

Book Reviews



Books for Sale: The Advertising and Promotion of Print since the Fifteenth Century. Eds. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2009. 191p. alk. paper, \$49.95 (ISBN 9781584562658). LC 2009-046880.

“Advertising is part of life,” asserts Michael Harris in an essay on the selling and promotion of books. “It is not simply a deplorable spin-off.” Proof of that assertion can be found in this delightful collection based on papers presented at the 30th Annual Book Trade History conference in Bloomsbury in November 2008. The essays—by academics, librarians, and publishing professionals—retain the brevity and accessibility of oral presentations without sacrificing scholarly depth. The book reads like a chronological sequence of microhistories. Each chapter stands alone, while implicitly enriching those that come before and after. The book is generously furnished with black-and-white illustrations ranging from French trade cards to book jackets.

In her essay on “Sale Advertisements for Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century,” Lotte Hellinga examines 44 extant single sheets that were used for selling books, the “earliest witnesses to use of the printing press for retail purposes.” She concludes that there is growing “evidence for the big business of the book trade” even in this early period. Julianne Simpson’s piece on the selling of the *Biblia Regia* shows how complex the trade had become by the sixteenth century. The “shrewd” publisher Christopher Plantin used royal subsidies, custom editions, presentation copies, sales agents, book fairs, catalogs, and display posters to promote his polyglot Bible in 8 volumes.

Boundaries between book selling and general trade were not at all fixed, as Michael Harris shows in his study of printed advertising in London around 1700. In

printed publications, book notices might be interspersed with other commodities and services. Patent medicines were distributed at bookshops. Book notices were fixed to the walls of bureaus of exchange, public gathering places that grew up in large urban centers to provide information on labor and trade. The essay by Phillippa Plock on an eighteenth-century Parisian trade card collection also discusses such a gathering place, which in France was called a *bureau d’adresse*. Plock brings out the varied uses of printed paper materials, not only for advertising, but for their aesthetic qualities, to stimulate conversation, or to wrap purchases. Such ephemeral paper materials made up a large part of the printing trade, but most of them have not survived.

Like many of the other authors, Charles Benson draws on business records and correspondence to reconstruct advertising and the book trade in early nineteenth-century Ireland. Most books sold in Ireland at the time were imported from England or Scotland and marketed by sales representatives and through ads in newspapers and monthly and quarterly reviews. As in earlier centuries, publishers and booksellers were aware of quite subtle national differences both in the types of works likely to be wanted and the way they could best be sold.

As a mass market for books developed in the nineteenth century, the book trade seems to have become more specialized. The book jacket was an invention of that century that is still with us today, even in the digital environment. As Alan Powers explains, paper jackets were first used to protect the book but later used to attract readers and provide information such as blurbs or author photos. A snobbish prejudice against book jackets held sway among publishers. Colorful jackets were

associated with women's and children's books and compared to a pretty woman's clothes. Nowadays, retro book jackets are all the rage.

Book prizes are largely a creature of the twentieth century. They were intended to reward serious authors and encourage reading in general, but did they actually help to sell books? In his essay "The Use and Effect of Literary Prizes in the Late Twentieth Century," Peter Strauss finds that, with the sole exception of the Goncourt Prize in France, they rarely did. The author's reputation and word of mouth were more important routes to popularity. Strauss offers a detailed look at sales of Booker Prize winners and especially Salmon Rushdie, whose novel *Midnight's Children*, was the first to buck the trend. Nowadays the effect of the Booker on sales is "seismic."

The eighth and final essay in the collection, "Advertising Books Online: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," is a little different from the rest. It is not a work of historical scholarship, but an account of the online used book business written by Udo Göllmann, Manager of Sales and Accounts at AbeBooks, Europe. Göllmann believes that the great strength of the Internet is that it offers "the largest possible selection of books" to the reader. Competition and collaboration among online mediators and vendors is in constant flux. Göllmann provides a formula for business success that has allowed AbeBooks to survive, which includes an active marketing plan.

One of the virtues of this collection is that the authors do not press general ideas and interpretations; instead, they limit themselves to what the evidence supports. This allows the reader to participate in the act of historical interpretation based on primary sources, but with the guidance of an expert. There may be lessons to be drawn from the history of book advertising, but the main purpose and pleasure of this book is to understand a little better what life was like in times different from our own. The one thing that remained

constant was the fact that books need to be connected to readers.—*Jean M. Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.*

Mistakes in Academic Library Management: Grievous Errors and How to Avoid Them. Ed. Jack E. Fritts, Jr. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 132p. alk. paper, \$50 (ISBN 9780810867444). LC2009-016939.

This concise collection of essays, each written by an experienced library administrator, presents ten management mistakes commonly made by supervisors working in academic libraries. The contributors describe errors made in communication, project management, staffing, knowledge management, program planning, change management, and developing power and influence in the campus arena. Solutions are presented to help managers avoid these pitfalls. In his introduction to this volume, editor Jack Fritts states that the purpose of this book is "... to offer ideas and suggestions to help others avoid the snares some of us have already fallen into." He stresses that good communication skills are vital to the success of an effective administrator, a theme that links the essays together.

Each chapter begins with a scenario that illustrates a managerial miscalculation. This stratagem sets the stage for the theory and advice that is presented in the body of the essay. Since this book is designed to be a practical guide, the authors concentrate on the presentation of solutions that might serve to resolve the scenario effectively. Each solution is contrasted to the inappropriate strategies used within the case study. In some essays, the suggestions are backed by a brief explanation of related management theory. References are provided so that readers can refer to more theoretical works on the topic.

Unfortunately, the essays are inconsistent in quality. "Keeping Your Library on the Right (Correct) Side of Campus Politics" and "Developing Power and Influence as a Library Manager" would