

with a rich interplay of negative and positive space. There are often structures in the prints which, when followed, recall Celtic knots which move in, out and around.

The wood engravings in this book are strong examples of the prints so well known to fans of Brender à Brandis' work and are sure to be a delight to all. The commentaries of Mr. Hoeniger are very helpful and relevant, and they assisted me in understanding the Shakespeare I have feared for so many years.

## REVIEW

*The Janus Press – 50 Years*

By Ruth Fine (University of Vermont  
Libraries, 2006, US\$35)

Reviewed by Peter Mitham

Newark, Vermont book artist Claire van Vliet is no stranger to Vancouver. Two years ago, she visited the city to participate in the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design's summer institute on book arts. Among her comments that week, she observed that a broadside should be more than a page from a book; it should be a visual experience in its own right that entices readers to read.

Somewhat appropriately, then, *The Janus Press – 50 Years* offers an enticing design (though nowhere near as complex as some of van Vliet's latest works) and content that entices readers to discover more about this strong-spirited and committed book artist.

Last year, van Vliet's Janus Press marked its fiftieth anniversary and, as the current catalogue of its output by Ruth Fine (a sometime collaborator with the press) indicates, van Vliet continues to renew her creative vision and, often literally, the shape of her oeuvre with complex and dynamic projects that often integrate experimental examples of paper-making, typography and book assembly.

Published to accompany an exhibit of Janus Press publications at the Grolier Club in New York and other institutions, the catalogue includes an overview of van Vliet's career with a particular focus on the interests that have shaped the common threads running through her work. Fine, who previously produced three catalogues of the Janus Press for the years 1955 to 1990, divides the work of Janus and van Vliet into six clusters that reflect van Vliet's progress as an artist. What relationship these bear to the exhibition isn't clear, but the distinctions nevertheless help the reader of the catalogue in achieving greater insight into van Vliet's career.

Fine summarizes van Vliet's multi-faceted role as publisher, creative director and back-office staff at Janus Press in a way that gives new respect for the artist's dual role as both creator and business person. She also drops in biographical details that allow us to see van Vliet in a context shaped by personal circumstances, circumstances that remain discreetly in the background of the narrative.

The heart of the catalogue, in some ways the *raison d'être* of this catalogue raisonné, is an annotated checklist of Janus publications from 1991 to 2005. A three-part index of Janus publications from 1955 through 2005 concludes this 80-page volume.

Viewed as a catalogue raisonné, the checklist is less comprehensive in its description of van Vliet's output than such a catalogue typically is. Replete with descriptive information, the checklist is less than comprehensive when it comes to photos of the titles themselves. It also omits information on the major institutions holding van Vliet's work. The catalogue is closer to being a descriptive bibliography without being one of these, either.

No matter; a wealth of details on the materials, typefaces and production methods used to create each title, and (of course) details on print runs, keeps the reader busy. Illustrations of van Vliet's work appear not on every second page, but near to it, and often in colour. These help make the book as appealing to the eye as to the mind.

The index, arranged according to authors and translators, artists and title, is handy. The three parts reflect the diverse circle of creators van Vliet has drawn around Janus over 50 years, a network that reflects her belief "that all arts ... are interrelated."

Many of van Vliet's recent projects have concerned themselves with feminist and spiritual topics, such as Hildegard von Bingen, *Circulus Sapientiae/Circle of Wisdom* (2001), and a forthcoming edition of the Gnostic Gospel of Mary, translated by Karen King with commentary by the noted theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther. Fine acknowledges these interests, rooting them in van Vliet's past and suggesting that they "signal a new chapter in a long and productive working life." But there is nothing deeper to elaborate the philosophical (even theological) underpinnings of this latest current in van Vliet's work.

The same is true of the other currents Fine notes in van Vliet's work under the Janus imprint, however. Fine maintains a steady focus on the artistic aspects of van Vliet's work, creating a concise and illuminating glimpse of a career that

is among the most innovative in the field of contemporary book arts.

## REVIEW

### *The Amphora Project*

By William Kotzwinkle

(Grove Press, 2005, \$30.95)

Reviewed by Ryan Vernon

Unlike the *Amphora* now in your hands, William Kotzwinkle's first adult novel in a decade is a fast-paced space opera, complete with such science fiction staples as spaceships, robots, laser guns and aliens set against a backdrop of good versus evil.

The Amphora Project of the title is a project controlled by the "Consortium," a cabal of the 12 richest and most powerful individuals on Planet Immortal. Hidden deep within an orbiting salvage yard known as the Junk Moon, the project moves forward with clues left by the supposedly benevolent "Ancient Aliens." The project promises to give the key to immortality; instead, it is a trap set by predatory aliens from another dimension.

The introverted entomologist Adrian Link is the hero of the story. Link comes to discover the true destructive power of the Amphora Project after becoming involved with the space pirate Jockey Oldcastle, who initiates him and his companion robot, Upquark, into a plot to infiltrate the Amphora Project. Oldcastle and his companions, however, find nothing but danger in the project laboratory. People begin to die, their bodies transformed into crystal. Several groups of characters work to counter the wave of destruction the Amphora Project creates, including the Controller, a young woman who sits at the centre of a panoptic surveillance system on Planet Immortal; Oldcastle and his lizard-like companion Lizardo; and Link and his exotic love interest, Ren. In the end, Link saves the day by working out that the Amphora Project does not store up the sought-after life-force, but lets malevolent aliens steal said life-force for their own purposes.

Kotzwinkle, best known for penning the novel version of the movie *E.T.*, delivers an entertaining novel in *The Amphora Project*—at least if you enjoy quirky science fiction in the vein of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or Spider Robinson's *Time Travelers Strictly Cash*. For the most part, however, it uncritically presents a social landscape based on contemporary North America. Although Kotzwinkle hints at larger issues such as widespread surveillance and

the efficiency of capital punishment for those in power, *The Amphora Project* fails to challenge normative expectations in the way high-quality space operas can (such as those by Charles Stross or Iain M. Banks). The pacing and narrative twists and turns add excitement, but also add to the feeling that this novel is somewhat rushed and unpolished.

Like the story itself, the design of *The Amphora Project* is functional, if unremarkable. There is no note on the book's design or the type used (a serif font perhaps of the Times family); still, design elements do not detract from the enjoyment of the text.

*The Amphora Project* succeeds, if it succeeds at all, primarily as a beach book. The fast-paced plot, with its many changes in direction and perspective, will keep fans of the genre turning its pages, at least if they can manage to sustain their willing suspension of belief through more than one unlikely *deus ex machina*. The story resolves happily, with the requisite romantic pairing. Most readers who finish the book will be satisfied with this conclusion; others will be lucky to have made it past page 50.

## REVIEW

### *Words Fail Me*

By Teresa Monachino (Phaidon, 2006, \$14.95)

Reviewed by Peter Mitham

This slim portfolio of curiosities has as much fun with the idiosyncrasies of the English language as it does with the ways design can play with words to make—or undermine—their meanings. For newcomers to English, such as author Teresa Monachino's mother, it also highlights how words can fail those whom they're intended to serve.

Monachino dedicates *Words Fail Me* to her mother, to whom she found herself regularly attempting "to explain the often extreme differences in meaning between similar-looking words." For those who know the language, however, Monachino's presentation of each example reveals the potential for the language to betray itself.

Monachino arranges her examples in seven sections, including Contradictionary, a collection of words at odds with their meanings; Antigrams, words whose letters are rearranged into words that mean the opposite of the original; Ambtexterity, a collection of heteronyms; Pleonasties, two-word phrases where one word was sufficient; Antonyms, words that look and sound the same but have opposing meanings;