

Book Review

Peter Mitham

only by the number of pages contained in the BOOK.

The medium is ideal for long term archival use. Several field trials have proven that the medium will still be readable in several centuries and because of the simple user interface, it will be compatible with future reading devices.

The operator can also make personal notations next to BOOK text entries with optional programming tools, the Portable Erasable Nib Cryptic Intercommunication Lead Stylus (PENCILS). Portable, durable and affordable, the BOOK is being hailed as the entertainment wave of the future. The BOOK's appeal seems so certain that thousands of content creators have committed to the platform. Look for a flood of titles soon in your own neighbourhood!



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Classic Book Jackets: The Design Legacy of George Salter. Thomas S. Hansen. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005. 200 p. \$50.00.

Memory has turned the house of my father's sister in Westmount, Quebec, into a tower of stairs, landings and rooms full of books. It almost seems like something from the sketchbook of M.C. Escher, though in reality it was just three or four storeys hiding the largest – and most wide-ranging – private library I knew as a child. Rooms overflowed with titles reflecting the broad interests of my aunt and her husband, medical doctors with active intellects nourished both by the accepted classics as well as the titles that informed the chatter of their educated and cosmopolitan circle.

But by the time I discovered its secrets in the 1990s, the collection was telling its age. Browsing some sections was like stepping back in time, designs on the jackets and wrappers marking the editions as being from decades earlier.

That the designs should have spoken their era so loudly may be due in part to the work of George Salter, celebrated in *Classic Book Jackets: The Design Legacy of George Salter*. Boasting over 220 examples of Salter's work, *Classic Book Jackets* is a visual record of the quiet but significant influence Salter exerted over mid-20th century book design until his death at 70 in 1967. Few readers will recognize nothing of his work, even if they are unfamiliar with the man himself.

Salter designed the covers of modern literary classics such as the 1954 jacket for Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* and *Seven Other Stories* (still in use when I studied the collection in the late 1980s)

and the award-winning 1941 jacket for Paul Gallico, *The Snow Goose* (a copy of which sat in my parents' bookcase). Calligraphic lettering and oftentimes bold colouring gave Salter's covers a memorable look that occasionally won iconic status while helping books sell. *Classic Book Jackets* itself adapts Salter's jacket for Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man* for its own cover, highlighting the enduring nature of Salter's vintage designs.

"It soon dawned on his contemporaries that his art represented something new," writes Hansen in the introduction, pointing up the quiet impact Salter had not only on the work of the German publishers who employed him prior to the Second World War, but also Knopf and the U.S. houses that welcomed him following his emigration in 1934.

Though the introduction frequently suffers from stodgy prose, Hansen offers a keen analysis of Salter's success. Hansen doesn't detail the declining health that limited Salter's professional output in the late 1950s but discusses the cultural influences that shaped Salter and allowed him to become "the quintessential hybrid modernist." He also acknowledges that Salter, for all his skill, benefitted from the good fortune of preparing covers for several important 20th century writers.

Hansen's analysis of Salter's career melds almost seamlessly with the jacket images at the core of this book. The introduction regularly references the various examples of Salter's work that follow. This allows the reader to read the introduction in tandem with the images, or to browse the images with the help of the succinct, insightful captions that accompany them.

For the bibliographically inclined, Hansen also provides appendices with a near-comprehensive checklist of Salter's designs for the book trade, as well as a list of works by and about Salter.

Hansen's work isn't the only recent title on the topic of jacket design. Coinciding with the 70th anniversary Penguin's paperback list, England's Allen Lane has published Phil Baines, *Penguin by Design: A Cover Story* (2005). While Baines focuses on the role of designers in the making of a particular publisher's identity, Hansen's study ultimately provides insight into what makes good design in a variety of contexts. The principles that guided Salter through his various commissions remain as relevant today as they were a half-century ago.

Hansen reminds us that Salter's designs drew strength from the text of books they were designed to promote, rather than being developed separately from the texts. Salter's approach is not unlike that of Gaspereau Press in Nova Scotia, whose co-proprietor Andrew Steeves told Alcuin Society members in March 2005 that foregrounding the text (in Gaspereau's case, though letterforms) seems more sensible than diverging from it with eye-candy with a marketing edge. Gaspereau has reaped the rewards, with designs as compelling in their own way as Salter's.

Classic Book Jackets is an enticing gallery for those would seek similar success.

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