

## Vocational Soul-Searching

*After seven years establishing some degree of stability in the challenging field of publishing new Canadian poetry, Dawn Kresan's Palimpsest Press of Kingsville, Ontario, is poised for its most ambitious year yet.*

Author, book designer and former auto industry assembly line worker Dawn Kresan started Palimpsest Press in 2000 with the intention of publishing poetry “to give voice to the marginalized, to build and support new literary communities.” Initially Palimpsest focused on issuing *Kaleidoscope: An International Journal of Poetry* which ran till 2003, the same year Kresan issued her first trade book, Anne F. Walker's *The Exit Show*. As Kresan's interest in publishing evolved through classes in letterpress printing and binding, Palimpsest likewise evolved to issue limited edition chapbooks.

From the start Kresan realized that her focus on publishing original Canadian poetry had limited ability to sustain itself. She thus expanded the scope of the press to offer commercial design and letterpress printing (primarily custom invitations), as a means of subsidizing her own publishing projects. To date Palimpsest has published four trade poetry collections and five limited edition chapbooks. The trade books generally are printed offset, whereas the limited editions combine digital printing and limited letterpress (for the covers). *Ampbora* wanted to talk to this young Canadian publisher about how and why she stretched beyond writing to designing and producing books, and how the worlds of trade and limited edition books overlap...

---

*Why were you interested in learning about the production of books?*

As a writer, the ways in which design affects interpretation and technologies affect not only distribution but the reading process itself are of great importance. The production of books does not happen in isolation—there are many cultural, historical and technological forces at work. I find it fascinating how different printing technologies have affected the production and distribution of texts. Moveable type not only made work available to more people, it also created a stable text. For the first time, a text could be duplicated without the mistakes of a scribe. The Internet, once again, is revolutionizing how we read. The linear top-to-bottom text is being replaced with hyperlinks that create a jumping text that once again is unstable. No two reading experiences are the same. Binding also greatly affects how we read. Most books are left-bound codices, but there are so many other options. Books bound at the top so the pages flip up, a segmented book with many bindings, or one that has no binding at all. Binding affects how we turn pages and how we experience the text. With creative bookbinding, reading becomes

more performative and individualized.

*Palimpsest's trade titles are printed offset, and your limited editions are primarily digital, with letterpress used for the covers. Do you see letterpress taking a greater role in your projects?*

I would like to start doing letterpress broadsides. The more I get into it, the more I love doing it. Letterpress has a beauty about it—the way the paper glistens under the light and the way the slight indentation feels under my hand. I love blind stamping for this reason. There is a simplicity about it.

*You are working in two parallel publishing veins, trade and limited editions. And while they have many superficial similarities, there are fundamental differences, from modes of production to the kind of person who buys them. Do you find one more interesting or rewarding than the other?*

Early in my publishing career I was very naive and lost a lot of money, and then made the mistake of publishing a book I thought was good enough, but not great, because it would sell well. After, I became so disillusioned that I took some time off to rethink my whole publishing program. I felt like I had lost my focus, that I





*Paper Lanterns: 25 Postcards from Asia* (2006, chapbook edition of 100, \$65). A series of poems set in QuarkXPress and printed digitally. The six full-colour postcards were created in Adobe Photoshop and printed offset. The text and cards were combined in a side-stab structure with a letterpress-printed cover.

wasn't having any fun, and I certainly didn't want money to be the determining factor in selecting a title. What came out of that vocational soul-searching were my limited editions. I thought, Why would I want to continue publishing 400 copies of relatively ordinary looking books when I only sell half the print run? I'd rather print 100 copies and spend more on making beautiful, high quality books that I love, and I know others will appreciate, potentially making less, but valuing the process and the outcome more.

Objects made by hand, whether a table, stained-glass window or book, are one-of-a-kind, and there is great care taken in the production of them. That means something in this commercial age. And doing everything myself gives me the most creative freedom as a designer. I have the flexibility to explore my wildest ideas, like designing the spine of a book to hold a syringe, as in Marty Gervais' chapbook *Taking My Blood*.

The trade books are the books that are produced with a more general, wider audience, although for poetry the audience is always somewhat limited. I find these books easier and quicker to produce. The limited editions are time intensive, but the rewards are also greater. I am more emotionally invested in the limited

editions because they are so hands-on, and I am involved in the process from start to finish. For each book there is a creative vision. I then work with the materials, manipulating and tweaking the vision as I go along.

*How do you recognize such text/poems/poetry that fulfills the role you've set for Palimpsest?*

I make decisions relatively quickly, based on if I find the work intriguing. If, after a few pages, I am not intrigued enough to want to read more, then it goes in the reject pile. Most end up there. For the few that make it further along, I can't explain exactly how I decide. Ultimately, I go with what I like.

---

In 2007 Palimpsest will publish poetry books by Diane Tucker and Andrea MacPherson, and two limited edition chapbooks—Valerie Stetson's *The House Poems* and Christian Bök's *Triptych*. The latter consists of a single poem in three parts. The book, says Kresan, "will have a stained-glass overlay, and be built into a hinged wooden frame that folds up and stores in a sleeve. I haven't quite figured out some of the technical details, but that is part of the challenge and the fun." See [www.palimpsestpress.ca](http://www.palimpsestpress.ca) for more details.