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Review of *Illuminating Letters*

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Abstract

Illuminating Letters, edited by Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton, adds notably to the study of "the relationship between a text's typography and its literary interpretation."

Comments

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does describe Friends as an alternative source of funding for public libraries, she renders no guidance on how best to work with such groups. Nor does she share ideas on how to collaborate with community organizations, such as the Rotary or chambers of commerce.

Among the most frustrating aspects of this book is its lack of a conclusive definition of a "small public library." Is Weingand describing libraries that only serve fewer than 6,000 residents or that have annual budgets less than, say, \$100,000? Or are these primarily libraries that are staffed by non-Master's degreed librarians? It is impossible to tell. By way of explanation, Weingand notes that "the word *small* is a comparative one, implying the existence of something larger and perhaps more complex" (p. 30; emphasis in original). She then goes on to say that, in the case of libraries, *small* "suggests a smaller community, collection, staff, and building than would be found in larger public library situations. . . . 'Small,' therefore, is often viewed in terms of limitations" (p. 30). Since most public library administrators face limitations of one sort or another, perhaps the concept of a "small public library" is at best relative depending on the circumstances of any given organization.

Despite its apparent failings, this book remains a straightforward, if basic, introduction to public library administration. Weingand should find an audience in novice librarians, library trustees, and anyone seeking a brief overview of the topic. Those requiring more detailed "how-to" information on administering small public libraries will have to look elsewhere, however.

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Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation. Edited by PAUL C. GUTJAHN and MEGAN L. BENTON. Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001. Pp. xii + 198. \$34.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-55849-288-7.

Illuminating Letters, edited by Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton, adds notably to the study of "the relationship between a text's typography and its literary interpretation" (p. 3). The book's essays argue that "type and typography are . . . an intrinsic part of the text that a reader encounters when he or she reads a book" (p. 3). Part of the text, not an adornment to the text: Gutjahr and Benton choose their word carefully. With Michele Moylan and Lane Süles, the editors believe that there is "no such thing as a text unmediated by its materiality" (p. 4). "Literary texts are no less 'marked' by their typography than more commercial or functional texts. Once given visual form, any text is implicitly coded by that form in ways that signal, however subtly, its nature and purpose and how its creators wish it to be approached and valued" (p. 6; emphasis in original).

Quibbles are possible. "Typography," the editors say, "is an interpretive act" (p. 6). Is it only that? The University of Massachusetts Press issued their work with illustrations distinguished primarily by almost uniformly unpleasant and inaccurate grayness. Its reproductions appear in a size utterly incommensurate with the point they are supposed to complement. (Most egregiously, fig. 38 [p. 85], a page spread from the Kelmscott Chaucer, misrepresents not only size but also color and typography.) The face used in *Illuminating Letters* is small, cramped on the page, and gray, the "antitype" of the book's ostensible subject. This physical product demonstrates

that typographic choices may represent economic as well as interpretive choices. The University of Massachusetts Press website (http://www.umass.edu/umpress/fall_00/gutjahr.html; last accessed August 6, 2002) refers to this 198-page book as 256 pages long. Perhaps a mere typo, the reference also suggests abandonment of an originally more spacious design, probably to keep production costs down.

Its many merits are more significant, however, than the defects of this book's physical presentation, although these are regrettable in a work on this topic. Gutjahr and Benton's introduction, quoted above, precedes seven essays. By providing "bridges" between essays, to review and reinforce each essay's point and show how it advances the book's overall argument, the editors also make *Illuminating Letters* a coherent and sustained argument, something very different from the usual collection of essays.

Gutjahr's essay, the first in this volume, shows how typographic decisions in four Bibles—the 1611 first edition of the Authorized ("King James") Version; Isaiah Thomas' 1791 illustrated American-printed Bible; Harper's 1846 *Illuminated Bible*; and Golden Cockerel's 1931 *Four Gospels*—affected and reflected very different responses to books all containing "the same" text. Gutjahr perhaps overemphasizes typography's significance as a guide to reception while understating its significance as a response to changed attitudes. The Golden Cockerel *Gospels*, targeted at "a collector's, rather than religious, market" (p. 37) and adorned by Eric Gill's eroticized religious images, reflects attitudes about its text quite different from those which, less than a century before, produced objections to nudity in Harper's *Illuminated Bible* illustrations (pp. 33–37). Nonetheless, Gutjahr persuasively demonstrates the interaction between typography and interpretation of "the same" book.

Sarah A. Kelen discusses the use of blackletter in Thomas Dunham Whitaker's 1813 edition of *Piers Plowman*. By reprinting *Piers* in blackletter, Kelen shows how Whitaker (who, though the text's editor, also determined its typography) sought to keep the poem's rebarbative Roman Catholicism at arm's length from its reader and to contain its possible impact on contemporary Anglo-Catholicism at a time when repeal of Britain's anti-Catholic laws (which Whitaker opposed) was much in the air. But Kelen does not make clear why Whitaker chose to reprint *Piers* at all. Moreover, if he chose blackletter to assure his modern reader's "historical distance" (p. 66) from Langland's poem, why did he also provide a modern English paraphrase of Langland's unfamiliar Middle English at the bottom of each page, in roman type? Like Gutjahr, Kelen points to more complications than she has solved, but she reveals typography as a locus of important issues.

Benton analyzes the gendered language of typographers and designers, who helped reform late nineteenth-century bookmaking, and shows that they explicitly sought to eliminate what they called "feminine" practices in contemporary bookmaking. Recommending instead strong, virile, and sometimes (in language, anyway!) surprisingly phallic practices, they hoped to reclaim "culture" as a masculine rather than a feminine arena. I know only one even partly comparable piece of work, Marvin J. Taylor's study of the homoeroticized language of book collecting ("The Anatomy of Bibliography: Book Collecting, Bibliography and Male Homosexual Discourse," *Textual Practice* 14 [Winter 2000]: 457–77). Both marvelous essays suggest the rewards of sensitive attention to details of the language used by people working in various aspects of the book world.

Steven R. Price shows Samuel Richardson—the only major English novelist who was also a printer, and his own printer at that—manipulating fonts in the 1751 third edition of *Clarissa* (London: printed for Samuel Richardson, 1751) both to tag and to comment on different characters. Almost completely unexpected, con-

vincing, and concerned with one of the most-studied great works of English fiction, Price sheds new light on Richardson's techniques through examination of typography (one of *Clarissa's* least-considered physical attributes). Price's essay alone makes Gutjahr and Benton's point.

Edgar Allen Poe's lifelong interest in penmanship and handwriting, Leon Jackson shows, dovetailed with his work as editor and writer, and his involvement with typography and design to produce his view of "the manuscript hand as medium of truth" (p. 139). Poe, whose experience of typos was unpleasant and frequent, distrusted printers. He explored anastatic printing, a new technique that, he hoped, would privilege the author's own hand as a means of reaching a mass audience. Jackson reveals a Poe whose attitudes toward manuscript and print are important constituents of both "his aesthetic . . . [and] emotional needs" (p. 161).

Gene Kannenberg, Jr.'s essay studies the letterer's impact on how comics are understood. He illustrates Walt Kelly's P. T. Bridgeport speaking (*Pogo* series; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1951-89) in a variety of handwritten "wooden typeforms" familiar from various nineteenth-century American advertising media (fig. 59). Even as a child reading *Pogo* (although I was also the sort of nerd who read the Knopf colophons with which Gutjahr and Benton open) I responded to variations in the comic's "typography" just as (if memory is not too deceptive here) Kannenberg suggests.

Beth McCoy's analysis of Nella Larsen's 1929 *Passing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) is through its "intertypographical" relationship to Carl Van Vechten's 1926 *Nigger Heaven* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). ("Intertypographical" is a neologism on the analogy of "intertextual.") I disagree with McCoy's view (that Caslon, the face used in Larsen's *Passing*, recalls Van Vechten's 1929 book, which also used Caslon). Caslon, she argues, allowed Larsen to encode in *Passing* a rejoinder, not otherwise expressible, to Van Vechten's view of African-Americans.

McCoy's essay is a complex argument. Van Vechten, like Larsen, was a Knopf writer. Larsen could not overtly object to a novel from the same publisher over whose imprint her own appeared, particularly since African-American writers at that time were far more dependent on white publishing, reviewing, and distribution networks even than today. Worse, Van Vechten was the Knopfs' guide to writers of the Harlem Renaissance. If no Knopf author could criticize another Knopf author, no Knopf black author could afford to criticize the one person who brought the Knopfs their black authors. (Langston Hughes, also a Knopf writer, in part as a result of his friendship with Van Vechten, defended *Nigger Heaven* against opposition from the African-American community.) For McCoy, the 1986 Rutgers University Press reprint *Quicksand and Passing* (by Nella Larsen, edited by Deborah E. McDowell), though it brought Larsen new readers and critical attention, forfeited these typographically allusive references to Van Vechten by setting *Passing* in Perpetua rather than the Caslon of 1929. Rutgers thus removed *Passing* from a historical context in which typography itself originally signified historical embeddedness. Both novels certainly use Caslon. But McCoy seems to ignore the very different feel other design elements give each book. Most readers will only have recourse to her illustrations, figures 41 (Larsen, 1929) and 43 (Van Vechten, 1926), to test my view of this matter. I think, however, they provide evidence to suggest that more work is needed to establish the connections she wants to make.

Yet McCoy's essay is the most exciting and provocative one in the volume, in which every essay merits attention and praise. Details may not yet be proved, but her essay illuminates, more strikingly than any other, what makes this volume important. Typography embeds meaning, allusiveness, and historicity in ways no reprint

duplicates. Price sees it doing so in conjunction with textually based elements (the characterizations Richardson's characters provide of themselves in their own letters). I suspect that, in general, "typographically determined" meanings emerge from concert with history, text, and other physical aspects of design (layout, line width, the use of rules, initials, and illustrations or printer's devices). From this complicated mix of text, context, and physical features—a mix McCoy gets exactly right—meanings emerge and are born.

Gutjahr and Benton, in effect, have polemical purposes that lead them to overstate their case. Already a very strong case, it needed no overstatement. Even an argument such as McCoy's, which a reader who objects to its reliance on typography alone finds nonetheless exemplary in its use of typography to interweave a host of otherwise far from obviously related concerns, proves excitingly productive; so does the book in which it appears.

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Information, Knowledge, Text. By JULIAN WARNER. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001. Pp. x+150. \$49.50. ISBN 0-8108-3989-X.

Unusual in format and short in length, *Information, Knowledge, Text* is a collection of edited versions of papers and book reviews that were originally produced for other venues between 1993 and 1998. There are seven chapters, ranging between five and thirty pages long: three are republications of journal papers, from the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, the *Journal of Documentation*, and *Aslib's* magazine, *Managing Information*; three are revisions of conference presentations; and one concluding chapter is made up of six book reviews—three that were originally published in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, two from *Journal of Documentation*, and one from an unidentified source.

The author is a faculty member in the School of Management and Economics at the Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and an active, long-time participant in the Special Interest Group on the History and Foundations of Information Science (SIG/HFIS) of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST). Warner is that rare bird in the field of library and information science (LIS): a highly literate and historically aware theorist. When he quotes a character from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Warner readily admits that his source "is not usually considered within information studies" (p. 34). Many of the other sources to which Warner refers in this book are similarly "unusual," and it should be noted that few authors are as able or as eager to draw on the classics of literature, philosophy, theology, and science as Warner does here, refreshingly and entertainingly.

The current book may best be viewed as a record of the ways in which some of the ideas introduced in Warner's earlier work, *From Writing to Computers* (London: Routledge, 1994), have been developed by the author in recent years. In Warner's compelling (if not deliberately original) amalgam of semiotics, on the one hand, and the mathematical theory of communication often known misleadingly as "information" theory, on the other, communication is viewed as the process by which an agent instantiates a sign—that is, as the process by which a signal (the "signifier") is used to represent either a message or the decision to select that message from among an initial set of messages (the "signified"). Form and content, or ex-

