

Librarian, What of the Book Jacket?

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ONE OF THE most startling success stories of recent times is the rise of the book jacket from its once lowly estate as a plain typographic wrapper, placed round the book for the simple purpose of protecting it from dust and dirt, to its present dominating position, not only as the chief attraction in any bookstore display, but even as the sole attraction of exhibitions intended to demonstrate its artistic qualities as a product of the graphic arts. This evolution, the result of the discovery by publishers of the efficacy of the jacket in promoting the sale of books, has created serious problems for libraries.

For the sake of convenience, the material printed on the book jacket may be roughly classified into three types: descriptive, pictorial and bibliographical. The first consists primarily of the description of the contents of the book, commonly called the "blurb," and of the prepublication "criticisms" of reviewers. The pictorial matter may be broadly interpreted as the general design of the jacket, whether typographic, decorative or illustrative. The bibliographical information includes (in addition to the title and the name of the author) details concerning the design, production and publication of the book, data by or about the author, the name of editor or illustrator, the series title, and such pictorial matter as is specifically related to and sometimes mentioned in the book, including illustrations which are a part of the series in the text.

There are special problems and opportunities inherent in each of these categories,

and it is the purpose of this paper to draw attention to them and, on the basis of replies to a questionnaire sent to a score of libraries, to report what they are doing about them.

Bibliographical Importance of Book Jackets

By far the most important of the problems is the increasing practice of publishers to put on the jacket the kinds of bibliographical information mentioned above, while omitting such information from the book itself. This aspect of the jacket has been discussed in some detail, and with examples, in the writer's article "On the Desirability of the Bibliographically Self-contained book,"¹ but its importance justifies more than a passing reference here. Publishing practice in this respect compels the library to examine each jacket carefully in order to determine whether any valuable information or pictorial matter appearing on it has been omitted from the book. If so, it is necessary to clip it and paste or bind it into the book. The time and labor thus consumed adds considerably to the cost of processing.

On the other hand, libraries which acquire such books at second hand, without the jacket, are not only possibly receiving an incomplete book, but usually have no easy way of determining whether this is the case or not, unless, for example, a jacket illustration is identified in the book. The reproduction on the jacket of Van Thienen's *Jan Vermeer of Delft*, cited in the writer's article mentioned above, is listed in the table of plates, with a plate number and the location "jacket." In this case the jacket re-

¹ *Publishers' Weekly*, 159:912+, February 10, 1951.

production is especially important, since the book intends to present colored reproductions of all of Vermeer's work (with the exception of one painting, the location of which is unknown) and its absence from a jacketless copy of the book makes the latter as defective as if a plate had been torn out of the book itself. Fortunately, the table of plates supplies a check.

Such a check is lacking in the following examples. The jacket of Steinbüchel's *Zerfall des christlichen Ethos*² states that because of the sudden death of the author his manuscript remained a fragment, that he had intended to add another entire section. There is no mention of this whatsoever in the book itself, so that anyone using a copy without the jacket remains in ignorance of this circumstance, unless the library has incorporated the information into the book at the time of cataloging. According to the jacket of Heer's *Aufgang Europas*,³ the scientific apparatus (i.e., the notes) of the work appears in a separate commentary volume. No mention of this fact is made in the book, nor is there any volume numbering to indicate that the work is not complete in one volume. Beyerlein's *Von drei Reichen*⁴ consists of selections from the deceased author's writings. The name of the editor who made the selection and who contributed a foreword is given only on the jacket. If information similar to the foregoing cannot at times be included in the book because of unforeseen circumstances, an erratum slip should be inserted, otherwise the bibliographical and sometimes even the textual integrity of the book is destroyed. This is an area which might well receive the attention of the ALA Committee on Relations with Publishers.

² Steinbüchel, T. *Zerfall des christlichen Ethos im 19. Jahrhundert.* Frankfurt a. M. [1951].

³ Heer, F. *Aufgang Europas.* Vienna [1949].

⁴ Beyerlein, K. *Von drei Reichen.* Reinbek bei Hamburg [1947].

Collection, Use, and Storage of Jackets

In discussing how libraries utilize book jackets, one must distinguish between keeping the jacket or parts thereof for reference or display purposes, and collecting them permanently for their value as a branch of the book arts, for the light they throw on publishing history, or as general cultural documents. The commonest temporary use is to call attention to new books received. Bulletin boards with their colorful displays are a familiar sight, especially in public libraries. Some college and university libraries leave the jackets on the books in their browsing rooms, to brighten up the rooms and to make the information on the jackets available to readers. Harvard has discontinued this practice because the jackets soon become untidy.

A number of libraries keep a selection of jackets for exhibition purposes, either to call attention to a group of books on a special subject, to an anniversary of a man or an event, or simply to illustrate book jacket design. In the latter case, a single designer, a special type of jacket, or the production of a country or group of countries may be featured. Art schools and art departments of colleges use jackets as models in classes in commercial design. In all these cases, the jackets sooner or later are discarded for more recent ones. Libraries, however, customarily leave the jackets on books going into special collections, where suitable accommodations and careful supervision assure their preservation from damage. In Harvard's Houghton Library for rare books, first editions and fine printing, the jackets are marked with the call number of the book and stored separately in boxes.

Various parts of the jacket, on the other hand, are clipped by many libraries and made a permanent part of their resources. Portraits and biographical data are either tipped into the books or preserved in pam-

phlet files. The pictorial parts, especially reproductions of works of art, are added to the art or picture collection. Some libraries paste the blurb into the book for the reader's information, but at least one library has discontinued the practice because jacket material may be biased or misleading. This question has been investigated by students in the School of Library Service of Columbia University and a summary of their findings published.⁵

Relatively few libraries, it seems, collect jackets on a permanent basis as examples of the graphic arts or as illustrating trends in the book arts and in publishing history. The late Holbrook Jackson saw an even broader value in their preservation. Describing the "Sanctuary of Printing," a collection of printing ephemera formed by John Johnson, then printer to the Oxford University Press in England, he says: "Dr. Johnson's store of ephemera may prove to be as reliable a guide to historians as the congeries of books in the Bodleian or the British Museum. The historian of the future may yet learn more of our period from book-jackets and blurbs than from the novels whose flamboyancies [they] are designed to sell, just as the literary archeologist has recovered treasures of song from the ephemeral broadsides of the itinerant ballad-mongers."⁶ Be that as it may, it is certainly true that because of their high artistic quality, many jackets, especially those from abroad, constitute an important contribution to the graphic arts. The value of a collection of such jackets, moreover, will be considerably increased if, as is hinted from time to time, the jacket in its present form should be superseded by a less expensive method of achieving the publishers' objectives.

No library at the present time preserves

all book jackets, although until recently this was the policy at the Library of Congress and the University of Illinois library, both of which formerly discarded only the plain typographic ones. The Library of Congress has not destroyed its unsorted accumulation of from 50,000 to 75,000 jackets, but it now retains only about 25 per cent of current receipts, roughly 10 per cent as book jacket art and 15 per cent as picture and other reference material. The University of Illinois has discontinued collecting jackets, turning its entire accumulation over to the Print Room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Book Jacket Designers Guild in New York has done likewise). In selection for preservation, emphasis will naturally be on artistic quality, but the Museum will keep a certain number of representative jackets for purposes of historical perspective. The New York Public Library adds to its permanent collection 125 jackets annually. Harvard preserves only those designed by outstanding artists. Yale and Princeton, being near the publishing center of New York, feel justified in leaving this type of collecting to the New York Public Library and to interested graphic arts groups in that city. The British Museum keeps roughly one in every fifty jackets, basing its selection on artistic quality and on bibliographical or other important information, when this is omitted from the book itself.

The problem of storing and making easily available to the public large quantities of jackets is obviously a formidable one. The Library of Congress collection is bundled unsorted and stored in cartons. Under the new policy of limited collecting, incoming jackets are sorted into the two groups, book arts and reference material. The first may sometime be staple-bound into annual volumes, the pertinent parts of the second clipped and added to the picture and refer-

⁵ Schlegel, A., et al. "Do Book Jackets Encourage Reading?" *Library Journal*, 74:1738-39, November 15, 1949.

⁶ *The Printing of Books*. London, 1938.

ence files. At present the collection is neither cataloged nor classified, but is available for examination. At the British Museum the jackets are wrapped up in parcels and stored in annual groups as received. No cataloging or classification is attempted, but they are available to the public. Those containing bibliographical information are placed in the books. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Harvard store their collections flat in boxes, arranged according to country and designer, and they may be examined upon request.

The New York Public Library has evolved and put into practice a carefully thought out procedure. The year of publication is noted on the jackets when they are removed from the books. About every two weeks the jackets of no interest are discarded and the others sent to the various departments for selection: print room, map room, picture collection, etc. From the remainder the annual selection of 125 is made. These are intended to be representative of trends rather than the "best 125," and include examples of various types.

The jackets are mounted in scrapbooks in such a way that, in general, each opening of the scrapbook will show a single jacket cut into two parts, the spine, front panel and flap on the right-hand page, the other part on the opposite page. If the illustration covers both front and back panels, these are mounted in one piece on the right, the two flaps on the left. Since books published in any one year may come into the library in subsequent years, the jackets are not mounted until two years after the end of any particular year. The collection is represented in the card catalog and may be examined in the same way as any other material.

The scrapbook method of preservation has the disadvantage, not only that the jackets are cut up, but also that they can be exhibited only before they are mounted (at

the New York Public Library for a period of from two to three years). Retrospective exhibitions are out of the question. For exhibition purposes jackets should be stored intact, and in such a way that the book shape can easily be restored, because only thus will the artistic qualities of the jackets appear to best advantage. In favor of the scrapbook is its simplicity in shelving and handling, as well as the fact that it is perhaps the only way that the jackets can be protected from the wear and tear which is certain to deteriorate jackets stored and used loose. With small collections the problem of storage can be approached differently. La Sierra College Library in Arlington, California, for example, files the jackets, flaps only folded as when on the book, in legal-size vertical filing cabinets. Marked with and arranged according to the class number of the book, they are easily and quickly accessible. The arrangement could, of course, alternatively be by country and designer.

Libraries do not feel that their financial resources and the storage space available justify collecting jackets in large quantities. In this connection Princeton and the Library of Congress suggest that there should be a comprehensive collection somewhere, logically in New York, and that it might properly be a cooperative enterprise of the New York Public Library and interested graphic arts organizations there. Regional collections might also be developed. In the Middle West the University of Wisconsin and the Newberry Library preserve a number of jackets for their book arts interest. In California, the Los Angeles Public Library is doing some work in this field. At Stanford silverfish destroyed an embryonic collection, a hazard which may well be noted.

When jackets are collected, it is obviously

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- wealth Ave., Boston 15. v.1, no.1, April 1952. Monthly (except July-August). Free?
- Familie und Volk.* Degener und Co., Berchtesgaden. v.1, no.1, January/February 1952. Bimonthly. DM780.
- The Forum.* 176 Main St., Johannesburg. v.1, no.1, April 1952. Monthly. 13 s.
- The International and Comparative Law Quarterly.* Society of Comparative Legislation, 18 Northumberland Ave., London, W.C.2. v.1, no.1, January 1952. 30 s.
- Journal of Rational Mechanics and Analysis.* Graduate Institute for Applied Mathematics, Indiana University, Bloomington. v.1, no.1, January 1952. 1 v. a year. \$18.
- Laboratory Investigation.* P.B. Hoerber, Inc., 49 East 33d St., New York 16. v.1, no.1, Spring 1952. Quarterly. \$8.
- The Magazine of Building. House and Home Edition.* Time Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Monthly. \$5.50.
- Maryland State Medical Journal.* 1211 Cathedral St., Baltimore 1. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Monthly. \$5.
- Metabolism, Clinical and Experimental.* Grune and Stratton, Inc., 381 Fourth Ave., New York 16. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Bimonthly. \$9.
- Metal Age.* Metal Information Bureau, Ltd., 27 Albermarle St., London, W.1. no.1, January 1952. Monthly. 25 s.
- The Meter Reader.* Writers' Club, Springfield, Ohio. 1952. Frequency not given. Price not given.
- The New Generation.* 603 South Main St., Geneva, N.Y. Summer 1952. Quarterly. 50¢ per copy.
- News From Behind the Iron Curtain.* Research and Publications Service, National Committee for a Free Europe, Inc., 110 W. 57th St., New York 19. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Monthly. Free.
- Nordisk Musikkultur.* Sigurd Berg, Hammerengsgade 3, København. no.1, 1952. Frequency not given. Price not given.
- The Orchid Journal.* 132 W. Union St., Pasadena, Calif. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Monthly. \$5.
- The Philatelic Folio.* L.F. Livingston, 2435 North Charles St., Baltimore 18. v.1, no.1, March 1952. Quarterly. \$2.
- Religious Book Previews.* 31 Markham Road, Princeton, N.J. v.1, no.1, January 1952. Quarterly. \$4.25.
- The Speech Teacher.* Speech Association of America, 12 E. Bloomington St., Iowa City, Iowa. v.1, no.1, January 1952. 4 no. a year. \$3.50.
- Technicalities and Technical Valuation.* E.D. Crawford, P.O. Box 107, Jamaica, N.Y. v.1, no.1, February 1952. Quarterly. Price not given.
- U.S.A., the Magazine of American Affairs.* National Association of Manufacturers, 350 E. 22d St., Chicago 16. v.1, no.1, March 1952. Monthly. \$3.

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extremely helpful if the designer's name and the year of publication appear on them. On the Continent, the name of the designer often appears in the book, but not on the jacket. Since such collections redound to the glory, even perhaps to the profit of the publisher, his cooperation may not unfairly be asked.

The attitude toward book jackets of private book collectors, who have played such an important role in building up the resources of libraries, has been fully dis-

cussed by Mr. Kohn.⁷ To what extent jackets as such are privately collected is difficult to say. They are not bought and sold in the market place as are other collector's items, but usually can be obtained only with and at the price of the book itself, a formidable deterrent to collecting them separately. Only one private book jacket collection, to the present writer's knowledge, has been described in print, that of W. A. D. Englefield's Rex Whistler collection.⁸ There are probably many others.

⁷ Kohn, John S. Van E., "Some Notes on Dust Jackets," *Publishers' Weekly*, 132:1732-35, October 30, 1937.

⁸ "Check List of Rex Whistler Book-Wrappers," *Book-Collectors' Quarterly* (London) April-June 1935, p. 64-9.