

THE PORCUPINE'S QUILL AND THE GASPEREAU PRESS:

Studies in the History, Philosophy, and Production Values of Two
English-Canadian Printer-Publishers

Tara Kathleen Murphy

Department of English

McGill University, Montréal

February 2008

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the degree of Masters of Arts

© Tara Murphy 2008.



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-51394-1

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-51394-1

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
EPIGRAPHS	6
INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 1: "Poetfathers and Printmothers"	14
CONTEXTS	14
THE COACH HOUSE PRESS, 1964/5-1996	18
THE HOUSE OF ANANSI, 1966—	21
CHAPTER 2: "Those Fabulous Teeth"	23
INTRODUCTION	23
THE PORCUPINE'S QUILL: HISTORY	24
THE PORCUPINE'S QUILL: PHILOSOPHY	30
A PQL CASE STUDY	38
CHAPTER 3: "As a Seed Capsule"	51
INTRODUCTION	51
CONTEXT: CANADIAN PUBLISHING, 1995-2000	52
THE GASPÉREAU PRESS: HISTORY	55
THE GASPÉREAU PRESS: PHILOSOPHY	57
A GASPÉREAU PRESS CASE STUDY	63
CONCLUSION	78
WORKS CITED	82
APPENDIX	88

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the histories, publishing philosophies, and printing practices of two English-Canadian small-press publishers (The Porcupine's Quill of Erin, Ontario, and the Gaspereau Press of Kentville, Nova Scotia). By researching their publishing influences as well as the social and political climates in which each press operated, it is possible to analyze the decisions they made about why and how to publish certain kinds of texts. From there the thesis summarizes their publishing philosophies, and conducts extended analyses of the production of two specific literary texts: *Endeared by Dark: The Collected Poems of George Johnston* (PQL 1990), and *Execution Poems* (George Elliott Clarke, Gaspereau 2001). The historical research relies partly on secondary sources, and more generally the methodology was supplied by contemporary work in book history and textual criticism; however, the majority of the research, in chapters two and three particularly, has been culled from primary texts, press releases, newspaper features, web pages, and archival materials (letters, financial records, and so on). Overall, this thesis concludes that both the Porcupine's Quill and the Gaspereau Press emphasize an holistic approach to bookmaking, wherein each component part is capable of contextualizing, augmenting, celebrating, interpreting, historicizing, or socializing a literary text.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent mémoire examinera deux petites maisons d'édition du Canada anglophone—*The Porcupine's Quill* à Erin, Ontario, et *Gaspereau Press* à Kentville, Nouvelle Écosse—leurs histoires, leurs philosophies d'édition, de même que leurs pratiques d'impression. En faisant des recherches sur leurs influences dans le domaine de l'édition, ainsi que sur le climat politique et social dans lequel chacune a fonctionné, il est possible d'analyser comment et pourquoi elles auraient décidé de publier des textes dans de certaines façons. Partant de là, ce mémoire résumera leurs philosophies d'édition et mènera des analyses approfondies sur la production de deux textes littéraires spécifiques : *Endeared by Dark: The Collected Poems of George Johnston* (PQL 1990), et *Execution Poems* (George Eliott Clarke, Gaspereau 2001). Les recherches historiques s'appuient en partie sur des sources secondaires, et la méthodologie a été fournie de façon générale par des ouvrages contemporains sur l'histoire du livre et de la critique textuelle ; cependant, la majorité des travaux de recherche (surtout ceux du deuxième et du troisième chapitre) sont issus de textes primaires, de communiqués de presse, d'articles de journal, de pages web, et de documents d'archives (lettres, dossiers financiers, et ainsi de suite). Globalement, ce mémoire tirera pour conclusion que les maisons d'édition *The Porcupine's Quill* et *Gaspereau Press* mettent l'accent sur une production du livre holistique, où chaque partie composante sera capable de mettre en contexte, d'augmenter, de célébrer, d'interpréter, d'historiciser, ou même de socialiser un texte littéraire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following thesis was made possible by the support of numerous people, the first of whom was my supervisor, Professor Robert Lecker. Neither his rigor nor his advice on the subject of semi-colons will be forgotten soon. Also appreciated was the encouragement and counsel of Professors Maggie Kilgour and Tom Mole, of the Department of English, and Professor Desmond Manderson of the Faculty of Law. For his editorial assistance and his general empathy I am indebted to Ph.D. candidate Joel Deshayé.

Much of this thesis would not exist were it not for the cooperation, interest, and patience exhibited by Dr. Richard Virr and Ann Marie Holland of the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the McLennan Library; extra thanks are also deserved by conservation specialist Donald Hogan, who suffered for this project some truly heroic stays at the xerox machine, and who lent me a Baltimorean Parlor Press back in 2006.

I would also like to thank Tim Inkster for his amusing and insightful letter; George Elliott Clarke and Robert Bringham, for permission to access the Gaspereau Press correspondence archives; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, as well as the McGill Graduate Student Travel Fund, for their much-appreciated financial support; Rachel Dingle, for her Haligonian hospitality; and the staff at the Gaspereau Press, for putting up with a hanger-on in August of 2007.

Lastly, I would like to thank my families, immediate, extended, and adopted, for their continual love and support. The most especial thanks go to Daniel Cabena, who reminds me to eat my vegetables, and who doesn't seem bothered by the Gaspereau Press museum that sprang up beside his desk. His vision, gentility, conscientiousness and kindness remain an inspiration.

You did not fathom our depravity,
Our willingness to squander and destroy;
Yet we must bless you for your charity
And glad example of your craftsman's joy
That kept at bay for you life's deep annoy,
Or seemed to do—what can we ever know?
You said, Love is enough. We take you so.

George Johnston, "A Toast to William Morris," lines 35-41.

My words collide with walls of fists,
Collapse, my teeth clacking like typewriters.

George Elliott Clarke, "Identity I," lines 7-8.

INTRODUCTION

In his 1973 chapbook about the Coach House Press, Tim Inkster observes that many of Coach House's early publications encourage people to ask questions about the impact of book design. Readers can open flaps and unfold inserts in search of hidden texts or images; the more adventurous among them can expand their understanding of the print medium by reading experimental works with unusual formats. According to Inkster, this kind of design-focused publishing "reinforces the idea of the Book as poetry itself," and it denies that a book is "simply a repository for the typeset word" (*CHP* 15).

Since its founding in 1965, Coach House Press has influenced generations of Canadian printers, many of whom, like Inkster, have become influential themselves. The printing and publishing ideals that Inkster praised in 1973 are still visible in his own work at The Porcupine's Quill (1974 -), and Andrew Steeves of Gaspereau Press (1997 -) cites Coach House as an inspiration for Gaspereau's cottage-industry, craft-like productions. Over the course of the past forty years, these three presses and others like them have demonstrated how intimately related the poetical and the typographical arts can be—and consequently demonstrated that a new form of criticism, which takes book design and physical presentation into account, is necessary to the interpretation of the literature of these presses.

Though media-based and cultural approaches to literature are becoming more popular, literary criticism in Canada has largely avoided the material book, and book production generally, as a subject.¹ Traditional bibliography, moreover, both in Canada and abroad, has been slow to generate a vocabulary appropriate to the work of Canadian printers and poets. While textual scholars have been studying and describing the printed book's material features for some time, it wasn't until the 1980s that they began to ask seriously "whether or not the material form of books,

¹ Exceptions include Robert Lecker's "Would You Publish This Book? Material Production, Canadian Criticism, and *The Theatre of Form*" (*Studies in Canadian Literature* 25.1 [2000]: 15-36); Imre Szeman's "Introduction: A Manifesto for Materialism" (*Essays on Canadian Writing* 68 [1999]: 1-18), and the contributions made by literary critics to *The History of the Book in Canada* (eds. Fleming et al., 3 vols., 2004-2007).

the non-verbal elements of the typographic notations within them ... have an expressive function in conveying meaning" (McKenzie "Form" 17).

Of these works, Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991) was the first to outline a workable protocol for assessing the book's expressive and social functions. "Every literary work that descends to us," McGann argues, "operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other" (TC 77). According to McGann, book-artists often manipulate these "codes"—codes based in the shared knowledge that different genres employ the book and page in recognizably different ways—to great effect. In this way, he argues, "production structures can be exploited for aesthetic effects in ... highly individuated ways" (82); and in this way, they can be manipulated to bring "certain other, larger issues—social and political issues—... to the foreground of the reader's attention" (85-86). Ultimately, McGann's conclusion resembles something that printer-publishers operating in Canada already knew: no matter how charmed one is by the literary features of a text, they can never be fully understood, aesthetically or historically or otherwise, until the text's physical form has been understood alongside it. The following thesis investigates the kinds of relationships that exist between the physical texts, the social contexts, and the literary works of two contemporary English-Canadian printer-publishers: the Porcupine's Quill of Tim and Elke Inkster, and the Gaspereau Press of Andrew Steeves and Gary Dunfield. Its goal is to come to a better understanding of contemporary English-Canadian poetry, and the meaning that poetry takes from its material surroundings—both concretely (from its type, format, paper quality, and cover design) and more generally (from the financial, social, or political forces that influence how and why poetry is produced).

Both McGann's position, as well as the related position I adopt in this paper, take as principles some of the arguments seen in recent book history and bibliography; and though I will spend the next few moments outlining these arguments, before I proceed it must be noted that the methods of book history and bibliography are most often applied to canonical British or American texts, and some complications arise when attempting to make use of them in a contemporary

Canadian context. First, it will quickly become apparent that much Canadian poetry dating to or slightly before the time of the Porcupine's Quill was already investigating how the material book could be made to express something of the values of its time, place, or poet. This self-consciousness means that to investigate how book design comments upon social contexts is not an archaeological exercise; nor is it an attempt to reconstruct values based on scanty bibliographical evidence. Instead, we are dealing with printers who, as designers, know full well how books "talk" through their physical bodies; every material choice they make, therefore, can (in the absence of obvious financial or production constraints) be read as "saying" something quite deliberate. This fact moves the process out of the area of historical reconstruction and into the more nebulous area of artistic interpretation; as a result, all the caveats which apply to literary interpretation (about intentionality etc.) must now be assumed.

Assessing the relationship between physical books, their social contexts, and their literary contents will, for any period and in any country, require first an assessment of what a book is, how it is made, how it functions in society, and how those things may collectively influence its literary meaning. Following book historians Robert Darnton and Adrian Johns, as well as bibliographer D.F. McKenzie, recent book history has opted to define "the book" as a set of relationships rather than as a physical object with recognizable properties. In "Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve," bibliographer D.F. McKenzie defines the book as an "organic form, a material statement in which all its elements participate, a comprehensive rhetorical structure articulating an extremely complex set of relationships between author, bookseller, printer and reader in specific and definable historical contexts" ("Typography" 201). Similarly, in *The Nature of the Book*, Johns defines the book as "a nexus conjoining a wide range of worlds of work" (Johns 3). Finally, in Robert Darnton's model for the study of the book (1990), which was modified by Adams and Barker (1993), and applied recently in the three-volume *History of the Book in Canada* (eds. Fleming et al, 2004-07), Darnton takes as his working assumption the notion that "some holistic view of the book" is "necessary" to book history (Darnton 111). All three of

these approaches believe that to study books as physical objects is meaningful because, in McKenzie's words, of "the human presence in any recorded text" ("Form" 29)—or, conversely, because the material features of books are, like texts, "the product of human agency" ("Intro" *Bibliography* 4).

To define the book as a form which brings printers, readers, and materials together in "definable historical contexts," and to say that it operates by "articulating" or "conjoining" different types of "human presence[s]," is to provide a fundamentally sociological definition of the book, and to attribute a sociological significance to its physical attributes. However, as a literary critic, one cannot automatically translate sociological meaning into textual meaning—even though, as Jerome McGann remarks, texts are also "certain kinds of human acts" (*TC* 4), and both kinds of meaning can be examined from a sociological point of view. It was therefore a major contribution to the study of the book when McGann demonstrated that the material form of the book possesses expressive and literary significance as well as social significance: "every part of the productive process," he argues, "is meaning-constitutive—so that we are compelled, if we want to understand a literary work, to examine it in all its multiple aspects" (*TC* 33).

The sense that all aspects of production are meaningful has captured the imagination of Canadian printer-publishers since before the 1970s. All the presses that feature prominently in this thesis share the belief that the book joins together a literary text with a cultural object, and that both portions are of significance to the work as a whole. To ignore the content contributed by the material book—especially if that book was produced by one of the presses under study here—is to deny half of a collaborative effort which exists, in Tim Inkster's words, between "poetfather and printmother" (*CHP* 13). Moreover, it is to forgo an opportunity to demonstrate that such information, vital to the way we appreciate texts, is a necessary part of any literary process of evaluation.

The positions of McGann and Inkster are, for the most part, the positions from where I begin—positions which claim that knowledge of a book's design and a book's production can better our understanding of the poetry within it, and of the period in which it was published. Chapter one of this thesis is an introductory one;

its function is to sketch the general financial climate that existed prior the founding of the PQL, and to identify the material and political obstacles faced by the majority of indigenous Canadian publishing houses at that time. For this I draw upon work by critic Frank Davey ("Writing and Publishing in English Canada") as well as historian Roy MacSkimming (*The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada, 1946-2006*). Furthermore, by studying the writings and memoirs of the founders of Coach House Press (1965-1996) and the House of Anansi (1966 -), chapter one explains in greater detail how the printer-publishers working in the decade before the PQL perceived the book, its relation to society, and the consequences of its physical form. By the end it becomes evident that these houses, which Tim Inkster cites as having influence over the Porcupine's Quill, frequently used the material book as a vehicle for textual interpretation as well as a form of social commentary.

In chapter two of this thesis I examine the influence of Coach House and Anansi on the developing aesthetic of the Porcupine's Quill (1974-present), both as it was governed by founders Tim and Elke Inkster, and as it received editorial direction from critic and short storyist John Metcalf. By examining the press's history and philosophy, and by engaging in a case study which reconstructs, from archival records, the process of editing and printing of *Endeared by Dark: The Collected Poems of George Johnston* (1990), it becomes clear that the Porcupine's Quill was creating texts that were, in many ways, anti-social—that is, texts whose literary properties were emphasized, but were otherwise disassociated from contemporary cultural or political values. What *Endeared by Dark* reveals is not the social context of Johnston's poems, but rather an attempt to repress socialization as a technique for either physical or literary analysis.

In chapter three of this thesis, I move away from the Porcupine's Quill to examine a more recent approach to book printing and publishing in Canada. Distanced by thirty years from the questions of nationalism that inspired the first generation of printer-publishers, and distanced philosophically from Metcalf's apolitical aestheticism, the Gaspereau Press is presently exploring the connection between physical texts, literary content, and social contexts in new ways. Though it exhibits some of the Porcupine's Quill's conservatism with regard to book design,

the Gaspereau Press is also clearly less critical of the socially-outspoken stance taken earlier by Coach House, and sympathetic to the argument that modes of production are intimately bound up with both social and literary values. Unlike the Coach House of the 60s, however, the Gaspereau Press is not interested in exploring this idea by creating subversive or anti-establishment textual objects, and has instead created a philosophy of “connectedness” upon which their business strategy is founded. Assuming that all aspects of publishing are materially and spiritually interrelated, Gaspereau’s founders speak as if their production methods must reflect the values espoused by their texts. As Andrew Steeves said in 2002, his “vision for Gaspereau Press ... is to create cultural objects that are meaningful in their conception, execution and result. It is a vision for keeping the manufacturing process small enough—close enough to craft—so as to ensure that everyone involved can keep their sights on the common goal and share in the value and dignity of the work” (“Note” 2002).

The extent to which the Gaspereau Press assumes the integration of the literary with the material and the social is examined through a case study that combines typographical and literary reading techniques. The text, George Elliott Clarke’s *Execution Poems* (2001), provides a unique opportunity for examining Gaspereau’s approach to printing for several reasons. First, on a thematic level, it, like many early texts from Coach House, questions the political uses to which books and printing can be put. Second, *Execution Poems* was set twice: first as a letterpress folio edition, and then again as a trade paperback. The fact that Steeves, who designed the book, was explicit about wanting the second version to resemble the first as closely as possible, indicates that he felt the form of the book was significant to the text. It can be argued that the design of *Execution Poems* does significantly change how the text might be read; but moreover, and more generally, the complexity and typographical resonance of *Execution Poems* demonstrates how sensitive contemporary printers have become to the signifying power of their medium. This sensitivity, I suspect, has been accumulating and developing now for over forty years.

In some ways, all of the presses talked about at length in this thesis—the Coach House Press in chapter one, the Porcupine’s Quill in chapter two, and the Gaspercau Press in chapter three—can be seen as a large extended family spanning three generations of Canadian book publishing traditions. They all share certain traits: they all are primarily trade publishers, for example, and rarely produce the specialized art books done by other small presses in Canada.² And, of course, in their publishing philosophies all three place a great deal of emphasis on doing their own printing and publishing—something not common to either small-press publishing or to corporate publishing houses. But above all, the thing that unites them is the way each takes up the question of how the physical book, and the material components from which it is made, situate the text in its social context, and contribute to its literary meaning. Though their answers differ, and the uses to which they put the book are sometimes contradictory, what is clear is the degree to which each house sees the body of the book as an integral and meaningful component of any published or written work.

² Jan & Crispin Elsted’s Barbarian Press, Mona Hertig’s (m)Öthér Tøñgué Press, Jim Rimmer’s Pie Tree Press, Will Reuter’s Aliquando Press, Glenn Goluska’s *imprimerie dromadaire*, and Thaddeus Holownia’s Anchorage Press are all examples of contemporary fine-press printers who specialize in letterpress productions and infrequently (if ever) print trade editions.

CHAPTER 1: "Poetfathers and Printmothers"

Canadian Publishing, 1965-1974

CONTEXTS

Though the period between 1965 and 1974 does not by any means mark the origins of small press printing in English Canada, it does mark the moment when the English-Canadian small press assumed many of its most indelible characteristics. Literary printing until that point was done in either one of two ways: by large houses (domestic- or foreign-owned), or by small literary magazines and their affiliated presses. Yet while the financial difficulties faced by these older imprints formed the proof for many of the political conclusions that newer presses would draw about the state of Canadian printing and publishing, it was the young presses themselves whose values would come to direct the course of small-press publishing for the next forty years. Fiercely nationalist, radically experimental, and conscious, to an unprecedented degree, of the impact of media forms on the reader's experience of text, the small press houses of the sixties and early seventies were vocal proponents for the significance of the Canadian book industry—both in its role as a generator of national and cultural identity, and as a maker of objects forced to compete in a limited market, which was already saturated with American and British products. They also took unprecedented steps toward making the physical appearances of their books reflect the subversive, anti-capitalist, or nationalist sentiment expressed within them.

In the proceedings from a 1987 conference on "Questions of Funding, Publishing and Distribution," Frank Davey argues that English-Canadian literary production operates in a "petty commodity mode," which, when compared to the "capitalist production mode" of 19th- and 20th-century British and American book industries, is much less efficient and markedly less profitable (Davey "Writing and Publishing in English Canada" 14, 19). Borrowing his terms from Norman Feltes, Davey argues that the "capitalist production" of books is characterized by "the separation of production into distinct and progressive stages" (14), which results in, firstly, a split between publishers, printers, and booksellers; secondly, in "series production" (14), which requires the publisher to produce books within series or

genres, so as to develop an easily recognized brand identity; and, finally, in “the commoditization of labour” (14), or the development of writers who are willing to produce a series, or to work within a genre, both according to market specifications. Though the fruits of “capitalist production modes” in Britain and the US were quite different (the British preferred smaller, more expensive runs, while the Americans produced inexpensive editions in vast quantities), the effect was the same. By narrowing their role to the creation of brand identities, which convey to the reader a sense of the “type” of book published by any given house, publishers could cut the expense of “hand-selling” new authors or ideas to individual members of the public. Yet most original Canadian fiction and poetry, Davey notes, with the exception of works by poets and novelists who can replicate their distinctive subject-positions over multiple volumes (Pierre Burton, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood), does not fit easily into standard brand identities of either foreign or domestic publishers (19-20).

The majority of Canadian-owned publishing houses, Davey argues, at least in respect to the publication of original fiction and poetry, were obliged to operate in the “petty-commodity mode”—an expensive undertaking that generally required the financial support of another, more profitable publishing area (most often textbook or educational publishing). “Petty-commodity” production entails the publication of works in “small press runs of relatively expensive paperbacks to pre-defined markets” (19). But, as the Royal Commission on Book Publishing (“Publishing”) pointed out in 1973, the buying potential of those “pre-defined markets” in Canada is quite small when compared to the buying potential of the American market (which is, in 2007, roughly 11 times the size of the Canadian one).³ Since the unit cost of any work of original fiction or poetry will be higher here than abroad (Publishing 11), and since the market can only absorb a fixed number

³ Based on 2006 figures for our respective GDP Purchasing Power Parallels. The US’s GDP PPP is approximately 13.06 trillion annually, while Canada’s is 1.18 trillion. See Central Intelligence Agency, *Cia - the World Factbook – Canada*, 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ca.html#Econ>, 15 Jan. 2008.

Also see Central Intelligence Agency, *Cia - the World Factbook -- United States*, 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html#Econ>, 15 Jan. 2008.

of new titles per year,⁴ publishing original Canadian works is a risky venture. As the Commission observed, poor editorial choices made in Canada translate into costlier mistakes than in Britain or the U.S.; successful choices, on the other hand, reap smaller financial rewards. The market size discrepancy is so extreme that even traditionally profitable publishing areas provide smaller returns for Canadian companies.⁵

The Royal Commission on Book Publishing was assembled in 1971 as a response to American takeovers of the Canadian firms Ryerson and Gage (MacSkimming 113); its objective was to examine, objectively, the question of whether the financially ailing Canadian publishing industry was worthy of public support. They were keenly aware of the financial pitfalls that Canadian publishers often fell into, and it is not surprising that one of their first questions was: "why do any publishers choose to be come engaged in Canadian publishing?" (15-16). Even the large Canadian-owned houses like McClelland & Stewart, who published in many non-literary areas in the first half of the 20th-century, and who actively pushed their brand identity as "The Canadian Publishers" in the centenary period (MacSkimming 131), considered selling the business to American interests in 1971.⁶ The RCBP's question was even more pertinent for small houses, who, if they published strictly literary works, might find themselves selling nothing but debt.

⁴ Karl Siegler, the business manager and president of Talonbooks (1974-present), claimed in 1997 that "the market for serious literary work is about \$400,000 to \$500,000 per year in current dollars, for about 26 new and re-issued titles annually" ("Amusements" 95).

⁵ Textbook and reference book publishing is a good example. Encyclopedias and textbooks are expensive to develop, and are usually undertaken only when the projected number of purchasers is large (Publishing 20-21). It is therefore more cost-effective to adapt American or British textbooks for Canadian use than it is to develop independent Canadian editions—and educational publishing, the cash cow for so many publishers abroad, proves not very profitable for those companies who do not have international parents (who fund development research and adapt results to a variety of English-speaking markets). In the 70s this phenomenon was perceived as a distinct threat to Canadian national identity, and an entire section of the RCBP report was devoted to recommendations for the public support of Canadian-made educational publishing (see pages 168-218, "Educational Publishing," as well as 219-48, "Nurturing a Canadian Identity").

⁶ Spurred by the RCBP report, the government of Ontario intervened to prevent the sale. They declared M&S "a national asset worthy of all reasonable public encouragement and support" (qtd. in MacSkimming 149) and provided the company with a 10-year debenture worth almost one million dollars.

The answer, the Commission reports, is that publishing must be “creative before it is competitive” (223). After surveying 185 briefs, 19 commissioned research papers, and 4400 pages of transcribed hearings, the RCBP remarked:

... the impact and influence of a publisher is measured and judged in many ways—by the importance and quality of authors he has been the first to publish, by the imagination of his programs, by what authors think of his books, by what critics say of them, and only rather farther along by what the banker concludes. (10)

Between 1973 and 1986,⁷ therefore, it was the position of the governments of Ontario and Canada that the making of Canadian books—in an unfavourable market that is “weighted heavily in favour of ... foreign product” (11)—was an undertaking whose “cultural implications far outweigh the economic implications to society, whether the latter are measured in jobs or in cost of possible measures to preserve the industry” (4).

The publishers and printers who began to operate in and around this period could not be anything but conscious that the objects they made were deemed culturally and sociologically important. RCBP Commissioner Marsh Jeanneret (who was also the director of the University of Toronto Press from 1953 to 1977, and the man who contracted Marshall McLuhan for *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1961), had described book publishing as a “national service” (qtd. in MacSkinning 114). The sale of Canadian books, like the growth of road systems and railway lines, represented a quantifiable measure of the country’s national development. And this consciousness of the socio-cultural importance of the book as a product—as an object worthy of public money and support—partially determined the types of texts that were published, and, even more so, determined the manner in which they were produced (Davey 21).

The Book Commission’s premise was not new, as the association of quality printing with cultural development is almost as old as the printing press itself. Among printers, and as a plaque in the PQL printshop boasts, it is thought that

⁷ In 1986 the Government of Canada moved from a “culture-based” model of funding to a “business-based” one. See page 27 of the next chapter and Siegler 95.

“book design is one of the excellencies by which a civilization can be measured.” What renders Canadian printers and publishers unique, therefore, is not the cultural significance they assign to books. It is the degree to which they are conscious, not just of the impact of the material conditions of book production, but of the effect of typographic form and convention upon the page—and conscious of the way those production methods, forms, and conventions help construct meaning in and assign value to literature.

What separates these presses from one other, however, is that each made use of these ideas in different ways. Some associated print media with acts of colonial or capitalist expansion, and therefore sought alternative forms; some saw print as a means to instill political awareness in a nation too subject to foreign influence. Still others found motivation in the notion that form shapes meaning, and went on to master the conventions of typography and book design. The radical outlooks of these first-generation small presses exerted enormous influence on second- and third-generation publishers, including the Porcupine’s Quill; and to understand the PQL’s approach to publishing, it is necessary to spend some time discussing the responses of the two houses Inkster cites as most formative.

THE COACH HOUSE PRESS, 1964/5-1996

The Coach House Press, which began releasing titles under their imprint in 1964-65,⁸ was the first small press in Canada to combine an interest in avant-garde printing with experimental poetry. Under the direction of printer Stan Bevington, poet Victor Coleman, and an editorial collective that eventually included George Bowering, Michael Ondaatje, David McFadden, Joe Rosenblatt, and bpNichol, the Coach House Press would revolutionize how Canadian literature made and understood books.

⁸ According to Roy MacSkimming, the first title to bear the Coach House logo was Wayne Clifford’s *Man in a Window* (MacSkimming 171); and in his reflections upon the first decade of the life of Coach House, Victor Coleman agrees that this book did bring founders Stan Bevington, Dennis Reid, and Clifford together in a momentous and unprecedented way (Coleman 29). That said, Coleman also notes that bibliographer Nicky Drumbolis refers to a 12-page booklet by Carl Dair, entitled *Why Typography?*, as the first Coach House publication (dating to late 1964; see Coleman 29).

This revolution was twofold: first, Coach House, imbued with Coleman's anti-establishment vision, offered an alternative to American-style commercial publishing. In the initial years the editorial group developed their "signature collective-production mode" (Coleman 29), which, as Coleman recalls, involved "as many eager hands as possible," as well as "plenty of peanut butter ... sandwiches and maybe some beer" (29). The poets, Coleman writes, "[got] their hands dirty by helping to make their own books" (28); this provided an empowering "way to complete their collective vision of the new direction in Canadian writing and publishing" (28). Books were edited, printed, and even occasionally written on-site at CHP (located, until 1968, in an old Victorian coach house in Toronto). The integration of writing and printing enabled some of the strangest works of English-Canadian literature to be produced (including George Bowering's *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9* [1967], which was shaped like a pennant and plastered over with grass-green felt). By eliminating the division between publishing work and printing work, Coach House was not only distancing itself from the monolithic American book industry, which has divided printer from publisher since the seventeenth century (Davey 15). Coach House was actively coordinating its talented print staff with its experimental authors in order to create books that—though they might defy industry standards—were often graceful, playful, supportive and complex acts of textual interpretation.⁹

The latter point leads into the second part of the Coach House revolution, which was ideological rather than methodological. As Julie Beddoes notes, Coach House publications from the early 60s and 70s were exploring "some of the other things we now recognize about books ... before we read the theory" (Beddoes 36). The Coach House writers knew that Bevington and his staff would accept demanding works that required extraordinary amounts of typographical attention—works that could never be published, to satisfaction or at all, anywhere else.

⁹ As Frank Davey notes, however, this idyllic symbiosis between printer and publisher could not be sustained indefinitely. Davey's sketch of Coach House affairs from 1975-86 is that of "a publishing (fool's) paradise": a group of editors who could publish the titles they liked "without having to concern themselves about the salaries or supervision of employees, cost of business and warehouse space, accounts receivable, ongoing cash flow, or possibility of debt." See p. 54 and *passim* of Frank Davey, "The Beginnings of an End to Coach House Press," *Open Letter* 8.1 (1997).

Authors could therefore write non-commercial (and occasionally indigestible) texts that challenged the assumptions readers bring to the printed page, the text, or the book. Highly influenced by Marshall McLuhan and interested by new modes of textual reproduction (offset lithography, photo reproductions), Coach House writers like Nichol and Steve McCaffery were determined to inspire “awareness of the page as a visual, tactile unit with its very own separate potential” (McCaffery and Nichol 63). The book, as Nichol and McCaffery argued in *Rational Geomancy*, was no different from any other “machine”: it had a “capacity to alter function and affect the psychological content of the fictional reality presented” (69). They and the other authors at CHP took the impact of print media very seriously, and Bevington joined them in their experiments to determine just how closely related the medium and the message actually are.

Nichol and McCaffery argued that our interactions with books and our English-language techniques of reading (front to back, left to right, in horizontal rows) have been standardized for so long that we no longer see them as culturally acquired techniques; nor do we see the form of the book as it affects our thought processes. Exposing these assumptions was the primary motive underlying the unconventional formats of texts like Nichol’s *Journeying and the Returns* (1967), which came in a lavender-coloured cardboard case and was accompanied by several “poem objects,” as well as a 45 RPM recording of Nichol reading his poems (MacSkimming 172).

In its attempt to establish a new collective identity for Canadian literary publishing, the Coach House Press set the standard for the small press universe in the decade that followed Canada’s centenary. What mattered to CHP, and to subsequent presses of that generation, was “cultural capital,” and they were willing to sacrifice “financial return or marketable celebrity” in order to get it (Davey “Beginnings” 50). Establishing cultural capital meant, in most cases, rejecting the standards set by sales-driven, commercial book publishers, and in this Coach House titles were no exception: they were difficult, hard to categorize, iconoclastic, and often virulently anti-establishment. Yet even though sales were dismal—perhaps

because sales were so dismal—for at least ten years Coach House books were thought to be at the foremost edge of avant-garde cultural publishing in Canada.

THE HOUSE OF ANANSI, 1966—

While the Coach House was exploding the social and material limits of book production, it was a contemporaneous press that investigated the book's power to explode on a culture at the national level. The House of Anansi was founded by poet Dennis Lee and novelist-poet Dave Godfrey in 1966 (largely because Godfrey could see no other way of getting Lee's *Kingdom of Absence* into print). Equally radical in their politics though far more traditional in their book design, the House of Anansi was founded partially to publicize Canadian perspectives on hot, contemporary political issues.

As book historians Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon observe, the 1960s were years of "transition" for the book industry in English Canada:

the demographic impact of the baby boom, reaction to the Vietnam War (and the American immigration it provoked), unprecedented economic prosperity, innovative government programs, liberal social policies, second wave feminism, and the nationalism surrounding the centennial of Confederation inspired a new boom in literary and publishing activity. (Gerson and Michon 8)

Within this period of rapid change, Anansi had a knack for churning out inflammatory texts that captured the public imagination. Their *Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada* (1968), a dreary-looking brown paperback, was a hugely popular anti-war text, and it sold 55,000 copies by 1970 (MacSkimming 177). By 1970 Anansi had also published George Grant's contentious essay collection on modernity, *Technology and Empire*, and they successfully campaigned against the extension of Toronto's Spadina Expressway in *The Bad Trip*. What's more, in 1972, they published one of the country's most controversial pieces of Canadian literary criticism to date—Margaret Atwood's *Survival*.

Anansi could spot more than political firestorms, however. In 1970, while Godfrey was living in Provence, Lee expanded Anansi's list to include titles by Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, Austin Clarke, Harold Ladoo, George

Bowering, P.K. Page, Patrick Lane, and Northrop Frye. As Roy MacSkimming notes in *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada 1946-2006*, Lee quickly became known as one of the country's most fastidious and nurturing editors (179). In the 1969 Anansi catalogue, Lee wrote: "We have one modest aim ... to change the climate for Canadian fiction by letting the best young writers get into print, find an audience and get on with their next book" (qtd. in MacSkimming 179). And though the original founders both left Anansi—Lee in 1972, and Godfrey earlier—they established for it the reputation of being an author's press, a place where new writers could take innovative work.

In 1969, Godfrey founded New Press with Jim Bacques and Roy MacSkimming, as well as the Press Porcépic with his wife Ellen, all from the basement of his apartment at 671 Spadina Avenue in Toronto. However, it was the combined selectiveness and editorial thoroughness of Godfrey and Lee, as well as their ability to discern new talent, that most definitively set another small press industry standard, the likes of which remained perhaps unmatched until John Metcalf began his term as editor at the Porcupine's Quill in 1989.

When Tim Inkster founded the Porcupine's Quill in 1974, he wanted to change how books were published in Canada. He would keep Coach House's production methods as well as their mandate to set texts intelligently; he would strive to match the quality of Anansi's editorial vision. As we shall see, his strategy for effecting change was not so anti-commercial as Coach House's, nor did it operate on a large national scale, like Anansi. Still, CHP and Anansi demonstrated to Inkster that the independent production of quality literature was possible, and to the country that the conditions under which literature is produced are of social and textual significance. It was through their works that the expressive power of the physical book became popular currency among the more radical of this new generation of printers and publishers.

CHAPTER 2: "Those Fabulous Teeth"

Tim Inkster, John Metcalf, and the Pointed Texts of the PQL

"Now, it must here be understood, that *Ink* is the great missive Weapon, in all Battels of the *Learned*, which, convey'd thro' a sort of Engine, called a *Quill*, infinite Numbers of these are darted at the Enemy, by the Valiant on each side, with equal Skill and Violence, as if it were an Engagement of *Porcupines*."

Jonathan Swift, "The Battel of the Books," 378.

INTRODUCTION

The Porcupine's Quill, the printing and publishing house founded by Tim and Elke Inkster in 1974, has been described as "Canada's pre-eminent literary press" (MacSkimming 260). It came into being during a period of radical change for the Canadian publishing industry, when everything from profit sources to printing methods was being questioned, experimented with, and revised. Small presses were springing up all over the country: each of them was asking what it meant to be publishing Canadian literature. Each, moreover, was newly inspired by the idea that the material conditions of publishing were determining the kinds of texts that circulated in the country. Several publishing houses in the sixties (most notably the Coach House Press, but also Takao Tanabe's Periwinkle Press in Victoria) had decided to change those conditions by mastering the art of book design, and by applying that mastery to works of experimental literature. Others, like the House of Anansi, had taken a more political approach, and circulated controversial texts widely in the attempt to give voice to Canadian perspectives, and to stir up debate on issues relevant to Canadian life.

While it absorbed a great deal of influence from these small presses the Porcupine's Quill did not fully come into its own until the late 1980s and early 1990s. This chapter will trace the PQL's development, from its early influences and origins in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to its peak in the early to mid-nineties, and its sudden decline after 2003. It provides a history of the press, as well as an overview, reconstructed from the writings of Inkster and Metcalf, of the PQL's printing and publishing philosophies. Ultimately it will look at how those philosophies affected the PQL's design decisions, and, using George Johnston's

Endeared by Dark (PQL 1990) as a case study, it will argue that Inkster and Metcalf tried strenuously to control the kind of brand identity that was passed on by the material text. Their efforts in this regard are revealing of the values, aims and ambitions of the press—all of which influences how PQL readers approach the literature itself.

THE PORCUPINE'S QUILL: HISTORY

Inkster's interest in printing began as an English literature student at the University of Toronto in the late sixties, when he began collecting new publications from Coach House and Anansi. Before he graduated Inkster applied for a job at CHP, but Stan Bevington told him he was too young and that he should return to school. Inkster, who finished at Toronto in 1970, immediately went to work for Dave Godfrey (who was one of his professors, and currently running the Press Porcépic). Though he had no experience, Inkster became Godfrey's entirely unpaid press operator. And excepting a two-hour tutorial with Stan Bevington in 1970—where Bevington “explained that there are basically seven controls on an A.B. Dick duplicator,¹⁰ and everything else would be a refinement of the above” (Inkster *Honest* i)—Inkster remained self-taught, learning on Porcépic's Multi 1250 (a small offset duplicator that could only print two pages at a time).

Godfrey, at the insistence of Tim and his wife Elke, moved the press outside of Toronto, to the small town of Erin, Ontario; and there, in 1974, the Inksters founded the Porcupine's Quill. Tim had applied to work at Coach House again in 1973; but this time, Bevington told him he was too old, that he would cause trouble (Inkster was 24). And under Godfrey, Inkster was frustrated at being unable to devote what he thought was appropriate time and money to production (Fagan 1991). Left with little choice, the Inksters therefore bought their own press, an ATF Chief, and incorporated the Porcupine's Quill as the independent production arm of Press Porcépic.

It wasn't just Godfrey who resisted spending money on production, however: by 1975, Inkster told Fagan, “we'd been doing quite a bit of book printing

¹⁰ An A.B. Dick duplicator is a small offset press.

for a variety of small publishers. And I was frustrated as a printing craftsman that I couldn't convince any of the publishers to put the kind of money that I thought appropriate into some of these titles for their best presentation." To demonstrate the effectiveness of quality printing to his clients, Inkster procured a manuscript from his college friend Brian Johnson (later a film reviewer for *Maclean's*) and printed it on his own time. From that point on, the print quality of the books he designed for other houses remained much higher.

In 1976, when Godfrey decided to move Porcépic to Victoria, B.C., Tim and Elke were free to launch their own imprint (Dobroslavic 6), and it quickly became known for its durable and thoughtfully-designed books. Printed on acid-free Zephyr Antique laid paper and sewn into signatures on a 1906 Smythe book-sewing machine, PQL books are designed to resist the aging and wear suffered by cheaply-made paperbacks. Sewn bindings mean the pages will not fall out (as glued pages often do); and high quality, acid-free paper means those pages will not yellow, become brittle, or crumble with age.

Of the books published by the PQL between 1976 and 1989, about half of them were poetry titles. 22% were fiction, 12% were art books or collections of prints, and 8% were directed at young readers. A few of their books were criticism, two contained plays, and two PQL titles were cookbooks. (They also published one travel book, Karen Mulhallen's *Views from the North* [1984], and a Festschrift, dedicated to Robin Skelton, in 1986.) By 1989, at least 14 of the Inksters' books—most under the PQL imprint, some by other publishers—had won awards for book design.¹¹ The literary quality of the titles, however, was mixed. Though many were shortlisted, only two out of 89 books received literary prizes: *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* by Stephen Scobie won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1980,

¹¹ In chronological order, the awards are: 1977, a Design Canada Look of Books Award for *Letters* (Inkster, Black Moss Press); 1980, the Distinctive Merit Award from the Art Directors Club of New York for *Alphacollage* (Zeller, PQL), and an Alcuin Award for *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* (Scobie, PQL); 1981, the Society of Graphic Designer's Certificates of Merit for *The Book of Numbers* (Dutton, PQL) and *Wood, Ink and Paper* (Brandis, PQL); 1983, another Distinctive Merit Award for *I Am Walking in the Garden of His Imaginary Palace* (Urquhart & Urquhart, PQL). From 1982 to 1983, the *Malahat Review* gave the PQL a total of 10 awards, which led Inkster to be called "the twice-crowned Prince of Design" (Dobroslavic 7). In 1989, moreover, Ludwig Zeller's *Alphacollage* received a Silver Medal at a 5-year retrospective at the Leipzig International Book Fair.

and *The Quarter-Pie Window*, by Marianne Brandis, won two children's book awards in 1986.

The PQL supplemented their publishing costs by doing job printing for local businesses, including several high-end country-style inns, like Langdon Hall (Cambridge, On.) and the Millcroft Inn (with whom they eventually released a cookbook in 1987). They also were contracted to design and print books for Black Moss Press, Brick Books, Exile Editions, Penumbra Press, Aya Press, Quadrant Editions, ECW Press, the Padeloup Press of Virgil Burnett, and others. PQL printed and bound the literary journals *Essays on Canadian Writing* and *Descant*; and they purchased the printing arts journal *The Devil's Artisan*, or *DA*, in 1995. Their job printing responsibilities were in addition to their publishing duties, which included the selection and editing of all manuscripts; and by 1989, as both the jobs and the publishing agenda grew, the Inksters found they had too much work to handle on their own.

It was then that Inkster approached John Metcalf about sharing the editorial burden.¹² Metcalf, a short storyist, a novelist, and an anthologist, was well-known for his stormy literary opinions, and was not afraid to call the eclectic and uneven backlist for what it was. "In 1989," John Metcalf remembers, "I thought that the Press was too slight. Tim and Elke had published some good books but not enough of them" (Metcalf *Underground* 237). Together Metcalf and Inkster decided the press needed to develop a more defined image. "Literary presses which were mainly ink and boards and paper," commented Metcalf, "presses like Black Moss, say, or Mosaic—are largely inert" (*Underground* 242). Till that point, the PQL reputation centered around Tim's work as a designer; and while Metcalf claimed he would "never underestimate the importance of Tim's printing and design," he also believed that "a press lives fully only when it creates a personality and mythology" (242).

By 1990 the PQL had a full-time staff of six (including a pressman, a bindery assistant, and a receptionist) and the Inksters were prepared to consider printing long texts. They decided to abandon slim poetry volumes, and instead

¹² Prior to this, the only editorial advice Inkster received came from poet Joe Rosenblatt.

would release collected works of poetry by established authors (they eventually published P.K. Page's two-volume *The Hidden Room*, which, according to the PQL website, has been described as "one of the two dozen best books ever published in Canada"). Metcalf, who owns the largest collection of Canadian short stories in the world, also brought his enthusiasm for the genre to the press, and after several years the PQL came to rival Oberon in its reputation as a publishing house for short fiction. (They brought out collections by Leon Rooke, Hugh Hood, James Reaney, Gil Adamson, Clarke Blaise, Matt Cohen, Caroline Adderson, Annabel Lyon and many others.) Metcalf also proposed the shortlived "Sherbrooke Street Series," which reissued out-of-print works by Canadian authors. (The first title in the series, and the first book to be issued by the PQL under Metcalf's editorial guidance, was Ray Smith's *Cape Breton is the Thought Control Centre of Canada*, initially published in 1969 by Anansi). Focusing in these ways helped clarify the "personality," or the brand, of the PQL.

Twenty years later, and with Metcalf's assistance, Inkster finally had what he wanted back in 1970: a press that combined the technical virtuosity of Coach House with the editorial acumen and sensitivity of Anansi under Dennis Lee. And the literary establishment responded: in 1991, two titles were nominated for Governor General's Awards (Terry Griggs's *Quickening* and Don Dickinson's *Blue Husbands*). The following year *Blue Husbands* won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and Ray Smith's *A Night at the Opera* won a Q-Spell Award; and in 1993, Don Coles's *Forests of the Medieval World* won the Governor General's Award for poetry. The Porcupine's Quill also gained a reputation for publishing first books by authors whose second books, with other publishers, went on to win major prizes or recognition (Russell Smith is perhaps the best example).

Despite their newfound literary success, however, the PQL, like other small presses in the 90s, was having money troubles. In 1986 the government of Canada confirmed its shift away from a culture-based funding model (where funds were estimated according to production costs) to a business-based model (where funds were based on sales, and where much of the incoming money was earmarked for

marketing and promotion).¹³ Evaluators demanded to see increased profitability from year to year, as well as proof of the PQL's expanding market presence. They encouraged small presses to borrow substantially against the promised "business funding" in order to "kick start" expansive new sales programs (Siegler 95). Finally, they refused to fund print runs smaller than 500 copies (Coleman 35). The difficulty faced by publishers in this period was that the size of the Canadian market was unprepared for serious growth: large runs translated into overstocked inventories and serious drains on capital. Small presses found themselves carrying huge debts because they were told to promote serious literary works as if they were blockbuster paperbacks—a strategy which, were it to work, would inevitably mean losing hot authors down the line (as they would be snapped up by larger houses with more advance money to offer; "Beginnings" 49). In 1990, the PQL's total liabilities were almost three times their total equity (\$141,126.43 compared to \$57,147.54), and their income from grants had exceeded their income from book sales two years running (\$71,493.00 versus \$41,991.97 in 1990).

This is not to say that the government did not have cause to encourage small presses to adopt a more business-minded, publicity-focused approach to book publishing. But, as Inkster wrote in his Canada Council grant application in 1989, "the danger is that the cost-of-sale vastly outweighs the revenue." (Earlier in the application Inkster compares the act of investing money in sales to standing on the corner of Yonge St. and Bloor, "trading \$2 bills for loonies" [Inkster Yates]). For financial reasons, publicity and distribution took a backseat to production values in the day-to-day operations of the press—though in an interview, Inkster once said he considered "the printing excellence we're known for" to be "a very sophisticated and understated marketing tool" (Abley 1992).

Low visibility was not much of a problem at first, when PQL books were distributed largely through independent booksellers. Independents, as Inkster

¹³ This funding model, begun in 1979, was called the Canadian Book Publishing Development Program (later the Book Publishing Industry Development Program, or BPIDP). The BPIDP (pronounced "bippy-dip") was established to provide industry and financial support to publishers, and it allocated funds through a formula which rewarded marketplace success. Previous Canada Council funding rewarded cultural output. The BPIDP, renewed in 1986, transferred 4.8 million to their block grants program – much of which was later clawed back. See MacSkimming 261, 325-56.

observed in 2005, are “small, educated, dedicated, well-informed, intelligently staffed”—and they were willing to “hand-sell the Porcupine’s Quill products” (qtd. in Caldwell 2005). In such a context there was little need for expensive national advertising campaigns. Between 1994 and 1996, however, as the Chapters and Indigo superstore rollouts began, the number of independent booksellers dropped dramatically and small press sales shrunk—the grant money withering in response (Siegler 96). Many houses, including Coach House, were forced to shut their doors as the governments of Canada and Ontario defaulted on their funding commitments in 1995 (Siegler 97). The PQL survived, along with a handful of others, though the number of returns from Chapters/Indigo continued to rise, and sales were shaky. But when General Distribution Services (GDS) suddenly declared bankruptcy in 2002, the effect on small presses across the country was disastrous. Porcupine’s Quill, along with Coteau Books, Véhicule Press, and McGill-Queen’s University Press, lost all the inventory that GDS had warehoused. The Inksters personally lost \$65,000.00 and had to scale back their operations dramatically (Caldwell 2005). To this day, the company remains shaken.

As the PQL began to downsize operations over the next five years, John Metcalf moved himself and many of his authors to Biblioasis (Dan Wells’s press based out of Windsor, Ontario). Now, as both Elke and Tim are approaching 60, the future of the press seems uncertain. Inkster, however, seems to have salvaged some traces of optimism. In 2005 he asserted that the company would close by 2007 (Caldwell 2005); now, he and Elke, the only remaining employees (excepting an occasional bindery assistant), are concentrating on attractive gift products, such as P.K. Page’s *A Brazilian Alphabet for the Younger Reader* (2005).

Between August and November of 2005, former Anansi publisher Martha Sharpe conducted a series of interviews with members of the book publishing industry in order to ascertain the industry’s perception of the Porcupine’s Quill. One of the questions she asked was forefront in everyone’s mind: “Do you think there is a future for the PQL?” Though responses were varied, one funding officer (who wished to remain anonymous) replied with some urgency. “There has to be a future,” the officer asserted. “That house should be mentoring someone, bringing

someone along. There's a legacy—literary capital needs to be preserved" (Sharpe 14).¹⁴

A fitting conclusion, perhaps, for a company born just a year after the Royal Commission on Book Publishing effectively declared cultural capital to be the only return a literary publisher can reasonably expect in this country. Whether or not the RCBP was correct—whether or not Canada is, as Morley Callaghan declared in the 1938, "no publisher's paradise" (qtd. in MacSkimming 3)—is being tested in new ways by new generations of printers and publishers. But for the PQL, it seems enough to declare that a literary legacy is no small thing: the cultural capital in which the government and the people of Canada have invested is here, it is significant, and it goes beyond the nationalist aspirations to which it was first dedicated. The circumstances in which the PQL grew, and the ideologies they inherited, set the groundwork for a new Canadian philosophy of book-making—one that will have a significant impact on the way we interpret the relationships between books, their design, their social importance, and their literary content.

THE PORCUPINE'S QUILL: PHILOSOPHY

Inkster was a printer who felt deeply that typographic convention affects textual content, and was spurred on to master book design as a result. Inkster's style absorbed a certain degree of self-consciousness from the experimental works of Coach House (as well as the writings of McLuhan, Nichol, and the language poets¹⁵); however, in the long run, Inkster was more inclined to work creatively with the conventions of book design than he was to expose, subvert, or discard them. Inkster and Metcalf both assert the significance of the book as an aesthetic object, and, unlike their immediate predecessors, they do not feel it necessary to couple the book's aesthetic function with a sociocultural or nationalistic one—in fact, they went to great lengths to suppress those later functions entirely. Metcalf and Inkster

¹⁴ Used with permission. See Appendix, p. 91.

¹⁵ Also called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. Language poetry is a movement with its origins in the United States and is associated with the Black Mountain Poets (Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley) as well as the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance (Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser). Language poetry, which emphasizes the reader's experience of the text and often encourages readers to deconstruct syntax and subject positions, had a great influence on *Tish* and the West Coast poets particularly (especially George Bowering and Robin Blaser). See Donald Allen, ed. *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999, esp. xi-xiv.

had 23 years since the centennial to observe the unreceptive literary environment react to social and nationalist pressures; publishers still encountered uniformly low sales, and Metcalf, in his programs to bring Canadian fiction into Canadian schools, met with resistance from boards and publishers.¹⁶ As such, Inkster and Metcalf felt more strongly the impulse to create books that would last well into the future, when tastes might change. They wished to create books that would contain, as Milton famously called it, “a potencie of life” (Milton 999)—books that would be embryos into which are seeded all the values that their makers wished to pass on to subsequent generations. And again, this is no radical break from publishing traditions across the centuries: authors since long before Milton have talked of books like children, as living things that might bring something of themselves into the future. What makes the PQL unprecedented is its desire to couple this very conservative approach to bookmaking with new and radical ideas about the expressive power of the book’s physical form.

The idea that the conditions under which a book is produced contribute to our understanding of its literary content meant, for the PQL, that more than the author’s thoughts might be preserved: the physical books might be made to contain arguments about the nature of literary achievement. And though Metcalf was profoundly opposed to the notion of evaluating literature according to its social role rather than its literary merit, I think even he was hoping that the books made at the PQL might preserve something of the spirit and the energy of the press as a movement. Inkster’s and Metcalf’s shared aesthetic, which valued technical accomplishment and “quality” above all else, combined to create books that were intended to endure long into the future. That way, in one or two or three hundred years, someone might pick up a PQL book and reflect—as Metcalf himself did,

¹⁶ As late as 2000, the average Canadian poetry title sells only 400 copies in its first two years of print (Hayward 23). Regarding school initiatives, Metcalf produced dozens of anthologies for use in classrooms; he also co-founded the *Montreal Story Tellers* with Hugh Hood, Clark Blaise, Ray Fraser, and Ray Smith). The five writers enthusiastically toured Montreal high schools, and read their own fiction to student audiences. “We were all aware, I think,” Metcalf writes in “Telling Tales,” “of the missionary nature of the readings,” and they felt that to “read Canadian matter and talk of Canadian concerns was then rather like carrying the Word to people who ate grubs” (*Pricks* 76). Metcalf later concludes that he might never “know how successful [the Storytellers] were,” and asserts that, from where he stands, “still nothing much has changed ... Canadian writing is still foreign to Canada” (*Pricks* 76-77).

when the PQL archives were purchased by McGill University—that “something happened here.”¹⁷

Inkster may have learned his trade in an environment that associated book arts development with the progress of national culture, but his own list of titles does not demonstrate an overt political agenda, nationalist or otherwise.¹⁸ Nor do the majority of his books (excepting a few art books and print collections) exhibit the formal unorthodoxies of early Coach House productions—PQL titles are more likely to come shaped like books than they are boxes or baseball pennants. What Inkster did retain from the Coach House Press, however, was an understanding of how intimately connected form and content are. Even in his early writings, and particularly in *The Coach House Press: An Alive Chapbook* (1974), he demonstrated a high degree of awareness regarding book design, its conventions, and its impact on textual interpretation.¹⁹

He distinguishes himself from the poets of Coach House, however, because Coach House went beyond historical reflexivity to become critical of the uses to which good printing has been put in Canada. As Robert Bringhurst observes in *Ocean Paper Stone* (1984), many experimental poets of the 60s (including the poets of Coach House and *Tish* magazine) had mixed feelings about the value of good book design. “If fine printing is respectable,” they thought, “it can only be used for certain classes of literary texts, and perhaps under some conditions one cannot risk using it for any literature at all” (Bringhurst *Ocean* 25). *Tish* poets in particular treated publication like “a thrust, an act of challenge if not of violence,” and they often wondered if it was wrong to uncritically “enshrine and honor the

¹⁷ The phrase “something happened here” is taken from a story collection by Norman Levine, who, as Metcalf goes on to point out, knew how closed the Canadian literary market can be. For a transcription of Metcalf’s address, see *Canadian Notes and Queries* 69 (2006).

¹⁸ The argument could be made that publishing only Canadian authors and regional artists is, by default, a overtly political act; however, it is also a practical necessity. The Canada Council only funds publications authored by Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada (“Eligibility” B.60.60-66). The point could be argued either way. Ultimately the distinction I would uphold is between a nationalist press, which would, like Anansi ca. 1968-69, release issues-focussed titles, and a national press, which has broad appeal but whose literature has no defined position on matters of national politics.

¹⁹ For example, when writing about the cover design of *Light Verse* (a CHP volume of Victor Coleman’s poems, ca. 1969), Inkster praises it as an exemplary “collaboration between poet and printer” (CHP 16) because it “implies the author’s poetry is moving,” (16), i.e., provides insight into the text.

text" (*Ocean* 25). Bringhurst goes on to point out that, at the time, authors and printers who felt otherwise were in the minority; he cites Takao Tanabe's Periwinkle Press as one of the few design-focused literary presses of the period.

Inkster did not share the sense that publication was a violent act; nor did he consequently make his reader aware that they were being challenged. He was less interested in subverting, experimenting with, or exposing design conventions than he was in mastering them. He did not hesitate, moreover, to point out when Coach House failed to do its homework. His primary critique of bp Nichol's *The Martyrology* (CHP 1972), for example, was that neither Nichol nor designer Jerry Ofo adequately understood the "look"—the page borders, type sizes, and paper stocks—"of religious books" from the early print period (*CHP* 7-8). In his own designs, Inkster always went out of his way to ensure type, page, and content reflected one another. He would choose "extreme, awkward set[s] of characters" to set a text that contained eccentric and awkward subject matter (*Honest* §20), or he would include marbled endpapers to pick up the "dated, eighteenth-century feel" he felt was present in a collection of poems (§9).²⁰ Coach House, of course, was often similarly subtle with their typographic gestures; the major difference between them was that Coach House was equally often radical, and in a way that Inkster admired but chose not to imitate.

Inkster may have felt there was no further need for experimentation because the CHP premise—that book design affects how we read, think about, and interpret text—was adequately proved. In his chapbook on the Coach House Press, Inkster begins by reflecting upon Brian Thackray's reading of *Topolobampo Poems*;²¹ and it is with some astonishment that Inkster notes Thackray "was missing a wealth of what is valuable in the small press world of literature," simply because he "ignores the whole cultural impact of print" (*CHP* 6). "Given the pre-eminent importance of the **word** in modern poetry," Inkster goes on to say, "the visual appearance of that word on the printed page takes on an added significance" (6).

²⁰ Martin Reyto's *The Cloned Mammoth* (PQL 1981) and Steve McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions* (PQL 1979), respectively.

²¹ The review was printed in *Alive* magazine, vol. 3.5 p.26. *Topolobampo Poems* was Inkster's first published collection of poetry.

For Inkster, the “pre-eminence” of the word, particularly in concrete poems, long poems, and other experimental forms that call attention to the page as a medium, was exactly what he says—a given. It was assumed. Inkster did not feel obliged to be subversive in his use of design conventions, or to challenge his reader with the form of his text (as many CHP and *Tish* productions did): doing so would just be further proof of what was already “documented in Marshall McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy*” (6). Inkster was therefore free to do as he liked, provided he never forgot about the printer’s power to impact the way a text is read.

Inkster did, however, feel a responsibility to set the text as sensitively as possible. Taking Coach House production as his model, Inkster argued that form and content are best synchronized when printers and poets collaborate—or, in his words, when books are born from the union “between poetfather and printmother” (CHP 13). Inkster goes on to explain that printing—“not a trade but a crafter called magick” (11)—is what bestows upon books and authors an “indefinitely [sic] prolonged life” (11). Printed books are living things; and what’s more, like children, their lives depend partly on the qualities they inherit from their parents. That being the case, it’s small wonder that Inkster wanted to raise the aesthetic and intellectual standards for literary printing. Ensuring good form meant ensuring the text lived the longest and best life possible (as well as contributing to the survival of both printer and author). As Inkster was to say, more sedately, and many years later: “The authors we publish are important, and we want to make sure their work lasts” (qtd. in Abley 1992).

Inkster, who was producing books for other publishers by the mid-seventies, knew from experience that not everyone felt the self-evidence of Marshall McLuhan’s claims, or the value of Coach House’s collaborative production strategy. Publishers with tight budgets needed to be convinced that form mattered enough to spend money on it. However, over time, at first using *Marzipan Lies* (1975) and later using his design-award winning titles, Inkster was able to persuade publishers to invest more money in printing. The production standards of many small-press publications dramatically improved as a result (MacSkimming 260). By the time Metcalf joined the PQL as editor, Inkster had had spent fifteen years

establishing his values as a printer and advocating those values to the publishers who sought him out. He had busied himself with the refinement of his craft and the developing of relations with artisanal printers in the region, including William Reuter of the Aliquando Press. He became involved with community arts initiatives, like the Eden Mills Writer's Festival, which was founded by Leon and Connie Rooke in 1989. He served as the treasurer of the Association of Canadian Publishers, consulted with the Ministry of Culture & Communications, and served on the Ontario Arts Council projects jury. He bought almost all of his provisions, supplies and materials from independent retailers located within 150 kilometers of Erin, and would occasionally donate his printing services in support of the arts in Ontario (including the printing of a catalogue for Mieke Bevelander's exhibition of Ontario authors, artists, and booksellers, which ran from April 4-23, 1989, at the Bau-Xi Gallery). In short, when Metcalf came on board in 1989, Inkster had already helped establish a closely-knit community of publishers who believed in the importance of good printing and worked intimately to promote one another's work.

Metcalf felt that if he could find a literary vision that would unite authors as powerfully as Inkster's aesthetic vision had united publishers, then a community of mythological proportions might spring up around the PQL. As it stood, however, PQL books weren't circulating as broadly as they might, and Metcalf felt the Inksters were not "really thinking in national terms" (*Underground* 237). What Metcalf wanted was "personality," "mythology," a press whose authors shared a "more than commercial association" (*Underground* 242). "I wanted our writers to draw strength from community," he writes.

I wanted each to embolden the next. I wanted writers who loved language and who would swagger and flaunt.... I wanted a press crackling with energy. I wanted to draw together into one place so many talented writers that we would achieve critical mass and explode upon Canadian society in a dazzling coruscation showering it with unquenchable brilliance. (237)

Metcalf's glittery agenda combined a thirst for outstanding literary quality with the willingness to find and nurture new talent. The scope of his ambition also added a

new vigour to the publishing side of things—it infused a climate, previously focused on surviving in financially hostile terrain, with newfound hope for the future of small-press trade publishing. Largely thanks to the success of Metcalf's new program, Inkster was able to drop much of his job printing and concentrate more heavily on the PQL's design and overall management (MacSkinning 261).

As an editor, Metcalf capitalized upon the frustration experienced by writers who found themselves “ghettoized” (*Underground* 268) in academic environments. Universities, Metcalf felt, were more inclined to argue for the social construction of literary taste than for the overall importance of literature. Disdaining classrooms, “battery-acid coffee,” and “dragooned student audiences” (268), Metcalf's new program was a call-to-arms to those who felt literary establishments, universities and publishers alike, were devaluing what formerly constituted literary skill. The effective manipulation of prosody, metrics, grammar, or rhetoric was no longer a prerequisite, Metcalf argued, for critical approbation: the only thing needed was demonstrable affiliation with some particular “ism” (“Aesthetic” 35). Metcalf wanted the PQL, by contrast, to represent technical proficiency; he wanted it to be aggressive in its challenge of sub-par standards.

In his memoir of the same name, Metcalf refers to the PQL as “An Aesthetic Underground.” He uses many words besides “underground” to describe what he and Inkster created—he calls it a “commingling” (242), a “shared venture,” a “network,” a “web” (247)—but the sense that repeats throughout is that of the title phrase. Both Inkster and Metcalf held up their mediums as aesthetically important, independently meaningful, and apolitical forms of expression, each bearing its own conventions and histories. Moreover, both argued that not enough people understood why those conventions need to be mastered before the form can be put to effective use.²² The PQL was to bring what few people there were together, and

²² It is worth observing that neither Metcalf nor Inkster spent much time dwelling on potential abuses of form. As any *Tish* poet could tell you, it is easy to attribute authority to works which are well-printed, and in Canada particularly, that authority has been put to ugly colonial uses (ranging from the forced conversion of Native peoples to Christianity to the spreading of ‘literature’ that urged the persecution of Japanese and Chinese residents; *Ocean* 17-21). Though Metcalf's railings against the politicization of literature do, at times, stink of conservative backlash, I think the PQL's aggressively apolitical stance can more accurately be seen as a refusal to, for lack of a better term, throw the baby

to be, quite literally, a community of aesthetes, united by their love of quality literature and quality printing. Later, in the second installment of his memoir, Metcalf asserts that the PQL accomplished exactly that: "The central achievement of the Press was to fight for and establish an aesthetic approach to literature" (*Shut Up* 141).

It is in the coming together of like-minded, stylistically precise, and observant people that Metcalf saw the potential for literary progress. There will always be those, Metcalf says, who "see more clearly than we do" (*Pricks* 61); however, by remaining sensitive to aesthetic standards, we enable ourselves "to share in their vision" (62). The production method of PQL was one such vision, and it had taken hold of the publishing community's imagination; Metcalf wished to transform this energy into a broader standard that might be shared across media and sustained by a diverse community of artists, poets and printers alike. Writers benefit, Metcalf argues, when "they are part of something larger than themselves" (qtd. in *MacSkimming* 263). And it was the sense that each book was the child of an artistic union—between the small-press community and the literary community, between writers "emboldening" one another, between generations of printers and their accumulated wisdoms—that made aesthetic quality, in turn, a necessity. Metcalf wanted these books to survive as a monument to the power of the movement (even if it remained unpopular and underground). Each Porcupine's Quill book was to become a testament to the strength of sharing influences, and to the power of aesthetic competency to inspire and unite on levels that precede the political.

PQL books were built to endure. And in some ways the philosophy of the Porcupine's Quill could be said to be about exactly that: asserting aesthetic quality in the face of faddish, disposable culture. The PQL was overtly catering to the ages in lieu of the present (which they felt, as Metcalf's dyspeptic remarks on contemporary Canadian literature suggest, left much to be desired). They believed that if they gathered enough talent around themselves, and spent enough time perfecting their use of their mediums, then perhaps, bit by bit, standards would

out with the bathwater. Forms, they would argue, whether literary or typographical, and whether or not they are sometimes abused, are not worthless as a result.

change; until then, they would produce books that can withstand the wait—books whose forms would convey the literary aims, life and spirit of the ‘aesthetic underground’ to future generations. “We cannot have a literature,” Metcalf declares, “unless the books are available to readers and being read; we cannot have a future unless we are securely anchored in a past. We are, St. Augustine reminded us, what we remember” (*Underground* 234-35).

A PQL CASE STUDY

GEORGE JOHNSTON’S *ENDEARED BY DARK: COLLECTED POEMS* (1990)²³

Endeared by Dark collects over 65 years of the poetry of George Johnston, draws from six volumes of his previously published verse, and includes some of his work as a translator of Old Norse.²⁴ Promotional materials and jacket blurbs from earlier volumes announce Johnston as a poet who handles the profound and the mundane with equal skill: *Home Free* describes him as “a remarkable serious light poet”; *Happy Enough* speaks of a poet both “urbane and at the same time colloquially conversational”; and *Ask Again* compliments poems filled with “subtle maturity and confidence, yet touched by humour and compassion.” Critical responses have agreed to a large degree, and comment on “the enduring coexistence in his poetry of the outlandish with a deceptive homeliness” (Keefer 137). Critics, however, also observe those aspects of his poetry that the PQL would choose to emphasize with their book design: Johnston’s “sturdy, wry, and generous vision” (Rooke 5), as well as his formal use of metre and rhyme. Frank Davey argues that Johnston “uniquely

²³ All correspondence between Johnston, Inkster and Metcalf referred to in this section can be found in Box 24 (“Johnston, George”) of the PQL Archive, McGill University. Correspondence is limited to the period between May of 1986 and March of 1996. The archive contains Johnston’s letters to the PQL, letters between Metcalf and Johnston, and letters between Metcalf and Inkster relating to *Endeared by Dark*; however, there are no letters from Inkster to Johnston. If they were kept, such letters would be located in the George Johnston fonds of the National Library, Ottawa. Individual letters from the McGill collection are referred to by month, date, and year (and, when necessary, by recipient). All other references to archived materials are arranged by name, box and file number (i.e., “Employment” B.46.1). This material appears in the bibliography as: Johnston, George, John Metcalf, and Tim Inkster. *Correspondence: Johnston, George*. Montreal.

²⁴ His poetry volumes are: *The Cruising Auk* (Oxford UP 1959), *Home Free* (Oxford UP 1966), *Happy Enough: Poems 1935-1972* (Oxford UP 1972), *Taking a Grip* (Golden Dog 1978), *Auk Redivivus: Selected Poems* (Golden Dog 1981), and *Ask Again* (Penumbra 1984). (The dates for *Happy Enough* are mistakenly listed as 1933-72 on the back cover of *Endeared by Dark*.) The translation, *The Lay of Thrym*, is a 9th-century Norse text taken from the *Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda*, ca. 1250-1300. At the time of its inclusion in *Endeared by Dark*, *The Lay of Thrym* was also being published separately, in a limited edition, by Fred Louder of Montreal (“09/12/89”).

combined technical conservatism with a warmth and unpretentiousness of manner” (*From There to Here* 142), and Metcalf was drawn to that aspect of Johnston’s work—so much so that he later suggested Davey’s quotation for the back cover (see correspondence dating to 12/14/89).

Though Metcalf has talked at length and in many places about his vision for the Porcupine’s Quill,³⁰ a more complete description of the PQL production agenda is contained in the books themselves. Tracing the development of a book’s content and tracking the growth of its material form also enables us to assess how Metcalf’s editorial judgments and Inkster’s production choices interact on a practical level. I have chosen to examine *Endeared by Dark* because it provides the first, and possibly the most powerful, articulation of the idealistic vision that was shared by Metcalf and Inkster at the commencement of Metcalf’s editorial tenure. *Endeared by Dark* was the first non-reprint title that Metcalf and Inkster brought out; it was also the first collected poetic works published by the PQL. It marked the beginning of an era of increased output and unprecedented literary acclaim for the press. Other texts at later points in PQL history will, inevitably, reflect differently on Metcalf and Inkster’s working relationship; other texts will suggest how this initial vision was altered in response to fluctuating market conditions and shifting industry perspectives. Still, I think *Endeared by Dark* is a good place to begin, as it is with the publication of this book that Metcalf and Inkster make one of their first attempts to shape the PQL mythology.

Inkster and Metcalf saw the *Collected Poems* as an opportunity to assert the new values and artistic direction of the press. By examining the correspondence between Inkster, Metcalf, and Johnston throughout the period surrounding the *Endeared by Dark*’s development, it becomes clear that both Inkster and Metcalf were able to identify and emphasize the aspects of Johnston’s aesthetic that they would like to see associated with the press itself. Inkster and Metcalf were, moreover, both aware of the significance of producing a collected works. A collection, as a summary of Johnston’s lifetime achievement, is also an investment

³⁰ His most emphatic remarks, collected from essays dating back to the first years of his involvement with the PQL, appear in *An Aesthetic Underground* 233-84, and *Shut Up He Explained* 39-52, 127-64, and *passim*.

in his poetic future; the book's design suggests the PQL took that investment very seriously. What emerges from *Endeared by Dark*, therefore, is an argument about literary value, and about how cultural capital is transferred from one generation to the next; the design of the book suggests there should be a direct relationship between literary quality and the length of a writer's artistic and formal legacy.

The idea for *Endeared by Dark* came out of a conversation between Metcalf and Johnston in 1989. Johnston, having no idea Metcalf was now associated with the PQL, mentioned how he would like to do a collected works; Metcalf suggested Inkster as a publisher, and Johnston, himself a connoisseur of fine papers and an admirer of the press, was delighted by the idea ("08/20/90"). Johnston and Inkster had corresponded long before the idea of a collected works came into being, as Johnston was a noted calligrapher, and Inkster had been sending him blank notebooks since at least 1986 ("05/13/86"). However, most of the contact between Johnston and the PQL, excepting a few letters of thanks directed to Inkster in June and July of 1989, went through Metcalf; and Metcalf, who was living in Ottawa at the time, in turn communicated with Inkster largely by letter and fax. The bulk of the editorial work took place between September of 1989, when Johnston first mailed the manuscript and introduction to Metcalf, and January 12, 1990, when Johnston submitted his final set of revisions. The cover design, back cover matter, dedication, and calligraphy samples were selected during this period as well. From February 16 to May 29 of 1990, the book was in the print stages (though the majority of the labour occurred in May). The entire 328-page manuscript was therefore put together in just under nine months.

The editorial relationship between Metcalf and Johnston was characterized by a deep respect, on Metcalf's part, for Johnston's authority and integrity as a poet. Metcalf revised very little, as Johnston himself compiled the manuscript, decided what was to be excluded, and did the proofreading himself. For the reader, the only sign of Metcalf's involvement is a small note in the front matter, which declares the book was "Readied for the press by John Metcalf" (Johnston 3 *ED*). The back cover also goes out of its way to emphasize Johnston's control over the text: "This *Collected Poems*," it reads, "draws together all the poems *George Johnston wishes*

to preserve from earlier volumes" (emph. added). Metcalf's interest as an editor was not to shape the body of Johnston's work, or, as he later did with less-established authors, to help distill voice or clarify diction. What Metcalf wanted was to help readers notice and appreciate the qualities in Johnston's work that Metcalf found most admirable, and consequently wished to be associated with the PQL: technical proficiency and personality.

The following anecdote illuminates the subtle ways in which Metcalf operated. At first Inkster and Metcalf were considering "a purely typographic/calligraphic cover" for *Endeared by Dark*, and Metcalf requisitioned some poems from Johnston in order to see what his "handwriting—blown up—would look like" ("11/17/89"). Johnston submitted four poems in two different styles: two were in italics with varying nib sizes (Figs. 1 and 2), and one was in "Edward Johnston's" basic letters" (Fig. 3). The calligraphic cover idea was eventually discarded in favour of an illustrated cover, but Inkster and Metcalf still wanted to showcase the calligraphy itself. They therefore decided to print seven pages of poems in Johnston's hand throughout the *Collected*, opposite to typed transcriptions. The trouble, Metcalf thought, was that Johnston's formal hands were *too* formal: "I have a feeling of your writing being on its best behaviour," he commented. "There seems to me to be a slight stiffness to it" ("12/14/89 Johnston"). So instead of using Johnston's italics, Metcalf requested that Johnston copy the poems out into his letter-writing hand (Fig. 4), which Metcalf felt was still beautiful, but also "easier, looser, very personal in its feel" ("12/14/89 Johnston"). The same day, Metcalf also wrote to Inkster to recommend Davey's quotation for the back cover blurb, and from that point on the book's aesthetic direction was set. It was to demonstrate Johnston's formal style, which was "clean," "classic," and "spare" ("12/14/89 Inkster"), but *Endeared by Dark* was also to reflect Johnston's "warmth and unpretentiousness of manner." In Johnston's poetry Metcalf saw the same blend of technical accomplishment, aesthetic integrity, and human interest that he would like PQL productions to present to the world, inside and out.

²⁶ Edward Johnston (1872-1944) is largely credited with the twentieth-century revival of broad-nib calligraphy. See Johnston, Edward, *Writing & Illuminating & Lettering* (New York: Dover, 1995).

Figure 1: George Johnston's Large Italic ("12/05/89")

SHADOWY

Endearing nakedness
that takes
at unawares
~how otherwise?~

bright
mortal
touched with darkness,
endeared by dark.

Figure 2: George Johnston's Small Italic ("12/05/89")

SHADOWY

Endearing nakedness
that takes
at unawares
~how otherwise?~

bright
mortal
touched with darkness,
endeared by dark.

Figure 3: George Johnston's Edward Johnston Style ("12/05/89")

PITY

Get off the road, snake;
laze not in the sun
sunning your snake ache!
Move on, little one!

Nudging with my boot.
Snake flickers and strikes;
thinks better of it;
so much for me; takes

snake anger and all
off to privy.
No rest for the small.
Damn human pity!

Figure 4: George Johnston's Informal Hand (*Endeared by Dark* 103)

US TOGETHER

I do not like anything the way I
like you in your underwear I like you
and in your party clothes o my in your
party clothes and with nothing on at all
you do not need to wear a thing at all
for me to like you and you may talk or
not talk I like you either way nothing
makes me feel so nearly at home on Earth
as just to be with you and say nothing.

It is perhaps not surprising that Metcalf, a self-declared bibliophile (*Underground* 1-2), came to understand what he liked about the poetry by meditating on its calligraphic presentation. However, I also think that Johnston's calligraphy gave Metcalf a physical example of the values he did (or did not) want associated with the press. Good technique alone is not enough, said the calligraphy to Metcalf, when cultivating a personality—and a personality for the PQL is what Metcalf was after. Metcalf did not want Johnston's formidable technical skill, either as a calligrapher or as a poet, to deter those readers who might associate formalism with what was cold, academic, or outdated.

As a formal poet, Johnston departed from popular tastes. Both Metcalf and Inkster knew that, even by Canadian literary standards, this was going to be a hard book to sell. (Metcalf later remarked that of a print run of over 500, only 45 copies were sold in advance; *Underground* 239.) Some editors would have tried to make *Endeared by Dark* more accessible by downplaying certain things—by putting Johnston's informal poems in prominent positions, for example, or by expunging subjects that might be denounced as out-of-date. Metcalf, however, though he knew the book would be unpopular, refused to alter the ordering of the text, accepted all of Johnston's revisions, and more or less published the manuscript as he received it. The only mention he made of improving the book's saleability was minor, and in reference to the author photo that Inkster wanted to place in the PQL catalogue: Metcalf wrote that "Inkster says that he must sell your book and feels a photo ... will help" ("12/14/89 Johnston"). That the reminder of the book's commercial function was attached to such an insignificant request suggests how little Metcalf cared for broadening sales.

Metcalf's enthusiasm for good technique blended with strong personality complemented the brand identity Inkster had already been cultivating in his designs. PQL trade books are easily recognizable by their signature paper, their size,²⁷ and their collection of preferred typefaces (including Ehrhardt, which is the

²⁷ The size of the average trade paperback book at the PQL is partly determined by the printing press and partly by quirky preference. An Heidelberg KORD 64, the offset press upon which the majority of printing is done, can only take sheets up to 18 by 25 inches; this, when folded four times, produces 8 leaves, or 16 pages. After the book is sewn, the folded edges can be trimmed to any size

face of *Endeared by Dark*). However, Inkster also went to great lengths to make each production reflect the author's interests. In 1991, Inkster wrote a brief note on *Endeared by Dark* for an issue of *Amphora*, and in it, he recalls a conversation with Canada Council juror Sean Virgo:

Sean asked what we had published recently. I mentioned the Johnston book as one I was particularly pleased with at the time, and Sean said: 'Oh yes, George Johnston ... the academic.' But did Sean realize that George was a reconnaissance pilot for the RCAF in North Africa in WWII? No, Sean did not. His eyes grew distant: 'It's like that,' he said, 'with the real ones. They don't say much about themselves.' (Qtd. in Dobroslavic 11)

Inkster, like Metcalf, knew Johnston as a particularly well-rounded poet, and he wanted to emphasize the breadth of Johnston's life experience to readers. Inkster therefore included a brief biography on the back cover, where he mentions Johnston's military experience in conjunction with his years as a professor of English. (*Endeared by Dark* was the first of Johnston's publications to provide more than two lines of biographical information.) Gestures like this, and like the inclusion of Johnston's letter-writing hand, demonstrate how both Inkster and Metcalf felt that the book should reflect the variety of Johnston's accomplishments. This was the case firstly because Inkster and Metcalf understood how significant releasing a collected works is, both for the poet and for the press. Secondly, I think that they found it helpful to engage with Johnston's personal history because it enabled them to clarify some of their ideas about what it means to be creating a cultural legacy. Moreover, and in a practical sense, it enabled them to meditate upon the kind of returns they could one day expect to inherit.

smaller than 9 by 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The fact that most PQL books are exactly 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 5 $\frac{9}{16}$ is explained by Inkster in *An Honest Trade*: "a comfortably minimal trim off head and tail leaves 8 $\frac{3}{4}$. The other measurement is mystical, and was discovered by my brother Mark while reading mathematics at the University of Guelph.... The answer, 5 $\frac{9}{16}$, provides for a book which is slim enough to be held in my one hand, hence it is comfortable, it suits me, but more importantly—a book trimmed to 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 5 $\frac{9}{16}$ will provide an artificial diagonal drawn from the head at the spine to the tail on the outside trimmed edge which will cast up two numbers as angles which, when permuted and combined into their various possibilities of longitude and latitude will describe the geographic location of the Bermuda Triangle" (*Honest* §7).

While Metcalf was concerned to represent Johnston's personality and interests through the inclusion of calligraphy, Inkster represented them largely through images. First, an osprey appears on the back cover, half-title, title and dedication pages. The osprey, Inkster says, "is intended to represent something of Johnston's career as an aviator." He also suggests that, "given the bird's Nordic and nautical connotations," the image connotes "something of [Johnston's] later career as a translator of poetry from the Old Norse" (qtd. in Dobroslavic 11). The bird, like the boat prow that appears on the cover, is an appropriate symbol with which to begin a journey through Johnston's poetic history—more so because, like the boat, part of the bird extends off the page. Every time it appears, the bird's left wing-tip is cut off by the top right corner. What results is a tidy assertion about the impossibility, even in a collected works, of representing the entirety of a person's literary development.²⁸

Both editor and printer felt they should present Johnston, then 77 years old, with a book that would be both durable and beautiful. "[W]e all know it's a good read," Metcalf wrote to Johnston, but "Inkster is determined to make this a beautiful looking book" ("12/14/89 Johnston"). For a poet whose works are rarely anthologized and not often taught, publishing a collected works is a major accomplishment. One reason Inkster may have devoted so much time and money to this project is because he knew that *Endeared by Dark* would be the most serious poetic publication Johnston saw in his lifetime, and that it, as a collection, would come to define his poetic achievement. And, from a practical point of view, Inkster and Metcalf both knew that the contemporary poetic climate was not likely to be receptive to Johnston's work. As the cover blurb notes, Johnston had a "loyal audience," but it was also a small one. Inkster therefore wanted to make a large work, something permanent and monumental, that might endure until the moment when public taste became more accommodating. It was a very conscious investment

²⁸ As for the boat, the cover features a line drawing, done by Virgil Burnett, of a Viking ship (based on a photo of the Oseberg ship, ca. 800 A.D., found near Oslo in 1903). "Visually, it's something of a ghost ship," Inkster commented in 1992. "The way you perceive the image changes according to your point of view. It's designed to sail through your imagination" (qtd. in Abley 1992).

in Johnston's poetic future, and one that, as we shall see, came at significant financial cost.

Endeared by Dark was one of the most expensive books the PQL ever produced, and it was the most expensive book on the 1990 list. For comparison's sake, here are the PQL titles from 1990 and their respective costs, including labour (titles arranged in chronological order):

<i>The Sign of the Scales</i> (Marianne Brandis, 160pp.):	\$ 7,818.24
<i>Endeared by Dark</i> (George Johnston, 328pp.):	\$11,075.84
<i>The Secret Voice</i> (Gaetan Brulotte, 96pp.):	\$ 3,257.60
<i>Lunar Attractions</i> (Clarke Blaise, 300pp.):	\$10,424.32
<i>Quickening</i> (Terry Griggs, 144pp.):	\$ 3,909.12
<i>Victims of Gravity</i> (Dayv James-French, 160pp.):	\$ 5,212.16
<i>Volleys</i> (Struthers, J.R., 96pp.)	\$ 3,257.60

The only costs that came anywhere near *Endeared by Dark* are those for Marianne Brandis's *The Sign of the Scales*, which was the third volume in a popular series for young adult readers, and was also illustrated with wood engravings; the other was a reissuing of Clark Blaise's *Lunar Attractions*, a novel with a comparable number of pages. But poetry volumes cannot command the same readership as novels, and there was no way Johnston's popularity could match Brandis's (her series was selling well and had already won two major prizes). These facts only emphasize how exceptional it was for Inkster to lavish so much money on a volume of verse.

Most publishers estimate the cost of a book to produce and compare that to projected sales at a reasonable price; if costs exceed sales (or income from grants), the book is not made.²⁰ Inkster, however, rarely makes those initial estimates. "There would be no point," he told H.J. Kirchoff of the *Globe and Mail* in 1990. "If I did a proper costing, it would give me a ridiculous set of numbers. I'd have to charge \$25 for a paperback edition of George Johnston's poems." Instead, Inkster set the retail price of *Endeared by Dark* at \$12.95, which, at the time, was about the

²⁰ For a more detailed explanation of this phenomenon, and for an analysis of its consequences to publishing works of Canadian literary criticism, see Robert Lecker's "Would You Publish This Book? Material Production, Canadian Criticism, and the *Theatre of Form*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 25.1 (2000): 15-36.

most a consumer would be prepared to pay for contemporary poetry. The PQL retains 55-60% of that price on all bookstore sales, and therefore earns about \$7.77 for every copy sold. In order to break even, Inkster would have to sell almost 1,500 copies—except that his cost figure, \$11,075.84, only represents a print run of 570. Even if all the copies sold and the book went into a second printing (which it did), it would be impossible for that book to recoup its expenses, much less make a profit. Inkster could have had no rational expectation for a financial return on this book in his lifetime.

If it were another publisher, one could suggest that perhaps he knew no better. As Michael Hayward observes in “Talonbooks: Publishing from the Margins,” many of the communally-run houses founded in the sixties and seventies did not keep good records—to the point where it was occasionally difficult to tell if the house was running a profit or a loss (Hayward 24). Inkster’s records, however, were immaculate. Every month he totaled all the assets he had tied up in unsold titles as well as inventory supply: everything from Hi Gloss Process Yellow Ink to tubes of Neutrogena hand cream was measured down to the milliliter, given as a percentage of the total volume, multiplied by the unit price (also updated every month), and included in their total assets at year-end (Inkster *Financial Records* B.46). He also was stringent about tracking books that were shipped to stores either independently or through one of their distributors. He would enter the store name, address, contact information, number and name of books ordered, shelf prices less retailer’s discount, and the total amount owed into a computer database; at the end of every month the computer tallied their accounts receivable. He knew exactly how much each of his materials cost to use and whether their use translated into better or poorer sales. The bottom line is that, whatever glib assertions Inkster might make about refusing to do cost sheets, he would have known he was about to take a significant loss on *Endeared by Dark*. He made the book anyway.

Here are some of the places where a more profit-minded publisher could have cut costs. First, because collected works are lengthy publications, one of the most effective ways to save money is by using cheaper paper. Inkster, however, chose to print the book, as he does all his books, on Zephyr Antique Laid (which,

at 0.06¢/sheet in 1990, is not cheap). Totalling 328 pages, one copy of *Endeared by Dark* requires 20.5 sheets of Zephyr Antique: this works out to \$1.23 per copy in paper costs. If you add to that the cost of the card stock used in the cover,³⁰ then the total cost of paper in each book was \$1.25—which is nearly 10% of the book's retail price. Minor cost-savings could be had by using white thread as opposed to cream thread, which costs \$2.17 more per roll. But since Zephyr Antique is a cream paper, and white thread would have been faintly visible, white thread was discarded. Inkster also could have taken Burnett's drawing of the ship and printed it directly onto card stock. Inkster, however, decided to have a magnesium die cut, and he foil-stamped the image on to each cover in gold. The drawing itself cost \$100, and the foil cost \$48.00 (gold is two or three times more expensive per unit than other foil colours, excepting perhaps copper—which is what they ordered initially, but then decided not to use). Finally, the foil-stamping also made the cover more labour-intensive, when labour costs were already high: *Endeared by Dark* took over 300 hours to produce (B.46.32-36).³¹ At Inkster's estimate of \$25/hour, that time translates into \$7,500.00. If you add that to the cost of paper, foil, and drawing, the book's printing costs are now at \$14.61/copy for the initial print run. This is nearly 13% more than the sticker price, and fails to include typesetting costs (\$1760.00), overhead (30% of the retail price), or author royalties (10% of the retail price). Producing a book whose cost per unit exceeds its sticker price by such a gross amount—over 50%, all told—was unusual, even for the PQL. By industry standards, however, it was unheard of, as printing costs (including labour) are generally 30-40% of the sticker price for a run of that size.

The only rational justification for the expense is that Inkster was investing in Johnston's future, and in the future of the PQL. "That book cost me \$12,000 to

³⁰ Cornwall Coated Card stock, which comes in sheets of 20"x26". Each sheet generates 8 covers. At 0.17¢/sheet, this works out to just under 0.02¢ per copy.

³¹ 300 hours may be a conservative estimate. In his inventory, Inkster notes how many hours per month were spent on each individual book, and the numbers for *Endeared by Dark* range from 5.5 hours in January of 1990 to 96.5 hours in April. No number is given for May, the month when labour on the book reached its peak; I have therefore estimated, based on the wage log and weekly schedule, a number slightly higher than the figure given for April. (That 300 hours also excludes any hours spent on design in 1989, as there are no records pertaining to *Endeared by Dark* from that year.)

produce, and it's beautiful," Inkster commented afterwards. "But it's pretty clear we're not going to stay in business if we depend on publishing books like that" (qtd. in Kirchhoff 1990). What the PQL bought with that money was proof of their commitment to quality production. It was certainly a means of honouring Johnston—Johnston later told Mark Abley of the *Gazette* that "it's the nicest production" he has "ever had" (qtd. in Abley 1992). But the extravagance of *Endeared by Dark* also suggests a certain fatalism on Inkster's part. If you're going to lose money, *Endeared by Dark* implies, you may as well lose it spectacularly. Both Inkster and Metcalf were consistently frustrated by the fact that, outside of a very limited literary community, Canadian prices and tastes were not reflecting the quality and importance of Canadian cultural output. In such an environment, the return on a cultural investment will only come (if it comes at all) far in the future, after tastes have shifted and values changed. The technical perfectionism of the PQL, the aestheticism which on the surface declares something akin to "art for art's sake," is therefore also a gesture towards preserving the underground, and is underwritten by the notion that quality alone survives.

What the PQL wanted to preserve was an argument about the function, purpose, and importance of literary quality—an argument underwritten at all points by Inkster's initiative, Metcalf's vision, and their shared community-building. The Porcupine's Quill took hope from the idea that their books, as objects, might convey something of the PQL's idealism, thoughtfulness, and intensity to future readers—that someone one day might pick one up and wonder who the author was, and why someone lavished so much care on publishing their work. That their goal was so distant indicates that they had perhaps admitted defeat to the frustrating conditions of the industry; however, it also demonstrates a deep faith in the power of books, physically and literarily, to draw people together in a cause that spans generations. In the underground of the PQL, Inkster and Metcalf planted books like seeds: seeds that they intended, in Milton's words, to be "as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth; and being sewn up and down, may chance to spring up armed men" (1999).

CHAPTER 3: "As a Seed Capsule"

The Living Book at the Gaspereau Press

"A Gaspereau is a fish: the river herring or alewife, small and full of bones but good to eat. It was vital to the diet of early peoples living in the Maritimes but is now caught primarily for lobster bait and cat food. Gaspereau is also the name of a valley in Nova Scotia where the evidence of herring-eating humans goes back at least 11,000 years. The press that goes by the same name sustains a substantial amount of the past and may also embody the future of publishing."

Robert Bringhurst, "Celebrating Gaspereau Press," 39.

INTRODUCTION

The Gaspereau Press, founded in 1997 by Gary Dunfield and Andrew Steeves, describes itself as "a literary publisher and printer based in Kentville, Nova Scotia" ("Press Releases" 2007). Steeves and Dunfield began solely as publishers, but quickly were drawn into the printing community. Drawing inspiration from trade publishers (like Coach House and the Porcupine's Quill), as well as letterpress printers (like Thaddeus Holownia of the Anchorage Press), typographers (like Robert Bringhurst), and engravers (like Wesley Bates), the Gaspereau Press has established itself as part of the third generation of Canadian printer-publishers. In some ways, they differ very little from their predecessors: they, like Coach House and the PQL, assert that their texts and authors are best served by an integrated printing and publishing process. In other ways, however, Gaspereau is radically different. They have transformed this concept of "integration" into a working ethical philosophy, which governs both their business and design practices, and which distinguishes them from other "cottage-style" printers (as well as from large-scale, international publishing houses). What the Gaspereau Press does is make explicit the degree to which printer-publishers see the business—both its literary and bibliographical components—as a means of addressing broader concerns for the state of Canadian society and the Canadian arts. While the Coach House and the PQL each behaved similarly in their own times, the Gaspereau Press is more explicit than either about what it means to engage, as a literary publisher, with a local environment, and with the country as a whole.

It therefore seems appropriate that Gaspereau favours authors who meditate upon the relations between literature, place, community, and history.

These meditations are also carried on by the press staff (on the level of design and production) as well as by the authors (on the level of literary forms and themes). In this chapter, I will outline the history of the Gaspereau Press, as well as the role it plays in the contemporary publishing scene. I will examine its philosophy of printing and publishing, both as expressed by Andrew Steeves, and as it relates to the writing of two Gaspereau authors (Robert Bringhurst and Peter Sanger). Finally, using George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* (2000/2001) as a case study, I will demonstrate the way in which Gaspereau Press texts are made to articulate literary, bibliographical, and sociological arguments about the role of the book in contemporary Canadian society. The subtlety and effectiveness of the design of *Execution Poems*, and the manner in which the book situates Clarke's poetry, suggests how the last forty years have seen the expressive function of the book transformed: from a subversive tool in the early days of Coach House, to an historically aware and nuanced art form in the present day.

CONTEXT: CANADIAN PUBLISHING, 1995-2000

In the mid-nineties, Canadian publishers faced some of their most difficult years to date. Between the federal government's reneging on funding promises in 1995 and the "Chapters blitzkrieg" (MacSkimming 361) of 1997 to 2000, capital was chronically short. Chapters, which by 2000 accounted for 65% of all English-Canada's retail book trade, had begun demanding wholesaler's discounts of 50% or more on titles instead of the standard retailer's discount of 45-48%. The profit margins of small houses, already razor-thin, could barely weather the increase; and when Chapters began returning books in unprecedented amounts—reaching a total of 50 to 60% of all sales in 2000, marking a doubling of the previous industry average—many houses, including the Porcupine's Quill, thought they were done for (MacSkimming 362). Moreover, NAFTA and the strengthening Canadian dollar meant that U.S. imports were easier and cheaper to come by. The federal government, which was ostensibly enforcing limits on foreign investments in Canadian publishing firms in the 1980s and early 1990s, and which had mandated that a minimum of 51% interest in each corporation be Canadian-owned, was also engaged in secret backroom deals with international conglomerates, and had

promised to sell those publishing interests back to the internationals once ownership regulations relaxed (MacSkimming 329-30, 39). Arguments about the importance of national cultural output fell on ears that were stoppered to everything but internationally-focussed, pro-American sales strategies. Companies that began producing material targeted at American or international interests, like ECW Press and Key Porter, did relatively well. Companies that did neither, like Coach House, went under.

Those in small-press book manufacturing experienced previously unknown levels of competition. The blockbuster success of a handful of Canadian first novels, including Ann Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (M&S 1996), Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on your Knees*, and Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (both from Knopf Canada in 1996) suggested to foreign corporations that providing large advances to young Canadians could be a profitable investment—if just one of ten or twelve authors was as successful as MacDonald, the investment in all twelve would be returned many times over (MacSkimming 370). Small houses, therefore, were competing not only for sales but for authors and manuscripts. Donna Scott, former Chairman of the Canada Council, called it a period “of massive changes in cultural production,” which endangered “the indigenous and authentic expressions of all nations” (Scott 2007).

It is therefore with considerable wryness that Andrew Steeves reflects on the entry of himself and his partner into the arena in 1997. “Together,” Steeves commented five years later, “we possessed just little enough knowledge of literary publishing to think it might make a good business venture” (“Crazy” 2).³⁹ Steeves was a freelance journalist who studied literature and criminology in university; Gary Dunfield was a software developer whose interests included theology and forestry. Though criminology, theology, and forestry might at first seem like dubious assets to bring to the intensely competitive publishing industry, they eventually provided the pair with a good marketing advantage, and a fresh perspective from which to approach the problems of the industry.

³⁹ Steeves has issued two very similar sets of remarks on the subject. The first was published as “A Note of Encouragement: Gaspereau Press at 5” [DA 51 (2002)]; the second was a revised version of the first, published under “The Right Kind of Crazy” in *Books in Canada* Feb. 2004, p. 40.

At the time it was clear that a literary publisher, wishing to remain afloat, needed new tactics to secure authors, funding, and readers. In the context of a fast-paced global economy, the old nationalist arguments had started to appear dated, fatalistic, and tired. The kind of alternative brand identities offered by houses like CHP and the PQL were losing their countercultural reputations as it became evident that these houses, despite their convention-and-market-defying aesthetic standards, still remained subject to the limits of the publishing industry. The promise of an abstract form of cultural capital was, in any case, hardly a sufficient inducement to lure young writers away from twenty, thirty, or sixty thousand dollar advances; nor could it compensate for the relative impotence of small Canadian presses in the global market.

Rather than buck the system, which was doing its best to undermine the aesthetic and literary advantages of small-press publication, the Gaspereau Press chose to offer it a moral corrective. The GP promoted itself as a house that believed, not only that printing and publishing should be integrated, but that the act of publishing itself was grounded in larger philosophical questions about what it means to be an active member of a community (be it global or local, business or artistic). Like the PQL, the Gaspereau Press was asking what a Canadian literary publisher ought to be, but unlike the PQL, Gaspereau did not limit the question to aesthetics. Steeves and Dunfield were also asking what they could do to make Canadian bookmaking more ecologically responsible, more socially engaged, and more financially viable. Their backgrounds in criminology, theology, and forestry bespoke a shared interest in justice, morality, and the natural world—issues that would, over time, come to define Gaspereau's image. What GP offers to their authors is therefore distinct from a political alternative to American capitalism, or an aesthetic alternative to low-end, disposable literary culture. By associating their printing and publishing methods with an ethical program as well as an aesthetic one, Gaspereau is trying to assert, in a renewed and modernized way, the place of the small press in the Canadian publishing industry. They are choosing to emphasize the social consequences of their personal and intimate production processes in an

era when corporate manufacturing is widely associated with impersonal service as well as ecological and humanitarian atrocities.

THE GASPEREAU PRESS: HISTORY

In February of 1997, The Gaspereau Press was established as a registered partnership between Andrew Steeves and Gary Dunfield. "Like so many people in the business," observes Steeves in 2004, "I stumbled into publishing by accident. I was as ignorant of typography, printing and books as I was empty of intention" ("Anchorage" 2004). By 1999, however, they were releasing eight trade books annually, as well as four issues of their literary periodical, the *Gaspereau Review*. They had an employee, monthly job contracts, and typesetting work from other publishers. Eventually the volume of work grew beyond what their local printer could handle, and when the printer refused to expand his operations, Steeves and Dunfield had no choice but to acquire a 20-year-old Omni-Adast 724p press. Dunfield was designated the press operator, and Steeves decided that he had "better learn something" about book design ("Anchorage" 2004); he therefore embarked on a self-directed study of typography, printing, publishing, and the historical methods of book production. He studied the writings of typographers like Stanley Morison and Jan Tschichold, and he bought a Vandercook 219 letterpress so that he might experiment with handsetting, scoring, embossing and die-cutting. He looked around for mentors and established relationships with Stan Bevington, Tim Inkster, Robert Bringham, and Thaddeus Holownia of the Anchorage Press. He also turned to the works put out by Coach House, the PQL, Netherlandic, and Oberon for design ideas. He particularly liked the uncoated, non-glossy papers that Coach House Books was using at the time: "the sensual quality of these papers," says Steeves, inspired him to think "about books as physical objects.... We moved to using a natural-coloured laid text paper in most of our books and started designing covers that emphasized the physical characteristics of uncoated papers" (Steeves "Crazy").

In 2000, Steeves and Dunfield moved the press headquarters from Wolfville, N.S., to Kentville. They had applied for Canada Council funding in 1999 and were continuing their program of eight titles per year. 2000 also saw the first

book they printed in-house (Harry Thurston's *If Men Lived on Earth*); it featured an untrimmed gripper edge, cover flaps, and laid text paper. In 2000 the Gaspereau Press also went from four to six full-time employees, and held their first annual Wayzgoose (a festival in celebration of the printing arts).

The watershed year for Gaspereau was 2001. First, they stopped production on the *Gaspereau Review*. The *Review*, Steeves contended in 2001, was intended to increase the press's profile (Gaspereau Press "Press Releases" 2001); however, they decided the press needed "to refocus how it will invest in [the writing] community." As their production standards improved and their circulation and sales increased, it became apparent that book publishing was more effective than the *Review* as a means of promoting their writers. Later that year, they were proved right, as George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* won the Governor General's Award for poetry, boosted their sales, and catapulted the Gaspereau Press into the critical spotlight.

The next two years saw Gaspereau decorated repeatedly with literary and design awards, including seven awards and nominations from The Alcuin Society's annual book design competitions.³⁸ By 2004, the Gaspereau Press was printing ten titles per year and employing a full-time staff of nine; they had opened a new print shop on Church Street in Kentville, and they continued to do well at the Alcuin Awards. Furthermore, in honour of their "consistent high quality in author relations, editorial production and marketing skills; retail support, and commercial success" (Association 2007), the Gaspereau Press was twice selected by the

³⁸ In 2001, J.J. Steinfeld's *Anton Chekov Was Never in Charlottetown* won an Honourable Mention for design in the Alcuin Society's prose-fiction category, and the next year *Execution Poems* was entered and won first place for poetry design. In 2002, Don McKay's *Vis à Vis: Essays on Poetry and the Wilderness* was nominated for the Governor General's Award (non-fiction) and won second place in its category at the Alcuin Awards. Kent Thompson won the 2002 Evelyn Richardson Prize for his travelogue, *Getting Out of Town by Book and Bike*. In 2003, John Terpstra won the Hamilton & Region Literary Award for *Falling Into Place*, and the Gaspereau Press received four more Alcuin Awards: for Peter Sanger's *Spar: Words in Place* (first place, prose non-fiction), Michael DeBeyer's *Rural Night Catalogue* (first place, poetry), Terpstra's *Falling Into Place* (second place, prose non-fiction), and Susan Haley's *Maggie's Family* (third place, prose fiction).

Canadian Booksellers Association as the CBA Small Press Publisher of the Year (for 2005 and 2006).³⁴

The commercial and literary success experienced by Gaspereau over the past three years is partially a reflection of the attitude they take towards marketing, sales, and publicity. Gaspereau authors do reading tours, make guest appearances at book festivals, and lead workshops at the annual wayzgoose. And Gaspereau also goes out of their way to make sure their promotional materials are as attractive as the books they publish. In the Introduction to their Spring 2006 catalogue, Steeves observes that, even though "a publisher's catalogue is by nature an ephemeral and intended to flog books," at Gaspereau they prefer "to produce catalogues that also reflect the quality and tone of our titles and the greater interests and objectives of our publishing program" ("Spring 2006"). They use their catalogues to test new typefaces and to experiment with different formats, papers, printing techniques, and page layouts. (It is not unusual, for example, to see woodcuts decorating their catalogues, or paragraphs explaining the history of the typefaces employed therein.)

Their prognosis for the future is positive. "There are many who fear, with good reason," Steeves writes in the Fall 2007 catalogue, "that Canadian literary writing and publishing are endangered. Official efforts to foster and protect them too often produce writing and thinking which bear closer resemblance to market-bound cattle than to any creature I've met in the wild. But," he continues, "wild literature holds on despite the odds. At Gaspereau Press, we ... contribute what we can toward its celebration" (Steeves "Intro 2007").

THE GASPEREAU PRESS: PHILOSOPHY

Publishers in Canada have, since at least the sixties, acknowledged how profoundly social or political the act of book-making can be. Coach House saw books as

³⁴ During these years Gaspereau Press titles received another ten awards and nominations. In 2005, Thomas Wharton's *The Logogryph* won the Howard O'Hagan Award for short fiction and was nominated for the Sunburst Award; Jonathan Campbell's *Tarcadia* won the Dartmouth Book Award and the Margaret & John Savage First Book award; David Helwig won the Atlantic Poetry Prize for his collection *The Year One*, and K.I. Press's *Spine* was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award. In 2006, the Pat Lowther shortlist contained Jan Zwicky's *Thirty-Seven Small Songs & Thirteen Silences, With English Subtitles* would go on to win the F.G. Bressani Literary Prize; *The Logogryph* would be shortlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award; and John Terpstra's *The Boys* would be shortlisted for the Charles Taylor Prize and the B.C. Award for Canadian Non-Fiction.

saturated by the codes of capitalist corporate production, and was certain that typographic experimentation could expose them as such. Anansi saw political codes as inextricable from literary ones, and they felt that taking control of the latter might increase the amount of political control and national sovereignty Canada could claim. And the PQL, as Metcalf's remarks make clear, granted as much status to the myth- and legacy-building power of texts as it did to their literary and bibliographic functions. Whether or not this insistence on other, more sociological kinds of "coding" demonstrates the influence of the post-McLuhan world into which these presses were hurled, or whether it merely reflects the self-consciousness born of publishing in such a financially infertile environment, contemporary Canadian printers and publishers have always treated the production of texts as an act interpenetrated by social and political concerns; and they have treated the book, moreover, as the vehicle wherein these concerns might come to life.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than at the Gaspereau Press. Gaspereau sees the printed text much as book historian Adrian Johns describes it: "a nexus conjoining a wide range of worlds of work" (Johns 3). For Steeves and Dunfield, these worlds include the literary, the mechanical, the natural, the financial, the cultural, and the social. At Gaspereau, books and their meanings are inseparable from the social and natural ecologies in which they participate: consequently, understanding books, as well as designing and producing them sensitively, are actions that require the maker to engage with more than literary history or the conventions of typographic design. Here, the integration of printing and publishing—which at Coach House was an anti-capitalist gesture, and at the PQL was a statement of aesthetic value—becomes a means of combating the narrowness of vision that results from the division of labour into specialties. "This reductive approach to production is not a new phenomenon, nor is it limited to printing," writes Steeves in 2001; "there is something about the ability to mass-produce goods that tends to compartmentalize and dehumanize an otherwise creative, intellectually-stimulating process" (*Good Idea*). The Gaspereau Press sees printing

and publishing as a means of releasing our environments, both social and natural, from the categories we impose upon them.

This philosophy of engagement and re-integration has given small presses another means of distinguishing themselves from larger publishing houses, who, over the past ten or fifteen years, improved their design standards and eroded the aesthetic edge maintained by houses like the PQL.³⁵ But most importantly, the Gaspereau's justification for re-integrating the worlds of printing and publishing marks an important new direction in the industry, and perhaps in the country's literature. Steeves, like many of Gaspereau's authors, is arguing for a philosophy which states that all things are connected: and, correspondingly, that one's behaviour in the world is connected to the kinds of things one can create in it. What the argument forms is an ethical imperative—and like the PQL's aesthetic imperative did seventeen years prior, it seems to have transformed the Gaspereau Press into a hub of energy. As an anonymous funding agency officer told Martha Sharpe in 2005: "What Gaspereau is today, the PQL was then ... a creative engine in the industry" (Sharpe 13).

The philosophy of the Gaspereau Press finds good expression in the writings of Robert Bringhurst and Peter Sanger, with whom the press maintains extremely close relations. Steeves once said that Bringhurst was the only person with whom he could ever co-design a book; moreover, Bringhurst's thoughts about typography, book design, language, and print culture are often echoed in Steeves's own writing and incorporated into his design practice. Sanger's influence, however, though less materially evident, is perhaps more profound, and his *White Salt Mountain* (2005) was identified by Steeves as one of the most important books Gaspereau Press has published. There are others I could name whose thoughts and poetry reflect the values of the press: Jan Zwicky is one, Michael deBeyer is another. Bringhurst and Sanger, however, will provide sufficient introduction for my purposes.³⁶

³⁵ "How is it," asks Steeves in his 2006 fall catalogue, "that the multinationals can outdo the little presses, not only at the volume game—where profit rules—but at the quality game too?"

³⁶ It is more straightforward to relate the values of the press to the thoughts of its authors in the case of Gaspereau than it is, say, in the case of the Porcupine's Quill. Writers of the PQL stable tend to

Sanger and Bringhurst share a belief that the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, the material and the abstract, are not so impenetrable as we sometimes like to think. In *White Salt Mountain: Words in Time*, Sanger explores two terms from St. Augustine: morning knowledge, or *cognitio matutina*, “knowledge of the uncreated, the eternal” (Sanger 17), and evening knowledge, *cognitio vespertina*, “knowledge of the created, the world in time, what we name nature” (17). As Sanger recalls moments of his life, and as both his imagination and research situate those moments in history, Sanger finds his relationship with the natural world, its places, and the objects within it, is deepened. Moments of change—like the habitation of an eyrie by two eagles, or the eyrie’s subsequent destruction by storm—prompt him to consider how human notions of permanence and mutability might cause him to mistake one kind of knowledge for the other. They also prompt him to speculate, however, that the eternal world and the made world are in “exchange” (17) with one another, and that such an exchange can be taken to represent the relation between the word (a made thing) and time (an eternal thing). It is the “intercalation of words in time” (24), or the formation of individual words into linked syntactical structures, that allows the momentary to merge with the timeless; in language, Sanger argues, the known and the unknown come together, and meaning emerges from that union.

In short, Sanger argues that language is a force through which seemingly distinct elements demonstrate their interrelatedness. This is a philosophy that Robert Bringhurst takes one step further: “everything is related to everything else,” he says in Gaspereau’s Fall 2007 catalogue (qtd. in “Bringhurst” 11). Bringhurst, who studies linguistics and typography, poetry and storytelling, oral literature, mythology, and translation, has based much of his interdisciplinary work on what

be united, first and foremost, by a shared devotion to technical innovation, and only secondarily (if at all) on the level of subject matter. At Gaspereau, on the other hand, thematic similarities echo between the texts, as well as in the promotional materials and Steeves’s publications. This is not to say that the PQL never publishes texts for which their interest is content-based; the literary criticism they publish is proof enough. (See *An Independent Stance* by W.J. Keith, or *Volleys*, edited by J.R. Struthers.) Nor is it to say that Gaspereau does not take an interest in matters of form (Carmine Stamino and George Elliott Clarke are both widely regarded as formal poets). The difference is that Gaspereau authors are more prone to making explicit statements of value in their work, and these can be compared and weighed to determine the degree to which they represent the values of the press itself.

the catalogue describes as a “sense of basic connection” (“Bringhurst” 11) between things in the world. And in the world of the Gaspereau Press, where everything is constantly signifying its relation to everything else, all elements of production take on a significance that approaches the textual.

In the fall of 2006, Steeves identified a metaphor of Bringhurst’s that closely reflected his own views on publishing: “if a publishing house is to succeed,” recited Steeves, “the artifact it creates to carry ideas out into the world needs to be every bit as well constructed as a seed capsule. By well constructed,” Steeves continues, “I take Bringhurst to mean the *physical* aspects of a book—the design, the type, the materials, the binding. Form and function must be in balance” (“Fall 2006”). Here Steeves and Bringhurst imply that the book will sprout for each reader: that each physical element plays an integral part in the growth of the text, as it opens in the reader’s hands and mind. Moreover, the metaphor suggests that the sturdier the seed, the more effective its design, the better chance it has of taking root somewhere. At the Gaspereau Press, therefore, each decision—be it of paper quality, type, or illustration style—is assumed to have a metaphorical and symbolic meaning that contributes to the effectiveness of the signifying power of the whole text.³⁷

The Gaspereau Press clearly acknowledges that their philosophy owes much to the work done by Coach House and the PQL. Though they talk about culture and ethics instead of capitalism and aesthetics, Gaspereau, like its predecessors, still places a great deal of emphasis on the significance of integrating printing and publishing. “Rejoining publisher and printer under one roof is one way of ensuring an interest in the quality of both the what and the how,” wrote Steeves in the booklet published for their second annual Wayzgoose. He feels uniting publishing and printing

encourages a personal investment in the creation of cultural objects
... that are meaningful in their conception, execution and result. It’s
also possible to keep the manufacturing process small enough—close

³⁷ Type is perhaps the best example, as Steeves once described letterforms as “tiny metaphors that transmit a complicated mix of emotional, intellectual, cultural and phonetic information.” See Andrew Steeves, “Making a Mark,” *Wayzgoose (Open House) Booklet* (Kentville, NS: 2001).

enough to craft—so as to ensure that everyone involved keeps their sights on a common goal. (“Good Idea” 2001)

What his production mode generates, he hopes, is an emotive force not dissimilar from Coleman’s “collective production-mode” or Metcalf’s “mythology” or “persona”—an emotive force powered by a team of devoted people who believe in the quality of the work that they do. “Like Coach House and the Porcupine’s Quill,” Steeves observes, “[Gaspereau’s] publishing program stresses the importance of quality across the entire process, from editorial and design to the manufacturing stage” (“Background”). This emphasis on improving quality of life, be it for the press’s employees or for the authors who interact with the press, is one thing that extends Gaspereau’s achievement beyond the literary or the bibliographical. What the Gaspereau Press has accomplished is every bit as social as it is textual—the social and the textual being two things, Steeves would likely argue, that aren’t really separable anyhow.

From Sanger’s meditations on the eternal and the temporal to Steeves’s own reflections on typography and signification, the notion that all aspects of publishing are meaningfully connected is central to the Gaspereau Press’s practice. When he first became a book publisher, Steeves remembers feeling shocked when he learned that “few printers were aware, or even interested in, the content or the design of the sheets that they were printing” (“Good Idea” 2001). Since then, he has embraced a printing mode wherein the mundane work—what Sanger and St. Augustine would call “nighttime knowledge”—remains undivided from the spirit of the written word, the *cognitio matutina*, that each printed book is intended to herald. What’s more, Steeves is convinced that readers will come to appreciate his philosophy of engagement, and to “value ... quality design and production” if it is provided to them more regularly. After all,” Steeves continues, “the biggest impediment to quality is ... an imaginative one. So much of publishing is, at heart, about paying attention” (“Fall 2006”).

A GASPEREAU PRESS CASE STUDY

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE'S *EXECUTION POEMS* (2000-2001)

Early in 2000, Andrew Steeves approached George Elliott Clarke about the possibility of doing a limited-edition letterpress chapbook. Clarke, though a prolific author and scholar, had never published a letterpress book before, and he readily accepted the invitation.³⁸ A Nova Scotia native, Clarke was born in Windsor Plains, and many of Clarke's works attempt to make the voices of his community, which he describes as "Africadian," audible to literary history. According to Clarke, Africadian writers:

are the descendants of the Black Loyalists and the Black Refugees who came to NS in 1783 and 1815 as well as those of more recent immigrants. Their voices are tinged with saltwater and rum, gypsum dust and honey, anger and desire. They are voices which, despite their debt to West Africa, have also adopted the timbre of Elizabethan English, M'ikmaq, Gaelic, and French. (Clarke "Declaration" 10)

Prior to 2001, Clarke's best-known work was *Whylah Falls*, a dramatic poem that presents a fictionalized account of the murder of Black Nova Scotian Graham Jarvis. In *Whylah Falls*, and later in *Beatrice Chancy: A Passional* (1999), Clarke experiments with European poetic forms—particularly epic blank verse—but he also interrogates their cultural limitations and biases. "We've been given these devices, these forms, genres, techniques, tendencies in English Literature," Clarke observed in an interview in 1998. But "[w]hat," he asks, "do they have to do with being a Black Nova Scotian? How can I use them to articulate who we are and create an English literature with a Black Nova Scotian accent?" (qtd. in Compton 1998). Though he often praises the Africadian spirit for what he sees as an "ability to ... define beauty for one's self" (qtd. in Compton), he also observes the ways in which he thinks the exclusion of Black Nova Scotian experience from Canadian literary

³⁸ To date Clarke has published thirteen volumes of verse, one book of criticism, and one novel; he has also edited three anthologies, including *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing* (2 vols., 1991-92) and *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature* (1997).

traditions can trigger a painful sense of self-negation in the Africadian writer. He recalls being startled when he realized “there was not going to be a space completely available for my work in what we describe as Canadian literature, at least not as it stood circa 1990” (McNair and Clarke). And the more Clarke tried to force open a place for Africadian writing in literary history, the more he found it necessary “to quarrel with language. To hurt blank verse into black drama” (“Embracing” 2003).³⁹

For Clarke, books, ink, and the printed word symbolize both the beauties and the dangers of the Western literary tradition for the African-Canadian writer. Clarke admits that he thinks “every writer is at least in part a bibliophile, somewhere inside,” and that as a writer he “always had that dream, that someday [he would] have that special book, that special binding and that special lettering” (McNair and Clarke 2001). Still, books and letters are for Clarke also tangible reminders of the realities faced by African-Canadian writers across the country: books by African-Canadians constitute a small part of a small market, and the languages they use have been (and are) employed by interests that sought (or seek) to prevent Black experience from holding a legitimate, central place in Canadian literature. As Clarke notes in his introduction to *Eyeing the North Star*, the “absence of a mass audience” for African-Canadian art meant that “African-Canadian writers were seldom published by major presses during the period of the literature’s modern expansion—the 1960s to the 1980s” (*North* xvii). Relying either on self-publication or publishing through collectives, Clarke suggests that contemporary Black art “must be created via a shifting combination of self-reliance, communal initiative, and public-sector support” (xvii). The end result is that, historically, few African-Canadian literary works were printed on expensive paper or received lavish typographical attention.⁴⁰

³⁹ Clarke’s “quarrel,” it should be noted, takes place on several fronts simultaneously: against the exclusiveness of white (English and French) literary cultures, against the omnipresence of African-American literary culture, and against the majority of African-Canadian writers who, together, significantly outnumber Africadian writers. See Compton 1998.

⁴⁰ Indeed, as Clarke observes in the Introduction to *Eyeing the North Star*, the majority of African-Canadian compositions prior to 1960 received little attention as printed objects. They were released either for ephemeral circulation (newspapers, broadsides, flyers) or kept as private, non-circulating records (sermons in church records, etc.) As for Clarke’s own work, he had two of his poems set as

That Steeves asked Clarke to author Gaspereau's first letterpress project, and that Clarke responded with the manuscript for *Execution Poems*, indicates that both of them understood the significance of the gesture. For Steeves, still a fledgling publisher, a letterpress project—even a limited edition—represented a substantial investment of time, resources, and materials. For trade publishers, letterpress projects are often celebratory and undertaken in homage to authors or printers,⁴¹ and as Clarke himself observed, they make “you realize you’re dealing with ... people who really care about the well-being and who care about a particular writer’s work.” He found it “very gratifying,” he said, “to see one’s work given that kind of life” (McNair and Clarke).

Though Steeves did not know what kind of manuscript Clarke would produce, he was familiar with Clarke’s work, and he felt that Clarke’s style, subjects, and methods merited permanent recognition. Steeves’s choice to memorialize Clarke’s accomplishment with a limited edition letterpress project served as a tangible measure of Clarke’s success: both his personal success as an artist, and his success in arguing for the irremovable importance of African-Canadian and Africadian perspectives to Canadian history and literature. (Though Clarke had authored limited-edition chapbooks before, this was the first to be hand-set, and it, measuring 12” x 18”, remains the most impressive—at very least the largest—of Clarke’s volumes.) The opposite of ephemeral, *Execution Poems* was to stand as a permanent tribute to Clarke’s accomplishment as an artist, an African-Canadian, and a Nova Scotian.

Clarke agreed to the project on February 4, 2000.⁴² Though the manuscript did not appear until June 5th, Clarke decided early upon the subject for his

broadsheets (“Antiphony” by Tree Hollow Press in North Carolina, and “White Breeze, Palm Lace” by above/ground press in Ottawa); he also published limited edition chapbooks with Carolina Wren Press (*Gold Indigoes*, 2000) and Magnum Book Store (*Provençal Songs*, 1993; re-released by above/ground in 1997). However, neither book was letterpress printed; at this date, I am uncertain about the broadsheets.

⁴¹ As an example, one could take the recent celebration held in honour of B.C. typographer Jim Rimmer at Simon Fraser University’s Harbourfront Center (November 2006). Over 20 small presses, Gaspereau included, produced limited-edition letterpress broadsides to commemorate Rimmer’s contribution to the typographic arts.

⁴² The following chronology was derived from the letters of Clarke to Andrew Steeves, housed at the Gaspereau Press, and made available to the author in August 2007.

chapbook. Six years earlier, Clarke had discovered that two of his cousins—George and Rufus Hamilton—were tried and executed for murder in July of 1949. Since then, Clarke had been researching their story periodically; he eventually went to the National Archives in Ottawa, found their trial transcripts, read them, and decided he must write about their lives (McNair and Clarke). At the time of Steeves's request, Clarke was already contracted to McClelland and Stewart for a novel about his cousins,⁴³ but he had not broached the subject in verse. The majority of the poems were new, therefore, when they appeared in the manuscript that Clarke delivered, and they had been written specifically for the Gaspereau chapbook.⁴⁴ Revisions took place throughout June and into early August, though something approaching a final draft was submitted by July 11; the book was designed and set by August of 2000, and the chapbook itself released in December. A "groundswell" of interest in the limited edition, in part heightened by an interview published in the National Post and later broadcast on CBC Radio, prompted the release of the trade paperback (Steeves "Note" 2002); the paperback, printed using digital off-set at one-half the size of the original, imitated the letterpress edition as nearly as possible. The trade edition of *Execution Poems* was nominated for the Governor General's Award for Poetry in October of 2001, and it received the award the following month. *Execution Poems* remains the Gaspereau Press's best-selling text to date.

The letterpress folio version, of which 66 copies were made, is an imposing object.⁴⁵ It stands a foot-and-a-half tall; its cover is jet black. The title appears all in caps, and is stamped into the paper using black foil (Clarke's name appears in italics below). The guts were printed on 25"x19" sheets of Mohawk Superfine (a cream-coloured, high-quality text paper that also appears in the trade paperback).⁴⁶

⁴³ Clarke eventually published *George & Rue* in 2004.

⁴⁴ To my knowledge, there are just three exceptions: an altered version of "Negation" (EP 11), as well as "Haligonian Market Cry" (EP 18) and "Avowals" (EP 40) appear in *Blue* (Polestar 2001). This suggests that they, like the rest of the poems in that volume, were written between 1994 and 1999. See George Elliott Clarke, "Turning Blue," *Blue* (Vancouver: Polestar, 2001).

⁴⁵ Of those 66 copies, 6 were specially bound in leather.

⁴⁶ According to their website (<http://www.mohawkpaper.com/showcase/mohawk-show/>), Mohawk Fine Papers is known for their environmentally-friendly production practices, which include generating 100% of their electricity from wind power, refusing to purchase wood fibres from high

The guts were printed in two colours (black for text and red for titling) using a case of Monotype Bembo (18-pt and 12-pt), which Steeves purchased in Toronto; the text was set at Gaspereau by Susan Baxter and Nyla Trimper. Wesley Bates carved a wood engraving for the frontispiece, and the whole chapbook was run on Steeves's Vandercook 219 letterpress.

In 2001, the trade paperback edition was made in direct imitation of the limited edition: according to Steeves, "we took great care in translating the design from the letterpress-printed original to the smaller, computer-composed, offset-printed trade version ... the typographic design was simply reduced proportionally to fit the new format" ("Note"). As a result, the trade paperback measures 9" x 6", bears the same foil-stamped black-on-black cover, and features type (black and red) set digitally in 9-pt Adobe Bembo. In 2002, Steeves remarked that "it was important to me that as little as possible was lost between the 'art book', which was available only to a select few, and the 'trade book', which was available to anyone" ("Note"). The fact that Steeves was determined to translate the letterpress edition into a digital format so precisely suggests that he felt there was a profound connection between the poems and their material incarnation. Exploring those connections, as I will do over the next several pages, will indicate how Steeves and the Gaspereau Press use the physical book as a medium for textual interpretation, and it will reveal the level upon which material and textual components interrelate.

The first part of the process I will assess is Clarke's poetic relationship to letterforms and to the act of printing; I argue that printing, ink, and the material letter are central tropes within a complex of images through which Clarke meditates on Blackness and its representations in White literature, especially Shakespeare. Second, I argue that Steeves's design for *Execution Poems*, and especially its type and page layout, alludes to the design and type of a text by the 16th-century Venetian printer Aldus Manutius; lastly, I will argue that Steeves's design choices assert a rapport between the intellectual and political climate of Manutius's Venice and Steeves's Nova Scotia of the 1990s. Considering these things together it becomes

conservation-value old growth forests, and working towards carbon-neutral production processes (already in place for three of their paper lines).

evident that *Execution Poems* provides a site wherein bibliographic concerns (about the effect of book design) can demonstrate their profound connection both to literary concerns (about the limitations of form) and to social concerns (about representations of race).

Clarke uses images of printing and of writing technology (including type, ink, and chalk) to destabilize the concept of "Blackness" as it has been employed by White English literature, and particularly as it has been used in blackface theatrical traditions. The practice whereby White actors "blacken" their faces for theatrical purposes was initially used to denote damnation in medieval Mystery Cycles and court masques; however, as Virginia Mason Vaughan argues, the practice had been racialized by the 1590s, and blackface in the theatre thereafter served "to create expectations and attitudes about black people" (Vaughan 2) for an increasingly curious White British (and later, American) population. Characters in blackface are acknowledged by critics to be "white fantasies scripted onto black bodies" (1), possessed of "a readily recognizable set of meanings" that "shaped the ways black characters were 'read' by white audiences" (3); and while these characters expressed little of the lives and experiences of Black Africans, their behaviours nonetheless came to represent Blackness to the White literary public. Because the "Blackness" of blackface and the blackness of ink on the page are both literary constructions used to describe White society—and because the image of applying pen to paper is visually cognate with that of applying black paint to white skin—it is therefore fairly common to encounter phrases, like the ones above, which talk about "reading" the blackface actor as if he were text (or "script"). As I shall discuss momentarily, Clarke's metaphors often conflate black ink and blackface; they are also frequently extended to include other visual cognates (like the "black and blue" of bruises and of ink), which in turn suggest the antagonistic relation he perceives between opposing (White- and Black-created) depictions of Blackness. For Clarke, however, it is the images of writing technology that stand alone in their ability to challenge White literary "Blackness," and it is through the tools of print—paper and ink—that Clarke comes to assert a self-generating and creative space for the Black Canadian artist.

In his 2006 volume *Black* Clarke calls a section of poems "Black Ink." Within that section, in a poem titled "Principles," he writes the following:

A black man cannot hide—
Eh?—in the page's white skin.

When you think of my ink,
Or meditate on a page,

Pay attention to the blackness,
Its rich darkness.

Ink and voice—the liqueurs of the savage—
Ignite the very fire of freedom.

Imagine this ink is flame
Burning the page as you read. ("Principles" ll. 11-20)

This poem suggests two ideas which are central to Clarke's use of the ink-and-paper image cluster. First, his poem critiques the mode of reading wherein black letters, like blackface, "make whiteness visible so that it can be 'read' and in the process to make it seem fairer by contrast" (Vaughan 6). In this sort of reading, and on this sort of "page," there is no room for a black man to hide: though the letters may be black, the vision of Blackness they present is so limited that its only function can be to make Whiteness legible. Black letters and Black faces, Clarke therefore implies, are what White literary culture uses to read itself. Rebelling against the limited position assigned to Blackness, Clarke's ink swells beyond its allotted role: "Jet-black ink jets across the pure, pale page: / A delicious rape, eh? Caliban tugging Miranda" ("Mittelhölzer" 1.3-4). Clarke's images of ink swells, ink spills, ink jets, and the "liqueur" of ink all bring with them the implication that to write exuberant Blackness damages or consumes White literary culture (or at least the White literary culture that is dependent on an artificially limited sense of Blackness).⁴⁷ Beyond the comparisons to rape and to the burning page we see here, Clarke's "Black Ink" series also includes a "vernacular" that "oozes black ink" and "dye[s] ...

⁴⁷ It should be noted that many of the poets to whom these poems are dedicated are White poets, whom Clarke perceives—at least partially—as committing revolutionary damage to their own tradition.

white grammars" ("Nortje" ll. 5-7), as well as a "black flag of ink" that proclaims "anarchy—or piracy—in a white desert" ("Mittelhölzer" 4.15-16).

In the context of *Execution Poems*, where the superabundance of ink is realized only by the black-on-black foil-stamped cover, images of Black creativity find themselves constantly inhibited by images of Black criminality and poverty. The poet-figure, Rufus Hamilton, is not so free as the speakers in "Black Ink": he lives in Nova Scotia in the 1940s, he is poor, and his poetic language is considered uncivil by Whites ("Admit that, for a Negro," demands the Crown attorney, "you speak our English well" ["Malignant" l. 4]). And, unlike the speakers in "Black Ink," Rue Hamilton is a real-time murderer, not a committer of metaphorical or literary violence. His persona is therefore more divided than those of Clarke's later artist-figures, because, though he asserts the differences between himself and his White prosecutors ("Malignant English"), he also identifies himself with archetypal images of Black criminality derived from White literature (particularly Shakespeare). Rue explicitly equates himself with Aaron of *Titus Andronicus*, claiming that "*Sit fas aut nefas* [Be it right or wrong], I am become Aaron.... Dreaming of tearing down stars and letting grass incinerate / Pale citizens' prized bones" ("Reading *Titus*" ll. 22-26).⁴⁸ Rue also admires the rebel slave Nat Turner,⁴⁹ saying that, like Nat, he is "natural homicidal" (l.29). And like characters in English blackface, and particularly like Aaron and Othello, Rue draws attention to his complexion and claims it foreshadows evil deeds to come ("My black face must preface murder for you" ["Negation" l. 8]).⁵⁰ Though he is careful to claim that his similarity with these murderous figures is literary—it is Rue's "pages" that are "crying fratricidal damnation" ("Reading *Titus*" l. 30)—these identifications are complicated by the fact that Clarke's poems still purport to describe the historical figure of Rufus

⁴⁸ The Latin phrase, untranslated in Clarke's poem, also appears in *Titus* (2.1.133).

⁴⁹ An intelligent, well-read and charismatic African-American who led fifty of his fellow-slaves to revolt on August 21, 1831, killing 57 whites.

⁵⁰ Compare to *Othello*, where Othello claims that Desdemona's name "is now begrim'd and black / As mine own face" (3.3.387-88), or to *Titus Andronicus*, where Aaron asserts he "will have his soul black like his face" (3.1.204-05). See William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, Moor of Venice*, and the *Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton, 1974). On the metadramatic elements of Renaissance blackface, see Vaughan 6.

Hamilton, who killed a taxi driver in 1949. Clarke's portrait of Rue blends actual violence with the repression of his desire for positive self-definition ("I mean / To go out shining instead of tarnished," he says, "To take apart poetry like a heart" ["Negation" l. 6-7]). The correspondence Clarke asserts between literary violence and actual violence, therefore, is part of a more complex argument, which has four basic tenets. The first tenet is that there is a need to recognize the legitimacy of all forms of artistic expression. The second is that such a need is equivalent with the need to recognize that cultural and personal identities must not be imposed from without, but rather generated from within. The third asserts that the failure to recognize one is a failure to recognize the other. The fourth, which the characterization of Rue Hamilton demonstrates, is that such failures constitute a kind of violence that breeds violence (either actual or metaphorical) in turn.⁵¹

In such a context, the presence (or absence) of "black ink," of legitimate Black creative space, becomes a matter of serious consequence. The ability to escape the representations of Blackness as put forth by White literature—representations which bind Rue's "black face" to "murder" as a "preface" to a book—would be comparable to a material escape from Rue's life of violence, crime, and eventual death by hanging. But Rue, who refuses to identify his language with the "alabaster, marble English" of his prosecutor ("Malignant" l. 5), is told that he has made "a gallows" of his surname, of "the majuscule letter, that sturdy 'H'" ("Prosecution" l. 9). The black letters of the alphabet, instead of being a wellspring of creative power, are systematically associated with death and suffering. (In the poem "Avowals," Clarke assigns an image to each vowel: "A is a cracked steeple. / E is a long scream. / I is a gawky guillotine....Y is a two-pronged gallows" ["Avowals" ll. 1-6].) Finally, as George and Rue prepare to be hanged, Rue concludes with the following line: "We will fall into our sentence: silence" ("Famous" l. 17).⁵² Silence is

⁵¹ A similar lesson appears more explicitly in *George & Rue*: Rufus, when he realizes no one appreciates his "hammering" on the piano keys, he takes a hammer to the head of the taxi driver, Silver. See pages 66 and 108 of George Elliott Clarke, *George & Rue* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2004).

⁵² This is not the last line of the poem, but it is the last that can be attributed with certainty to Rue. The final line of *Execution Poems* ("We will watch night shudder as stars fall" [l.18]) is separated from Rue's comment by a stanza break. I am uncertain whether the break indicates merely a pause in Rue's speech or the addition of a third, unknown speaker.

the one phrase that “alabaster English” permits Rue; and silence, for the poet, is also death. The seemingly unshakable alliance between writing technology and the suppression of Black self-expression is, in the end, confirmed.

Though images of writing, print, ink, and literary creativity in *Execution Poems* are employed more pessimistically than they are in the “Black Ink” series, their pessimism is tempered by an expression of hope for the future—an expression made paratextually, by the presence of the letterpress book. *Execution Poems* was printed using more or less the same technology that would have been available to the printers of *Titus Andronicus* in 1594. It is the same machine that, famously, enabled the spread of White Western values with more rapidity than ever before.³³ But in the era of digital typesetting, the use of the labour-intensive letterpress has been transformed from a potentially colonizing gesture into a self-reflexive one: it asks contemporary readers why we choose to honour certain texts through typography, and what it has meant to honour texts in this way in the past. The fact that one of the quintessential symbols of cultural imperialism was used, here, to set *Execution Poems* (which is in many ways a devastating portrait of the effects of cultural imperialism), provides tangible proof to the reader that Clarke is free to do now what Rue could not then: he can reclaim ink and paper, the Black letter on the White page, as symbols of Africadian self-expression. In this way the physical violence of the letterpress—the muscular force required to insert the letters into the page—becomes a gesture that in both its triumph and its aggression symbolizes Clarke’s struggle to make room for Africadian assertions of cultural vitality.

The significance of the form of *Execution Poems* goes beyond, however, the simple fact that the letterpress book exists, that it tells a story of Africadian suffering and crime, that it was written by an Africadian man, and that such a text was unlikely to be letterpress printed in 1949. The major material features of *Execution Poems*—its type, its size, its page proportions—are based on the designs

³³ A notorious version of this sentiment is found in *L’Apparition du livre* [The Coming of the Book], which was written by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin between 1953 and 1956. The text, widely regarded as the first social history of print, claims that “The book created new habits of thought not only within the small circle of the learned, but far beyond, in the intellectual life of all who used their minds. In short ... the printed book was one of the most effective means of mastery of the whole world” (10-11). See Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L’Apparition du livre*, trans. David Gerard (London: NLB, 1958).

and types of the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius, whose Aldine Press came to prominence between 1494 and 1515. While it may seem tenuous at first to assert that aesthetics of a 15th-century Italian artisan could have much bearing on the work of a 20th-century African-Canadian poet born in rural Nova Scotia, historical observations demonstrate that Manutius's cultural agenda was in fact very similar to Clarke's, and to Steeves's. Through the form of *Execution Poems*, Steeves asserts Clarke's affinity to the Renaissance in terms that align him, not with the period's embryonic cultural imperialism or with the growing racialization of literary values, but with the transcultural scholarly undertakings that are now celebrated as one of the significant achievements of Renaissance humanism.

There are two major physical resemblances between *Execution Poems* and works by Aldus Manutius. Firstly there are the page and text block dimensions. Typical Renaissance proportions, and the proportions used specifically by the Aldine Press for the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499, dictate that the height of the page should be about 1.5 times that of the width (Bringhurst *ETS* 171). The text block (which sits not in the center of the page, but slightly towards the spine and top margin), has a height 1.7 times that of its width (*ETS* 171). The trade edition of *Execution Poems* measures 9" x 6", which produces a height-to-width ratio of 1.5; similarly, the text block measures 7" x 4 1/8", which gives a height-width ratio of 1.7.⁴ Both the page proportions and the text-block proportions of *Execution Poems* conform exactly to the Renaissance standard.

More interesting, however, is Steeves's choice of typeface. In 1929, Stanley Morison, consultant the Monotype Corporation in England and typographical advisor to Cambridge University Press, commissioned a font that was to imitate, in a slightly revised form, a typeface that first appeared in another of Manutius's volumes. Called "the first Aldine roman," this face was designed and cut for Manutius by Francesco Griffo, and it was first used to print *de Aetna* (a philosophical dialogue that was issued in 1496 and written by future Cardinal Pietro

⁴ The size of the text block was determined by measuring vertically from the top of a poem's title phrase to the bottom of the page number, and horizontally by measuring the length of the longest continuous line of prose. Because *Execution Poems* is a volume of verse, however, no page actually fills the text block in its entirety, and only a few poems ("Reading Titus Andronicus" and "Child Hood II," for example) contain lines that reach the right margin.

Bembo). Morison took “Bembo” as the name for his restored version, and it, as “Monotype Bembo” (and later, in digital form, as “Adobe Bembo”) went on to become an extremely popular humanistic typeface for book-setting in the twentieth century (Lowry 137). Though William Morris in the nineteenth century, and later Daniel Updike in the twentieth, both cite Griffo’s predecessor Nicolas Jenson (1420-1480) as the superior punchcutter, Morison observed that it was Griffo’s roman, not Jenson’s, that has been admired and copied by Antoine Augereau and Claude Garamond (two of the sixteenth century’s most influential type designers; see Morison 48). The Aldine roman’s “uninterrupted career of nearly three centuries,” writes Morison, “confers upon it a look of familiarity” to the modern eye; moreover, he argues that, in 1496, its design was so revolutionary that it “rendered all preceding romans archaic” (Morison 49-50).

Morison, along with Giovanni Mardersteig of the Officina Bodoni Press, claims that the Aldine roman was significant because of its lower case. For that, they argue, Griffo drew on “lapidary patterns”—stone engravings—as well as on calligraphic hands (Mardersteig 137; see Morison 49).⁵⁵ However, the history of the majuscules reveals another source of inspiration that is perhaps more directly related to Manutius’s cultural agenda and accomplishment. To set this inspiration in context, however, it is necessary to spend a moment discussing the intellectual trends and social history of Venice in the late fifteenth century.

In the decades following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, thousands of Greek refugees fled to Venice (Harris 1-2). Despite the close trade relations that had existed previously between the two great cities, the refugees were granted no legal protections, and were often made to feel aware that “they were in Venice under sufferance” (Nicol 416). By the time Manutius established his print shop, Venice was at the height of its wealth, yet was in no way inclined to acknowledge the contribution of either Greek labour or ancient Greek writings to Venetian

⁵⁵ Prior to Griffo’s work, most alphabets appearing in upper and lower case used majuscules based on Roman capitals and miniscules based on calligraphic hands of (generally) the Carolingian style. Griffo, apparently, was the first to use the proportions of the Roman capitals to generate a related set of lower-case letters (as the Romans themselves employed no lower-case).

intellectual life.⁶⁶ Constantinople's decaying splendour compared unfavourably with Venice's present vitality; Latin was universally preferred to Greek as the language of scholarship (Hexter 144); and socially, the Venetians tended to "distrust and despise" the Greeks (Nicol 416). Manutius, however, was intrigued by Greek, and he, as Morison notes, "early became a devotee" of the language (Morison 53). Manutius employed no one but Greeks in either his print shop or his house, and his first books were printed in Greek (53). By devoting his shop to the reprinting of classical Greek texts, as well as by producing the grammars and dictionaries scholars would require in order to learn the language, it is thought that Manutius almost single-handedly "provided scholars with the means to read often well-known staple texts anew, in the fresh light of their Greek ancestors" (Hexter 144). Manutius's work at the Aldine Press made a new kind of interlingual and intercultural scholarship possible, and asserted the dependence of Latin authors on Greek sources (144). Moreover, by so doing, Manutius was also acknowledging the social and economic reality that would have been at least tacitly understood by every Venetian citizen: that Venice's wealth, and the scholarship that wealth enabled, partially depended on the labour of a comparatively poor, dislocated, Greek-speaking population.

When Francesco Griffo went to cut a roman type for *de Aetna*, Manutius's first publication in Latin, he began by consulting a Greek face from a grammar book⁶⁷ (which featured characters based on the handwritten work of local scribes). From that face, Griffo took the capital letters shared by Greek and Latin, and used them to generate letterforms for the rest (Mardersteig 138-39). While Griffo did draw on Latin stone inscriptions for his lower case, he also ensured the Latin-inspired, lower-case alphabet would match the Greek-derived upper-case; and his efforts were so successful that, in 1953, Stanley Morison would argue that the "two alphabets in the *Aetna* blend harmoniously to a perfect degree" (Morison 49).

⁶⁶ Two of the main occupations taken up by Greek refugees were related, one directly and one indirectly, to intellectual health of Venice. Venice's wealth was sustained by seafaring trade, and the Greeks frequently worked in the shipyards, either as builders or as galley labourers; the Greeks also worked as scribes. See Harris 1-2, and Nicholas Barker, *Aldus Manutius and the Development of Greek Script* 12.

⁶⁷ By Constantinus Lascaris. Lascaris was, appropriately, Bembo's Greek teacher from 1493-94.

Griffo's roman letters, based on Greek characters, therefore did for typography what Manutius's Greek publications did for Renaissance scholarship: they asserted Rome's dependence on the Greek cultural legacy, and what's more, they embodied the sort of "pan-European intellectual enterprise" (Hexter 156) that would eventually be regarded as the high point of Renaissance scholarly achievement.

It is perhaps for this reason, then, that all prior Latin types, which were created without reference to Greek artistic achievements and which failed to reflect the Greek presence in Italian society, were rendered "archaic" by the first Aldine roman. Manutius's type contains encoded historical truths (that Greece preceded Rome; that Roman art responded to Greek art) and makes coded reference to a social fact (that contemporary Venetian learning rested upon Greek labour). It is therefore no small irony that the Aldine roman, in its "300 year" career, became the representative book face of the European Renaissance—and has been used, in a variety of reincarnations, to assert the superiority of European culture across the globe. Still, the history of the first Aldine roman began subversively, and within it remains a typographic gesture that acknowledges the debt incurred when a dominant culture appropriates both the ideas and the labour of a subordinate one.

This, then, is the history behind Monotype Bembo, which Andrew Steeves used to set the letterpress edition of *Execution Poems* in Nova Scotia in the fall of 2000. The first Aldine roman provides a perfect example of how social and literary concerns can be embodied by typographical ones. Whether intentional or not, its use affiliates *Execution Poems* with an instance wherein type was used to redress an historical injustice, caused by a failure to recognize the independent legitimacy of creative expressions made by a subaltern group. That affiliation certainly resonates with Clarke's later tropes, which equate Black creativity with the reclamation of writing technology. But the use of Bembo also underscores the importance of *Execution Poems* itself as a cultural object and as a social event. *Execution Poems* was an opportunity to address historical injustices through typographic means, and though the poems themselves emphasize the ways in which White literature and its technology have constrained Black identity in order to better read itself, the book and its type both participate within another tradition—one which suggests that the

black letter on the white page can be used to read Blackness instead of White culture. It says the letterpress can be used to celebrate Black creativity instead of enshrining White canonical texts. This extra-textual information is perceived as the story of George and Rue unfolds; it provides social and bibliographical significations that counterbalance the predominantly despairing arc of the poems themselves. In practical terms, these significations may register as nothing more than a sense of disjunction as the reader encounters Bembo's elegant forms, pressed into expensive paper, as they relate Clarke's "Black Acadian Tragedy"—whose words, contrary to their letterforms, are unsparingly brutal and often grotesque. But what can't be ignored is that Steeves's use of Bembo does more than assert a derivative relation between Clarke and his Renaissance sources. It is more than a tribute to Clarke's familiarity with (and critical stance towards) the White English canon. Instead the use of Bembo equates Clarke's undertaking, in Nova Scotia of the 1990s, with one of the most significant moments in the history of Western printing—when one printer, one type-cutter, and a phalanx of Greek scribes, compositors and pressmen, undertook to assess (*sit fas aut nefas*) the impact of one culture upon one another.

The significance of this comparison is more than literary, and it is more than bibliographical. Its importance can only be understood when one apprehends how much social change was required in order to make the comparison possible. (At what other point in print history could one see the story of two poor and murderous Africadians compare—favourably—to the rediscovery of the principle works of classical Greek literature?) I would argue that perhaps it could only come to pass in an era capable of articulating how deeply complicit writing technology has been in the suppression of cultural works by non-Whites; and that it could only be executed by a publisher who was willing to expose that complicity in his own use of the printed word. It seems appropriate that this exposition, this historic event, should have transpired at the Gaspereau Press, which has gone to such lengths to assert the intimate connections that exist between literary, social, and typographical practices.

CONCLUSION

The subtlety with which Steeves manipulated the “bibliographic codes” of *Execution Poems* suggests to me how refined the techniques of typographical expression have become. They have grown past their tentative, self-discovering origins in the “poem-objects” of the Coach House Press; they gained confidence under Metcalf and Inkster’s joint program to educate readers as to the expressive power of the printed form; and they have flowered as part of Gaspereau’s wholly integrated and intuitive form of typographic interpretation. Though approaches to book design shift from press to press and period to period, uniting all of them is a shared devotion to the expressive power of the physical book, and the belief that books share profound connections with both their texts and the times and places that produced them.

The 1960s and 1970s in English-Canada saw printers, publishers, scholars, government officials, and authors come together to assert the cultural and sociological significance of Canadian-made books. Not just Canadian *literature*—Canadian books. As the Royal Commission on Book Publishing indicates, it is the production and sale of books that can be translated into a measure of national development; and as the experiments of the Coach House Press demonstrate, it is the physical form of books which can be transformed into typographic art, or be made to test Marshall McLuhan’s radical media theories. It was the sale, as Frank Davey and Victor Coleman observed, of non-commercial and non-standardized texts, which Coach House offered as resistance to American capitalist expansion. And in the case of Anansi, it was books that physically provided the forum for expressing Canadian perspectives, anti-American sentiment, and radical discourse. Sometimes through their form and sometimes through their content, the texts of this early period confirmed for future publishers that the material book is both significant (culturally) and capable of signification (typographically).

By the mid-1990s, publishers were seriously questioning the nationalist and political uses to which the expressive power of the material book had first been put. At the Porcupine’s Quill the physical book’s expressive power was consciously directed away from cultural concerns, and was instead made to betoken something

of the personality of the author, or of the PQL itself. Inkster, though inspired by the production values of both Anansi and Coach House, was much more formally conservative than his predecessors; under the influence of John Metcalf in the 1990s, this conservatism petrified into an even stricter aesthetic. As was the case with George Johnston's *Endeared by Dark*, the PQL used symbolic cover images and biographical material to emphasize the personae, as well as the technical accomplishments, of their authors; this practice eventually came to represent the PQL brand identity as much as their use of Zephyr Antique laid paper and century-old bindery equipment. The results were books that were costly, quirky, enduring, and, most often, hard to sell. Inkster's high production standards, the ambitiousness of Metcalf's publishing agenda, their shared unwillingness to conform to market norms, and their sheer refusal to cater to popular taste, caused the press continual financial strain. The Porcupine's Quill tried to ensure that the physical forms of their books would *not* express contemporary cultural values, largely by disdaining the social nature of book production (at least as it was theorized by the previous generation of printer-publishers). PQL productions from this period, in both their physical forms and their literary contents, prize aesthetic accomplishment above all else.

The difficulties faced by a trade publisher that maintains a purely aesthetic approach to bookmaking were obvious by the late 1990s. PQL sales remained consistently low, and niche competition from the large-scale publishing houses increased as they too began producing attractive, high-quality trade editions. While the publishing industry had been tempered by the PQL's conservative aesthetic, and taste at large no longer inclined toward the radical social experiments of early Coach House and Anansi works, it nonetheless seemed evident that to detach bookmaking and books from the social sphere was an unworkable (not to mention unprofitable) publishing strategy. Knowing this, Andrew Steeves and Gary Dunfield founded the Gaspereau Press, with the intention of producing books which would be indivisible from the natural and social ecologies in which they participate. At the Gaspereau Press, the integration of printing and publishing—which at Coach House was an anti-capitalist gesture, and at the PQL was an assertion of

aestheticism—requires the publisher to engage with more than literary history, and the printer with more than the conventions of typographic design. Printing and publishing has become for them a multi-faceted and symbolically rich art form, which touches upon multiple fields and makes use of several different forms of expression. Confident of the expressive power of the physical book, Gaspereau texts mimic few of the subversive gestures made by early Coach House productions; and celebratory, rather than skeptical, of the connections between books and their social and natural worlds, Gaspereau designs often comment upon political, geographic, geological, or economic themes. Sometimes these comments are fairly straightforward, and exhibit the desire (first expressed by the PQL and Coach House) to set texts sensitively and intelligently. Other times, as was the case with *Execution Poems*, Gaspereau books engage in sophisticated acts of literary interpretation, and contribute substantially to the meaning of the text via typography and page layout.

In 2008, after forty years of combined effort, the tradition of Canadian printer-publishers has deepened into an art form that is at once literary, visual, typographical, social, and economic. The terminology of book historians and bibliographers, moreover, has also evolved to the point where it can now describe the kinds of typographic and sociological playfulness that certain thoughtfully-designed books exhibit. However, it is still a long way from being able to exhaustively interpret the complex material statements being made in the works of present-day printer-publishers. Jerome McGann perhaps comes closest, as his examples are drawn from printer-poets (William Morris, William Blake) who incorporated bibliographical experiments into the presentation of their poems. Even McGann, however, does not have an appropriate metaphor to describe the effect of the Coach House Press's self-conscious, self-effacing designs, nor for the Gaspereau Press's polyphonic typographic expressions.

Though neither formal book histories nor traditional literary approaches have seen it necessary to develop a vocabulary with which to analyze these new fruitions in typographic arts, I can only reassert, with Inkster, that "given the pre-eminent importance of the word in modern poetry"—and given, I think, the general

consensus on the impact of media forms on textual content—there can be no refuting the importance of analyzing how poems are printed and set; and the importance, too, of analyzing how their literary values, their social concerns, their production ethics and their typographic expressions interact.

Were I to put forth a metaphor, which would describe the manner in which these vital forces support and contend with one another, I would probably draw it from a piece of ephemera put out by the Gaspereau Press. In 2004, they released a promotional poster featuring eight wood engravings, each of which depicts a stage in the life of the book. In “What is the History of Books,” Robert Darnton described similar stages as a “cycle”—a term that, as a metaphor, is partway there. The word chosen by the Gaspereau Press is “ecology”: which, according to the OED, is defined as a “branch of biology which deals with the relations of living organisms to their surroundings, their habits and modes of life” (1). Throughout this thesis, whether it was as the offspring of Tim Inkster’s “poetfather and printmother,” or as Robert Bringhurst’s “seed capsule,” we have seen evidence that Canadian printers and publishers treat their books as living entities, capable of growth and exhibiting examinable behaviour.

If future critics intend to engage on a literary level with the poetical works issued by either the Porcupine’s Quill or the Gaspereau Press, I would encourage them to remember the Gaspereau Press’s “Ecology of the Book,” and to envision their chosen text as one tiny creature in a vastly more complex world—and to think, as they watch that poetic creature squirm (or sleep, or dream) in its material surroundings, of the processes and behaviours and beliefs that were required to secure it there, however briefly, for their inspection.

Works Cited

- Abley, Mark. "Canada's Loveliest Books Are Made in Erin?" *The Montreal Gazette*, 1992. *Home Page of the Porcupine's Quill*. 27 Dec. 2003. <<http://www.sentex.net/~pql/clipping.html>>.
- Agency, Central Intelligence. "Cia - the World Factbook -- Canada." Washington DC, 2007. 15 Jan. 2008. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ca.html#Econ>>.
- . "Cia - the World Factbook -- United States." Washington DC, 2007. 15 Jan. 2008. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html#Econ>>.
- Association, Canadian Booksellers. "Canadian Booksellers Association - Literary Awards - Small Press Publisher of the Year Award." Toronto, 2007. 15 Jan. 2008. <<http://www.cbabook.org/awards/default.asp>>.
- Barker, Nicolas. *Aldus Manutius and the Development of Greek Script and Type in the Fifteenth Century*. Sandy Hook, CT: Chiswick Book Shop, 1985.
- Beddoes, Julie. "Reader's Regrets." *Open Letter* 8.1 (1997): 36-39.
- Bringhurst, Robert. "Celebrating Gaspereau Press." *Books In Canada* Mar. 2004: 39.
- . *Ocean Paper Stone*. Vancouver: William Hoffer, 1984.
- . *The Elements of Typographic Style*. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley, 1992.
- Caldwell, Rebecca. "Literary Gem to Cut Staff, Book List." *The Globe and Mail* 31 Mar. 2005, sec. Arts. *Globe and Mail Online*. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/search>>.
- Clarke, George Elliott. "À Arthur Nortje." *Black*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2006. 45.
- . "À Edgar Mittelhölzer." *Black*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2006. 42-44.
- . "Avowals." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 40.
- . "Declaration." *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotia Writing*. Ed. George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, NS: Pottersfield, 1991. 10.
- . "Embracing 'Beatrice Chancy': Rewriting History as Libretto." *Rooke Lecture Series*. Peterborough: Peterborough Public Library, 27 Mar. 2003.

- , ed. *Eyeing the North Star*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997.
- . "Famous Last." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 41.
- . *George & Rue*. Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2004.
- . "iii - Principles." *Black*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2006. 36-37.
- . "Malignant English." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 38.
- . "Negation." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 11.
- . "Prosecution." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 39.
- . "Reading *Titus Andronicus* in Three Mile Plains, N.S." *Execution Poems*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001. 25.
- . "Turning Blue." *Blue*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2001. 7.
- Coleman, Victor. "The Coach House Press: The First Decade. An Emotional Memoir." *Open Letter* 8.1 (1997): 26-35.
- Compton, Anne. "Standing Your Ground: George Elliott Clarke in Conversation." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.2 (1998): 138. *ProQuest Online*. 8 Dec. 2007. <<http://proquest.umi.com/search>>.
- Davey, Frank. *From There to Here: A Guide to English-Canadian Literature Since 1960*. Erin, ON: Press Porcépic, 1974.
- . "The Beginnings of an End to Coach House Press." *Open Letter* 8.1 (1997): 40-77.
- . "Writing and Publishing in English Canada." *Questions of Funding, Publishing and Distribution/Questions d'édition et de diffusion: Towards a History of the Literary Institution in Canada*. Eds. I.S. MacLaren and C. Potvin. Edmonton: The Research Institute for Comparative Literature, 1989. 13-26.
- Dobroslavic, Thérèse. "Tim Inkster: Poet and Author, the Printer, the Designer, the Publisher." *Amphora* 83 (1991): 1-27.
- "Ecology, n.1." *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 22 Jan. 2008. <<http://dictionary.oed.com/search>>.
- Fagan, Cary. "The Porcupine's Quill." *Books in Canada*, 1991. *Home Page of the Porcupine's Quill*. 27 Dec. 2003. <<http://www.sentex.net/~pql/clipping.html>>.

- Febvre, Lucien, and Henri-Jean Martin. *L'Apparition du livre*. Trans. David Gerard. London: NLB, 1958.
- Gaspereau Press, The. "Brighthurst: Everywhere Being Is Dancing." *Fall 2007 Catalogue*. Ed. Andrew Steeves. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2007.
- . "Gaspereau Press - Archive of Press Releases, 2001-2007." *Home Page of the Gaspereau Press*. Ed. Beth Crosby. 15 Jan. 2008. <<http://www.gaspereau.com/pressarchive.shtml>>.
- Gerson, Carole, and Jacques Michon. "Editors' Introduction." *History of the Book in Canada: 1918-1980*. Eds. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon. Vol. 3. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007.
- Harris, Jonathan. "Byzantium: Byzantines in Renaissance Italy." *The On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. Ed. Kathryn Talarico. New York, 2002. 20 Nov. 2007. <<http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/late/latebyz/harris-ren.html>>.
- Hayward, Michael. "Talonbooks: Publishing from the Margins." *Canadian Theatre Review*. 98 (1999): 23-27.
- Hexter, Ralph. "Aldus, Greek, and the Shape of the 'Classical Corpus'." *Aldus Manutius and Renaissance Culture*. Ed. David Zeidberg. Florence and Venice: Leo S. Olschki, 1994. 143-60.
- Inkster, Tim. *An Honest Trade: An Exhibition of Canadian Small Press Books Printed and Bound at the Porcupine's Quill in Erin, Ontario (1974-1983)*. Erin, ON: Porcupine's Quill, 1983.
- . *Financial Records*. 1989-2003. Porcupine's Quill Archives. McLennan Library Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Montreal. Box 46.
- . *Letter to Ann J. Yates, Programme Officer, the Canada Council*. 1989. Porcupine's Quill Archives. McLennan Library Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Montreal. Box 32, files 60-66.
- . *The Coach House Press. An Alive Chapbook*. Guelph, ON: Alive, 1974.
- Johns, Adrian. *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.
- Johnston, George. *Endeared by Dark*. Erin, ON: Porcupine's Quill, 1990.

- Johnston, George, John Metcalf, and Tim Inkster. *Correspondence: Johnston, George*. 1986-1996. Porcupine's Quill Archives. McLennan Library Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Montreal. Box 24, file "Johnston, George."
- Keefer, Michael. "Poems New and Selected [Books in Review]." *Canadian Literature* 119 (1988): 136-38.
- Kirchhoff, H.J. "Small Press, Big Ideas." *Globe and Mail*. July 1990. *Home Page of the Porcupine's Quill*. 27 Dec. 2003.
<<http://www.sentex.net/~pql/clipping.html>>.
- Lowry, Martin. *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979.
- MacSkimming, Roy. *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada, 1946-2006*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007.
- Mardersteig, Giovanni, ed. *De Aetna*. Verona: Officina Bodoni, 1969.
- McCaffery, Steve, and bp Nichol. *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book-Machine. The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group 1973-1982*. Ed. Steve McCaffery. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991.
- McKenzie, D.F. *The Panizzi Lectures, 1985: Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. London: British Library, 1992.
- . McKenzie, D.F. "Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve." *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" And Other Essays*. Eds. Peter D. McDonald and Michael Felix Suarez. Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2002. 198-236.
- McNair, Christine, and George Elliott Clarke. "An Interview with George Elliott Clarke." *2001 Gaspereau Press Omnibus Reader*. Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001.
- Metcalf, John. *An Aesthetic Underground*. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2003.
- . "An Aesthetic Underground." *New Quarterly* 16.3 (1996): 22-37.
- . *Kicking against the Pricks*. Downsview, ON: ECW, 1986.

- . *Shut up He Explained: A Literary Memoir Vol. II*. Windsor: Biblioasis, 2007.
- Milton, John. "Areopagitica." *The Riverside Milton*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. Boston: Houghton, 1998. 987-1025.
- Morison, Stanley. *A Tally of Types*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Nicol, Donald M. *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Publishing, Royal Commission on Book. *Canadian Publishers & Canadian Publishing*. Toronto: Ministry of the Attorney General, 1973.
- Rooke, Constance, ed. *The Malahat Review Number Seventy-Eight -- A Special Issue on George Johnston* 78 (1987): 1-164.
- Sanger, Peter. *White Salt Mountain*. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2005.
- Scott, Donna. "The Canada Council for the Arts -- a Proud Legacy." *The Canada Council for the Arts Fortieth Annual Report and Supplement*. Ottawa, 2007. Canada Council for the Arts. 15 Jan. 2008.
<<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/organization/annualreports/>>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton, 1974.
- Siegler, Karl. "Amusements." *Open Letter* 8.1 (1997): 92-99.
- Steeves, Andrew. "A Brief History of the Anchorage Press: The First Twenty Years." *DA* 54 (2004). *Home Page of DA*. 15 Feb. 2006.
<<http://www.sentex.net/~pq/DA3.html>>.
- . "A Note of Encouragement." *DA* 50 (2002). *Home Page of the Gaspereau Press*. 28 Mar. 2006. <<http://www.gaspereau.com/devill.html>>.
- . "Gaspereau Press: Background." *Home Page of the Gaspereau Press*. Ed. Beth Crosby. 15 Jan. 2008. <<http://www.gaspereau.com/background.shtml>>.
- . "Introduction." *Fall 2007 Catalogue*. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2007. 2.
- . "Introduction, Fall 2006 Catalogue." *Home Page of the Gaspereau Press*. Ed. Kevin Estey. 21 Sept. 2006. <<http://www.gaspereau.com/essays.shtml>>.
- . "Introduction, Spring 2006 Catalogue." *Home Page of the Gaspereau Press*. Ed. Kevin Estey. 21 Sept. 2006. <<http://www.gaspereau.com/essays.shtml>>.

- . "It Starts with a Good Idea." *2001 Wayzgoose (Open House) Booklet*.
Wolfville, NS: Gaspereau, 2001.
- . "Making a Mark." *Wayzgoose (Open House) Booklet*. Kentville, NS:
Gaspereau 2001.
- . "The Right Kind of Crazy." *Books in Canada* Feb. 2004: 40.
- Swift, Jonathan. "The Battel of the Books." *The Writings of Jonathan Swift*. Eds.
Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper. New York: Norton, 1973. 373-
96.
- Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*.
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.