

Home Used to Be a Cozy Place

Think back, if you can, to the emotional of
in the 1940s and 1950s. If you're not that
minute contemplating a Norman Rockwell p
try to sense the mood of the times

Back in those long-gone days, when t
the centerpiece of family entertainment,
was ... well, claustrophobic, by today's stand
least it was peaceful: regular, ordered, and
You could take quite a few things for grant

Were you born on a farm? Then char
were expected to grow up and work you
someday. Were you a small-town kid? Then
saw your future in that self-same town, or
You were from somewhere, and that shaped
ty, your loyalties, and even the way you tal

If you were a boy, you probably looked
or some other male relative, for vocational
He worked for the steel mill? Then maybe
too. He sold insurance. Then he could probab
you to that line of work. He was a lawyer?
good chances you would follow in his footsteps

If you were a girl, your mom's life accurat
your own future. You would marry, probabl
you finished your schooling, and begin yo

Alphora

No. 150 Supplement ♦ NOVEMBER 2008

THE ALCUIN SOCIETY



Dingbats

ORNAMENTS &

fanciful initials



A regular feature of
The Devil's Artisan
www.sentex.net/~pql/DA.html

THE ALCUIN SOCIETY was the idea of Geoff Spencer, to promote a wider appreciation of finely wrought books among book lovers around the world. Other founding members were Basil Stuart-Stubbs, Bill Duthie, Sam Black, Bill McConnell, Dale Smith and Sam Fogel.

The name Alcuin was chosen to honour the memory of Alcuin of York (A.D. 735 to 804). Alcuin was a man who cared deeply about books and literacy. As Charlemagne's "Minister of Culture," Alcuin selected the most legible script of his day and gave it official blessing. Known as Caroline minuscule, it ultimately led to our modern lowercase alphabet.

To further its aims, the Alcuin Society engages in a wide range of educational activities, many of them in collaboration with educational institutions—lectures, workshops, exhibitions, field visits and competitions. Annual design awards are made by a panel of expert judges for the best in Canadian book design. *Amphora*, the Society's journal, covers a wide range of topics related to the book: the future of the book, the history of the book, the book arts (typography, type design, calligraphy, papermaking, illustration, printing and binding), publishing, bookselling, book collecting, notable library collections, and reading.

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Some back issues of *Amphora* are available for purchase; please inquire for numbers still in print. Letters, story ideas, manuscripts and other material for possible inclusion in *Amphora* are welcome and should be sent to the Editor's attention at the mailing address below, or via the *Amphora* e-mail link on our Web site. We cannot promise to return unsolicited material.

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Membership in the Alcuin Society has the following categories and annual dues: Individual (\$40), Institution (\$60), Corporate/Patron (\$100) and Student (\$20, three years maximum). Individual Canadian members receive a \$16 tax receipt; Patrons receive a \$76 receipt. All categories receive *Amphora*, plus occasional keepsakes and ephemera. Members also have the option, but not obligation, of purchasing books or other materials published or distributed by the Society. The Alcuin Society is registered under the Societies Act of British Columbia as a non-profit association.

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SPECIAL ISSUE

This supplement accompanies the fall double issue of *Amphora*, which also happens to be the journal's 150th publication. To mark this momentous occasion, the issue is devoted entirely to chronicling in full colour the work of Vancouver's first commercial printer, Robert Mathison. The material reproduced and the accompanying essays come from bookseller Stephen Lunsford and collector John Keenlyside, both of whom have spent several decades exploring Mathison's work and what it tells us about a particularly vibrant time in Vancouver's history.

ABOUT THE COVER

In 2006 photographer Kyla Mallett's exhibition "Marginalia" assembled images of annotations written into Vancouver Public Library books, exploring the annotators' motivations and the responses they provoke. The cover image was used in a banner triptych promoting the exhibition. The concept of marginalia as a focus for collecting is explored in this issue's Modern Firsts column.

THE LONG GOODBYE

In an editorial written for my first issue as editor (*Amphora* 143), I promised no more editorials. Forgive me for closing out my tenure with a second.

To celebrate *Amphora* 150, the entire issue is being dedicated to a graphic history of the work of Vancouver's first commercial ("job") printer, Robert Mathison. The collection of ephemera reproduced in the issue comes from two collections, both assembled over the past three decades. This is the first time it has been published, along with Mathison's story. Celebrating the work of the first commercial printer in the Alcuin Society's hometown seemed a worthy way to mark the journal's latest milestone. To make it more so, we have removed all of the periodic material from the periodical and present that instead in this supplement.

Amphora No. 1 was issued in 1967. Complete sets of the journal, when assembled, command a hefty price. Looking at a list of contributors from four decades of publishing to date, one quickly appreciates the national and international sphere the journal has encompassed. The journal's creation, and many of the first 150 issues, were shepherded along by one of the Society's founders, Geoff Spencer. Other editors have joined for shorter tours, and my own ends with this issue. I will always appreciate the free hand that the Society's board allowed me in planning and assembling the issues I have worked on. *Amphora* gave me a wonderful field on which to play, and an excuse to call up anyone I wanted to talk to about what they were doing; these people always responded with enthusiasm, I can only assume because of the reputation of the journal established by my predecessors. I have also enjoyed the companionship, help and guidance of a large number of people in getting the journal published, and I indulge myself in thanking some of them here.

Jim Rainer, who led the gang when I was shanghaied; Howard Greaves, who helped whenever asked (but otherwise left me alone); RRR, for guidance and boundless enthusiasm; David, who has talent & endless patience; Yasmine, who has her dad's patience (and talent); Naomi, who is that only reason because the issues don't read like this here; all of the contributing editors who signed on

and have added breadth and depth to our content; Jacqui, who picks up all the pieces; Mark & Michael, for international relations; Kara, for her excellent insert; Barbara, for work & play; Ann, who read—and commented on—every issue; Phyllis, for reviews and support; Will R, for lending his name; Peter and Jason, for picking up the load; Bill and Brownie, because; and finally, L1 and L2—one less project keeping me at my desk!

ROLLIN MILROY

UPCOMING

The next issue of *Amphora* will be the debut for a new editorial and design team. PETER MITHAM is a freelance writer who has spent 15 years writing primarily for newspapers and magazines on real estate and agriculture. A staff writer with *Business in Vancouver* for four years, he resumed full-time freelancing in 2004. Since then he's written two books about real estate and served as the books editor for *Amphora*. He's played at chapbook publishing and excelled at pulling together a collection of books he enjoys and which he hopes the silverfish that infest his apartment won't. He published a bibliography of Robert W. Service in 2000. Peter's first issue as editor heading up production of *Amphora* will be published in March 2009.

JASON DEWINETZ'S name will be recognized by *Amphora* readers as the Alcuin Book Design Award-winning publisher and designer of Greenboathouse Books, which published a series of pamphlets by contemporary Canadian authors starting in 1999. A graduate of the University of Alberta (where his master's research position resulted in a bibliography of Black Sparrow Press), Jason currently resides in Vernon, B. C., where, in addition to doing freelance design work, he teaches publication design at Okanagan College. He is also in the midst of establishing Greenboathouse Press, which will continue where Greenboathouse Books left off but with a focus on letterpress printing and longer texts. Jason will lend his distinctive layout and design talents to *Amphora*.

BOOKSELLING

AbeAzon—Amazon acquires AbeBooks

On August 1, 2008, the online mega-retailer Amazon.com acquired AbeBooks, which bills itself as “the world’s largest online marketplace for books.” It will be a long time before the dust settles on this seismic event, but here are some initial thoughts on the acquisition and its related fallout.

First, how much did it cost? The folks over at TechVibes venture a guess that Amazon paid between \$90 million and \$120 million. Since Boris Wertz, former COO of AbeBooks, is on the board of directors of both TechVibes and AbeBooks, I’m going to believe the number is somewhere in that ballpark.

Second, how do the major players fare? AbeBooks hits a home run. The company has been steadily building its offerings through acquisitions, preparing for a potential buyout. Many saw it coming, but were still surprised when the news broke that the buyer was Amazon.

Also, for many booksellers AbeBooks has been a declining revenue stream while Amazon has been an increasing one. AbeBooks’ model is in many ways mature and the years of stellar growth are behind it. So for AbeBooks to get Amazon to bite is something of a coup. AbeBooks will also benefit greatly from Amazon’s infrastructure and management. It will become a better company.

With the purchase Amazon has surely strengthened its position in the book world. Regardless of how broken or mature its model is, AbeBooks is still the leader in the field. And if you add AbeBooks’ eyeballs to Amazon’s eyeballs you get one giant cyclops. No competitor is in the same league. If AbeBooks were a public company, the SEC would probably be taking a look at the acquisition.

For booksellers, the increased exposure of used, rare and out-of-print books on Amazon will be a benefit in the long run. One of the long-standing stumbling blocks for the used-book market is simply the lack of exposure to and understanding of it. Having Amazon join the fray could be huge in overcoming this hurdle among the general public. In the meantime, however, this is a painful event. If booksellers felt they were being held hostage by AbeBooks before, news of the Amazon/

AbeBooks marriage is a form of torture.

Last, how does the acquisition affect the other major players in the marketplace? Let’s look at them in turn.

Alibris, without some major adjustments to its business model, might be in a bit of trouble. CEO Brian Elliott recently shared a bit of the company’s current strategy with me, and it became apparent that they are in the midst of some revisions to remain competitive in the new landscape. Much of their new strategy is focused on the traditional used and antiquarian bookseller. They have already initiated a new fee structure that caps their commission at \$60, including the credit card processing fee. This is a clear indication that they are courting the antiquarian bookseller who has been left high and dry in the current marketplace.

Much of the growth in the online bookselling world has been at the expense of the traditional booksellers who were the backbone of these companies in their early years. The move by Alibris is an attempt to rectify the issue. Alibris has also launched an initiative that allows sellers to build their own storefronts on Alibris. It’s also working on a new feature to provide pricing history for individual books to sellers, which can, if done right, become a tremendous resource for the bookseller. So, Alibris is trying. Whether what it’s doing will be enough to convert the hordes of traditional booksellers that have essentially given up on the current online bookselling models remains to be seen.

Over at Biblio, the potential to use the Amazon/AbeBooks consolidation to promote itself as a real alternative to the mass-market bookselling approach should be pursued. Of all the online marketplaces, Biblio has done the most to weed out dubious and unscrupulous booksellers. Its overall positioning strategy has, however, been more of an organic one, and Biblio simply has not been able, up to this point, to garner the traffic to make a significant difference.

Finally, the acquisition makes Amazon a player in the book social network. The hidden gem in its acquisition of AbeBooks is the inclusion of a 40 percent minority interest in LibraryThing, a social cataloguing site for storing and sharing personal library catalogues and book lists. Since the AbeBooks acquisition Amazon has also acquired Shelfari, another major social cataloguing site. How these two

rivals will coexist under the Amazon umbrella remains to be seen. LibraryThing still retains its autonomy, but with Amazon's hand now in the book social network pot, things are sure to change quickly.

If there is one constant here it is that the world of online bookselling remains in a state of flux. The sector is still growing at a healthy pace, with online sales of non-new books now over US\$1 billion per year. Tremendous opportunities still exist, and sooner or later someone will successfully tap into the underserved antiquarian market and provide a viable destination for booksellers and book lovers.

Michael Lieberman is a blogger (www.bookpatrol.net) and partner in Wessel & Lieberman Booksellers (www.wlbooks.com).

MODERN FIRSTS

On the margins

Enthusiastic annotator Samuel T. Coleridge coined the word “marginalia,” defined by *Wikipedia* as “the general term for notes, scribbles, and editorial comments made in the margin of a book.” The study of marginalia is now a growing area of interest in the study of the history of the book. William Sherman's recently published *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* estimates that 20 percent of early printed books in research libraries are annotated. Clearly a reader's annotation made hundreds of years ago can provide added insight into a work and its time and easily engages the reader and the scholar.

The response of the reader to marginalia in a contemporary volume is much less likely to be positive. With the exception of notes made by the well-known identified reader, recent annotations are likely to be viewed by book dealers and collectors as defacement and by readers as a distraction. However, others champion such interventions as a form of transgressive discourse worthy of examination. These opposing views are described by H.J. Jackson in *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* as “A is for Annotator and B for Bibliophile (A thinks B might as well stand for Bore, and B that A is Anarchist).”

As a librarian and bibliophile at heart whose immediate response is to denounce marginalia, I find myself increasingly intrigued by the role it plays in how books are read. In large part this new interest was prompted by a public art project at the Vancouver Public Library by Kyla Mallett, which led to a gallery show at Artspeak in late 2006. Mallett's show *Marginalia* comprised photographic images of annotations in VPL books. In the accompanying exhibition catalogue *An Art of the Weak: Marginalia, Writers and Readers*, critic Denise Oleksijczuk succinctly describes the motivations of unsanctioned annotators (to use her phrase): “Some are spontaneous exclamations that make it possible to recover the mental processes of readers, others are mediated interventions by those who wish to communicate their ideas about the text to a later reader.” Mallett's photographs clearly illustrate these differing motivations and provoke multiple responses in the reader/viewer. The image reproduced on the cover (a half-page image used in the VPL banner triptych—the images in the Artspeak exhibition showed the full page of text) takes on a totally different meaning when one learns that the world-weary “?! Whatever” margin note appears in a book on teen suicide.

In a recent communiqué, *Amphora's* esteemed editor described his initial irritation on discovering that a used copy of Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* he had started reading had been annotated by a previous reader (in pink!). The irritation soon shifted to interest as he noted the sections the earlier reader found worthy of note. This led to the intriguing idea of building a collection of copies of the same title each annotated by a different reader. “Imagine,” he wrote, “looking for annotated copies in Third World countries; or comparing notations of copies from different generations;... or the triple crown—copies with multiple annotators.” A great if daunting idea which turns a book condition weakness into a strength and thereby establishes collecting parameters that by definition should be affordable. I will resist the temptation to try this out but recommend it to an energetic *Amphora* reader/collector. If anyone takes this on, or by chance has already been collecting with this focus, let us know how it's going.

I'll conclude by noting that my favourite marginalia are those made by authors

themselves. This is truly “sanctioned” annotating and can be really useful. A favourite literary example is Daphne Marlatt correcting the recipe reproduced in the novel *Ana Historic*. If I ever get around to trying it out, I’ll be much more confident knowing Ms. Marlatt has intervened with pen in hand in the copy in my collection.

Paul Whitney is City Librarian at the Vancouver Public Library.

REVIEW

*Detail in Typography:
Letters, Letterspacing,
Words, Wordspacing, Lines,
Linespacing, Columns*
By Jost Hochuli
(Hyphen Press, 2008, £12.50)
Reviewed by Owen Williams

Robin Kinross, the founder of the Hyphen Press, could be considered an anti-bibliophilic bibliophile. It is not the connoisseurship of title pages or the physical nuances of letterpress printing that informs his understanding of typographic design, but rather the clear and systematic design of tax forms, train schedules and telephone books. This socially responsible approach to design reflects the training Kinross received at Reading University’s Department of Typography in the 1970s.

Kinross founded the Hyphen Press in 1980 with the publication of a second edition of Norman Potter’s *What Is a Designer*. He consolidated the press’s reputation in 1992 through the publication of his own book, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*.

The books of the Hyphen Press—quiet, reserved, functional—could be considered particularly English. This approach, however, is not parochial but instead engaged with the northern and central European critical traditions of modern design and design reform.

At a time when graphic designers such as Neville Brody were exploiting the rich possibilities of the personal computer combined with QuarkXPress and the other new graphic design programs, and spoke of their work through the dialectical language of postmodernism, Kinross was writing, editing and publishing on modernity in typography.

Kinross understands modernity to mean “an articulate consciousness of action” and regards it as an unfinished project. This idea underpinned *Modern Typography*. His later essay, *Fellow Readers: Notes on Multiplied Language*, offered a critique of a superficial application of postmodernism in graphic design. The subsequent books of the press have served to articulate these positions.

Hyphen Press books are conceived as unified objects. Many are designed by their authors with an attention to detail rare in English-language publications. Christopher Burke, the author of *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, went so far as to design a second version of his typeface Celeste to increase the legibility of the book’s footnotes. With such attention to detail, it is understandable that Hyphen Press books are well made. Moreover, the books are often printed in the Netherlands or Belgium, where Kinross would argue the standard of printed matter is higher than in the U.K.

The authors who publish with the Hyphen Press are often colleagues from Reading’s Department of Typography or, like Jost Hochuli, members of the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI).

As a designer, Hochuli is known for having mediated a path between the once-polarized methods of Swiss modern typography and the neo-traditional methods of symmetrical typography. His approach realizes the value of contrast in design, while recognizing a need for detail and nuance. Aesthetically he prefers his books light and sparse, but possessing that particular form of elegance achieved through an explicit use of contrast. Though they assume a cultivated audience, his booklets in the Typotron series (1983–98) exemplify this approach.

Hochuli has written several books on typography. Though different in title and format, his English-language texts have been very similar in content. *Designing Books: Practice and Theory*, co-authored with Robin Kinross and published by Hyphen, is probably the most distinct of these publications.

Detail in Typography forms part of the press’s new series. To date the book has been translated into seven languages. This edition is a translation by Charles Whitehouse of the 2005 German-language edition published by Switzerland’s Niggli, which also published Emil Ruder’s *Typography: A Manual of Design* and Josef Muller-Brockmann’s *Grid Systems*

in *Graphic Design*. While these Swiss Modernist textbooks deal with macrotypography, Hochuli's book deals with microtypography. Hochuli explains the difference:

‘While macrotypography—the typographic layout—is concerned with the format of the printed matter, with the size and position of the columns of type and illustrations, with the organization of the hierarchy of headings, subheadings and captions, detail typography is concerned with the individual components—letters, letterspacing, words, wordspacing lines and linespacing, columns of text. These are the components that graphic designers or typographic designers like to neglect, as they fall outside the area that is normally regarded as “creative.”

Unlike other books on the subject such as Willi Kunz's *Typography: Macro and Micro-aesthetics* or the Oxford and Cambridge style guides, *Detail in Typography* is slim and concise. The method deployed by Hochuli lies in removing all elements that distract the eye, then optically adjusting the results to achieve a maximum clarity. The practice touches upon elements of orthographic reform. While highly aware of the conventions that underlie the practice, and deploying a classical aesthetic, Hochuli is not prescriptive or dogmatic, but rather enables the reader to experience the difference of these optical refinements through example. In keeping with the book's mandate, *Detail in Typography* is designed with a reassuring lightness of touch.

LIMITED AVAILABILITY

A sampling of new limited edition books from small and fine-press publishers

The Vampire and the Seventh Daughter
Larry Thompson
Greyweathers Press, 2008

This Gothic trifle (8 pp., edition of 75 signed copies, \$60) is hand-printed with cold type, using Italian Oldstyle for the text and Goudy Text for the cover, title page and opening lines. It is illustrated with five linoleum cuts by the author and printed on Arches Text Wove paper, with black Mohawk Ultrafine for covers. The

cover label is hand-painted by Holly Dean, with each copy “protected from vampires by a tiny cross bound into the front cover.”

Greyweathers Press (www.greyweathers.com) is run by Larry Thompson in Merrickville, Ontario, who has been printing books and ephemera by hand on a Vandercook S-219AB proofing press since 2006.



Miracle Mile
Alexander MacLeod
Frog Hollow Press, 2008

Miracle Mile (48 pp., edition of 95 copies issued in two states) is a love story amongst the runners, a story that drips with the mindless sweat of preparation and eventual culmination of what is won, but more enigmatically, what is lost. And there is no preparation for the ending of this story, something brutal but always rooted in MacLeod's rendering of character. The title page features a wood engraving by George A. Walker.

Digitally printed on archival 80-pound Mohawk Eggshell paper, the Deluxe Edition (20 copies, 15 for sale at \$50) is cased in Japanese cotton cloth over boards. The Regular Edition (75 copies, approximately 45 for sale at \$25) is Smyth-sewn, with a cover of mould-made Saint-Armand paper.

Frog Hollow Press (www.froghollowpress.com) has been printing and publishing letter-press limited editions of Canadian poetry and short fiction in hardcover, paper and chapbook formats since 2001.

Between You and the Weather
Mary Dalton
Running the Goat Books
& BroadSides, 2008

Dalton is reaching back to an ancient riddling tradition with these 26 little gems, but also engaging in a more contemporary and local one: the oral traditions of her home, where riddles and language itself have long been a form of entertainment. Puzzling and rich, these poems are very much of their place, and

are sure to delight and engage.

Between You and the Weather (64 pp., 150 signed copies, \$45) is set in 14-point Fournier, printed on Zerkall Book paper, and sewn in a Saint-Armand Canal paper wrap with Moriki Kozo endpapers. Printed by Marnie Parsons on a Vandercook SP15 proof press, the book includes three original wood engravings by Wesley W. Bates.

Running the Goat Books & BroadSides (www.runningthegoat.com) is a micro-press specializing in letterpress-printed and limited edition chapbooks, broadsides and “poem-phlets” by Newfoundlanders and Newfoundland-based writers. The press’s name comes from a traditional set dance, originally performed in Harbour Deep on Newfoundland’s Great Northern Peninsula.

Publishers interested in informing us about a new (within the past three months) or upcoming publication should contact column editor Richard Coxford (info@bytownbooksbop.ca).

NEWS

Grand opening of Rare Books and Special Collections

On Thursday, October 2, 2008, over 100 people gathered to celebrate the official opening of Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) at the University of British Columbia Library. The purpose-built space includes a large reading room, seminar room, staff workrooms and state-of-the-art vault that greatly improves security and access to UBC’s large collection of rare and special materials.

The opening was held in the spacious new Fort Fraser Reading Room and attended by booksellers, book binders, donors, librarians and archivists. The celebrative crowd listened to Peter Ward, University Librarian *Pro Tem*; Sherrill Grace, Professor of English; and Ralph Stanton, head, Rare Books and Special Collections, reflect on the history of RBSC at UBC and the future possibilities of the new space. The formal part of the program ended on a high note with John Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat singing historical British Columbia folk songs selected from Phil Thomas’s *Songs of the Pacific Northwest*.

Katherine Kalsbeek

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Summer sales & pulp classics

With the incessant rain that befell Ottawa this summer, I was provided ample opportunity to both catch up on my stack of summer sale catalogues and follow a few interesting pieces that found their way onto the auction block despite the usual lull in auction activity over summer.

To kick off the summer, Aquila Books from Calgary put out a splendid Arctic exploration catalogue filled with a number of scarce and interesting pieces, such as a hand-drawn Klondike goldfields map by Cuthbertson, circa 1890s; a beautiful 1801 leatherbound six-volume set of Capt. George Vancouver’s *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean* complete with all maps and plates for an even \$10,000; and the unique Antarctic archive of Merle R. Dawson ephemera from his 1956 Operation Deep Freeze, including field notes and data, photos, film, and a collection of Antarctic-related books and maps, all for a very reasonable price of \$3,750. For those with a penchant for collecting polar exploration material, this was a catalogue to be thoroughly enjoyed.

Another catalogue that was an absolute joy to leaf through was Thomas Cullen’s *Unusual and Historic Books and Manuscripts*. Among the interesting ephemera offered up was a partially printed document from the press of John Dunlap (printer of the Declaration of Independence) from 1777 for a modest \$350 a detailed travel journal from 1860 covering the two-month journey of S.B. Cary from Iowa to Colorado, with notes on the land, difficult travel conditions, frontier news and rumours, and an account of every campsite location and daily mileage (\$8,500). The catalogue also included a scarce 1773 edition of *Il Giuoco Incomparabile Degli Scacchi* (*The Incomparable Game of Chess*), authored by arguably the greatest 18th-century player, Ponziani, for \$2,000.

On the auction side, in early September two superb auctions tantalized collectors with some incredible offerings. The first was a Rare Books & Maps sale by the Edinburgh-based auction house Lyon & Turnbull, which auctioned off a fine collection of early James Bond books from the library of Sir Fitzroy McLean (Scottish diplomat/soldier considered

