

the ideas of others without giving supportive evidence, as when he refers to the detailed backgrounds of some etchings as “generic” without explanation (43n143). In another case, he claims to be in disagreement with Perlove and Silver when he actually agrees with them that Rembrandt’s detailed settings for the etched *Presentation in the Temple with the Angel: Small Plate*, of 1630, and the painted *Presentation*, of 1631, despite their details, were ultimately more fanciful than authentic (184n14; cf. Perlove and Silver [2009], 208). Rosenberg raises many points worthy of attention. In his discussion of Rembrandt’s early *Circumcision*, of ca. 1626, he queries why the artist, as late as 1641, would reprint a “juvenile plate” (168). The author does not discuss the topic further, but it is worth mentioning here that the reprinting may suggest this youthful work was well received by the art market. Rosenberg also sets forth such original ideas as his suggestion that Rembrandt’s etching *Virgin with the Instruments of the Passion*, of ca. 1642, may invoke the artist’s grief over Saskia’s death, in 1642 (26).

Rosenberg’s essay at the front of the book, “Rembrandt’s Religious Prints,” serves as both an introduction and a conclusion to the volume. He discusses the artist’s experimentation as a printmaker: his techniques and paper choices. The author also pursues such issues as the artist’s use of costume, landscape, and architectural settings, as well as auxiliary figures, including animals. His excellent and amusing description of dogs in Rembrandt’s art shows us that hard and fast generalizations cannot be applied to the master’s work. But he does make a good observation that the canines nearly always turn away from the religious revelation before them.

Rosenberg’s book is visually appealing, published in a wide format, with a host of high-quality images and details to relish. His close descriptions of Rembrandt’s religious prints are a pleasure to read, and his book is very useful to scholars.

Shelley Perlove, *University of Michigan*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.150

Playful Letters: A Study in Early Modern Alphabets. Erika Mary Boeckeler. Impressions: Studies in the Art, Culture, and Future of Books. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. xiv + 286 pp. \$75.

“I am the Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 22:13). Governed by the Christian religion, the Latin West was indoctrinated with the notion that the alphabet, divinity, and life itself corresponded. Boeckeler’s *Playful Letters* delves into the multivalent uses of alphabetic letters and letterforms in print, paint, and performance in the early modern period. The argument turns on alphabets as an interpretive model “to demonstrate . . . literature’s communicative function, affecting how readers read, writers wrote, printers printed, and image-makers made” (2–3). William Shakespeare, Albrecht Dürer, the Cyrillic alphabet, printed alphabets, and graphic design are all examined under Boeckeler’s theoretical eye,

showcasing the ways that letters were read, repurposed, and recombined outside of the alphabetic group, but ever with a keen sense of their prevailing organizational principle.

The first chapter considers one of the first printed works on graphic design, Geoffroy Tory's *Champ Fleury*, from 1529, which examines the proportion of letterforms based upon the proportions of the human body. Tory's explanation of type and letter design is in a similar vein to Dürer's work on human proportions, yet Tory's was only published in this singular edition. Boeckeler correctly points out that such a consideration of letterform design was the direct result of the invention of printing with movable type; many of the author's arguments throughout the book, in fact, focus on various aspects of print culture. Chapter 2 tackles figured alphabets, with particular focus on Peter Flötner's *Menschenalphabet* woodcut print, of 1534, and I. Paulini's alphabet, of the 1570s, depicting episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, further exploring the links between the individual, the body, and the letterform. For Flötner, human bodies with their appendages bent and contorted took the shape of the letters; Paulini's bodies, however, become letters in a Daphne/laurel-tree transformation. While I do not always agree with Boeckeler's elision of autonomous alphabetic prints with those incipit initials meant to be printed integral with text, her conclusion, which incorporates Conrad Gräle's alphabetic engravings, ultimately ties the bow on her discussion of the corporeality of printed alphabets. Boeckeler turns her focus on Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* of 1500 in the third chapter, examining how the painting is a self-portrait in both image and text. She considers the monogram as both an organizing principle and second self-portrait, but I was left wondering whether the monogram organized the portrait or whether both simply derive from Dürer's same system of proportion. Chapter 4 looks at the role played by alphabets in three of William Shakespeare's plays: *Richard III*, *King Lear*, and *Titus Andronicus*. Letters, letterforms, and alphabets creep into the plot of each play as both minor points and as fulcra on which the entire play can turn. Boeckeler spends considerable time discussing the pivotal *G* in *Richard III* and English orthography; *Lear* and *Titus* are less well covered. The fifth chapter takes us east, to an examination of the first printed Cyrillic primer by Ivan Fedorov, in 1574, and the historical narrative of the Cyrillic script/text. This was interesting new material for me, and I wish there had been a more substantive consideration of common pan-European trends in the early modern era.

Although the type of theoretical interpretation found in *Playful Letters* is not always my inclination, I can appreciate the perspective Boeckeler brings to bear on letterature. With its heavy reliance on an existing understanding of theory and academic method, this is not a text for undergraduates, but it should provide ample ground for graduates as well as for academics working in the areas on which Boeckeler touches. I would have preferred more-substantial endnotes grounding Boeckeler's readings and interpretations of the material, which would help to make the book more useful to those not just interested in the theoretical arguments. *Playful Letters* will, however, make me take a second look at the ways in which the alphabet/letterforms activate and are activated by aspects of early

modern print and literary culture, how something so concrete yet malleable, ubiquitous yet invisible, pervades aspects of early modern culture beyond the expected literary.

John T. McQuillen, *The Morgan Library and Museum*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.151

Measured Words: Computation and Writing in Renaissance Italy. Arielle Saiber. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. xvi + 260 pp. \$65.

Measured Words extends the boundaries of the field that studies the interaction between art and sciences by foregrounding the importance of the verbal and graphic dimensions that shaped the thought of Renaissance mathematical humanists. Building on Paul Lawrence Rose's foundational work, Arielle Saiber studies four moments of close interaction between the mathematico-scientific and the verbal-graphic spheres.

The first case study considers Leon Battista Alberti's *De Componendis Cifris* (1466), a text best known for its often-cited opening lines, in which Alberti praises the invention of movable-type printing. And although his contemporaries did not adopt his method of creating cyphers through a double alphanumerical system (which Saiber explains and schematizes with clarity), the significance of this twenty-five-page manuscript goes beyond its primacy as the first treatise on coding—less articulated precedents include Hildegard von Bingen's *Lingua Ignota* and the early fifteenth-century Voynich manuscript (Beinecke Library MS 408). As Saiber's analysis indicates, *De Componendis Cifris* is the product of a mind proficient in analytic processes that break down complex information into its building blocks, that identify patterns and proportions, and that create new metered compositions; skills that Alberti honed through his lifelong studies of languages and mathematics.

Measured Words's second and longest chapter studies Luca Pacioli's *Degno alphabeto Anticho*—published in *De Divina Proportione* (1509)—because his “letterforms are connected to the geometry he used to compute the proportions of things ‘divine’” (49). Saiber begins her inquiry by considering the thirty-some capitals appearing in the 1495 double portrait picturing the mathematician with—likely—the Duke of Urbino, reproduced on the dust jacket. Even without a systematic examination of the individual letterforms—an unfortunate omission because the differences, including the *B*'s upper lobe, the *C*'s aperture, the *P*'s stem-to-bowl proportion, the *R*'s leg, and the *S*'s spine stress, suggest evolution in the letterforms' graphics—Saiber has a compelling case for the close resemblance between the 1495 painted and the 1509 printed capitals; this proves Pacioli's long-standing interest in letterforms and confirms that he “dictated” every detail of this painting. Saiber's prefaces the discussion of the 1509 letters by noting that the divine proportion is a “condimento” (64), a sort of beauty sauce rather than the essence of letterforms (and architectural proportions). Pacioli's letters embody a special ratio in their