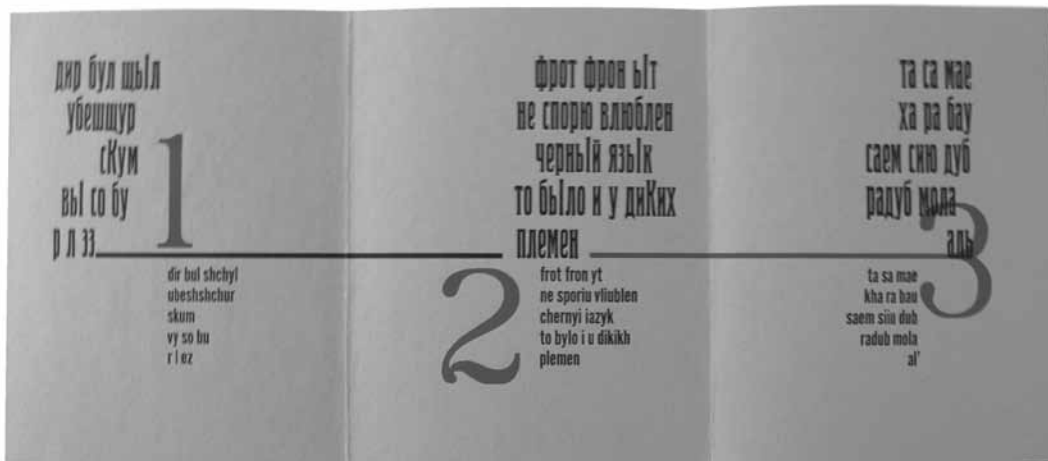


Glenn Goluska (1947–2011): A Singular Type

ROBERT BRINGHURST reviews the typographic education and remarkable achievements of one of Canada’s premier letterpress designers and printers.



3A UM: 3 transrational poems by A. Kruchenykh, inside pages, from the collection of Chester Gryski, who kindly provided most of the images that accompany this article.

CRISPIN ELSTED WROTE IN 1990 that Glenn Goluska was “the best letterpress designer-printer in Canada”—and no one was better qualified to make that judgment than Crispin himself. In the last two decades of his life, Glenn did all too little of the letterpress work he was so good at, but he proved beyond doubt that he was also one of North America’s finest all-round book designers and typographers, and he remained one of the gentlest, quietest, smartest, most self-effacing humans I have ever known.

He loved ingeniously designed and well-constructed bicycles, self-contented cats, good architecture, good writing, good printing, good food, good engineering and construction, and he abhorred pomp and pretension. He particularly liked the company of cheerful, skilful, unassuming people, though he also put up with the rest of us quite graciously. He would have chuckled at

any suggestion that he was in any respect saintly, yet most of those who knew him perceived him to be so. His presence alone deflated a lot of swelled heads before they could burst and calmed down a lot of fretful and distracted people.

He was born on June 26, 1947, in Chicago, and raised in a largely Polish neighbourhood on the city’s hard north side. His father and paternal grandmother—two of the most important people in his early life—conversed with each other in Polish. His mother, however, did not speak the language and took pride in being of German, not Slavic, descent.

As a boy, Glenn was quiet, nearsighted, musical, and obviously bright. He skipped fourth grade at the Catholic school he attended for eight years. Languages were his lifelong playground, and when his increasingly prosperous parents moved to the suburbs and enrolled him in the Loyola Academy, a prestigious private school,

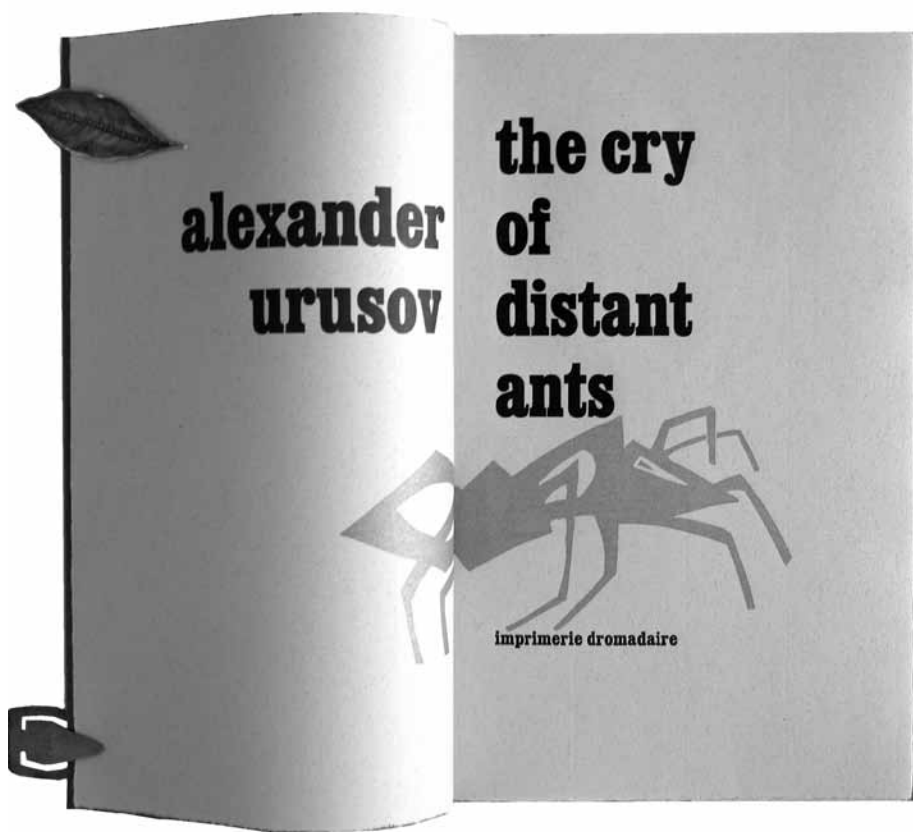
he learned a lot of Latin, French and German. He also spent a lot of time on the bus, riding back downtown to his favourite hangouts, the Art Institute of Chicago (then, as now, one of America's finest museums) and the central branch of the Chicago Public Library.

He had never yet done any typesetting or printing but, through his love affair with language, he had grasped what typography was. He was already becoming, in Colm Tóibín's phrase, "a connoisseur of the silent country of the printed page." He read John Updike, Evelyn Waugh and

along the lakes and north across the border, known as Toronto. The idea stuck, and in the mid-1960s Glenn enrolled at the University of Toronto. There he earned a B.A. (1969) and then an M.A. (1971) in Slavic languages. He also married one of his fellow students, another Chicago native by the name of Anne Bratton, whose interests included bookbinding.

In 1971, since neither Glenn nor Anne had a visa that would permit them to work in Canada, they moved back to Chicago. Glenn found a job there doing editing and design for a

translation bureau. He also learned to operate the bureau's phototypesetting equipment, though the scope for typographic creativity and design innovation was minimal. A couple of years later he was working at the Northwestern University Library and had acquired his first actual printing equipment: a small Poco proof press and a few scraps of foundry type. He was still a long way from being a printer, but at last he could fill a composing stick, roll some ink and make some practical experiments.



Philip Roth, and he read the pioneers of typographic history: Stanley Morison, Harry Carter and Daniel Berkeley Updike (John Updike's distant relative). Before leaving high school, he built a substantial collection of type specimens.

Glenn also played piano, and one of his friends and mentors was the local church organist, William George. It was George who introduced him to classical music—and it was George who dropped the hint that there was an interesting, faintly foreign city some ways east

Working at the library gave Glenn a chance to handle even more books than usual, along with a reason to look more closely at publishers' imprints. It was there in the cataloguing room at Northwestern that he discovered the Coach House Press. One of his bosses had placed a standing order with this fledgling Canadian operation, run by Glenn's former neighbour Stan Bevington. It had started as a small letterpress shop near the U of T campus and had issued its first publications in 1965—the year Glenn

started school at U of T. Yet in spite of their shared interests and close proximity over several years, Glenn and Stan had never met.

In its first decade, Coach House had published a large number of interesting books, mostly by young Canadian writers who had yet to make their names: Michael Ondaatje, bpNichol, and many more. The books were inventively written and inventively designed. They were set in type by a variety of means, from traditional metal to new-fangled phototype, and printed on the premises. These books intrigued Glenn enough, when he saw them in Chicago, that he decided to go see where they were made. On that initial visit, after a short conversation, while Glenn's young wife sat waiting in the car, Bevington offered him a job, and he accepted. He may not have known it at the time, but this was a major turning point in his life.

CONGENIAL SETTING AT COACH HOUSE

Glenn worked at Coach House for six years as a typographer and typesetter, learning to run both the Model 5 Linotype machine (vintage 1906) that presided over the ground floor and the Datapoint 2200 (vintage 1971) that sat demurely in an alcove on the upper level. The Coach House Linotype was the first of several such machines Glenn would use, to great effect, for the rest of his life. The Datapoint was a machine that soon disappeared, like other forerunners of the personal computer, but it taught Glenn well and early what computers could and could not be expected to do for typography.

Because so much Coach House work in the

1970s was collaborative, it is hard to make a complete and precise list of Glenn's work from this period, but Coach House books that are clearly his design include bpNichol's *Journal* (1978), Robert Kroetsch's *Sad Phoenician* (1979), Paul Dutton's *Left Hemisphere, Right Ear* (1979) and Sharon Thesen's *Artemis Hates Romance* (1980).

Outside the Coach House, his principal friends and mentors in those days were Robert MacDonald and Will Rueter. MacDonald was both a skilled hand compositor and pressman and an obsessive community organizer. With a few

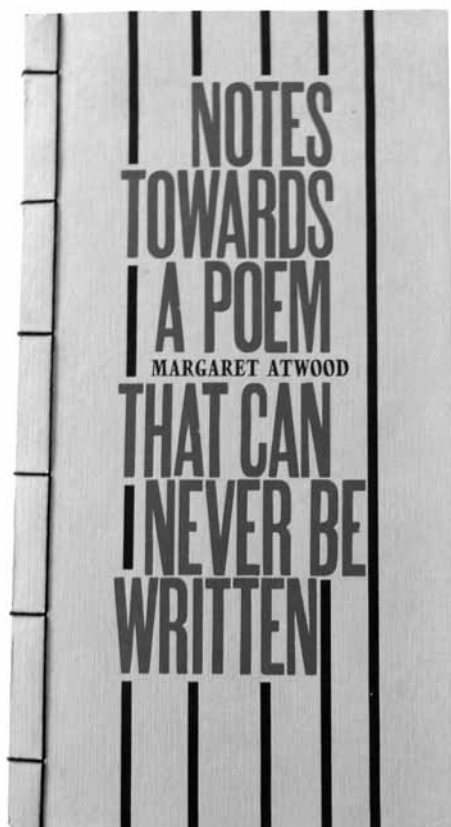
friends, he had contrived, in the early 1970s, to unite these twin passions in a supposedly leaderless, partisan enterprise known as the Dreadnaught Press.

Robert and Glenn could and did sit up night after night discussing for hours the merits of certain typefaces—and they could test and refine quite a few of their impassioned propositions by dipping into Dreadnaught's splendid collection of foundry type, locking up a page and printing it on "the Fag"—the Swiss-made F A G Standard proof press in Dreadnaught's cramped, congenial basement at the corner of Sussex and Huron.

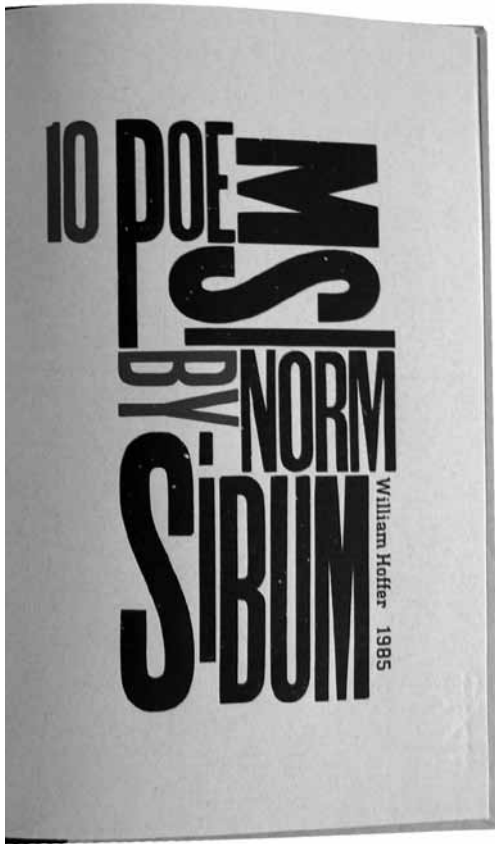
Coach House was just

half a block away. Four blocks the other way, on Major Street, was Will Rueter's meticulous yet prolific private press, Aliquando.

Soon after moving back to Toronto, Glenn replaced his little Poco with a Vandercook Universal No. 1—one of the finest of proof presses—and over the next several years he built a fine collection of wood type and foundry type. Most important of all, perhaps, he acquired his own Linotype, a model 31 (built in 1955, to a design that dated from 1937).



Glenn found the Coach House method congenial, and with minor adjustments it became his method too. It is much like the method used between 1920 and 1965 at the Grabhorn Press in San Francisco—and I suspect it has been used at many (though not all) of the better hand press operations of the past 500 years. It consists in working things out from scratch directly in the medium to be used, without the aid of renderings or sketches. A typographer who follows this technique begins by reading the text he is going to print and setting some of it in type,



either by hand or at some kind of keyboard. If he likes the result, he makes whatever refinements he thinks are called for and keeps going. If not, he disses or melts down what he's done and tries again, resetting the text in different type or to different parameters than before.

The compositor's task, when approached in this way, requires his full intelligence and attention. Fond though he was of music, Glenn never set type with a radio or stereo system playing, and he never sat at his Linotype machine

with earphones in his ears. He was always too absorbed in the task at hand, listening with his mind's ear to the text that he was setting, and watching with his eyes the type that was gathering under his hands. Working at the Linotype, he was also always listening to the machine itself, checking that the matrices were travelling, the type metal cooking, and the slugs being cast and delivered as he wanted them to be.

Beginning printers collect what comes their way, and Glenn acquired discarded fonts and leads, the wooden spacers known as printer's furniture, old stock engravings, type drawers and cases and benches. One early lot of odds and ends included several metal cuts of camels. Glenn liked these enough that he christened his press *Imprimerie Dromadaire*.

DROMADAIRE AND THE DEVIL'S ARTISAN

He did not expect the imprint to make him rich and famous. The first thing printed in this name was a broadside of an Easter sermon by Cyril of Turov, a 12th-century Russian Orthodox bishop. The second was a folded sheet containing French and English versions of part of a poem by Tristan Tzara. Both these pieces are dated May 1975. More broadsides followed shortly: poems by Vladimir Mayakovsky, Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksandr Blok, François Villon, and others.

The first Dromadaire book, published in 1978, was Alexander Urusov's *Cry of Distant Ants*—a wry account of life in the gulag, first circulated in Russian by *samizdat* around 1965. Glenn, as usual, not only did the design and set the type; he also made the linocuts and translated the Russian text. In this respect, *Distant Ants* is a typical Dromadaire production: Anne did the binding; Glenn did just about everything else. But binding is important in a book, and Glenn delighted in the fact of joint production. A decade later, when working with Anne grew painful and sad, Glenn's approach to bookmaking radically changed.

Yet another of his projects in those years was the founding of a magazine. It was called *The Devil's Artisan: A Journal of the Printing Arts*, and its first issue appeared in February 1980. His co-editors were William Rueter and Paul Forage; the publisher was Coach House. Forage—then a student of Chinese, interested

in the history of paper, printing and movable type in China—soon drifted away, but Rueter stayed with the journal for seven years, and Glenn for nine. Three decades later, it still survives and is formally known by what used to be its nickname, *DA*. (It is edited now by Don McLeod and published by Tim Inkster.)

It was Margaret Atwood who first understood the potential importance of Glenn's presence in Toronto. It was she, that is, who initially grasped that Glenn was the most promising letterpress artist in Canada and might play a significant role in Canadian literature if he were only to turn his interest in that direction. Late in 1980, she asked Glenn to do some letterpress work for her short-lived Salamander Press. He liked to say in later years that this commission gave him the courage to quit his job at Coach House.

He decided, however, that he needed a different name for any work printed by him and published by others, and the name he chose for that kind of work was Nightshade Press. He also realized he should learn how other printers made a living. To that end, he spent two busy weeks near San Francisco Bay. He devoted several days to an advanced letterpress workshop at the California College of Arts and Crafts—his only professional training. The rest of the time he spent visiting printers—Adrian Wilson, Jack Stauffacher, Clifford Burke, Andrew Hoyem, Peter Koch, and others—and the legendary Oakland papermaker Robert Serpa.

In his Nightshade guise, he printed Atwood's *Notes towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written* in 1981, and two years later her *Snake Poems*. On Atwood's recommendation, he was also hired to print a series of small books for the Writers' Union of Canada. These were conceived as a fundraising venture and published in 1983 under the imprint of the Grand Union Press. They included Atwood's *Unearthing Suite*, Robert Kroetsch's *Letters to Salonika*, and Jack Hodgins's *Beginnings*.

FINE EDITIONS FROM THE STABLE

Just before Glenn quit the only salaried job he ever held in Canada, he and Anne had bought a house on Markham Street with a shed in the backyard. This shed became his press room,

and some of his best work was printed there. But they had not been in their first house long when they saw the chance of having a coach house of their own. More precisely, it was a milk-wagon house, in the alley behind 105 Major Street. Glenn liked to call it the Stable.

It was a two-storey brick-and-concrete structure, built to shelter the wagons and horses of a 19th-century urban dairy. On the ground floor, where the wagons had once been parked and the harnesses stored, he installed his presses, his type and his Linotype machine. On the top floor, where the horses had been kept—because, when unhitched from the wagons, they could walk up the ramp—Anne had her bindery, and Glenn and Anne created handsome quarters for themselves, centred around a large and comfortable kitchen.

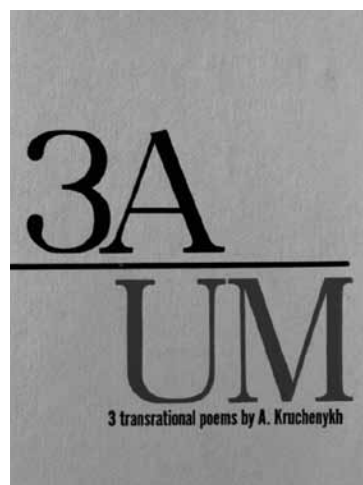
Marvellous work emerged from the Stable. In 1985, the list included Mayakovsky's *Brooklyn Bridge*, El Lissitzky's *Typographic Facts*, and Fernand Léger's *Ode to the Bicycle*, published by Dromadaire, along with Norm Sibus's *Ten Poems*, printed for

William Hoffer. A little later came Robert Kroetsch's *Liebhaber's Wood Type* (1987), the wonderful *Nine Poets Printed* broadside portfolio (1986–88) and Paul Dutton's *Additives* (1988):

a little book of word games that would have perished

instantly except for Glenn's typography, which gave it permanence and life.

Glenn, in his early forties in this fine back-alley house, was in his prime, but as the 1980s were ending, so was his marriage. He began to sleep downstairs with the machinery, then to spend stretches of time on Hornby Island, where a friend had loaned him a cottage. Soon he was thinking of moving all his gear to Hornby. Early in 1990, before he could take that radical step, he was offered a design commission at



the Centre Canadien d'Architecture (CCA) in Montreal, and his life took another major turn.

One project followed another at the CCA: posters, brochures and further exhibition catalogues. The more such work he accepted, the more time he spent in Montreal, perfecting his French and exploring the city. In November 1990 he rented an apartment on the Plateau-Mont-Royal. In the summer of 1993, he fell in love with a poorer neighbourhood, Saint-Henri, and rented a pleasant industrial space beside the Lachine Canal. In literary terms, he was moving then from the world of Mordecai Richler to the world of Gabrielle Roy and *Bonheur d'occasion*. But he was also, after three years' reflection, moving his heart across another cultural border. His canal-side space was large and strong enough for the Linotype, the Vandercook, the imposing stones and the cabinets full of type, which followed him at last from Toronto. That heart, however, was still broken. Throughout the 1990s, Glenn allowed the CCA to keep him occupied and solvent, and made very little use of his fine old-fashioned tools.

In 1998, forced by a new landlord to vacate his canal-side studio, Glenn bought a three-storey building two blocks away, in the Square Sir-George-Étienne-Cartier. He put his pressroom in the basement, took the top floor for Pica, his one-eyed cat, and himself, and rented out the rest. A year later, his decade-long relationship with the CCA also came to an end.

WRAPPING BOOKS FOR THE TRADE

In the last 12 years of his life, Glenn occasionally set some wooden letters or a few lines on the Linotype, and he printed several small things on the Vandercook. There is, for instance, a broadside poem by Susan Musgrave, printed in 1998 for Lazara Press as a memorial to William Hoffer; a splendid poster announcing the première Salon de la Bibliophilie contemporaine (2001); an undated bilingual broadside of Denis Roche's poem "La poésie," which I think was produced around 2003; and an Irving Layton poem, "Boys Bathing," printed for Véhicule in 2006.

But mostly he was working freelance for the trade, doing typography on a computer. Beginning in 2001, he designed a series of

low-budget literary paperbacks for Éditions du Noroît. In 2007, for Éditions du Boréal, he designed Michel Biron's massive *Histoire de la littérature québécoise*. There were catalogues and posters for art galleries, museums and historical societies. But from 1999 to 2011, his major occupation was a new one: designing jackets for books he had never read. He did well over a hundred of these for McGill-Queen's University Press, nine or ten for UBC Press, and some others here and there.

Many of these jackets are masterpieces of their kind: superb pieces of advertising typography. But jackets are a kind of gift wrap, whose function is to persuade you to open the package, then to invest your time and money in what it contains. The texts they contain are very rarely of lasting value. Jackets are to look at, while books are to be read. Glenn's most important and most lasting work doesn't separate looking and reading in this way; it fuses the two activities. His best work also fuses designing and making: it was almost always done by hand.

Glenn had no use for anger. He held no grudges against anyone, even when a grudge had been well earned. And he was, in fact, a serio-comic typographer—the best such I have ever known. All his best work is simultaneously serious and playful. The smiling and scowling, like the designing and making, the reading and looking, are fused. At the end of his life, when there was plenty to be sad about, he remained happy and wanted others to be so too. Only days before his death, when he was already confined to the hospice, he was married for the second time, to the artist Bernadette Lefèbre. His last conscious act was to ask his bride to rearrange some photos that friends had hung near his bed. He had seen a latent story in the images and wanted to turn them into a book. It was a great typographer's last gesture: a small book in one copy, in which there were no words.

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~ Robert Bringhurst is an acclaimed poet, typographer and author who contributes regularly to *Amphora*.