Society of Canada almost three years after the event and a year after publication. Yet it is always a pleasure to have these lectures in print. They are nice little pamphlets.

Brian Alderson subtitles his lecture “Some ruminations on texts and what are called para-texts.” He speaks of what he terms the personality of books. He imagines Hans Christian Andersen reporting the conversation between books in a parcel. He looks at the transitions of some editions and at some series imprints. He is for some reason scathing about what he terms “academic commentators,” for which I read historians of the book. He says we don’t concern ourselves with the physical form of texts, the status of that physical form, its variants or its place in “a wider field of historical influences.” This is not the place to argue that he is wrong. But we know he is. He speaks of the physical form of the book as though it is something book historians ignore in favour of the study of texts in a very limited definition of the term. Perhaps he doesn’t realise it, but those of us working in the field would fully endorse his later statement that arriving at an historical understanding of a book through bibliographical analysis is fundamental. It is what we do every day.

Despite such generalisations and allowing for a good deal of free jumping from topic to topic, there are a lot of really interesting examples of children’s publishers’ practices, generational changes in children’s books and publishing. His late nineteenth and early twentieth century American examples are especially good.

The book is illustrated throughout in black and white, and with eight pages of beautiful reproductions in the centre. The appendix is an extended study of some of the editions of Isaac Watts’s Divine Songs, a bibliographical project that certainly warrants the attention Alderson elsewhere advocates.


This is not really a book: hence no ISBN. G. Thomas Tanselle regularly makes available for sale through the Books Arts Press at the University of Virginia his syllabus for his bibliography course at Colombia University. This is the nineteenth revision, and the fifth
he has sold publicly. I buy every revision. Its doorstop bulk makes it daunting, but I dip into it and adapt sections of it for my own Masters and PhD bibliography courses. It isn't really a syllabus but rather a set of bibliographies of bibliographies. Navigating your way around the dozens of headings, sub-headings, sections and divisions is far from easy. Sometimes they are arranged alphabetically, sometimes chronologically, sometimes in groups within those listings. So it's all a little random and not at all as systematic and well organised as you might expect. The four pages of subject index at the end help although, always a mystery, the index is shorter than the outline of contents at the beginning. Nevertheless for an overview of bibliographies on the history of bibliography, bibliographical reference works, printing, publishing history, descriptive bibliography, paper, ink, typography, illustration, binding, and analytical bibliography, this is as good a place to start as any. There will be far more and yet far less than you need on any particular topic: more, because there is a lot of old, even outdated material here; less, because the more you know about a subject the less adequate someone else's bibliography of it is. But given that it is not, as Tanselle admits, a formal publication, its idiosyncrasies may be forgiven.


This is a how-to manual by one of the leading book designers in Great Britain. Normally concerned with construction, Johnson here gives advice on reconstruction and repair. Interesting though some of the processes are, I wouldn’t dream of attempting them. The book begins with a very general overview of why we like books and how they have been constructed. Johnson proceeds to half a page of notes for the professional bookbinder, and the warning that first editions should not in any case be rebound. But if you get that far and do decide to rebind, the damage he describes is horribly depressing: dog eared leaves, tears, worm holes, missing leaves, marks, stains, fungal spores, loose plates, unusual numbering or section arrangement and, innocently slipped into that list, amateur repairs. There is a single page on how to do a collation before you begin the