

Bookmaking as an Act of Redemption

Will Rueter celebrates The Aliquando Press's centennial book with a magnum opus drawn from the writing of T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. By Rollin Milroy.

The Aliquando Press's latest publication, *Majesty, Order and Beauty*, is a magnum opus of ambition and scope equal to the two milestones it marks: the imprint's 100th title and proprietor Will Rueter's 45th year of printing (making him not only the Canadian contemporary private press printer who has been at it the longest, but also the one who has been at it longer than any other in the country's history!). The new book draws its content, and inspiration, from the journals of Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, famed proprietor of the Doves Press. In the book's foreword, Rueter writes, "I have attempted to present Cobden-Sanderson's most interesting and pertinent personal observations on printing and binding—the crafts that deeply engaged his passion and vision—within the limitations of typesetting a book by hand."

Printed in three colours throughout, the extracts from Cobden-Sanderson's journals, which are presented in chronologic order, capture his passions and opinions, mixed in with some travails of daily life: "I had an interview with Dad at the National Liberal Club, to discuss my 'prospects' and means of living. He is not very hopeful about my bookbinding..." (April 10, 1884).

Majesty, Order and Beauty is an octavo of almost 80 pages, hand set in Palatino and Sistina type, printed on Hahnemühle Bugra paper, and cased in quarter cloth with patterned paper that was designed and produced by Rueter's great-uncle in Amsterdam circa 1900. All production work was done by Rueter in his small studio in Dundas, Ontario. He also created the five typographic broadsides incorporating his own wood engravings, printed on handmade Yuki gampi paper, that are interleaved throughout. The edition is just 45 copies (the first five printed on handmade paper, specially bound and issued with a signed set of the prints).

All these parts were brought together with Rueter's trademark skill, making the book truly suitable to mark a major milestone. When asked why he chose Cobden-Sanderson as the subject for his hundredth book (this is his fourth Cobden-Sanderson text), Rueter

says the choice goes back to his early days as a designer and printer.

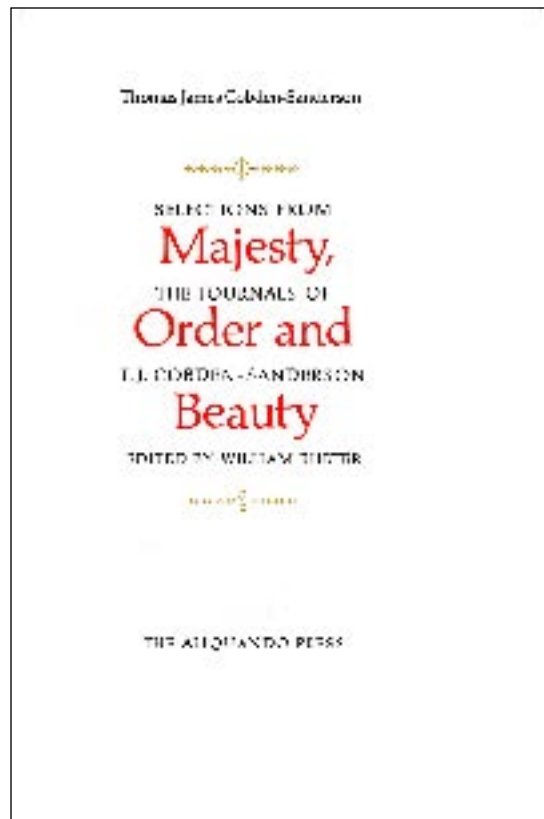
"When I first encountered the excitement and beauty of printed books in the early 1960s, the austere elegance of Doves Press books was a tremendous influence on the establishment and direction of the Aliquando Press. Here was a printer for whom the text meant everything, and he presented it to the reader in the most direct way possible. I feel great empathy for Cobden-Sanderson's serious, passionate dedication to the making of books. His belief in bookmaking almost as an act of redemption continues to affect me deeply."

Given the book's length and scope, and that Rueter undertakes each stage of production himself (including binding), it is not surprising that *Majesty, Order and Beauty* occupied almost two years of his life. Asked what effect spending that much time working so intimately with a text had on his relationship to the subject, Rueter says it connected him with the thoughts of a man who believed passionately in social justice (his wife was an active suffragette), the strength of craftsmanship and the power of ideas.

"With each typeset page I think I gained some insight into his development as a craftsman, his enthusiasm for the making of books, and the ecstasy he felt in his personal universe. Cobden-Sanderson probably suffered from depression, and through his idealistic dreams of the Book Beautiful I think he was able to maintain control of his life. In my view, very few people have written so passionately about the act of creating books. Making this book has been a very humbling experience.

"Trite though it sounds, I think Cobden-Sanderson's message is to strive for excellence, no matter how far short of your goal you fall. His belief in the power of the book as a physical object and a tool of communication is challenged daily, but those of us who continue to make books should be heartened by Cobden-Sanderson's dreams."

Taking the occasion of his imprint's centennial publication to look back, Rueter says his favourite books are the ones that show the fewest flaws and come closest to fulfilling his



vision for them. He singles out *Il Giardino d'Amore / The Garden of Love* (2003), *Books Books Books* (1986) and *The Articulation of Time* (1993). Despite what he considers its many flaws, this latter title, an anthology of favourite quotations produced during what Rueter calls a “darkish period” in his life, allowed him to stretch his typographic skills.

“In a few months, I hope, when I’ve finished binding *Majesty, Order and Beauty* and have lived with it, it will probably become a favourite. It has taught me so much.”

Even with 100 books (and a career as a professional book designer with the University of Toronto Press) under his belt, Rueter says that

each new project teaches him something. As he begins working towards his bicentennial book, he says a catalogue raisonné of his first hundred books and a few broadsides “to warm up my dormant printing skills” are next on his agenda.

“The challenge of constantly learning and refining skills never disappears. And with each book I pray I make fewer mistakes. The most interesting book project is always the one after the next one.”

Information about The Aliquando Press and its publications can be found at www.aliquando.ca. Copies of Majesty, Order and Beauty, priced at \$450, can be ordered directly from the press.

COLLECTING COLLECTORS

Amphora received a copy of Nicholas Basbanes’ latest, courtesy of Fine Books Press, for Christmas. *Editions and Impressions: Twenty Years on the Book Beat* reprints 33 columns by Basbanes grouped into three categories: book culture, people and places. Basbanes’ easy style is always enjoyable and entertaining, but this book may be best suited to the already afflicted, while his earlier one,

A Gentle Madness, may be a better choice if attempting to explain the condition to the family, friends and other outsiders. The aforementioned afflicted might be interested in the signed limited edition (250 copies, \$165) or deluxe edition (52 copies, \$300), both available from the publisher (www.finebooksmagazine.com).