

Book Reviews

Peter Beal. *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450–2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 457p. alk. paper, \$125 (ISBN 0199265442). LC 2008-295866.

Peter Beal has provided the English-speaking bibliographic community with a long-awaited volume to fill a certain gap on the reference shelf: a dictionary of terms for the description of manuscript documents of all types in English. Collectors, librarians, archivists, and researchers into the history of books and manuscripts have long enjoyed specialized reference tools in French, Italian, German, Arabic, even Catalan and Georgian, but few in English. That having been said, the volumes available for scholarly researchers in these languages have sometimes erred on the side of over-technical writing or terminology. Peter Beal takes as his inspiration the unassuming work first published in 1952, John Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors*. And as Carter says in his preface, Beal's volume celebrates its focus and self-limitation: "This is not an encyclopedia. It is an ABC." [Carter, p. 12]

Peter Beal's *Dictionary* similarly makes no encyclopedic claims. He offers a volume devoted to the needs of a variety of audiences, not necessarily scholarly: collectors, archivists and special collections librarians, genealogists, and other *amateurs* of textual manuscripts. His prose is correspondingly quite clear throughout. (He is even, for instance, fairly succinct in explaining the differences between DATES in the Gregorian and Julian calendars!) He does not claim to be comprehensive in coverage, and admits to many self-imposed limits on the volume's scope. He deliberately chooses the year 1450 as a terminus, leaving the description of medieval manuscripts to scholarly specialists; he claims a scant treatment of paleography, with a similar justification. The book's particular strengths,

terms relating to manuscript practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, follow Beal's own frankly admitted special interest and knowledge, though his coverage does proceed into the twentieth century (TYPEWRITER, FILOFAX, or TELEGRAM). Even within those limits, the *Dictionary* includes more than 15,000 entries (including cross-references), many entries running to several pages. Fully 96 illustrations, nearly all courtesy of Sotheby's, nicely complement his text, and include objects in the hands of illustrious figures from Charles Dickens to Guy Fawkes. A carefully selected bibliography culminates the volume.

Beal's choice (the same as Carter's) to organize the book strictly in alphabetical order can make it difficult to navigate topically. The copious cross-references and "compare" references, though, tend to mitigate this: how else might the user know that the true discussion of an APOCALYPSE only occurs in the entry for ESCHATOLOGY, or that *DIFFICILIOR LECTIO POTIOR* should be considered in conjunction with *UTRIUM IN ALTERUM ABITURUM ERAT* (two classic rules for textual criticism)? In addition, the author tends to pack a large amount of topical detail into the more extended entries. The well-couched entry for BINDING, for instance, is the place to find many subsidiary terms such as boards, buckram, calf, morocco, and paste-downs, though none of these terms may be located via separate entries and there is no index. The entry for BOOK includes several distinct possible definitions of the term. One facet of the PROMPTBOOK entry is an extended key to Early Modern staging shorthand, and fully 16 kinds of WRIT are defined under that entry. This suggests another strength of Beal's *Dictionary*: throughout, it is particularly rich in the number of



generic manuscript types for which he provides historical context.

One feature of the *Dictionary* that is both a strength and a weakness is the relentless focus on things British. Carter's *ABC* was obviously written for English-speaking book collectors, but he compiled definitions applicable to early books across Europe and elsewhere, including citations to non-English bibliographic tools. Beal's somewhat more insular approach allows him to focus admirably on the contexts for, and collection of, British manuscripts. Thus, the *Dictionary* includes helpful entries to orient the reader to more specialized topics such as a PHILLIPS MANUSCRIPT or the BAGA DE SECRETTIS (Kew Archives manuscripts dealing with cases of treason and other highly sensitive documents). Yet this focus can also lead to the omission of similarly important Continental institutions and manuscript genres. The BRITISH LIBRARY gets an entry, but not the Bibliothèque nationale de France or the Vatican; perhaps the only other library mentioned is the Amsterdam home of a large collection of HERMETIC MANUSCRIPTS.

Peter Beal's *Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*, nonetheless, belongs on the shelf of any English-speaking bibliophile. It would be welcome in many libraries' and special collections' reference shelves. It does not claim to be an encyclopedia, nor a comprehensive guide to manuscript terminology in English; the field must still wait for one to emerge. What the *Dictionary* offers instead is a helpful, interesting, and highly readable guide to the contents, contexts, and physical makeup of a wide variety of fascinating, and important, English historical documents. — Timothy J. Dickey, OCLC Office of Research.

The Portable MLIS: Insights from the Experts. Eds. Ken Haycock and Brooke E. Sheldon. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008. 296p. alk. paper, \$50 (ISBN 9781591585473). LC 2008-010351.

The *Portable MLIS* was compiled to fill what editors, LIS educators Haycock and Sheldon, have identified as a gap in the literature of foundational librarianship. The primary goal of this work is to provide a single-volume overview of foundation, practice, and future of librarianship. This collection of 18 essays written by 11 LIS faculty, 7 Academic Library administrators, and a single Public Library administrator, however, does not fulfill this purpose. What the reader does find is a compilation of highly respectable, valuable, but incomplete perspectives and opinions that, while of value to any information professional, also leave unrepresented the other disciplines, such as management and computer science, that contribute substantially to the solution of many contemporary information management challenges.

The *Portable MLIS* is organized as a series of three thematic "parts," the first of which, "Foundations, Values and Context," is composed of five chapters. The first of these, by Richard E. Rubin, takes the reader through various historical perspectives on the importance of the library to society. Disappointingly for a chapter positioned to set the tone for the book, a key opportunity is missed to generate much appreciation for current and future Web-based information management challenges. The increase of user reliance on the Web for information is described unenthusiastically, for example, as among the "clouds on the [profession's] horizon." Subsequent chapters in the first section do better to rouse excitement for new professional possibilities. Michael Gorman's offering on professional ethics and values in a changing world is certainly worthwhile, informed by his long engagement with the philosophy of librarianship, but its very particular political formulation becomes repetitive and strikes an occasional demagogic chord. Students will be challenged by Kathleen de la Pena McCook and Katharine Phenix's chapter 3, which traces a progression of the shift from librarianship's connection to democ-