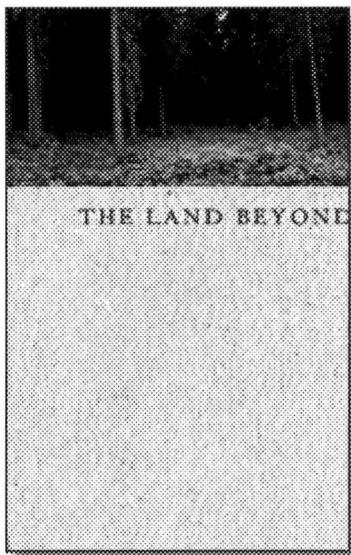


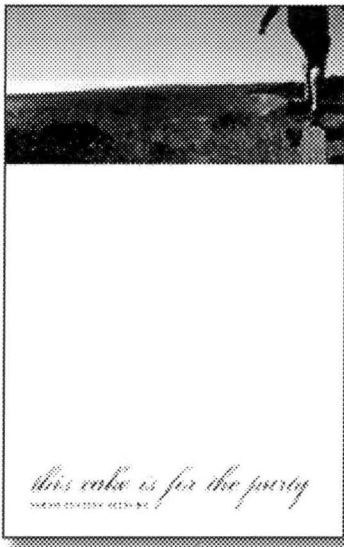
GREENBOATHOUSE BOOKS

Kuldip Gill

I interviewed Jason Dewinetz in Victoria, in January, 2004, when he was high on the design of his latest poetry chapbook, *The Land Beyond*, by Matt Rader, published in July, 2003. He had it in his hands as we talked. Little did we know that it would win second prize in the Alcuin Society's Book Design competition several months after the interview. When I asked why he was so happy with Rader's book, his thrill was palpable and he spoke quickly, hardly taking a breath. "It was the manuscript...the more I read it the more I liked it. I was away in Alberta at the time, sitting in a lawn chair in my father's back yard reading it again and again and at some point I looked up and around me...that was the picture for the book. The first line of the first poem is *The Land Beyond our house...* and it pretty much described the landscape surrounding me at that moment. Right away there was a connection between the poems and that landscape, so I took a bunch of pictures...and loaded them into the computer.

"The format was definitely, as with any book, decided by the text measure, by the length of the line. I knew this book was going to require a fairly large format. It's very close to 8-1/2 x 5-1/2, but I don't like those dimensions – too boring and expected – so this one was slightly off. Slightly taller – just enough to make the format more distinct. Everything after that just seemed to fall into place. Like when it came time to select the paper for the wrapper; I knew right away that the St. Armand Jute was the right stock, it's got the right earthy feel, the right texture. Then, by fluke, the picture actually printed well on the rough surface, which was amazing. Everything seemed to just click. The typeface I used – Fournier – right away I knew it was going to work. It's an eclectic face, historically originating at a point when the Renaissance Roman letter was giving way to the more Romantic letter of the 18th century. Writing a poem or designing a book, you're doing it long before you actually start doing it; it's as though in the process of reading the manuscript over and over again, the design is already there, I just hadn't seen it yet – then it came very suddenly. (Sometimes it's been a bit more of a forced process.) Fairly early on I knew I wanted the title to bleed off the page. This device functions not only as a metaphor for the title, but also works to





invite the reader to open the cover, to enter Matt's world. Unexpectedly the ideas just seemed to click into place. Even now, months later, I'm very grateful that I still feel this way about it. (Sometimes, when ideas seem to click, it's because you're working too fast.) Everything about this book just worked – and I liked the poems a lot, that's the greatest benefit."

Months later, The Alcuin Society awarded second place for Excellence in Book Design in Canada, in the Limited Editions section, to *The Land Beyond*.

The judges were intrigued by the simple but effective cover. The colour reproduction on the cover is of surprisingly good quality and it is a perfect match for the cover stock. The simple binding suits the subject to perfection, but it is the way the title bleeds off the page (a feature that is echoed on the half-title and title page) that we found so mysterious and intriguing. The effect is subtle but evocative. The letterpress and typography are themselves clean and elegant, and the format suits the content.

The cover photographs on various other books at this press are also Dewinetz' own. The cover image for the chapbook *this cake is for the party*, by Sarah Lucille Selecky, was one Dewinetz took of the author in Victoria. "The stock photo that Lucy and I liked was far too expensive for us to use so we took the idea of a girl walking along a fence, drove around town one afternoon, and took a whole lot of pictures of Lucy walking on fences. Eventually we came up with one we both liked."

The design, used on a number of Greenboathouse's books, is a photographic band along the top edge of the chapbook. "Yes, that's just a practical decision," he laughs. "It's less ink! Less than a full colour cover would take." Practicality is one of the overriding decisions at most small presses such as this one.

Greenboathouse Books began in the summer of 1999 while Jason Dewinetz was visiting Vernon, B.C. where he was raised. He and local writer, instructor and long-time friend John Lent began by organizing a poetry reading at a local art gallery, and quickly the idea became a series of evening readings. Dewinetz was staying at his family's cabin on Okanagan Lake, which was built in 1904 by his great-great-grandfather.

The property had an old green boathouse which Dewinetz had converted into a studio, so The Greenboathouse Reading Series was chosen as the series name. At the time, Dewinetz was collecting sample work from the contributors so that he would know which readers to put together. Because the work submitted was so strong, he suggested to Lent that they put some of the poems together into a little book to sell at the readings. That became the first publication. Dewinetz needed an imprint for the book, and thus Greenboathouse Books was born. “That,” he said, “was how it all started!”

Dewinetz also created the first Greenboathouse website soon afterwards, learning HTML along the way. After the first novice attempt, he has continually built new versions of it; at the time of this interview he was working on version 7 to be launched in 2004. (See his work on www.greenboathouse.com.) At this time he also teaches Electronic Publishing in the Creative Writing Department at the University of Victoria. The courses are primarily focused on the publishing process, but there is also a design and typography component to them. The intent is “to give students some practical training so that if they go out and get a job with a publisher, they have the sort of core skills they’ll need.” Jason Dewinetz also does freelance graphic design work such as website and book design.

I asked him what he calls the type of press work he does. He replied that it is a mixture of different things: a middle ground between the type of work done by rob mcLennan of above/ground press and something like Caryl Peters’s Frog Hollow Press. “rob is doing basic photocopy-fold-and-staple books; Caryl is doing higher-end letter press work. rob started his press in Ottawa about 5 years ago and he’s put out over 100 books. Caryl, on the other hand, is definitely out to make a beautiful and well-crafted book, which takes a lot of time, and that means far fewer titles each year. rob’s objective is to get writing out as cheaply and to as many people as he can – both, have honourable motives.”

Dewinetz gets the most joy out of book design. “I want the books to be as beautiful as I can make them, but I also want them to be inexpensive enough so that people can buy them without batting an eye – I never charge more than \$15 a book, the majority of them are \$10 – so to do that, in order to keep the costs that low, our production methods have to be a little unorthodox. In terms of the content of the book – the text

block – the inside pages are all laser printed. In instances like Lucy’s book (*this cake is for the party* - Sarah Lucille Selecky) where there are colour titles within the book, the page actually has to go through two separate printers: one for the laser printed text and the other through an inkjet for the colour. The colour covers make use of a method that is hundreds of years old and yet we now use it to overcome a computer output problem. Inkjet printing on untreated paper is precarious since any water accidentally spilled on it will run the colour. But shipping the project off to do offset printing is ridiculously expensive, and digital printing, while quick and effective, limits the kind of paper stock you can use. It has to have a very smooth surface. That means that the only way to use colour on a non-smooth stock is through inkjet printing which is not colour resistant. Through research I’ve found a way to make it feasible to use inkjet printing. The process I use makes the cover colourfast: I coat the pieces of cover stock with an alum solution, and dry them before they go through the printer. It was initially risky because the process definitely added to the production time, and we’ll have to raise the price of some books, but for these two we have held it at ten dollars.”

The press pays for itself since Greenboathouse Books usually has a small fund left to purchase paper stock and printer cartridges after each book’s print-run has sold. Like other small presses such as Frog Hollow Press, Jason Dewinetz says “I definitely don’t get any money out of it; that was never the idea to begin with. Anyone who gets into this expecting to get money is a complete moron. That’s why we only do 3 or 4 books a year – to combat the frustration of the cost and work involved with a more leisurely pace.”

During his M.A. at the University of Alberta, Dewinetz worked on a bibliography of the Black Sparrow Press of California, archived there and unopened since 1974. The books and their peripheral materials were in pristine condition. His research showed that at one point the press operators had almost burned out because of their production schedule. “I’m always cautioning other press operators not to develop that kind of schedule – don’t let it become a business. I mean, I just did a broad sheet at the Frog Hollow Press and it took me 4-1/2 hours to set the type! I can’t imagine doing whole books, let alone 20 of them a year!”

Although his degrees are in English Literature, his interests in book design are from self-directed study. He has never worked at another press,

but he collaborates with presses such as Frog Hollow Press (Caryl Peters) and Brindle & Glass Press in Calgary (Lee Shedden). All of the owners started their own small presses. Along the way he's formed relationships with rob mclennan (above/ground press), derek beaulieu (who, until recently, ran housepress in Calgary), Carleton Wilson (Junction Books in Toronto) and many others. "There are so many of us doing this," he says. "Many of us have joint subscriptions so they see everything I do and I get to enjoy their hard work – no one puts out any money, yet we all get to see what everyone else is doing – it's fantastic! It's an interesting community; everyone is open to exchanging ideas because no one really considers it a business. Everyone is aware that we are not going to make money off this – we are doing it because we like to make books. The sense of competition is gone." He tells me that people both admire and steal each other's ideas about something new that will work for them. When new books arrive from a fellow press operator there is a sense of excitement as one opens the package.

Greenboathouse Books usually invite poets to submit a manuscript, but their website also has a poetry page to which readers are encouraged to submit a poem or two by email. From these submissions Dewinetz and Aaron Peck select poetry to post. (Note their website: it has wonderful design and some of the best of cutting edge poetry in Canada.) They also keep an eye out, and if the work is remarkable they invite the poet to submit a complete manuscript. The open submission process is, however, frustrating, "...simply because people don't tend to read submission guidelines. Our website clearly says that we publish only poetry manuscripts of approximately 30 pages in length, and yet we get novels! That's a quick way for writers to burn their bridges with editors." Greenboathouse Books solicited twelve of the fourteen books they've published, through direct dialogue with writers, who were invited to submit their manuscript for consideration.

Aaron Peck, enrolled at York University in Toronto, now works with Dewinetz on Greenboathouse Books. Until he moved to Taiwan, Noah Buchan was initially Greenboathouse's assistant editor, helping take care of the submissions so that Dewinetz could focus on the design and distribution end.

Since they didn't have the luxury of making any but the most practical of decisions about stock, the papers first used by Greenboathouse

books were bought from a stationery store. "We used what we had to use in order to keep the prices down," he told me. Now they are able to spend more money on the text block material and they get it from Coast Paper. Until recently, the cover stock came from art supply stores such as Opus in Victoria. Caryl Peters's books (Frog Hollow Press) inspired the cover papers on most recent books. Peters also helped Dewinetz set up accounts with her paper suppliers. He ordered the cover stock for Matt Rader's book from one of Caryl Peters's suppliers in Winnipeg. The price point is always better in bigger lots.

The inks for the text are black, and for the colour printing the press uses "run of the mill inkjet." The press has recently acquired a new inkjet printer that uses archival inks in order to increase the shelf life. The general inks retain their quality for only 20 - 30 years before they slowly begin to fade. Most of the inks used are easily available from local stores.

We talked about illustrations and Dewinetz told me about Harold Rhenisch's book (*on the couch of dr. daydream*). The cover picture was from an old book of illustrations, depicting a man being stretched on a rack, which Dewinetz modified slightly. "Rhenisch's rendition of Shakespeare's poems is tortured to say the least, so the concept really fit the illustration. His are contemporary, twisted versions of the poems - some of them quite raunchy!" In the book, the left page presents the original verse, and Rhenisch's translation is on the right side.

Dewinetz's design philosophy was formed during his studies in English for his Master's degree. He studied Critical Theory which ingrained into his mind the concept that form and content absolutely must compliment one another. He tries to live by this theoretical stance.

Dewinetz talked about the illustration for Laisha Rosnau's book (*getaway girl*). He came across an advertisement for an art exhibit in the magazine *Art in America*, by an artist named Judith Schaefer who creates stained-glass windows. It showed her image "Road Kill Ophelia," which depicts a woman who has been hit by a car, the contents of her suitcase spread all over the road. The idea of that title stayed with him. "Here was a character traditionally depicted as tortured and suffering suddenly put into this bizarre situation. It threw some seriously ironic light on the matter." Since he was writing a set of poems about Ophelia ("thank God they never saw the light of day!"), he saved the advertisement so that if he did publish them, the image might work as a cover graphic. When

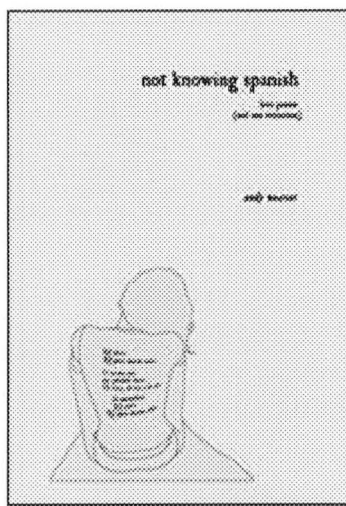
Rosnau's manuscript arrived it immediately reminded him of Judith Schaecter's art, but he had misgivings about approaching Schaecter since she is very well known, and it was doubtful that they could pay her. Dewinetz sent an email to say he would love to use her art – if she would give permission.

He told her he had a small press with a very small print run and an even smaller operating budget; and he attached a copy of Laisha Rosnau's manuscript. To his surprise Judith Schaecter said "absolutely, please go ahead and use it." All she asked for was a few copies of the published chapbook. He now says, "I always tell my students, 'if you're ever in a situation like this, whenever you find a photographer or artist whose work you love – just ask! The worst they can do is say "No," but they just might say "Yes."' Which is what happened in this case."

At times artists lend the book illustrations to Greenboathouse Books, others are purchased, while still others are their own creation. Jason Dewinetz produced the illustration for Andy Weaver's book (*not knowing Spanish*) based on one of Weaver's poems in which he talks about a girl wearing a T-shirt with a poem printed on it: "It was a Lorca poem on a shirt worn by a girl in one of Andy's poems, so I tracked down the poem and printed it on a T-shirt, took some photographs of my partner Zena wearing it, and then transferred the image into the computer where I traced a line-drawing to use for the book."

For another book, entitled *a translation*, author rob mclennan took one poem from an earlier collection of his own work and used each of its lines as the title for a new poem, thereby 'translating' the poem into new 'languages' or voices. Jason Dewinetz says, "for that cover I took the display type (set in Minion) and hacked it up into pieces just as he had hacked up his poem to make new ones." A strong creative energy runs through all of the work of Greenboathouse Books.

One of the last questions I put to the small press owners is "What are the main distractions and detours you face as the owner of a small press?" The answers are so far similar: anything that compromises or threatens to compromise the creativity. Dewinetz said, "the main curses are the practical decisions that I have to make, but don't want to make – there are books in my head I'd love to do but they'd cost \$100 each. The big



frustration is that I'm not able to do what I'd love to do, primarily due to financial constraints. I put those ideas away for "someday" when I can make the book I dream of. Currently I'm looking into photopolymer printing, which is a wonderful blend of traditional printing presses and more contemporary computer generated design. That's the direction Greenboathouse will go; it's just a matter of time and money. I've also had lofty goals of doing a short run of hard-bound copies for each of the books but the reality is I haven't had the time. [However, Dewinetz is planning just such a run for their fall 2004 release by Sina Queyras.] I have a day job; I have my own writing. This is basically a very time consuming hobby, and regardless of how much I love doing it, I have to look at it that way so I don't over-indulge my time in any one given area. I still have to pay the bills."

Grant applications eat up time. January is pre-production time for the summer reading series – the time Dewinetz must write their Canada Council funding application which is due by March. The series, held in the Okanagan, has had a remarkable success with the Canada Council from the very first request because it is located in the interior of the province where there is a dearth of literary events. The reading series runs from July to August, and must be planned early in the year.

Jason Dewinetz has his hands in many pies. He teaches, writes, works as a designer, mounts a reading series and publishes Greenboathouse Books, amongst other things. Watch for Jason Dewinetz and Greenboathouse Books, another small press operator whom, with his remarkable commitment to the literary and book arts, we are just beginning to hear about. Like most small presses, Greenboathouse Books put out only a handful of books a year, most of them aimed at a small niche market of poetry chapbook collectors and readers. Like other small press owners, Jason Dewinetz does not expect to make a profit. He loves the idea of designing and making exceptional and beautiful small books. Small presses enrich, delight and enlighten us.

Dr. Kuldip Gill, a social anthropologist, is the author of two poetry books: Dharma Rasa, Nightwood Editions, 1999; and Valley Sutra, Beach Holme Press, 2004. In 2003 she published the chapbooks, Cornelian, Turquoise and Gold, Colophon Books, and Ghazals: Rai and Sohni, Frog Hollow Press.