

POSTER EXHIBITION:

Text of *The Apocalypse* as Graphics by Prof. Alban Grimm

Christina Thiele

The Alban Grimm exhibit, ‘Text of the Apocalypse as Graphics,’ on display during the TUG’99 meeting, shows what happens when a typographer-cum-graphic artist is introduced to computer programs and finds that inputting code can lead to outputting incredible visual results.

At the urging of his son, Gerhard, Professor Alban Grimm first encountered T_EX and METAFONT via AmigaT_EX, so that Gerhard’s thesis in electrical engineering might be typeset. Browsing through *The T_EXbook* and *The METAFONTbook*, the professor recognized the vast possibilities that T_EX offered for his own field of work—and he was motivated enough that he even attempted to overcome the language barrier while studying those books. Several months later, he met Frank Mittelbach for the first time (summer of 1990).

One of Prof. Grimm’s aims was to study the nature of computer-generated type. That is, a hand-made type has the look and feel of hand-made type; if one used a chisel, characteristics specific to chisels would be apparent. So—can one extend this idea and identify features of truly computer-generated type (in contrast to type generated with the computer but emulating other methods)? The ‘VN’ set of font variations which resulted were inspired by a search for a font to set the biblical text, *The Apocalypse* by St. John.¹

It was Frank who suggested that an exhibit of this melding of computer code and graphic genius be held at TUG’99. We are therefore deeply indebted to him for provoking Prof. Grimm with METAFONT, and for making the arrangements to bring over from Germany the enormous folder containing these posters (a weight of over 10kg!). Fortunately, Wendy McKay and Ross Moore (also responsible for the TUG’99 web version of this material) were able to pick up both Frank and the folder from the airport.

¹ A revelation made to St. John and recorded by him in the last book of the New Testament, called also the *Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine*.

The exhibition comprised 7 sets of panels, each set being the full text (in German) of the *Apocalypse*. Some sets had 22 graphic pages while others only 11 (where two chapters were set on one page). In all, 132 panels were displayed, with Frank putting up a different set each morning and afternoon, with assistance from Anita Hoover, program co-chair and technical editor of the proceedings. In addition, several texts written by Prof. Grimm and translated by his son provide some background to the whole project.

To describe the images in this exhibit is nigh impossible. Almost. Imagine a large off-white poster-sized panel, with two main areas of ‘stuff’ rendered in varying combinations of black, red, blue, yellow, . . . The upper area shows material that is text (it just doesn’t look like text), while the lower area (in the early series) is clearly an all-caps text (the VN font). The graphics on top of each page were generated from the first and last sentences of the current chapter, which appears in the lower area (either on one page or two). The difference in presentation is the result of selecting appropriate METAFONT modifications.

The poster included in these proceedings has black text in the background (the ‘square’ configuration), and then red overlaid with bright green (lighter gray) in the foreground. Of course, these black and white reproductions cannot fully do justice to the work; I invite you, therefore, to follow the links from www.tug.org for a better view.

Obviously a colour monitor is a good idea (!). Since these are image files, downloading takes a while; in addition to .jpg format, the .pdf versions of the multi-colored images provide an additional show, as the image ‘develops’ on-screen.

Prof. Grimm generously allowed all his prints for this exhibit to be given away to the participants at TUG’99. We would like to express our thanks—and our amazement—to Prof. Grimm, for having shown us that paper and ink can go far beyond ‘boxes and glue’.

