

REVIEW

FARMER, G. *Private presses and Australia; a first supplement*. Hobart, 1976. 16p.
[no price, no ISBN]

This pamphlet of 16 pages, clad in primrose manilla boards, could without doing violence to my imagination become the topic for a minature thesis for a master's degree! And good fun it would be, too, but in spite of all the shortcomings of this publication, one point should be made clear right from the start: Geoffrey Farmer has done much for the history of private presses and all of us are indebted to him. The thesis would not be merely an adverse criticism of the author but rather an examination of problems he has created. Useful as the pamphlet is, there remain nagging questions.

In the absence of a publisher's name, this pamphlet on Private Presses is obviously the product of a private press – or is it? The author offers in his "foreword" a new definition of what constitutes a private press; it includes

1. The owner operates it for his own private purposes and enjoyment.
2. The owner has an interest in typography and fine printing.
3. The owner has direct artistic control over all stages of production.
4. The owner does not print on a commercial basis, and the press is not his livelihood, though he may sell his efforts to defray expenses.

Even if (1) is to be applied to this pamphlet, why not tell us where we can purchase it?

The pamphlet itself cannot by any standards be considered as fine printing. There are contradictions in the division of paragraphs; there is too much unnecessary play with type faces.

The absence of the printer's name makes this publication subject to prosecution under the Police Offences (Obscene Publications) Act.

On the positive side, Geoffrey Farmer has produced very useful supplementary data to the survey of the Australian private press movement published in 1972. He deliberately excludes detailed bibliographic descriptions and limits himself again to producing a general list of identifiable categories. This is praiseworthy and I hope further supplements will appear at quinquennial intervals.

There also remains the wholly untouched problem of the legitimate distinction between books or pamphlets set by letterpress or produced by some other, modern, but not necessarily immoral, process. Printing techniques have developed and changed. Should not the concept of "private presses" also be brought forward into the last quarter of the 20th century?

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