Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing (review)

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serve not only marketing agents that solidify the value of the book, but also as liminal figures who attempt to delineate relationships between books and readers.

Saenger's *The Commodification of Textual Engagements in the English Renaissance* not only convincingly illustrates the marketing function of the preliminary pages in Renaissance books but also that these paratexts, while focusing on a commercial transaction, liminally mediate between the book and reader. In doing so, these paratexts shed light on the early modern London book trade, early modern readers as well as conceptions of literature and authorship. Refreshingly, Saenger moves beyond the small section of books usually examined by textual scholars to include also a wide variety of printed texts, such as instructional works, religious texts, and even a book that contains instructions for constructing devices and conducting magic tricks and paranormal experiments. The number of books discussed by Saenger in his slim volume is impressive and lends itself well to his comprehensive assertions regarding paratexts in Renaissance books. Saenger's analyses are clear and insightful but — at least at times — left me wishing for lengthier discussions of particular texts. Overall, the book makes an excellent case for further analysis of the front matter of Renaissance texts and lays a good critical foundation for doing so.

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William Kuskin, ed. *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing.*
Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. xxviii + 394 pp. index. illus. bibl. $60. ISBN: 0–268–03308–0.

This edition of ten essays on English printing history is well-organized, with a descriptive list of illustrations, an excellent basic bibliography, and a helpful index. In many ways, the volume demonstrates where scholars are now in their pursuit of book history, an uneasy mixture of literary analysis, bibliography, history, theory, speculation, and received notions from twentieth-century scholarship. When the authors address the primary sources, the essays are at their best and most readable, weaker when they synthesize secondary materials, some of which are outdated; several essays become particularly opaque in their application of theoretical notions to Caxton and his legacy. Readers interested in obscure terminology — for example, anadiplosis, antimetabole, *fürstenspeigl*, governmentality, ideologeme, rhizomatic, uchronic — will learn much new vocabulary.

Kuskin's introduction points to the difficulties of writing well about general aspects of early printing history: there is much to be synthesized, not all of it dependable. Kuskin is strongest when he focuses on his sources for the book's title, Robert Copland's statement that he is "gladly folowynge the trace of my mayster Caxton" (7), along with Chaucer's "Gentilesse," its appearance in Ashmole 59, and its subsequent print history. The book is then divided into four sections.

The first section includes essays by David R. Carlson, Mark Addison Amos, and Jennifer R. Goodman. Carlson is always interesting, here arguing that jobbing was the primary enterprise of printers like Caxton and focusing on the only known handbill from Caxton's press, an advertisement for his Sarum *Ordinale* of 1477, along with printed indulgences and blank forms. There is some necessary reliance on received notions of the process of producing finished books. For example, Carlson says that in early print shops books were sent out to be bound or binding was left up to the customer. Foot, however, has recently suggested that display copies for purchase of popular texts were most likely bound in the print shop (Mirjam M. Foot, *Bookbinders at Work* [2006]). Elsewhere, Carlson comments, "Caxton's interest in English literature, such as it was, had not at all, or very little, to do with a love of literature . . . except perhaps for the love of literature in potential printed-book buyers which Caxton saw might be subjected to commercial exploitation" (58). One wonders how Carlson can know this. As Alexandra Gillespie asks later in the collection: "How far are the intentions of the printer recoverable from his bibliographical trace?" (172). Mark Addison Amos then presents a close reading of the *Knyght of the Towre* through the lens of Caxton's role as a powerful international merchant, using contemporary letters and sumptuary laws to make his case, while Goodman's discussion of the eight prose romances printed by Caxton is a model of clear analysis and beautifully composed prose style.

The next section of the book features essays by A. E. B. Coldiron and Alexandra Gillespie. Tracing texts of Christine de Pizan's *Moral Proverbs* from manuscript to print, Coldiron correctly argues that Christine was well-received by the early English printers but Coldiron's synthesis of secondary sources is not entirely successful, especially in her discussion of Richard Pynson's edition, for which she relies mainly on two scholarly essays for her argument. Gillespie's essay looks again at *Sammelbände*, which she has so eloquently discussed elsewhere. She analyzes the ways in which such compilations may have reflected Caxton's sense of market and the first print consumers' responses as evidenced by Roger Thorney's Oxford, St. John's College, volume and the so-called Fisher *Sammelband*.

In the third section, William Kuskin looks at the development of English national identity as reflected in public response to alien and foreign printers, drawing on documentary evidence pertaining to Pynson's near-lynching and other law suits (derived in part from essays published by Henry Plomer in the 1920s). A clever essay by William N. West takes up the question of just what constitutes an edition. Patricia Clare Ingham looks at Caxton's *Statutes of the English Realm*, then John Rastell's response to the *Statutes*, and posits that Caxton influenced Henry VII to think in terms of "Englishness"; her argument, however, is weakened by the omission of discussion of Pynson's continued publication and importation into England of books composed in Law French. Finally, Tim William Machan discusses the ways in which "early modern Middle English" was popularized by printers through their insistence on the figure of the author, writing as an ethical activity, and their later shift of emphasis from authors to editors.

In the fourth section, entitled "Coda," Seth Lerer concludes the volume with

a look at influential nineteenth-century writers on Caxton, including Thomas Frognall Dibdin, William Blades, James A. H. Murray, and Jennet Humphreys. Lerer's style is easy and his essay quite informative. A half-tone detail from one of Lerer's illustrations of a Marinoni combined perfecting and duplex single-cylinder press, used to print newspapers in the nineteenth century, has been used to open the volume giving this reviewer initially some pause, however: is it perhaps ill-judged to introduce a book about Caxton and his successors with such an image? Illustrations that open the other sections are blurry; the reproduction of the Howard Pyle print of 1902 that illustrates part 4 does not do service to the splendid original, reproduced as fig. 10.2. There are particularly poor reproductions of other illustrations including figs. 4.1, 4.3, 4.4 (these look to have been reproduced from microfilm), visual faults that might be attributed to the publisher rather than to the editor or authors.

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Sean Keilen. *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature.*
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, xiv + 224. index. illus. bibl. $40. ISBN: 0–300–11012–X.

Vulgar Eloquence makes a fresh inquiry into a familiar subject: the extraordinary flourishing of English vernacular literature in the 1580s and 1590s and its shaping by classical example. The period label *Renaissance* has, of course, long connoted the rebirth of classical languages and learning, but the debt we might expect English writers to acknowledge is an unexpected one. "Englishmen always wanted to be Romans," Keilen remarks at the opening of his book and this desire had long been satisfied by Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim that the British were alternative Romans being descendants of the Trojan Brutus (2). However, the debunking of this view by Reformation antiquaries made such an aspiration increasingly unrealistic, even undesirable, and it became apparent that the English, at least, were rather "the victim of Conquest, the bastard progeny of a brutal rape" perpetuated by the ancient Romans (19).

How this conquest came to be seen as "fortunate" (93), enabling the invention of English literature, is the subject of this ambitious and beautifully written book. It begins with Keilen noting the curious "willingness" of English writers "to emphasize rather than dissimulate England's subaltern" relationship "to ancient Rome" (4). This emphasis led writers to question the distinction between the civil and the barbarous and to value the vulgar eloquence of their own vernacular writing. It is not just that the Romans are discovered to be barbarians after all, but that they too were poor imitators of the exalted Greeks. Paradoxically, it is the vulgarity of the vernacular which brings the English closer to the Romans.

Keilen's study also wants to return to, if not quite to restore, an older understanding of literature as an aesthetic order that transcends its moment of