


Concerning
QUOTATION
MARKS

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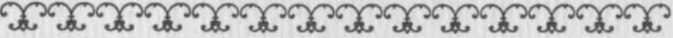


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No other mark of punctuation—or if one should object to the exactitude of that term—no other typographic device or auxiliary has as much interest historically or as much variety in usage as the quotation mark. I was first led to making some observations on marks of quotation five or six years ago and have been accumulating notes on the subject ever since. In view of the growing interest in the first appearance of various features in typography it may be desirable to record a few preliminary findings on this detail of bookmaking.

In the field of paleography we find that the scribes made use of several devices to mark passages which were quoted from other sources, but with the manuscript period we are not here concerned. In the earliest printed books we find quotations interpolated in the text with no distinguishing symbol and indicated only by the context, being usually introduced by some word like *inquit* or *dicit*. The difficulty was in knowing when the quotation ended and the text of the author resumed.

It is never safe to say just when the first use was made of any particular typographic device, for no

sooner is the statement made than someone discovers an earlier appearance. The very statement, however, serves to bring out information which might otherwise remain undeveloped.

These means have been used in the search for the first use of quotation marks. Hundreds of early books have been examined page by page. The published series of facsimiles of early printing have been consulted. The assistance of three skilled bibliographers (one in Paris, one in Berlin, and another in Oxford) was retained professionally to investigate the history of quotation marks in their respective national literatures. The statements regarding the symbol in practically every technical treatise on typography have been scheduled and compared. Finally, a note describing the scope of the inquiry was published in 1921, in the *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, and in response to a request for suggestions, numerous helpful letters were received from members of that Society.

The earliest book discovered in which appeared indicia which may properly be termed marks of quotation was printed in 1516 at Strasbourg, Alsace (then in Germany), by Mathias Schurer. It was "De Vitis Sophistarum" by Flavius Philostratus. The marks consisted of two commas in the left hand margin of each page outside the regular type measure. They were placed at the beginning of each line in which a quoted passage appeared, and were evidently added after the page was set up, because their alignment varies greatly. There was no method of showing just where in a line a quotation began or where it ended. Thus if a cited passage started in the middle of one line, ran through two full lines, and extended through the first two words

of the next, the pairs of commas would appear at the left extremity of all four of the lines involved. It should be added that the practice was not always absolutely uniform.

After discovering this volume it seemed that an examination of the other rather numerous books printed in Schurer's office might bring further data to light. Mrs. McMurtrie being on the point of an extended visit to Strasbourg, I persuaded her and her brother to examine the other Schurer books in the various libraries of that city, practically all of them being there preserved. The listing by Heitz in his "Elsässicher Büchermarken" was used as a guide. But, alas!, not another quotation mark was found!

From here the scene shifts to Italy, to the printing office of Aldus. In 1522 there was printed there the volume by G. Budaeus entitled "Libri V de Asse." This book, one of the Aldine octavos, has double commas in the left margins used to mark quoted passages. The practice in using them was practically the same as in the Strasbourg volume.

The third book in which the elusive marks have been discovered is one of French origin and one in which the members of the Grolier Club have a special interest: namely, Geoffroy Tory's "Champfleury," published at Paris in 1529. This book, a translation of which is now being printed for the Club by Mr. Bruce Rogers, made a notable contribution in many ways to French orthography and it seems quite appropriate that it should set the stage for the Gallic debut of quotation marks. Again the marks and their usage remain the same.

The evolution of these marks to their present form can be traced step by step with considerable accuracy,

the development of the guillemets, those little double angles used today in France, being of particular interest. Taking the marks at fifty-year periods, we can trace the gradual transition from the double commas in the page margin to the symbols in use at the present time. The usage has also evolved gradually. First the marks were brought within the type measure, next they were placed to indicate the actual start and termination of the quoted passage, and finally the mark used at the end came to be different (sometimes the same symbol inverted) from the opening mark. But this transition involves too much detail to be here discussed.

It has been said that the literature on the technique of typography was consulted for possible historical information. The various manuals from Fertel to De Vinne invariably pass on the same statements regarding quotation marks, and none of them appear to be based on even a vestige of fact. The French writers say that guillemets derive their designation from a printer of that name who first made use of them. It so happens that the archives and records regarding French printers are unusually complete, and there is no printer by that name in any of the registers. The statement, however, has been repeated by a hundred different authorities with no apparent effort to check its accuracy.

Another fact which lends interest to an investigation of quotation marks is that they are the only typographic device which is different in practically every country. We thus find quotations indicated one way in England, another way in France, and with yet other and differing methods in Germany, Holland, Sweden, and so forth. There is no other element of punctuation of which the same is true, with the limited exception of

the inverted exclamation point and question mark placed at the beginning of sentences in Spanish printing. This indicates a varying historical development in each country, and affords a fertile field for further inquiry.