

## BOOK REVIEW

*Eric L. Swanick*

Herrmann, Frank. *Low Profile : A Life in the World of Books*. New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press; Nottingham, Eng.: The Plough Press, 2002. 398 p. 39.95 US\$

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Herrmann's autobiography begins in the late 1930s in Germany before the family fled that country with the rise of Adolf Hitler. The family settled in England where Herrmann attended English private schools and went to Magdalen College, Oxford.

Following graduation in 1947, he joined the publishing firm, Faber and Faber where he had the opportunity to work with key individuals such as David Bland, Vivian Ridler, Richard de la Mare, Berthold Wolfe and, of course, T.S. Eliot. At Faber and Faber Herrmann received an excellent introduction to arguably the best typographic work in Europe as well as to book production at a significant English publisher. This was the first of many publishers for whom Herrmann worked—Faber and Faber was followed by Methuen, Ward & Lock, Marshall, Morgan and Scott (MMS), and Nelson. The list continues. He was also involved with Frederick Muller, Philip Watson Publications and Sweeten's Bookshops (the last two he casually lets drop that he had financial interests in the businesses).

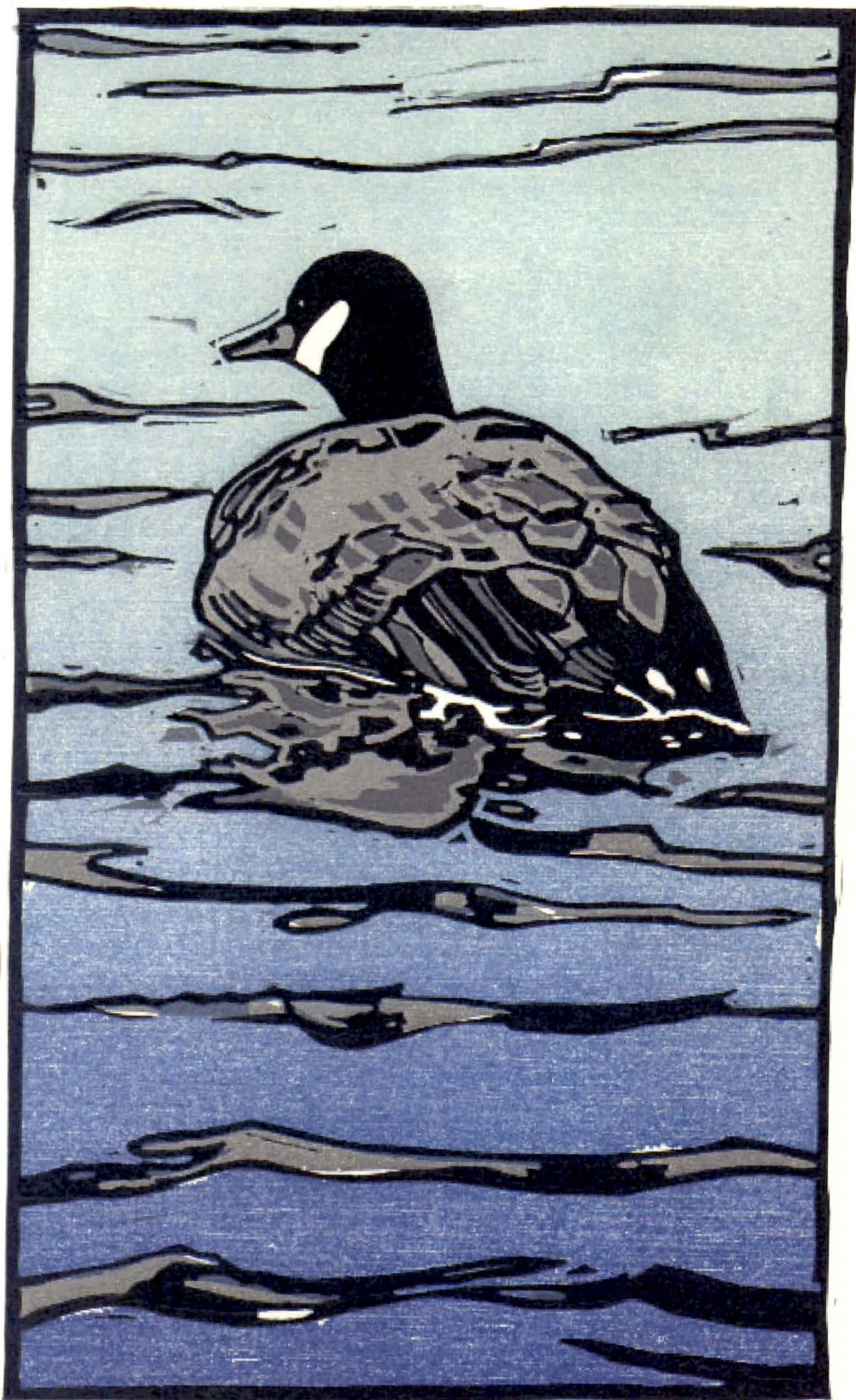
The book is interesting in a chatty way on various key English publishing firms, the British publishing industry during the 1970s plus, a period of much amalgamation, and the reorganizing and restructuring of various parts of various firms with which Herrmann was connected. For bibliographers Herrmann also offers insights into several publications, one of which dealt with Shepard's

famous illustration in *Wind in the Willows*. This illustration showed 'Rat rowing the boat and Mole as a passenger when it ought to have been the other way around.' It was published with this error for several years before it was corrected and there is a history of the development of these illustrations.

Chapters are devoted to books compiled/written by Herrmann—*The English As Collectors* (well received), his children's books based upon the character of Giant Alexander, and the official history of Sotheby's (also successful). At Sotheby's, Herrmann went on to a successful career, finishing his years with the firm as head of the overseas operations. *Low Profile* moves back and forth from the personal (for example, the return of former family properties in Germany—Pretzfeld Schloss and Wulkow) and other research projects, (one particularly enjoyable is his work on Edward Solly and the Kaiser Frederick Museum in Berlin), and concluding with his key role in the establishment and successful operation of Bloomsbury Book Auctions.

Herrmann has made a substantial contribution to British publishing. All this is recorded here complete with numerous asides and too often numbing detail better left to a volume of family reminiscences. This book could easily be reduced by one quarter to one third and would be better for it. Despite this major misgiving, *Low Profile* is a useful contribution.

As a supplement, it is nice to read acknowledgements to the indexer, the publishing director and the person responsible for typography.



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