

Book Review

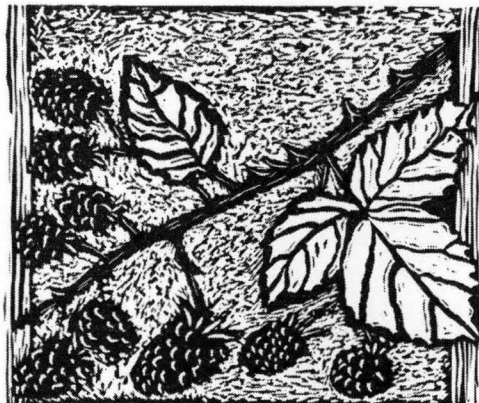
Peter Bartl

The Well-Made Book: Essays and Lectures. By Daniel Berkeley Updike. Edited by William S. Peterson, West New York, Mark Batty, 2002. Hard cover, 383pp. \$US 55. Available from Mark Batty Publishers, 6050 Boulevard East, Ste 2H, West New York, N.J. 07093.

This is a 'well-made book' for the historian of printing and typography. The book is a collection of Updike's essays and lectures from a number of different sources, some never published before. A few of these essays do have an astonishing relevance even today, but most are steeped in their time. They throw an interesting light on Updike's relationship to and his attitude towards some of his contemporaries like T.M. Cleland, R. Rudzicka and S. Morrison among others. For example of William Morris he writes: ... that Mr. Morris was not a great printer but a great decorator. Updike's approach as a patient craftsman printing the finest book possible under ordinary commercial conditions has the surprising ring of many modernist design principles, although the visual language he used is deeply steeped in tradition. The aims of his Merrymount Press were simple: "to do common work well — better in fact, than has been generally thought worthwhile." His idea of original creation, as opposed to imitation of tradition is beautifully expressed in "Some principles in planning printing" — "The man who has to plan or lay out a piece of printing ... his plan is best made alone in a quiet room (from which examples of other people's work are banished)...." The book itself is designed with Updike's aesthetic ideals in mind.

The Caslon typeface, traditional margins, the paper and the whole feel of this book complement the language and ideas of this voyage into the history of typography. It is a voyage, not only into typography, but into Updike's genteel circles in the Eastern United States, its society and technology at the turn of the 19th century into the 20th. Those among us who did grow up into a letterpress technology might still understand the technical references and the managerial culture of a traditional printshop. Few of us will however understand the references to personalities, mores and events that occupied Boston's moneyed, cultural circles in that time. For a humble craftsman, D.B. Updike had some pretty influential friends, he loved quoting the classics and now obscure 19th century figures. It astounded me how much our language has changed in less than a hundred years. Mark Batty, the publisher has made an important contribution to the history of North American typographic history with this publication.

Peter Bartl is retired professor of design, University of Alberta, now living in Balfour, B.C.



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