

1-1-2000

# Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading

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## Recommended Citation

Walker, T. D. (2000). Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading. *Library Quarterly*, 70(1), 166-167.

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*ies of Science* 6 [1976]: 281–306; Stephen Yearly, “The Dictates of Knowledge and Policy: Interpretive Structures in the Representation of Scientific Work,” *Human Studies* 11 [1988]: 341–59; and Leah Lievrouw, “Constructing Research Narratives and Establishing Scholarly Identities: Properties and Propositions,” in *Interaction and Identity: Information and Behavior*, vol. 5, ed. Hartmut B. Mokros [New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1996], pp. 215–35).

There is a fundamental irony in this example and in other claims throughout the book about academic silencing. The author has in fact been able to publish his views about the Guido Riccio controversy, even if they are couched within a thinly veiled polemic aimed at a discipline that has not accorded his ideas the respect he believes they deserve. He has compared the Guido Riccio case to other prominent (and highly sensational) cases, apparently attempting to equate scholarly criticism, error, and fraud. But neither he nor his ideas have been “silenced.” Ablex, among others, is renowned as a publisher of critical and nonmainstream work in the social sciences and social policy. Surely the existence of such outlets and their openness to independent scholars like the author undermines the book’s basic premise that academic research is monolithic and totalizing.

The issue of censorship and repression in scholarship is compelling and deserves a full and frank discussion. However, the present volume brings to mind a tongue-in-cheek lyric by the Texas songwriter Robert Earl Keen: “I only use my gun whenever kindness fails.” With this book perhaps the author has had a chance to even the score with unpersuaded colleagues.

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*Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading.* By PAUL SAENGER. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997. Pp. 480. \$49.50 (cloth). ISBN 0-8047-2653-1.

There is scant iconographical evidence of reading habits during the Middle Ages. Examples include a statue of Saint Gregory the Great from fourteenth-century Verona (in the Victoria and Albert Museum) depicting a clever adjustable reading desk, an engraving from the same century illustrating an octagonal swivel desk that would have brought the book to its reader, and numerous additional ordinary representations of people simply reading codexes. What is extraordinarily difficult is determining what occurred during the reading process itself. This activity cannot easily be depicted in picture or stone, and modern researchers have to assemble other kinds of evidence, primarily evidence from the manuscripts themselves. Paul Saenger culled relevant evidence from hundreds of medieval manuscripts in many countries and added two more unexpected kinds of proof to his arguments: physiological and psychological. The thrust of his work is that the introduction of word separation led to the development of silent reading during the Middle Ages.

Saenger, a paleographer and bibliographer, is the George A. Poole III Curator of Rare Books at the Newberry Library. Through his conference presentations, articles, and book chapters, he has established himself as a leading specialist in the study of word separation. His book, which synthesizes and expands his previous work, introduces readers to the physiology of reading, the early, primarily oral, history of reading, word separation, and word order. His second and third chapters, “The Nomenclature of Word Separation” and “Complements to Word Separation by Space” are a textbook for this specialized field. They are followed by summaries of word separation practices from the seventh through the thirteenth centuries,

including treatments of special subtopics such as separation of numbers and musical notation and various aspects of the geographical migration of word separation from England to the Low Countries, France, Germany, and the Mediterranean. The book should be considered indispensable for paleographers and other historians of scholarship and reading of the period.

One of the most engaging chapters is the last, "Written Culture at the End of the Middle Ages," which discusses issues such as the introduction of Gothic cursive script, the role of silent reading in educational settings, and changes in library design. Coincident with the development of silent reading, certain now-famous libraries constructed central halls, desks, and seating arrangements that placed readers side by side rather than separating them by banks of books or walls. Silent reading also had an affect on what people read. If one read to oneself, it would be easier to read heretical works or texts for one's own amusement. The chapter includes iconographic evidence as well: an illumination from Jacques Le Grand's *Libre des bonnes moeurs* (Condé Museum Library of the Chantilly Chateau collection, MS 297), depicting two silent readers in a chained fifteenth-century library (p. 262).

Conveniently, the notes are separated from the text. Of the 480 numbered pages, the notes and references occupy 155 pages in their own right and offer an education in this specialty. A two-page glossary is included and would of course be of greatest use to students and nonspecialists. A good number of terms, some with cross-references to other technical terms, refer to the physical act of reading and would be useful even to experts of paleography; for instance: "*Parafoveal vision*: The portion of the eye's normal span of vision beyond *foveal vision*, extending to a range of approximately fifteen characters to the right of the point of fixation. In it, the reader can perceive word shape, interword space, and *prosodiae*" (p. 434).

Saenger was thoughtful enough to include an "index of manuscripts cited," which lists the manuscripts by country, then city, then library. For those working with a particular corpus of manuscripts, it would be easy to check to see if they receive discussion. The range of countries and collections represented is impressive: several hundred manuscripts in several score libraries, in seventeen countries, including most especially France. The "General and Topical Index" also includes specific manuscripts, if the discussions warrant, as well as proper names, place names, and topics.

Because of the technical level and assumptions about previous knowledge of paleography of the Middle Ages, as well as the depth of Saenger's work with primary sources, the book would be best appreciated by specialists; however, it could inspire curious nonspecialists because of its innovative perspective, which frames the entire European manuscript tradition. It will likely interest those researchers and other active readers in the history of literature, the history of books and printing, and cultural history, as well as librarians who collect manuscripts and facsimiles for research and instruction. Saenger's work is a highlight of recent publications in the history of books and manuscripts; it will become a landmark in its field.

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*The Storyteller's Journey: An American Revival.* By JOSEPH DANIEL SOBOL. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998. Pp. 210. \$27.00 (paper). ISBN 0-87845-104-8.

Organizations, like the human beings who inhabit and inhibit them, bear their own stories, the stuff of dreams. Janice Radway's biography of the Book of the Month Club, *A Feeling for Books* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), is