

## Exhibition Review

### *The 1967 Chicago Book Clinic Exhibition*

On May 2, the Chicago Book Clinic opened its eighteenth annual book show. A review of the show could follow the usual pattern of calling attention to what is new and outstanding and what is ordinary and static. Factual information could be stated concerning the success or failure of the designer, the typographer, and the illustrator; production notes could be compiled about the type, paper, binding cloth, and reproduction techniques employed in each book. All this, however, has been accomplished in a review by Peter Keig published in the May number of *Book Production Industry*. What then remains to be done that would be appropriate for publication in *The Journal of Typographic Research*?

Perhaps very little; but it might be possible to use the current C.B.C. show as a reference point to gauge progress after eighteen years of bookmaking. As a premise we might restate the typographic needs of the serious reader, and try as best we can to determine whether or not progress is in fact observable.

Since *The Journal of Typographic Research* is in its infancy, it should not be amiss to print the oft-quoted aim of the Doves Press by its founder, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson: "The whole duty of typography is to communicate to the imagination, without loss by the way, the thought or image intended to be communicated by the author." While Cobden-Sanderson's dictum can penetrate deep into typographical practices, the Doves Press books themselves (for which a single font of roman type based upon that of Nicholas Jenson, 1470, was used) only restate the primary typographic solutions of the fifteenth century.

The typography of the book today is a relative matter. Some books are still as simple in design as a fifteenth-century one and can be treated as such. Others are complex beyond all belief and bear little or no relation to Nicholas Jenson's *Eusebius* or the Doves Press Bible. The complexity of typography is not an immediate happening; it has developed over the centuries as a result of the diversity of material presented and the necessity for multi-level emphasis throughout the book. The development of type sizes, accurate point system of mensuration, vast variations of type styles and modifications of basic styles,

printing surfaces, sensitive design knowledge and good taste in visual relationships, technical skills and machines capable of handling these elements, and the adjunct of illustrative reproduction in several well-known media have all contributed to the development. Modern counterparts of all the preceding elements are inherent in the books we design today.

Typographic design should lead the reader through a book in accordance with the nature of its content. This may mean fast and grasping pace, slow deliberate movement, or downright concentration page by page with reflection and re-reading:

1) If the content is straight narrative, the reader's progress should be direct and swift from the opening chapter to the last word. The typographic guideposts along the way will be held to a minimum with little more than a basic book typeface of normal reader size (8-10 point) properly leaded and set to a measure accommodated to a page size which can be easily held in the hands.

2) If information is the object, the typography should keep the reader in control of the material at all points with a minimum of design virtuosity.

3) If the material is complex and difficult to comprehend, the whole impact of typographic elements can be brought to bear. The typographer's skill in the manipulation of well-known type display relationships can reduce any complexity to understandable units or even segments of the whole subject.

When applying the foregoing to the exhibition, the dilemma is that typographic progress is either lost in the design consciousness of most books or they follow a well-known standard so closely that there is nothing to talk about. Anonymity prevails on so many levels of visual interest that book after book could pass before the eyes of a typographic expert without evoking a reaction—good or bad. Reaching a plateau such as I have described is probably an attainment of progress intended. There was a time when books from noted presses, or “press books” as they were known, stood out clearly from the trade issues in an exhibition. This is no longer true. Whatever the edge between these categories, it is barely noticeable in the eighteenth exhibition of the Chicago Book Clinic Club.

Perhaps we have to look to specific elements for something to talk about. There was a time when the statement “You can't tell a book by its cover” was true—not any more. Today the cover is the jacket and one can tell a great deal about a book from its jacket. Jackets have evolved in a relatively short time from a nonentity dust wrap-

per to a compelling visual representation of the entire book. The jacket is also a selling tool of the first magnitude without giving up one speck of its original function. During the same period edition book covers have advanced but little and are probably less strong as a case for protecting the book's "innards." This break with traditional standards is not serious since edition books are usually read once and set aside, or never read at all. The public library copies of edition books, of course, are rebound as needed—usually the rebound job is better than the original binding.

What are some of the conclusions regarding this exhibition of 66 books selected from a total of 320 submitted? First, I feel positive that, as a whole, the 66 books in this exhibition look better and work better as books than those in the first C.B.C. exhibition eighteen years ago. Secondly, it is quite possible that some one book in the first exhibition was a better book than the best one in this show. Progress, then, is group or mass progress. I also feel that the very best book in all categories of subject matter could have been conceived, set in type, imposed in relation to illustration or decoration and all other elements of the book, printed and bound at any time since the invention of movable type at the middle of the fifteenth century. Just as the lightest light is next to the darkest dark, the most obvious progress in book design has been immediately after a thoroughly degenerated period of printing design. Without the degeneration of their time William Morris and Cobden-Sanderson would have had no torch to hold as revivers of the art of printing.

#### R. Hunter Middleton

R. Hunter Middleton (Ludlow Typograph Company, 2032 Clybourn, Chicago, Ill. 60614) since 1923 has devoted his professional career entirely to the typeface program of Ludlow Typograph Company, having been responsible for the designing of some 80 typeface series. He is one of the founders of The Society of Typographic Arts and 27 Chicago Designers, active member of The Caxton Club, Association Typographique Internationale (Paris), The International Center for the Typographic Arts (New York), International Design Conference (Aspen), and author of two books: *Chicago Letterfounding, 1937*; *Making Printers' Typefaces, 1938*, as well as numerous articles for graphic arts journals. In 1944 he established a private press, Cherryburn, to print from original Thomas Bewick wood engravings.