.DCC. XXVIII.

Edward Holdsworth, *Muscipula* (Annapolis, William Parks, 1728).

quotation from Homer is corrected on the English title page, which also contains the name of the translator, Richard Lewis, a minor poet who may be regarded as the founder of a literary tradition in Maryland.

The third title mentioned by Mr. Wroth is *The Laws of the Province of South Carolina*, printed at Charles-Town by Timothy Lewis in 1736 (Evans 4080). This compilation by Judge Nicholas Trott was unique among contemporary legal publications in that it is not only a collection of the previous acts of the Assembly, but also of a codification and revision of much of the statutory law of England that was adaptable to the conditions of the province. The present compilation was the work of Judge Trott and was accepted by the Legislature on December 12, 1712, without a single change. Although publication was authorized at that time, this stupendous work did not appear until 24 years later. It was advertised in Timothy Lewis' own paper *The South-Carolina Gazette* in the issue for September 4-11, 1736 as ready for the subscribers on 'Wednesday next,' which was September 15. It is not surprising that Lewis was interested in designing a rubricated title page for a book of this importance with a text that runs to more than 700 pages. It is considered to be the earliest South Carolina imprint although three other books were issued from Timothy Lewis' press the same year and one at least, Josiah Smith's sermon of 29 pages, *The Character and Duty of Minister and People*, was published earlier on May 22, 1736. Lewis, however, began to print the laws shortly after November of 1734, and the first sheets were ready in May 1735, a year before Smith's sermon appeared.⁹

Samuel Kneeland and Bartholomew Green, who were mentioned earlier in connection with that prodigious edition of Samuel Willard's *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (Boston, 1726), tried their hand at another rubricated title page when they

⁹Trienens, Roger J., 'The Library's Earliest Colonial Imprints,' *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, July 1967, p. 197.

printed for Samuel Gerrish at Boston in 1736 the first volume of Thomas Prince's *A Chronological History of New-England* (Evans 4068). This is a most common book, the Library of Congress having no less than four copies of this attractive small octavo. At least one copy, the first of these, can show evidence that the red portions were put through the press first since the lower dot of the colon following the word ANNALS has been partially obliterated by the inner black line of the border. This was advertised in *The Boston Weekly New-Letter*, issue of November 4-12, 1736, as 'being now printed' and inviting subscribers to send in their names 'so a catalogue of their names may be Printed, and accompany this first Volume.' It is thus apparent that Rev. Thomas Prince's *Chronological History of New-England* did not appear until very late in 1736, and followed by several months the imposing folio from South Carolina that was produced on Timothy Lewis' press the same year.

Any full discussion of printing in colonial America without reference to Benjamin Franklin would be seriously deficient in its presentation. It is not surprising, therefore, that Franklin comes under review in this survey since he used more red ink in the output from his press than all of his contemporaries in the printing business. As early as 1729 Franklin was experimenting with rubrication. According to an advertisement appearing in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on October 2, 1729, Benjamin Franklin announced the publication of Thomas Godfrey's *Almanack for the Year 1730* (Evans 3168) 'Beautifully printed in Red and Black on One Side of a large Demi Sheet of Paper, after the London Manner.' Since no copy can be located we cannot be certain that Franklin carried out his announced intention. In 1740, however, Franklin tried again in his edition of *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal During the Time He was Detained in England by the Embargo, Vol. II* (Evans 4633). A trial title page printed in red and black is owned by Harvard, and this is unique according to the

definitive study of Franklin's imprints that has recently been brought to completion by Prof. C. William Miller.¹⁰ Why Franklin abandoned the experiment is not known, but he did not lose sight of the idea. *The New Year's Gift or a Pocket Almanac for the Year 1741* (Evans 4512), a tiny product of true pocket size, contains 16 strips that are printed on one side only. A unique copy of this edition from Franklin's press survives at Yale University. The continuation of this almanac with the abbreviated title of *A Pocket Almanac* was issued annually by Franklin and later by Franklin and Hall at least as late as 1766, but only the almanacs for the years 1742, 1743, 1744, and 1745 (Evans 4718, 4955, 5188, and Drake 9660 *bis*) contain rubricated title pages. Another issue of this almanac for 1745 is printed entirely in black (Evans 5397, Drake 9659 *bis*). Each page of text also contains some words in red. This is the first instance in American colonial typography where an entire book was put through the press twice. Actually since these are such tiny publications the entire text probably required only a single sheet to be placed on the press; as was the case with Godfrey's sheet almanac for 1730. From the frequent evidence of improper registration it is clear that the sections in red were put through the press first. Copies of these are quite scarce; the Library of Congress has the first three and Milton Drake¹¹ records other copies of the edition of 1742 at the Library Company and the Pennsylvania Historical Society; of the edition of 1743 at the Library Company and Yale; of the edition of 1744 at Yale and the University of Pennsylvania; and of the rubricated edition for 1745 at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

The use of red ink must have appealed to Franklin, for he also made use of it on the title page of *M. T. Cicero's Cato*

¹⁰Miller, C. William, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Benjamin Franklin's Printing in Philadelphia, 1728-1765* (in press).

¹¹Drake, Milton, *Almanacs of the United States* (New York, 1962). Part II, pp. 925-927.

Major, or His Discourse of Old Age, dated 1744 (Evans 5361), the last of the four rubricated titles mentioned by Mr. Wroth. The *Cato Major* is generally regarded as Franklin's finest product. It is reported that Franklin carried many copies of this book to England, and distributed them with evident satisfaction. The size of the edition is not known, but it must have been quite large since at least 34 copies are recorded in American libraries by the National Union Catalog. Prof. Miller knows the locations of 72 copies.

Although Benjamin Franklin ceased to take an active part in his firm after 1748, when he established a partnership with David Hall, one or two more rubricated title pages are recorded with his name in the imprint. One of these is Theophilus Grew's *Barbados Almanack for . . . 1752*, with the joint imprint of Franklin and Hall (Evans 6687), known today only through the unique copy in the Library Company of Philadelphia. There are also three issues of a German almanac, *Neu-Eingerichteter Americanischer Geschichts-Calendar: 1750, 1751, and 1752* (Evans 6376, 6558, and 6724). Copies of the first, with the joint imprint of 'Francklin' and Böhm, are owned by Yale University and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Yale University also has the edition prepared for 1751, and the German Society of Pennsylvania has a copy of that for 1752. Like the *Pocket Almanac* red printing occurs throughout the text as well as on the title pages. Other issues of this almanac for 1754 (Evans 7069), located at Princeton; 1755 (Evans 7263), in the American Antiquarian Society; 1756 (Evans 7497), also in the American Antiquarian Society; and 1759 (Evans 8198), located at the Pennsylvania Historical Society and Franklin and Marshall College at Lancaster, all printed by Anton Armbrüster, are also rubricated. Issues for 1753, 1757, and 1758 were probably printed with rubrication, but no copies can now be located. The latest in this series that we have noticed with rubrication are the issues for 1763 and 1764, copies of which are located in the American Antiquarian Society.

The chronology has been interrupted momentarily to permit an unbroken account of the books from Franklin's presses that carried rubrication. We must now go back somewhat earlier to 1748, when the Bruderschaft at Ephrata published their book of the Mennonite martyrs, *Der Blutige Schau-Platz*, translated from the Dutch of Tieleman van Braght (Evans 6256). This volume of 756 leaves was the largest book produced in Colonial America; 'that it may also be judged the ugliest' to quote Mr. Wroth 'does not take away merit from the pious souls who conceived, or from the pious but unhappy men who executed, the great project.'¹² The edition consisted of 1300 copies, and single copies were priced at 20 shillings. A number of copies were issued with four lines of the title in red, and one such example is found in one of the three copies available in the Library of Congress. These title pages with rubrication would seem to be most uncommon.

Another instance of rubrication that Edwin Wolf, 2nd, has brought to our attention is found in certain presentation copies of the *Laws, Statutes, Ordinances, and Constitutions, Ordained, Made and Established, By the Mayor, Recorder, Aldermen, and Assistants, of the City of New York*, printed and sold by James Parker in 1749 (Evans 6388). A special presentation leaf was added to several copies, and this special feature was signalized by James Parker by imposing the text in red. The only copies located today are in the possession of the Library Company at Philadelphia, and the New-York Historical Society.

Mr. Harold Hugo has called our notice to what he regards as the first book published in Connecticut with a rubricated title page, and a rubricated half-title as well. These are found in volume one of Bernard Romans' *Annals of the Troubles in the Netherlands from the Accession of Charles V, Emperor of Germany*, printed at Hartford by Watson and Goodwin in 1778 (Evans 16059). The rubrication in the Library of Congress copy is quite faint. The second volume, which was not

¹²Wroth, *The Colonial Printer*, p. 260.

published until four years later, does not have a rubricated title.

In this presentation the next illustration of color printing is strictly speaking not a book at all, but a series of pasteboard cards which carries the title: *A New Set of Geographical Cards for the Agreeable Improvement of Gentlemen and Ladies In the Necessary and Pleasing Study of Geography*. Issued without imprint these cards are believed to have been issued in Philadelphia by Thomas Dobson in 1786. This information derives from an advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of July 25, 1786. These cards have interest for us since three or four colors were used in their production; the title page is in black as are the 27 cards devoted to America. The 20 cards for Europe are in pale brick-red; and the six for Asia in a blue-green. The seven devoted to Africa were apparently printed either in blind or with the palest brown ink. This unique set in the Library of Congress undoubtedly represents the earliest instance in American printing where more than two colors were utilized.

Another instance of three-color printing occurs in Timothy Hilliard's *A Sermon Delivered December 10, 1788, at the Ordination of the Rev. John Andrews*, printed at Newburyport by John Mycall in 1789. While the title page of this sermon is printed only in black, the first page of text is embellished with a head piece of cannons and flags printed in red and an initial O printed in blue. This is the earliest example of printing in three colors that has been noticed in an American book. Of the nine copies recorded in the National Union Catalog, the Library of Congress possesses three. In one copy the coloration is much stronger than in the other two.

Other instances of two-color imposition can be demonstrated through numerous examples of paper currency that were issued during the latter half of the century.¹³ The earliest that

¹³ McKay, George L., *Early American Currency* (New York, 1944), p. 73 and illus. 34.

have been encountered in the examples available in the Library of Congress were printed at Woodbridge, New Jersey, by James Parker in 1758 and 1759. We met him earlier in New York City where he printed one red page for presentation in the 1749 *Ordinances*.

Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Hall in 1759, and the later firm of Hall and Sellers, active from 1771 to 1780, customarily issued their currency in two colors as did John Dunlap also at Philadelphia in 1777, and Isaac Collins at Burlington, New Jersey, in 1776. Such currency was usually imposed on large single sheets and later cut into the proper single denominations. The Library of Congress has several of these single sheets including one printed by Hall and Sellers for the State of Rhode Island. The issue is dated March 18, 1780, and the denominations are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 20 dollars. There is red printing on one side, and each of the eight denominations, in an obvious attempt to discourage counterfeiters, is watermarked 'Confederation.' A similar sheet dated January 14, 1779 was prepared by Hall and Sellers for use by the Federal Treasury, and the watermark 'United States' is found on each of eight denominations which are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 20, 70, and 80 dollars.

In conclusion it must be emphasized that rubrication was not commonly used by the colonial printers in English-speaking America. English-speaking is used advisedly since the printers in Mexico made frequent use of red-printing in the books which issued from their early presses. As early as 1548 an edition of the *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Mexicana* was published with a rubricated title page. Later in the century a number of liturgical books made extensive use of red ink throughout the text which is expressly required for books of this nature.

However, the earliest instance of red ink in an English-American book that has been encountered in this survey is William Keith's *Letter to His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for*

the County of Chester, printed at Philadelphia by Andrew Bradford in 1718. Two Boston imprints of 1726 and 1736, both by Samuel Kneeland and Bartholomew Green; one South Carolina volume, the sumptuous edition of *The Laws of the Province* of 1736; two unrelated New York books of 1726 and 1749; the former printed by John Peter Zenger, and the latter by James Parker; the *Muscipula* by William Parks at Annapolis in 1726 with its double title pages, and one Ephrata imprint, the extraordinary *Blutige Schau-Platz* of 1748, are the only examples of rubrication that have been encountered outside of Philadelphia.

Of all the colonial printers Benjamin Franklin seems to have made the most extensive use of red ink commencing with Thomas Godfrey's *Almanac* for 1730 and George Whitefield's *Journal* of 1740, with its experimental title page in red and black, followed by five pocket almanacs for 1741, 1742, 1743, 1744, and 1745, his *Cato Major* of 1744, his so-called masterpiece, and two later German almanacs for 1750 and 1752, the actual printing of which was most certainly not done by him. At least nine later issues continuing this series to 1764 utilized both red and black ink, and admittedly not very successfully. With the exception of Bernard Romans' *Annals* of 1778, Timothy Hilliard's ordination sermon of 1789, certain issues of paper currency, and the 1786 set of geographical cards, this would appear to be the total results of printing in red on the American presses operating during the eighteenth century. A few of the results are impressive, but printing as it was practiced at that time in our country can hardly be regarded as a high art. It was a practical affair with few departures from established techniques, but the occasional attempts to do something beyond the routine were not all unsuccessful, and they make interesting comparisons with the similar output from the presses of Europe.

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