

it will be recovered from its reuse for its original purpose at the back of some New York bar. A superfluity of things creates a new risk for cultural objects: that we will simply throw them away.

Traditionally valuable things continue to have an aura of protection, and we are unlikely to throw them in the garbage. Collectors of fine printed editions can take additional comfort that their purchases are likely to last much longer than collections of pulp fiction or comic books. All works currently produced in print may in turn last longer than much of our digital information, unless it is regularly updated to new digital standards, often a manual, time-consuming task.

This challenge will likely confront the majority of people alive today, as they face the decay of family snapshots and even formal portraiture, which in most cases won't last their lifetimes. Our reliance on digital means to aid our memories may mean that we lose more recent images, while the faces of our Victorian ancestors still scowl out at us from the prints of their own era.

.....
~ Sarah Sutherland spends her days online managing content and partnerships for the Canadian Legal Information Institute. She is vice-chair of the Alcuin Society.

BOOK REVIEWS

Typographical Ornata Et Cetera

BY JOHN GRICE

(EVERGREEN PRESS, 2016, £300)

WHEN JAN AND I started printing at Barbarian Press in 1977, anything to do with type was a passion. Very soon after we started, we visited a letterpress shop owned by two octogenarian brothers who were selling their business (“To a woman!” we were told in ghastly tones). I spent a little time looking around the composing room, scanning scrapbooks of work the business had produced over the decades: announcements of stock auctions, estate sales, village fetes; some wedding invitations and birth announcements; and a vigorous polemic against the removal of a memorial fountain from one to another part of a churchyard. But no matter how joyous, impassioned or eager the material printed, the only sign of any ornament was the use of rules—occasionally. Once, in a moment of irrepressible exuberance, a double rule. But no ornaments, decorated rules or borders. I mentioned this to the old gentleman still stolidly setting type on the lip of his distaff volcano. (He was, I was fascinated to see, holding quads in his mouth, spitting them into his hand when he came to fill out the line: evidently the spit made them slip in more easily.) “Printer’s flowers?” he said,

enunciating with difficulty. “If we was supposed to have flowers, type would be made out o’ dirt.”

It was our luck that one of the books published in 1976 was John Ryder’s *Flowers & Flourishes*, and it became part of the foundation of my love for specimen books of type and ornaments. Type always took precedence, of course. In specimen books ornaments were always shuffled to the rear and shown in unrevealing single lines, or arranged higgledy-piggledy in “Economy Sets” or “Hand-I-Fonts.” In earlier examples, like the elephantine 1923 ATF *Specimen Book & Catalogue*, they were used throughout to border or illumine samples of job work. Occasionally I discovered treasures devoted to them: Harold Berliner’s *Garden of Printers’ Flowers*, Paul Hayden Duensing’s *Ornamenta*, Richard Hoffman’s *When a Printer Plays*, Mark Arman’s monographs on ornament, and the exquisite set of five Monotype broadsheets designed by Sarah Clutton in the 1950s. Now, in John Grice’s *Ornata*, we have a new masterpiece to add to that shelf.

Ornaments, *pace* my elderly quad-sucking acquaintance, are always a pleasure to look at, however much they may sometimes evade my

attempts to use them. I find myself amazed at what other printers can do with them. John Grice's 128-page book, published in an edition of just 99 copies, shows arrangements of ornaments ranging from the well-known but infinitely versatile Fournier, Granjon and Lyonnaise designs to lesser-worked diggings like Bruce Rogers's dolphins and the set he designed for the Lanston Monotype Corporation, which always remind me of holly wreaths at Christmas, all spines and dots. Grice presents these within a running text informally and charmingly written with much information folded in. The effect is of paying a visit to his pressroom and having a tour of the ornaments, borders and ornamental founts. In fact, the whole book resembles a conversation with someone interested in the way of the letterpress printer or typographer.

The preface sets out the intention of the book, to show "the design and use of printers' ornaments and other display material, from the standpoint of the material held here at the press." Was this intended as a caveat? For me at least, it made the promising point that the book would be presented from experience, subjectively: every ornament or face printed in it has been through the writer's hands, and represents his taste and occasional demurral. For example, he inveighs against what he calls the "academist style" in ornaments associated with gothic and Tuscan types of the late 19th century, saying bluntly, "I have none with which to illustrate the point." And elsewhere: "My holding of twentieth century ornament is slight; I tend to favour the classics," yet facing this is a three-colour page showing David Bethel's Coronet ornament in black on yellow used in a striking diagonal design with two scarlet pica rules.

It is rare to find a book that gives such sound- ing pleasure at the turn of every page. There is not a dull opening in it. The specimens he shows (and none of the openings in the book is without at least two showings) are artfully designed and set, often arresting in their use of colour combinations, but occasionally in black alone, reminding us that good design and fine arrangement are quite capable of holding their own without colour. He shows a spread of two patterns of Glint (also a David Bethel design) that opened

my eyes because I have been working with Bert Smith's many Glint border arrangements for the Curwen Press,¹ which one might be forgiven for thinking "compleat," such is their range—yet these move beyond them. Interestingly, Glint is an ornament John Ryder grumbled about in *Flowers & Flourishes*, remarking that it "had popularity for a while but . . . now rests under the dust of disuse, happily out of sight." Yet, far from remaining disused, it has since been resurrected and proven probably the most versatile and inspiring ornament of the past 50 years: Michael Tarachow at Pentagram Press used it in hundreds of experimental arrangements, and it was a mainstay for Bert Smith at Curwen. Here is proof of the rise and fall of fashions in ornamental choice, a point that occupies John Grice several times in the book and links him to John Ryder, who remarked 40 years ago, "Further study of flowers might relate the appearance of new images to the socio-political life of place and period."

There is much else: nearly half the book displays quad initials, decorated letters, and titling faces of rich diversity, combined with various borders and a fine use of rules—which in turn have their own pages. There is a section on "diapers" (patterned fields), another on stock blocks and dingbats, and accompanying all this is the commentary of John Grice, who on the evidence of this superb book is a designer, printer, typographer and companion to be grateful for. There are not many indispensable books on type. I believe this is one of them.

1. Barbarian Press acquired the Curwen Press archives of Monotype ornaments and borders in 2009. It expects to publish *Bordering on the Sublime: Ornamental Typography at the Curwen Press* in summer 2018.

~ REVIEWED BY CRISPIN ELSTED,
BARBARIAN PRESS

