I pick the bones of what's been done,
lick them clean with a cautious tongue ...

THAT LYRIC FROM VANCOUVER folk music troupe Spirit of the West's "Far Too Canadian" came to mind while fact-checking points of the article regarding Douglas Coupland, who recently made a generous gift of his archive to the University of British Columbia. Coupland, of course, is the author of countless novels and other writing as a well as a visual artist of some celebrity. Prolific, he has vaulted from the West Coast into the pantheon of Canada's literary gods.

But whatever his popularity, that hasn't kept detractors from calling him on points that should merit attention from the Alcuin Society. One of the more over-the-top rants — which prompted the above verse to come to mind — was thrown into the blogosphere in May 2007 by Toronto blogger Joe Clark through his Web site fawny.org.

Ragging on director Robin Neinstein's film *Souvenir of Canada*, based on Coupland's books of the same name, Clark notes that Coupland's preference for sans serif faces in headers falls short of what it tries to represent. The credits of the film echo the federal government's visual identity protocol, which requires Helvetica. *Souvenir of Canada*, Clark notes, employs Arial. Clark, seeking to send up Coupland's pretensions, goes on to describe Arial as an "undesigned font." He rants: "Don't think for a second that, in 25 years, Arial will be looked back upon affectionately as a kitschy lodestar of the Aughties."

Of course, this is all familiar ground. New York's Rob Giampetro, in a 2003 interview in the now-defunct U.S. journal *Emigre*, critiqued what he called "default systems design" – the use of fonts and protocols loaded on the computers that have become so ubiquitous. The interview was a follow-up to various comments in the previous issue of the journal, which included the sort of comparison between "Old Modernism" and "Modernism 8.0" that Joe Clark might appreciate. A default font such as Helvetica (for you Mac users) might be common between the two styles, but "white space" becomes "empty space" and "iconic" is now "banal." Times change. What was acquires new significance as we live with it; simply re-presenting tableaus of the familiar to an audience may call forth emotions but doesn't necessarily move us forward.

But lest this column become a rant itself, it's worth noting California printer Peter Koch's effort to print the work of Joseph Brodsky in Venice. All art is autobiographical, Federico Fellini remarked, and in this regard Koch's effort produces a piece of fine printing with a story to match. His edition comes with a history owners would do well to cherish as much as they do the book itself, as Emma Jensen's summary of his comments to the Alcuin Society in April attest.

This issue also offers reports from Ontario, with Chester Gryski sizing up the Grimsby Wayzgoose and Larry Thompson relating on what happens to book design when placed in the hands of architecture students. And don't forget to read bookseller and collector Charlotte Ashley's report from the 2010 edition of Toronto's annual Book Camp.

Peter Mitham, editor

ABOUT THE COVER

One of many calligraphy studies in the Coupland archives, showing an interesting juxtaposition of modern ideas with a classic script. Courtesy of University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Douglas Coupland fonds, box 94 folder 15.