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Durrant, Michael

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The Rhetoric of the Page. By LAURIE MAGUIRE. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2020. xx+289 pp. £30. ISBN 978-0-19-886210-9.

- R06522** As Laurie Maguire outlines in the Introduction to her new monograph, the notion of the blank has ‘usually negative’ connotations (pp. 1–2). Phrases such as ‘blank stare’ and ‘blank out’ denote failures of memory and comprehension; contemporary synonyms for the blank, such as ‘lacuna’ or ‘hiatus’, similarly underscore the close association between the blank and the notion of ‘lack’ (p. 2). Surveying the many blank spaces that we often encounter in printed texts of the hand-press era, Maguire’s *The Rhetoric of the Page* interrogates such associations between blanks and absence. In Maguire’s hands, blank pages, as well as the typographical features that signal a blank or elision, such as the *etcetera* (or the *&c*) and the asterisk, are not straightforward signs of lack but self-reflexive and meaning-making devices, which prompted (and continue to prompt) imaginative participation between readers and printed texts. As part of this argument, the Introduction asks readers to consider the *mise-en-page* arrangements of early modern pages in deeply rhetorical terms: echoing ‘the rhetorical device of *occupatio* or *apophasis* (when a speaker brings up a subject by saying that s/he will not address it)’, Maguire posits that the blank similarly calls ‘our attention to what is not there’, paradoxically ‘accentuating rather than concealing’ (p. 14).

Made up of three long chapters and an Epilogue, what follows provides an accessible illustration of how early moderns read the blank, offering in turn a vivid example of how literary-critical and book-historical methodologies can be sensitively cross-hatched. As such, *The Rhetoric of the Page* is a welcome companion piece to recent early modern scholarship that has engaged with the back-and-forth dialogue between literary and bibliographical forms, including Adam Smyth’s *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and Claire M. Bourne’s *Typographies of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Chapter 1 engages with blank pages and blank (or ‘white’) spaces on the early modern page. Maguire begins by reminding us that early modern readers were comfortable with a sense of the printed book as a materially unfinished object, gesturing, for instance, towards the errata list as an example of ‘a readerly mindset in which supplementation is expected’ (p. 38). Maguire conjures a vision of the early modern printed book/page as a site of inducement: margins were there to be filled with commentary and commonplaces; authorial initials on printed title-pages are a ‘textual tease’ (p. 43), inviting readers to expand upon them; long dashes or empty parentheses materially signal the absent-presence of censored (and usually obscene) lines. This ‘readerly capacity for gap filling’ (p. 66) then segues into a compelling analysis of the ways in which authors—from Ben Jonson through to Laurence Sterne, and beyond—manipulate physical blanks to literary effect. The final phase of this chapter then turns to editing, including the ‘editorial tendency to reduce or eliminate blanks’ (p. 88), and with this, the challenges that blanks pose when they are digitally transcribed via online platforms such as Early English

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Books Online (EEBO). Among other things, this enables a fruitful juxtaposition between our own contemporary ‘unease’ with the blank—she notes how Google Books digitally inscribes blank space, ironically, with the phrase ‘page intentionally left blank’—and the early modern sense of the blank not ‘as a problem’ to be solved but as an appealing site of ‘ludic creativity’ (pp. 102–03).

Chapters 2 and 3 move from physical blanks to forms of typography that cue notions of incompleteness (*etcetera*, or *etc.*) and omission (the asterisk). In these chapters, Maguire continues to complicate the central paradox that occupies much of this book: that is, the way in which the blank, the *etcetera*, and the asterisk each call ‘attention to what it professes to conceal’ (p. 171). These typographical signs of absent-presence invite, and sometimes even demand, different kinds of readerly engagement, which extend the meanings of printed texts in unexpected ways. What also becomes increasingly apparent is the way in which authors and book-trade agents, including compositors, experimented with the rhetoric of the page, and with different manifestations of the blank. Especially where early modern printed playtexts are concerned, Maguire’s insights in this regard provide innovative methods for us to (re)read the printed page as a site of theatrical enactment, gesturing out to the circumstances of performance, and the mediating conditions of textual transmission from stage to page.

As the above-mentioned comment on Google Books suggests, *The Rhetoric of the Page* is not only concerned with the early modern. What is particularly striking about Maguire’s analysis is the way in which it draws from an extraordinary range of texts and genres spread across different historical periods. Consequently, the medieval scriptorium comes into dialogue with the early modern printing house and the digital database; the empty parentheses that end Shakespeare’s Sonnet 126 find parallels in contemporary children’s fictions; concrete poetry of the last century speaks back to the visual language of John Marston’s plays in seventeenth-century print. It is testament to Maguire’s skilful handling of these disparate sources that this is not distracting; rather, it works to further support her central thesis that ‘[l]iteral representation (typography)’ enlivens, and gives visual shape to, the rhetorical world of ‘literary representation (fictionality)’ (p. 22).

BANGOR UNIVERSITY

MICHAEL DURRANT

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Dr Michael Durrant
Room 317
Main Arts Building
Bangor University
LL57 2DG

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email address: m.durrant@bangor.ac.uk