

Printing Should Be Invisible

Imagine that
you have
before
you a
flagon of
wine. You
may
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nary demonstra-
tion, so that it be a
deep shimmering crimson
in colour. You have two gob-
lets before you. One is of solid
gold, wrought in the most exqui-
site patterns. The other is of crys-
tal-clear glass, thin as a bubble,
and as
transparent.

Pour and drink; and according to
your choice of goblet, I shall know
whether or not you are a connois-
seur of wine. For if you have no
feelings about wine one way or
the other, you will want the sensa-
tion of drinking the stuff out of a
vessel that may have cost thou-
sands of pounds; but if you are a
member of that vanishing tribe,
the amateurs of fine vintages, you
will choose the crystal, because
everything about it is calculated to
reveal rather than hide the beauti-
ful thing which it was meant to
contain.

Bear with me in this long-winded
and fragrant metaphor; for you
will find that almost all the virtues
of the perfect wine-glass have a
parallel in typography. There is the
long, thin stem that obviates
fingerprints on the bowl. Why?
Because no cloud must come
between your eyes and the fiery
heart of the liquid. Are not the
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Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favourite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to reveal rather than hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to contain. Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wine-glass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that obviates fingerprints on the bowl. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes and the fiery heart of the liquid. Are not the margins on book pages similarly meant to obviate the necessity of fingering the type-page? Again: the glass is colourless or at the most only faintly tinged in the bowl, because the connoisseur judges wine partly by its colour and is impatient of anything that alters it. There are a thousand mannerisms in typography that are as impudent and arbitrary as putting port in tumblers of red or green glass! Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his wine was a 'modernist' in the sense in which I am going to use that term. That is, the first thing he asked of his particular object was not "How should it look?" but 'What must it do?' and to that extent all good typography is modernist.

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