Reconsidering "Some Overrated Masterpieces": The Exhibition Catalogue Awards for 1997

Michael Scott Joseph

There's nothing so convincing as an opinion,writes Stanley Elkin, beginning a memorably iconoclastic essay, "Some Overrated Mastserpieces," "and an odd thing about words is the cockeyed weight they're permitted to bear." Elkin supplies a wonderfully farcical example: "so that if I say something as flagrantly meaningless or flat-out arbitrary as, oh, he's the sort of person who parts his hair, I've not only suggested something negative about hair-parting but have made, too, an aspersion on character."

While Elkin is writing about personal opinions, his observation might easily extend to collective opinions or juried dispositions just as well. If some awards jury somewhere were to write, "X has produced the sort of catalog that one invariably puts out for visiting groups of small school-children," or "Y has simply given us a cataloger's catalog," it is probable that, despite the overtly gracious intent and character of those expressions, the next time X or Y prepares an exhibition catalog, he or she will think twice before using illustrations, however beautiful they may be, or before making extensive

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bibliographical notes, however accurate and serviceable *they* might be. We might observe that the dilemma, indeed the *curse*, of awards committees is that such idealistic work must be continually grounded in the irony that (quoting Elkin) we "condemn a thing simply by mentioning it." (No? Then, when was the last time you *enjoyed* an Oscar-winning performance, or took the Bancroft winner to bed?)

Elkin's contemplations about opinion (and, implicitly, the subset with which we are concerned, the paradoxical nature of praise) momentarily touch upon the idea that maybe people should be restrained altogether from talking about art, that it should be banned to the public as too dangerous: a version of yelling *fire* in a crowded theater. However, as his own imagery draws him toward considering the Gulf War, which is being fought at the time he is writing, he wonders instead whether perhaps art is the only thing that *is* worth talking about, letting the chips fall where they may. He writes, clearly referencing a state of artistic inebriation, "And the point is, well, God bless the artists the point is. Here's to those with paints, whether we know whereof we speak or not. Here's to artisans, folks who make violins, cast bells, throw pots, have perfected their pitch. . . ," and, within this context, or at least borrowing its magnanimous spirit (and with the hope that we do not restrain the general feeling for or cause unintended offense to those we name), we would add the libraries, writers, scholars, editors, catalogers, and all others involved in creating this year's superlative group of Daniel J. Leab and Katharine Kyes Leab *American Book Prices Curent* award exhibition catalogs named below, including, not least deserving of all, this year's winners.

In this final category of winners, we have in Division One (expensive) *The Reformation of The Bible/The Bible of the Reformation*, by Jaroslav Pelikan, David Price, and Valerie R. Hotchkiss (Southern Methodist University, Perkins School of Theology, Bridwell Library). The committee was particularly impressed with Pelikan's masterful essay, which it felt clearly establishes a high–water mark for scholarliness in the genre of exhibition catalogs. The Division Two (moderately priced) winning catalog, *Kehillat Ha-Kodesh: Creating the Sacred Community: The Roles of the Rabbi, Cantor, Mohel and Shohet in Jewish Community Life*, by Sharon Liberman-Mintz and Elka Deitsch (Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library), seemed, in the opinion of the committee, an exemplary model of an important and understudied subject treated lucidly and comprehensively. And finally, the winning catalog for Di-

vision Three (inexpensive) is *For Love of Ruth: A Celebration of English and American Literature from the Ruth Goodhue Chasteney Memorial Gift*, by Robert Hershoff and members of the Fine Arts and Humanities Team at The University of Arizona Library. Hershoff's tribute to Chasteney struck an uncommonly poignant note in praising unambiguously the potential of donor relations to achieve a complex synchrony of reposer and repository, hope and achievement, and mind and heart.

Items preceded by a section sign (§) are winning entries.

Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum, History of Astronomy Department. *Awestruck by the Majesty of the Heavens: Artistic Perspectives from the History of Astronomy Collection*. Anna Felicity Friedman. $9.00. Contact Mave Lawler, History of Astronomy Dep't., Adler Planetarium, 1300 South Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605; phone: (312) 322-0594; fax: (312) 341-9935; e-mail: Mave_Lawler@orbit.adler.uchicago.edu.

Broward County Library, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts. *Bound To Please: An Exhibition of Fine Leather Bindings from the University of Miami Library*. James A. Findley, editor; essay by William E. Brown, Jr., Nora J. Quinlan, Pedro A. Figueredo. $8.00. Contact James A. Findlay, Librarian, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts, Broward County Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301; phone: (954) 357-8692; fax: (954) 357-6762; e-mail: jfindlay@mail.bel.lib.fl.us.

Broward County Library, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts. *zyx: An Exhibition of Selected ABC Books From the Jean Trebbi Collection*. James A. Findlay and Jean Trebbi. $6.00. Contact James A. Findlay, Librarian, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts, Broward County Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301; phone: (954) 357-8692; fax: (954) 357-6762; e-mail: jfindlay@mail.bel.lib.fl.us.

Broward County Library, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts. *Pictorial Covers: An Exhibition of American Book Jackets, 1920-1950*. James A. Findlay. $6.00. Contact James A. Findlay, Librarian, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts, Broward County Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301; phone: (954) 357-8692; fax: (954) 357-6762; e-mail: jfindlay@mail.bel.lib.fl.us.

Broward County Library, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts. *Modern Rare Books: An Exhibition of Selections from the Mata and Arthur Jaffe Collection*.

James A. Findlay, editor; Arthur Jaffe, essay. $6.00. Contact: James A. Findlay, Librarian, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts, Broward County Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301; phone: (954) 357-8692; fax: (954) 357-6762; e-mail: jfindlay@mail.bel.lib.fl.us.

Concord Free Public Library (Concord, Mass.) Special Collections. *A Wreath of Joy*. Sarah Chapin, editor. $23.00. Contact: Leslie Perrin Wilson, Curator, Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library, 129 Main Street, Concord, Mass. 01742; phone: (978) 371-6242; fax: (978) 371-6244.

Cornell University Library. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections. *125 Years of Achievement: The History of Cornell's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning.* Elaine D. Engst. $4.95. Contact Jill Ganoung, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University Ithaca, NY 14854; phone: (607) 255-3530; fax: (607) 255-9524; e-mail: jrg21@cornell.edu.

Cornell University Library. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections. *"The Instinct of an Artist": Shaw and the Theatre.* Ann L. Ferguson. $10.40. Contact Jill Ganoung, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14854; phone: (607) 255-3530; fax: (607) 255-9524; e-mail: jrg21@cornell.edu.

Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ, Florham-Madison Campus, Library. *The Czech Avant-Garde and Czech Book Design, The 1920's and 1930's.* Gordon Dana and Blanka Stehlikova. $48.50. Contact: James Fraser, Library, Fairleigh Dickinson University, 285 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940; phone: (973) 443-8532; fax: (973) 443-8525.

Folger Shakespeare Library. *Impressions of Wenceslaus Hollar.* Rachel Doggett, Julie L. Biggs, and Carol Brobeck. $18.70. Contact *Shakespeare, Etc.* (The Folger Museum Shop), 201 East Capitol Street, SE, Washington, D.C. 20003; phone: (202) 675-0364; e-mail: http://www.folger.edu.

Folger Shakespeare Library. *Shakespeare's Unruly Women.* Georgianna Ziegler, with Frances E. Dolan and Jeanne Addison Roberts. $13.90. Contact *Shakespeare, Etc.* (The Folger Museum Shop), 201 East Capitol Street, SE, Washington, D.C. 20003; phone: (202) 675-0364; e-mail: http://www.folger.edu.

§Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. *Kehillat Ha-Kodesh: Creating the Sacred Community.* Sharon Liberman-Mintz & Elka Deitsch. $9.00. Contact Rickie

Weiner, The Friends of the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY, 10027; phone: (212) 678-8962; fax: (212) 678-8998; e-mail: riweiner@jtsa.edu.

Kalamazoo College Library. *Books That Break the Mold: Twentieth Century Fine Press Books*. Susan M. Allen. $2.50 for postage and handling. Contact Director of Libraries and Media Services, Kalamazoo College Library, 1200 Academy Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49006-3285; phone: (616) 337-7149; fax: (616) 337-7143.

Library of Congress. *American Treasures in the Library of Congress: Memory, Reason and Imagination*. Abby Smith and curators of the Library of Congress. $29.95. Contact: Neil Schwarz, Book buyer, LC Sales Shop, Library of Congress, Publishing Office, Washington, D.C. 20540-4980; phone: (202) 707-3892 or (202) 707-5093; fax: (202) 707-6765; e-mail: reub@loc.gov.

Linda Hall Library, History of Science Collection. *Paper Dinosaurs 1824-1969*. William B. Ashworth, Jr. $8.52. Contact: Cynthia Rogers or William Ashworth, Linda Hall Library, Exhibit Catalog Orders, 5109 Cherry Street, Kansas City, MO 64110; phone: (816) 926-8731; fax: (816) 926-8790; e-mail: rogers@1h1.lib.mo.us; ashworth@1h1.lib.mo.us.

Ohio State University Libraries, Division of Rare Books and Manuscripts, and The Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the Ohio State University. *A Gathering of Leaves: Manuscripts and Early Printed Books from The Ohio State University Libraries*. Ruth E. Hamilton. $6.00. Contact: Geoffrey D. Smith, Head, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Rm. 327, Thompson Library, 1858 Neil Avenue Mall, Ohio State University/ Columbus, OH 43210; phone: (614) 292-938; fax: (614) 292-7859.

Princeton University Libraries, Department of Rare Books & Special Collections. *The Company of Writers: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1846-1996*. Charles Scribner III and John Delaney. The catalog is out of print.

Providence Public Library. Special Collections Department. *The Irish Literary Renaissance in Providence*. Philip J. Weimerskirch and Philip G. Maddock. No charge. Contact: Philip J. Weimerskirch, Providence Public Library, 225 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903; phone: (401) 455-8021; fax: (401) 455-8065; e-mail: philwh@dsl.rhilinet.gov.

§Southern Methodist University, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology. *The Reformation of the Bible/The Bible of The Reformation*. Jaroslav Pelikan, David Price, and Valerie Hotchkiss. $22.50 & tax (soft-cover).

Contact Jim Powell, P.O. Box 750476, Dallas, TX 75275-0476; phone: (214) 768-1031; e-mail: jpowell@mail.smu.edu.

Southern Methodist University, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology. *The Kelmscott Press and Its Legacy*. Isaac M. Gewirtz. $5.00. Contact Jim Powell, P.O. Box 750476, Bridwell Library, SMU, Dallas, TX 75275-0476; phone: (214) 768-1031; e-mail: jpowell@mail.smu.edu.

Southern Methodist University, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology. *The 1997 Helen Warren DeGolyer Triennial Exhibition & Award for American Bookbinding*. Helen Warren DeGolyer and others. $10.00. Contact: Jim Powell, P.O. Box 750476, Bridwell Library, SMU/ Dallas, TX 75275-0476; phone: (214) 768-1031; e-mail: jpowell@mail.smu.edu.

Southern Methodist University, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology. *Selina Hastings, The Countess of Huntingdon*. Wanda Willard Smith. $12.00. Contact: Jim Powell, P.O. Box 750476, Bridwell Library, SMU, Dallas, TX 75275-0476; phone: (214) 768-1031; e-mail: jpowell@mail.smu.edu.

Stanford University. *The William Saroyan Collection at Stanford*. William Saroyan, William McPheron. $5.42. Contact Billie Bousman, Department of Special Collections, Cecil H. Green Library, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6004; phone: (650) 725-1021; fax: (650) 723-8690.

Toronto Public Library, Osborne Collections of Early Children's Books. *"Ingenious Contrivances": Table Games and Puzzles for Children*. Jill Shefrin. $23.48 and GST–Canadian. Contact Leslie McGrath, Curator, Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Osborne Collection, 239 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R5, Canada; phone: (416) 393-7753; fax: (416) 393-7635; e-mail: lmcgrath@tp1.toronto.on.ca.

Trinity College, Watkinson Library. *Bentley's World: The Greek and Latin Classics & Their Influence in 18th Century Britain*. Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz. $1.30. Contact Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 06106; fax: (860) 297-2251; e-mail: jeffrey.kaimowitz@mail.trincoll.edu.

University of Alberta, Bruce Peel Special Collections Library. *wordsounz & eye rhymes: an exhibition of visual poetry & artists' books*. John Charles. $3.70. Contact John Charles, B7 Rutherford South, University of Alberta, Ed-

monton, AB T6G 2J8, Canada; phone: (403) 492-7929; e-mail: John.Charles@Ualberta.ca.

University of Alberta, Bruce Peel Special Collections Library. *The Variety of Literary Forms and Book Formats in the Age of Victoria.* Jeannine Green and John Charles. $10. Contact John Charles, B7 Rutherford South, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2J8, Canada; phone: (403) 492-7929; e-mail: John.Charles@Ualberta.ca.

§The University of Arizona Library. *For Love of Ruth: A Celebration of English and American Literature from the Ruth Goodhue Chasteney Memorial Gift.* Robert Hershoff, *et al.* $2.58. Contact Library Development Office, The University of Arizona Library, P.O. Box 210055, Tucson, AZ 85721-0055; phone: (520) 621-2101; fax: (520) 621-9733; e-mail: ballen@bird.library.arizona.edu.

University of California, Los Angeles, Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts and The Department of Special Collections. *Picturing Childhood: Illustrated Children's Books from the University of California Collections, 1550-1990.* Cynthia Burlingham. $19.68. Contact Eunice Adams, Administrative Assistant, UCLA Library, Dept. of Special Collections, Room A1713, University Research Library, Box 951575, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1575; phone: (310) 825-2422; e-mail: ecadams@library.ucla.edu.

University of Chicago Library. Department of Special Collections. *From Dreamland to Showcase: Jazz in Chicago, 1912-1996.* Suzy Taraba and Victor Cardell. $5.58. Contact Valarie Brocato, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, IL 60637; phone: (773) 702-8705; fax: (773) 702-3728.

University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, Archives and Special Collections. *The Carrell: Souvenirs of Miami Florida: 100 Years of Promotional Literature, 1896-1996.* William E. Brown, Jr. $7.50. Contact William E. Brown, Jr., Archives and Special Collections, P.O. 248214, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124; phone: (305) 284-3247; fax: (305) 665-7352; e-mail: wbrown@umiami.ir.miami.edu.

University of Mississippi, Department of Special Collections. *A Faulkner 100: The Centennial Exhibition.* Thomas M. Verich with a contribution from Gabriel García Márquez. $19.63. Contact Dr. Thomas M. Verich, Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677; e-mail: ulverich@vm.cc.olemiss.edu.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Wilson Library Special Collections. *The Invisible Process: Ingenuity and Cooperation in Finding Women's Lives*. Jan Paris, Lynn Holdzkkom, and Elizabeth Chenault. $4.24. Contact Jan Paris, CB 3936, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-8890; phone: (919) 962-1143; fax: (919) 962-4452; e-mail: jparis@email.unc.edu.

University of Pennsylvania Library. Department of Special Collections. *Networking Artists & Poets: Assemblings from the Ruth & Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete & Visual Poetry*. Craig Saper. $6.92. Contact Greg Bear, University of Pennsylvania, Dep't. of Special Collections, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, 3420 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6206; phone: (215) 898-7088; fax: (215) 573-9079; e-mail: gbook@pobox.upenn.edu.

University of South Carolina (Thomas Cooper Library), with University of South Carolina Press. *F. Scott Fitzgerald Centenary Exhibition: The Matthew J. and Arlyn Bruccoli Collection, Thomas Cooper Library*. By seven of Professor Bruccoli's graduate students. $19.95 plus p & p. Contact USC Press Business Office (Libby Mack), 205 Pickens St., Columbia, SC 29208; phone: (800) 768-2500; fax: (800) 868-0740; e-mail: USCpress@gwm.sc.edu.

University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. *The Discovery of Insulin at the University of Toronto*. Katharine Martyn and Michael Bliss. $8.00. Contact Gabriela Bravo, Development and Public Affairs, University of Toronto Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A5; phone: (416) 978-7644/7653; e-mail: bravog@library.utoronto.ca.

University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. *Tending The Young: From the T.G.H. Drake Collection on the History of Paediatrics*. Philip Oldfield. $6.98. Contact Gabriela Bravo, Development and Public Affairs, University of Toronto Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A5; phone: (416) 978-7644/7653; e-mail: bravog@library.utoronto.ca.

University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of: The Art and Design of Frederick and Louise Coates*. Paul Makovsky; one chapter by Hrag Vartanian. $8.84. Contact Gabriela Bravo, Development and Public Affairs, University of Toronto Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A5; phone: (416) 978-7644/7653; e-mail: bravog@library.utoronto.ca.

Washington University Libraries. *type/script: notebooks: an examination.* Kevin Ray. Gratis. Contact Kevin Ray, Special Collections, Box 1061, Washington University, One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130-4899; phone: (314) 935-5495; fax: (314) 935-4045; e-mail: kray@library.wust1.edu.