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 Letters et alia  
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To the Editor:

Several recent reviews in *Computing Reviews* have confirmed my long-standing impression that lots of readers are sensitive to matters of quality printing. So far  $\text{\TeX}$  has gotten good press in that journal; for example, Dick Andree began review #39,590 by saying "You will certainly be fascinated to see the excellent mathematical typesetting displayed in this book, set using Don Knuth's  $\text{\TeX}$  system. It is worth examining for this alone."

Of course, such reviews are somewhat embarrassing to me, because the lion's share of the praise should obviously go to the authors for the wonderful things they wrote; the format is only one of the many things that were well done.

This particular book—*Practical Optimization* by Gill, Murray, and Wright—was one of the first to be produced on Stanford's Alphatype. I can recall being pleasantly surprised to discover isolated pages (of unknown authorship) in our darkroom while I was working on *Seminumerical Algorithms*; later I found out that Gill, Murray, and Wright were responsible for this fine work. They took the time to "go the extra mile" by combining superb mathematical exposition with numerous refinements. For example, they added a unique appendix about "questions and answers"; they included excellent illustrations and tables; they chose their notation carefully; they made a good index and bibliography; they found wonderful quotations for the beginnings of each chapter. If  $\text{\TeX}$  had any part in this, it was merely to encourage the authors to strive for such quality because they were more personally involved.

Lynn Steen's "telegraphic review" of Arthur Keller's *First Course in Computer Programming Using Pascal* is another instance of format appreciation; he says, "The elegance of the text is matched by the elegance of its appearance: it was prepared and typeset at Stanford in  $\text{\TeX}$ ." [*American Math Monthly*, January 1983, page C8.]

Conversely, Bob Fenichel's review #40,719 in *Computing Reviews* speaks of a book that "is photographically reproduced from the output of the author's daisy-wheel printer .... The article headers are set randomly in at least two different fonts, while the font of the text, for reasons that the author does not share, is the inhuman OCR-B."

Such judgments are obviously matters of taste, and we can't expect universal agreement. For example, I went to the bookstore to see the book just

mentioned, and I didn't find its format disturbing; indeed, I think Adrian Frutiger did an excellent job, under the circumstances, when he designed OCR-B.

Fenichel's review goes on to make a point that I think is much more important: "There are errors in spelling and grammar on nearly every page. Granted that some authors have special interest and competence in copy editing, proofreading, and typographical design, are *all* authors now to be required to have such interest and competence? If not, then how can a publisher, presented with so-called camera-ready copy, reassert his traditional control of these matters? Should he refuse to accept such copy, accepting only traditional manuscript or machine-readable text?"

We must realize that fine formatting is only one of many aspects of book quality. I hope the day will come when there are copy editors and book designers familiar with  $\text{\TeX}$ , to deal with authors who are typesetting their books with  $\text{\TeX}$ . Meanwhile, I want to encourage authors who are using  $\text{\TeX}$  today to seek professional help, instead of assuming that publishers do nothing but print, bind, and distribute books. It would be terrible if  $\text{\TeX}$  were to lead to *decreased* quality because these other aspects were being neglected.

Of course, there is no royal road to quality; editors can make mistakes too. The immediately following review [*Computing Reviews* #40,720] mentions that another book "is particularly ill-served by its editors, who have failed to correct a large number of errors in English usage."

The best way to solve all of these problems is with teamwork. I hope that  $\text{\TeX}$  will ultimately help to provide better means of communication between people with different kinds of book expertise. At the moment we are seeing a sudden shift in who has the ultimate power to input and change copy; with care, we should be able to find an appropriate way to distribute that power.

—Don Knuth

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