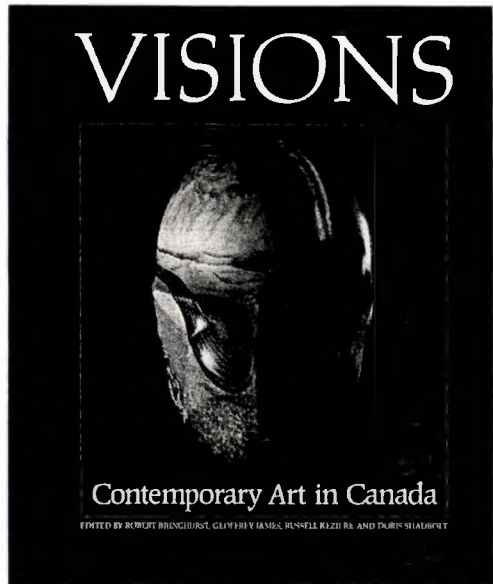


1984 ALCUIN CITATIONS

For Excellence in Book Design in Canada



In the spring of this year the Alcuin Society held its second competition for Excellence in Book Design in Canada. Publishers across Canada were invited to submit books in five categories — Poetry, Prose, Juvenile, Pictorial, and Other. The Society asked the publishers to observe the following criteria when choosing their submissions for the competition: books had to be at least 45 pages; produced wholly in Canada; and published in an edition of no fewer than 500 copies. Books in the Poetry, Prose and Juvenile categories had to have a retail price of not more than \$25.00; books in the Pictorial and Other categories, not more than \$75.00.

In all, 30 publishers submitted 121 books. A total of 14 Citations were awarded at a reception held at the Canadian Book Information Centre in Vancouver, on June 13, 1984.

POETRY

- 1st Stan Shikatani, designer, & Coach House Press; for *A SPARROW'S FOOD: POEMS 1971/82* by Gerry Shikatani, with drawings by Rosalind Goss.

Honorable Mention:

Gordon Robertson & Mary Scally, designers, & Coach House Press; for *PERSONAL LUGGAGE* by Marlene Cookshaw.

Gordon Robertson & Nelson Adams, designers, & Coach House Press; for *SPLIT/LEVELS* by Judith Fitzgerald.

PROSE

- 1st Not awarded.

Honorable Mention:

Greg Curnoe, designer, & Coach House Press; for *ANIMAL SPIRITS: STORIES TO LIVE BY* by David McFadden, with drawings by Greg Curnoe.

Gordon Robertson & Nelson Adams, designers, & Coach House Press; for *GONE TO GRASS* by Jean McKay.

(Note: one of the judges felt this book deserved 1st mention.)

Harold Kurschenska, designer, & Exile Editions; for *HUNGARIAN SHORT STORIES*, edited by Paul Varnai.

JUVENILE

- 1st John Larsen, designer, & Annick Press; for CAPTAIN CARP SAVES THE SEA, written and illustrated by John Larsen.

Honorable Mention:

Gina Calleja et al., designers, & Annick Press; for TOBO HATES PURPLE, written and illustrated by Gina Calleja.

(Note: one of the judges felt this book deserved 1st mention.)

Michael Solomon, designer, & Douglas & McIntyre; for ZOOM AT SEA by Tim Wynne-Jones, with illustrations by Kenn Nutt.

PICTORIAL

- 1st Robert Bringhurst, designer, & Douglas & McIntyre; for VISIONS: CONTEMPORARY ART IN CANADA, edited by Robert Bringhurst, Geoffrey James, Russell Keziere and Doris Shadbolt.

Honorable Mention:

Tim Inkster, designer, & The Porcupine's Quill; for TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS by Jorge Luis Borges, illustrated by Rikki.

Pamela McDonald, designer, & Camden House Publishing; for NIGHTWATCH: AN EQUINOX GUIDE TO VIEWING THE UNIVERSE by Terence Dickinson, with illustrations by Victor Costanzo and Adolf Schaller.

OTHER

- 1st Not awarded.

Honorable Mention:

Jorge Frascara and Shirley Neuman, designers, & Longspoon Press; for GRAMSCI X 3 by Wilfred Watson.

Jenny Holzer, designer, & Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; for ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE: TRUISMS AND ESSAYS by Jenny Holzer.

The Citations are intended to acknowledge Canadian publishers who, in spite of the temptation to misuse current technology, continue to maintain the highest possible standards in book production. Hopefully the Citations will give the winning publishers greater recognition for their well-designed books and at the same time help to set standards for other publishers as well as the public.

The judges for this year's competition were Crispin Elsted, Ron McAmmond, Robert Bringhurst, and Reinhard Derreth. All the judges made notes about the winning books, and often commented on books which, although they received no award, merited attention. We offer here the remarks made by Robert Bringhurst inasmuch as they reflect the general concerns of all four judges.

Notes on the Winners and Other Books

The task of the book designer, like that of the concert musician, is not to create something from scratch, but to serve a work which already exists. His task is to elucidate, realize, interpret, and in a manner of speaking to translate a text into physical form. His resources include the tools and materials of the printing trade — paper and ink, presses, trimmers, folders, stitching and binding machinery and so on — but his resources, like those of the concert musician, should also include some other things: (1) an intimate and personal knowledge of the history and traditions of his craft, and of the verbal and pictorial arts which it serves; (2) his own humanity. The designer, like the dancer, the actor, the musician, must reach into the depth of his own character in order to interpret and embody the text he is there to serve. And he should know the history of his craft not in order to be bound by it, but in order to be free to bring as much or as little as need be of that history to bear on a particular problem here and now.

Some texts, like some musical scores or dramatic scripts, are inherently more worthy than others, but one important test of a piece of typographic design is always how it serves and interprets the text at hand, no matter what text that is. Sometimes the typographer, like the jazz musician, may bring a great deal of himself and his own inventiveness into the work at hand. More often, he must keep out of the work's way. And a book, almost by definition, is a work in which the author, not the typographer, has principal claim on our admiration and attention. The book is a domain in which the designer must be impeccably prepared, sumptuously talented, and yet modest enough not to overperform.

The books submitted to this competition demonstrate that some superbly qualified book designers exist among us, but that they are scarce. The books also demonstrate that some Canadian publishers do and many do not know or care very much about standards of design. It is a well-known problem in the industry: the legacy of a technological and economic revolution which is still underway, and which has severed commercial manufacturing and marketing from traditional craftsmanship more often than it has bequeathed to skilled artists new opportunities, new audiences and new tools. This

predicament necessarily places a good deal of strain on any publisher who cares what he or she is doing. Perhaps all of us — typographers, authors, publishers and readers — may find solace in the remark of one of the finest typographer/printers of this century, Victor Hammer, who said: "The work itself is what matters, and when it is authentic, the condition of its accomplishment will necessarily be adverse."

Poetry

The books submitted in this category covered a considerable range, from the sloppy and thoughtless to the joyful and knowledgeable creations of designers who have learned their trade and who practice it with honor. There were good books from Porcupine's Quill, Exile, General Publishing, and Aya as well as from Coach House Press, which in the end won all the acknowledgements in this category. A couple of the judges were impressed by the titles submitted from General Publishing's Spectrum Series, but the typographical quality of the books was very uneven, and their necessary fealty to the series design prevented them competing successfully one by one against the books from Coach House or Porcupine's Quill which are individually designed.

The Coach House books impress with their application of sophisticated typography to commercial paperback production — a feature long associated with Penguin Books, but maddeningly scarce in Canadian trade publishing. The Coach House books impress too with their range, from the traditional to the experimental in design, and they give clear evidence that each title is designed from the text out, not from the cover in. (Surprisingly, however, all the Coach House books in the contest, if they were perfectbound, as many of them were, suffered from vertical alignment problems.)

The merits of the winning book ought, I think, to be obvious to anyone handling it. The Fitzgerald won our attention in spite of its bad cover, because of the immaculate typography of the insides. The Cookshaw was particularly impressive to me personally, because of the designer's thorough yet inventive fidelity to the theme and title, and because of the understated but great technical skill evident in its execution.

Prose

The submissions in this category were disappointing. Many of the books were badly bound (the action of the pages poor, the spine margins haphazardly calculated, if they were calculated at all) and the design quality overall was dull. Many of the books were caught be-

tween traditional and contemporary design and managed to fall flat between the stools. In most of the books, the typography was bargain basement stuff — bad cuts, badly set, probably by a compositor who was unsure of the difference between typography and typing. We chose no prize winner but gave honorable mention to three.

The McKay is a satisfying, if fussy, piece of traditional typography, disfigured, in my mind, by an unimaginative cover. (Not all the judges share this opinion. One of them at least wanted to give it a prize.) The McFadden, a resolutely ugly book, is so on purpose. It departs for its own reasons from traditional canons of typography, and we acknowledged it not for its beauty (it has none) but for its thoroughness as a piece of rather nostalgic (instead of traditional) design. The Varnai, on the other hand, is thoroughly traditional in its approach. It attempts nothing new, but does succeed in its own way, on its own terms.

Certain features of other books in this category merit attention. Paci's THE FATHER (Oberon) has some nice features, but the margins are bad, and there is a humorless woodenness in the execution. Gunnars' THE AXE'S EDGE has a splendid cover and title page, designed by Ken Seabrook, but the guts of the book are bland, and have *no relation* to the cover and title page. The book has been built, as many trade books are, in pieces which do not add up to a whole. There is a fine cover also to be found on the Doubleday entry, GLENN GOULD VARIATIONS, and inside this book is some fine photography nicely displayed. But the text pages are tired, badly set, characterless things. For all the money that was obviously spent in producing this book, a *much* better text page could have been obtained.

Juvenile

While the illustrations in several of the children's books were exciting to behold, the *typography* of these books was, almost without exception, atrocious. In only one of the books — Tim Wynne-Jones's ZOOM AT SEA (Douglas & McIntyre) — was the typography at all appropriate to the subject matter and illustrations in the book, and even in this case the net result was rather tired. Most of the books, including the two Annick Press books, were set thoughtlessly in one of two readily available faces, Helvetica or Palatino, with never a moment's consideration of the appropriateness of the face to the text or to the illustrations. I'd have been happier, myself, giving no prize in the category.

The Larsen wins on the basis of its illustrations, eminently suited to the theme, and well made on a low budget. The Calleja is a more sophisticated piece of bookmaking, but less fun to handle, and the type is even worse than in the Larsen.

Other

This threatened to be a difficult category to judge, because of the disparate nature of the entries. Books ended up here when they fit in no other slot. But in the end, few entries didn't fit somewhere else. None of them seemed to us to merit a prize, but we awarded honorable mention to two.

The first of these is a valiant attempt to handle an almost dadaist theatre script; the second is (like the McFadden book to which we called attention as a work of prose) deliberately obtrusive, threatening, unbeautiful. Both designs seem admirably faithful to their contents.

Robert Bringhurst
16 May 1984

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Alcuin Society gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the following individuals and organizations:

Esmond Lando
Don Atkins
Paperworks Gallery
Winter Lily Press
Western Book Reps
Canadian Book Information Centre
Roberta Beiser — Vancouver Partnership

and the judges:

Crispin Elsted
Ron McAmmond
Robert Bringhurst
Reinhard Derreth

The Alcuin Society

Hon. Past Presidents

G.A. Spencer
Neil Brearley
Allan Segal
M.S. Batts
Bryan Peet
Peter Quartermain
Don Atkins

Officers and Directors

Ron McAmmond, *Chairman*
Anne Tayler, *Vice-Chairman*
J.E. Horvath, *Treasurer*
Doreen Eddy, *Executive Secretary*

Directors whose term of office expires in

1985	1986	1987
W.G. Chappell	Denise Carson	J.E. Horvath
R. Diesvelt	Anne Tayler	R.L. McAmmond
Charlotte Bagshawe	Clemens Rettich	Richard L. Hopkins

Amphora

The editors will be glad to consider for publication in *Amphora* articles touching on topics of interest to bibliophiles.

Contributions should be sent to the Society.