

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Dane, Joseph A. Blind Impressions: Methods and Mythologies in Book History

Janice Liedl

Volume 38, Number 1, Winter 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088702ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22793>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Liedl, J. (2015). Review of [Dane, Joseph A. Blind Impressions: Methods and Mythologies in Book History]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(1), 162–164. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22793>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2015

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

collective and comparative work on these—and other—still little known but nevertheless important figures.

PAULA CLARKE

McGill University

Dane, Joseph A.

Blind Impressions: Methods and Mythologies in Book History.

Material Texts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. viii, 218 + 9 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-8122-4549-3 (hardcover) \$65.

The accomplished and deft bibliographer Joseph A. Dane offers here a new collection of essays, published as part of the “Material Texts” series, that unsettles conventions and challenges clichés in book history. As the punning title suggests, *Blind Impressions* tackles the assumptions that underlie practices of Anglo-American bibliography, using a style that is direct and often with an exasperated amusement at how the academy seems to promote wilful blindness. With elegant wordplay and humility, Dane’s volume offers up twelve distinct and valuable excursions into reimagining the practice of book history. The composition is united chiefly by Dane’s relentless insistence on returning to the sources and questioning interpretative commonplaces. *Blind Impressions* is firmly based in the study of early modern books and book culture, but not exclusively: Dane draws on the medieval, and ranges into the modern era for examples, comparisons, and critiques when it serves his greater purpose of changing the status quo in book history.

Dane’s introduction sets forth the case for rethinking academic practice by engaging with the reality of the material texts as opposed to accepting conventional wisdom or scholarly norms. The book embodies that aim in three sections. The first, “What is Print?” offers three chapters tackling elements of bibliographic interpretation and commonplace. Most valuable may be the second chapter, “Ca. 1800: What’s in a Date?” which questions the convention dividing print history at that year. Dane lays out the arguments for and against that watershed with fresh vigour. His conclusion, that the date retains its importance, is characteristically insightful: we cannot escape the importance of

1800 for book history “because this is the way modern bibliography has made that history understood” (56).

The three chapters in the central section appear less thematically cohesive but still offer valuable insights into how a leading scholar approaches the work of bibliography. Of particular interest to early modern specialists is Dane’s chapter exploring catchtitles in English books to 1550. He outlines his research practice and acknowledges pitfalls in the process. In the brief survey demonstrating how these early print practices defy consistent categorization, Dane reinforces the centrality of the material text to the scholarly conversation. Academics teaching bibliography might also find his chapter on editorial practice and principles valuable to assign to advanced students.

Blind Impressions concludes with a section of uneven and idiosyncratic excursions into book history. Lacking thematic unity, it nonetheless contains several essays grounded in renewed and direct examination of particular expressions of print. This can be seen with a humble and profound “Meditation on the Composing Stick” wherein Dane conducts a thought experiment reconstructing the possible methods of creating early books, line by line, and follows the evidence in proof sheets to a surprising conclusion: “The instability of pages I am claiming suggests a method of composition that does not involve galleys or the composing stick, but one whereby the unit of the page dominates [...]” (148). Equally rewarding is his confessional piece outlining the stops and starts in his understanding of early two-colour printing: “The Red and the Black.” Dane shares his elegant theory that the red lines were laid down first, mimicking manuscript technique, which appears to be confirmed by close examination with a loupe. Closer study with a binocular scope soon overturns this interpretation, instead showing that the red lines were drawn in by hand after the black ink was printed. Dane’s humility is refreshing and reinforces the book’s main point that scholarship will thrive only when we question conventional wisdom and return to the material texts.

Blind Impressions may frustrate some readers with Dane’s idiosyncratic exploration of the difficulties inherent in the practice of book history. There are far more questions than answers; however, the questions are smart enough to defy simple solutions, and the prospect of answering them with further research is invigorating. Informed by his wide experience in the field, alive with articulate erudition and grounded in an exhaustive attention to the physicality and cultural possibilities of books, *Blind Impressions* is a rewarding read. Dane’s

eclectic volume will be welcomed by scholars in bibliography, book history, and literary and cultural studies. It can further serve as an intriguing entrée for advanced students interested in following one of the top academics in the field as he navigates through problems, process, and possibilities in book history.

JANICE LIEDL

Laurentian University

De Vitoria, Francisco.

De iustitia. Über die Gerechtigkeit. Vol. 1. Ed. and trans. Joachim Stüben, intro. Thomas Duve.

Political Philosophy and Theory of Law in the Middle Ages and Modernity, Texts and Studies. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013. Pp. cxii, 191. ISBN 978-3-7728-25-6-4 (hardcover) €168.

The present book is the first of three projected volumes that aim to make newly available Francisco de Vitoria's Salamanca lectures on questions 57–122 of the *Secunda Secundae* of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. Since justice is the main topic of this section of Aquinas's *Summa*, Vitoria's commentary not only provides us with insight into the reception of Aquinas in sixteenth-century Spanish Scholasticism but, even more importantly, promises us a better understanding of Vitoria's own views on justice and law—the object of justice, according to Aquinas and Vitoria. Vitoria's importance in the history of legal and political thought is well established; he is considered to be the founder of the school of Salamanca and the father of international law. Therefore, new editions and translations of any of his works are welcome events.

Among the lectures Vitoria held at the height of his academic career at the University of Salamanca between 1526 and 1546 we have to distinguish between the regular lectures (*lecturae*), which mostly commented on Aquinas's *Summa*, and the special ceremonial lectures, the so-called *relectiones*. The *relectiones* are usually considered the more important results of Vitoria's teaching. They have been printed many times since the sixteenth-century, and it is to them that Vitoria owes his reputation and reception. The regular lectures are less well known. They are preserved in student reports, and were not printed