Karen Mulhallen, ed. *The Book: Twenty-fifth Anniversary, Part One*. Special Issue of *Descant* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1995), 120 pp.; \$10.00 (paperback). ISSN 0382-909-X.

Karen Mulhallen, ed. *The Book: Twenty-fifth Anniversary, Part Two*. Special Issue of *Descant* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 102 pp.; \$10.00 (paperback). ISSN 0382-909-X.

Descant has come a long way in thirty-one years. It began publication in 1970 as a humble sheaf of mimeographed pages cobbled together by a group of enthusiastic students in the Graduate English Department of the University of Toronto. Today, after more than 113 issues, *Descant* has grown into a leading quarterly journal of arts, literature, and commentary. In 1995, to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary, *Descant* published two special issues devoted to "The Book." Long-time *Descant* editor Karen Mulhallen notes in a preface that the magic of books has been central to her development as a writer and to the growth of *Descant*. The two anniversary issues are celebratory offerings to this. They are "dedicated to the history of books, and of the making of books, and of their movement and conservation, and study and appreciation."

To say that these issues are eclectic is a mild understatement. In the space of 222 pages over two volumes we are treated to fifteen contributions, ranging from discussions of scrolls and codices to the effect of technology on contemporary publishing. Physical parts of the book are studied (prefaces, as well as blurbs), as are printing, book design, book collecting, antiquarian bookselling, radical publishing, and books as works of art. Both volumes are nicely printed and are elegantly illustrated with book-related images, many taken from items in the Ruari McLean collection of fine Victorian illustrated books, now housed in the Robertson Davies Library, Massey College, Toronto. The contributors are an agreeable mix, as well: academics (John Clement Ball, G.E. Bentley, Jr., Mark Kingwell, W. John Rempel); librarians (Marie Korey, Richard Landon); artists (Mark Lewis, Micah Lexier); publishers (Paul Dutton, Michael Torosian); arts writers (Robin Metcalfe, Peter O'Brien); an antiquarian bookseller (David Mason); and a poet (Patience Wheatley). Their writing styles range from the solemnly academic to the anecdotal.

The quality of contributions varies, as one might expect in such a project. The range of topics is so broad, though, that anyone with a

serious interest in books will likely find enough nuggets to pique their curiosity. There are even a few gems along the way. For example, in Part One I found Marie Korey's "The Deluxe Book in Victorian Britain" an illuminating overview. She discusses the careers and work of some of the leading figures in Victorian book design and colour printing, including George Baxter, Edmund Evans, Benjamin Fawcett, Charles Joseph Hullmandel, Henry Noel Humphreys, Owen Jones, Alexander Francis Lydon, William Pickering, William Savage, and Charles Whittingham the Younger. Representative examples of their work illustrate the text.

Michael Torosian's "Printer Savant" includes a piquant but all too brief memoir of a visit to Crosby Type, the last hot metal type shop in New York City, just before its demise in 1988. In it one gets the sense of the passing of an era, and some idea of the character (and characters) common to these old-style shops.

Peter O'Brien's "Recent Canadian Artists' Books" is fascinating in that it brings to light several eccentric book artists/publishers who are far from the mainstream. These people are interested in exploring the outer reaches of what defines a book: its shape, format, composition, and content. They're interested in artistic exploration or social commentary rather than the bottom line. Some are delightfully subversive. For example, Lise Melhorn-Boe is a North Bay artist who consistently pushes the boundaries of "The Book." In 1982, she published *Hairy Legs*, in an edition of ten. It is a collection of advertisement statements on society's expectations concerning the shaving of women's legs, together with personal stories of acceptance and resistance from her friends. The book contains nine pages, each of which is three feet long and shaped like a leg. It is composed of handmade paper, leg hair, and a garter belt. The 'binding' is a hand-knitted wool sock into which the pages fit. In a similar vein, in 1986 Melhorn-Boe published *Come Into My Parlour*, a collection of hairdressing stories of various friends, printed on a folded, pie slice-shaped piece of handmade paper and 'bound' by a pink hair curler. Such creations underscore the fact that "The Book" is really whatever the creator thinks it should be.

Micah Lexier's book sculptures are wonderful, and are well represented in Part One. They are composed of stacks or shelves of book-like objects that have slices of photographs quarter-bound on their thick, rounded spines. When the books are stacked in order, life-sized photo portraits of individuals are revealed. Eight pages of illustrations document examples of these book sculptures, which are fun and somehow disturbing at the same time.

Part Two is perhaps the less eccentric volume, as it focuses more on the traditions of bookselling, collecting, librarianship, publishing, and scholarship. David Mason's delightful "A Tale of Illusion, Delusion and Mystery: Booksellers and Librarians" is the outstanding piece here. It is based on a talk given by Mason, one of Canada's leading antiquarian booksellers, to an audience at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. In it he examines the relationship between antiquarian booksellers and institutions, based on his own experience of almost thirty years. We are introduced to such characters as Bernard Amtmann, the dean of Canadian antiquarian booksellers, and David Esplin, a librarian who dedicated his career to building up the research and manuscript collections at the University of Toronto. Mason's focus is on how people such as these work together to help build outstanding collections. The piece is filled with humorous asides and telling anecdotes. It is bittersweet, too, in its frank admission about the pecuniary vagaries of a life spent buying and selling antiquarian books. But, as Mason states, "In spite of the foolishness of the book business from an economic viewpoint, it continues to attract the dreamers and the eccentrics, and somehow some of us survive and the 'tradition continues.'" And thank God for that. Mason's piece is made even more valuable by the fact that it is so rare. Antiquarian bookselling is a fascinating occupation filled with scholarship, mystery, and sometimes even intrigue. It is rife with book gossip and yet, so few of its Canadian practitioners have written memoirs or even brief recollections of their lives and preoccupations.

G.E. Bentley, Jr., is the world's foremost authority on the works of the British poet and painter William Blake. His essay "William Blake's World in a Grain of Sand: The Scholar in the World of Books" highlights the importance of private collectors to building and preserving the printed record. In the case of Blake's works, Bentley recalls his encounters with great Blake collectors such as Lessing J. Rosenwald and Paul Mellon. We are also introduced to less well-known figures such as Joan Linnell Ivimy, who was discovered to have shoe boxes filled with correspondence of Blake and his circle stored at the back of her bedroom closet. Mystery, curiosity, serendipity—all are common in collecting and scholarship, and feature prominently in Bentley's contribution.

James Edwards and James Lackington were eighteenth-century contemporaries who had a profound effect on the development of bookselling in Britain. Richard Landon's "The Two Jameses: Edwards

and Lackington and the Development of Antiquarian Bookselling in Great Britain" is a straightforward account of their careers. Landon focuses particularly on the contents of their book catalogues and the sale of "great books" to wealthy and discerning collectors.

Paul Dutton's "Underwich [sic] Editions and the Radical Tradition" offers another escape from the mainstream. Underwhich, an unorthodox, Toronto-based publishing collective imprint founded by bp Nichol in 1979, has published a wide range of books, broadsides, chapbooks, one-folds, cassettes, and vinyl. Dutton's survey of the activities of Underwhich details its dedication to "presenting, in diverse and appealing physical formats, new work by contemporary creators, focussing on formal invention and encompassing the expanded frontiers of literary endeavour." Its authors have included all four members of the Four Horsemen (Rafael Barretto-Rivera, Dutton, Steve McCaffery, and Nichol), Victor Coleman, jw curry, Brian Henderson, John Riddell, Steven Ross Smith, Richard Truhlar, David UU, and other exemplars of the Canadian underground. Dutton's comments on the imprint's desire for an uncompromising editorial vision versus the strictures imposed by granting agencies (particularly the Ontario Arts Council) are especially interesting. And, like David Mason's contribution, Paul Dutton's work is most welcome because of its rarity. First-hand accounts of the operations of Canadian underground presses are rarely published in mainstream arts magazines.

The two parts of *Descant: The Book* are a zestful celebration, well worth examining. Karen Mulhallen and the contributors to the issues should be praised for their uncommon devotion to the promotion and study of the printed book, in all its glories and peculiarities.

DONALD W. McLEOD

University of Toronto

Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, eds. *Working in Women's Archives: Researching in Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001. vi, 120 pp.; \$24.95 (paperback). ISBN 0-88920-341-5.

For the past 16 years my office has been in the Archives of York University. There I have watched and, at times, participated in the