

author's true colors.—*Harlan Greene, Charleston County Public Library, South Carolina Preservation Project.*

**Epstein, Jason.** *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present, and Future.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 188p. \$21.95 (ISBN: 0393049841). LC 00-60079.

Jason Epstein's brief memoir is part history and part professional autobiography. Best known to readers of this journal as one of the founding editors of the *New York Review of Books*, Epstein gives us a somewhat potted history of the decline and fall of trade publishing in America. According to him, from its apex in the 1920s, trade publishing declined precipitously in the postwar period from a industry dominated by quirky, dedicated missionaries of the word to one enmeshed in, and finally destroyed by, the soulless world of global capitalism. As he looks at the contemporary scene, he sees oversaturated markets driven by the demands of the megabook chains and media syndicates, both of which are staring at self-consuming futures. The prognosis is not a happy one. But it is familiar, nonetheless. We have been here before.

There is more than a little myopia in Epstein's spin on the malaise of the present. He tends to identify big-time trade publishing with all publishing and so conveniently ignores the proliferation of small and niche publishers. These are the people looking for—and finding—those audiences abandoned by the corporate dinosaurs, and their quiet successes make for a very different view of the present state of books and publishing in America.

As autobiography, *Book Business* presents us with the figure of the creative businessman, on the one hand, and his alter ego, the selfless apostle of great literature. As the former, Epstein portrays himself as the master innovator, the editor/publisher with an uncanny sense of time, place, and need. He is not shy about strutting his stuff: Anchor Books, the *New York Review of Books*, and the Library of America, among others. Of Mr. Epstein's

many virtues, modesty is not among them. But that's OK; modesty tends to be oversold these days. The author's achievements are real, so let him crow a bit. As a missionary of great literature, Epstein sees himself as a rescuer of noble traditions in the context of banality and mediocrity. His crusade has been to bring to Everyman the joys of reading serious literature that he experienced as an undergraduate at Columbia in the 1950s. If he made some money along the way (and he did), fine. But he was in the business of culture for the sake of culture.

*Book Business* is almost totally lacking in personal detail. We learn nothing about young Jason or his family or for that matter from whence he hales. A chapter entitled "Young Man from the Provinces" gives us no information about which particular province the author is alluding to, although I suspect he means anything that is not Manhattan. The chapter titles, on the other hand, are all allusions to the great literature Epstein reveres. Indeed, they are just a wee bit embarrassing in that respect ("Lost Illusions," "Goodbye to All That," "Groves of Academe," et al). Epstein also lets fly his share of howlers, among them, an oddly vitriolic denunciation of the Catholic Church as "that sex-besotted, dictatorial Church" (oh, dear!); a swipe at the Library of America for issuing "a volume of sermons *most of which are without* [sic] literary value or historical interest in themselves" (just give me The Canon, thank-you); or an odd reading of Marx advocating that "technological changes—what Marx called changes in the forms of production—produce changes in consciousness" (which Marx?). But the book does give us some memorable anecdotes, such as Edmund Wilson ordering six martinis for himself at one time, Norbert Weiner lurching on a quart of milk and a bag of potato chips, and Vladimir Nabokov recounting his field work for *Lolita*.

Running through *Book Business* is a strong current of faith buttressed by a bit of naiveté. These rescue the memoir from

lapsing into another jeremiad about the decline of books, standards, and Western civilization in general. Epstein has faith in two sources of salvation. The first is technology. Rather than seeing the new digital technology as corporate America's final assault on the book business and its customers, Epstein conjures up a scenario in which Web publishing allows authors and readers to communicate directly with each other. Disintermediation is, I believe, what the process is about, and Stephen King's recent effort at that is heralded as an omen of a happier future. Where publishers had once been useful and efficient middlemen, they have long since degenerated into obstacles standing between literature and readers. The Web is in the process of ending that and thus of totally refiguring the nature of publishing.

The other source of salvation is human nature itself. How will Everyman learn to navigate and make sense of the chaos that is the Web? Not to fear, Epstein reassures us: "Human beings have a genius for finding their way, for creating goods, making orderly markets, distinguishing quality, and assigning value. This faculty can be taken for granted." Indeed, if anything, new technologies will build on and enhance "this faculty." It is been a while since I have encountered such an unashamed profession of faith in rational man. There is something quintessentially American about Jason Epstein, or at least that is how he presents himself. He believes in the benevolent transforming power of technology, the reasonableness and inventiveness of man, and the march of progress. In a world of cynics, egoists, and postmodern dyspeptics, Epstein urges on us some good old unreconstructed Enlightenment optimism.

*Book Business* is not particularly acute or informative, but as a cultural statement, it is well worth a read. I should add, too, that Norton did a fine job producing the book. The type—Mrs Eaves Roman—was new to me, but most appealing: spacious, roundish, and elegant.—*Michael Ryan, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.*

**Lee, Stuart D.** *Digital Imaging: A Practical Handbook.* New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, in association with Library Association Publishing, London, 2001. 194 p. \$55, alk. paper (ISBN 1-55570-405-0). LC 00-45075.

As libraries increase their interest in digitization projects, they often encounter a bewildering array of options. This book attempts to sort through the options and to provide the beginner a realistic picture of what to expect when managing or working within a digitization project. Although the author has outlined the basic requirements of digitization, from selection through delivery of the digital product, he has not produced a detailed guide to the process. However, this is not his intention. As director of the Center for Humanities Computing at Oxford University, Stuart Lee has been both a practitioner and a theorist in the field of digitization. The practical guide he provides is a handbook on how to think through the digitization process. It is a starting place for project managers, librarians, museum professionals, students, and anyone interested in thinking through the steps of a digitization project or seeking to determine what issues need foregrounding when beginning digital imaging.

Lee spares the reader the dense technology-Babel of many digitization guides; rather, his book is a set of clear and practical chapters covering the basics of process and spanning the essentials in planning. The beginning practitioner may be misled by the spare nature of this handbook and its European focus. There are no full-color images, step-by-step diagrams, or comparative charts to visually stimulate the reader to run to the scanner. The syntax is at times awkward in its brevity but is generally clear and to the point. The flourishes are few. This is a solid and well-thought-through handbook that joins the real-life project with conceptual modeling. This book promises to be well used over the course of the entire digitization project, as it repeatedly asks *Why?* and then assists the reader in finding the best answers for their particular situation.