Spotlight on five small poetry presses: Barque, Crater, Face, Gargoyle, and West House

The Small Press Poetry Collection includes substantial holdings of several single British presses. We have collected (and will continue to collect) the output of these presses not only because they feature the work of poets that are taught here at Sheffield, but also because of their importance on the small press poetry publishing scene.

The five presses spotlighted here represent the best of contemporary, avant-garde, non-mainstream poetry printed in Great Britain in recent times, and feature long-established poets alongside younger ones in an eclectic mix of styles. The presses differ from one another in the form of their productions: from Face Press’s understated yet exquisitely hand-made broadsides and booklets, to Crater’s innovative printing, folding, and colour use in a perfect symbiotic relationship between form and content. Acclaimed Barque Press and West House produce their collections in a more traditional beautifully designed form, while Gargoyle offers simple, occasionally quirky, inexpensive giveaway ephemera.

A tremendous thank you is due to the founding editors of our featured presses: Ian Heames of Face; Richard Parker of Crater; Andrea Brady of Barque; and Alan Halsey of both West House and Gargoyle, who have each contributed brief histories of their presses, and given insights into their production and selection methods.

Face Press

The first books from Face Press were printed in 2009, at the Bibliography Room workshop of the University of Oxford, at that time housed in a basement under the New Bodleian Library. These earliest projects afforded an introduction to letterpress printing methods and typography, thanks to the generously given help and guidance of Bibliography Room manager Dr Paul W. Nash.

Subsequent books and broadsides have made use of a number of different print technologies. As well as letterpress printing from movable type and zinc plates, risograph, laser jet, ink jet, and colour copier have all been used at different times. In
addition to the variety of printing methods, hand-made and mould-made papers have been used to make books, as well as recycled stock and photopaper. Sewn, stapled, and wire stitched bindings have all been used, as well as perfect binding into card wrappers, and (in one case) hardback boards with foiling and a glossy dust jacket.

Face Press maintains no house style for the production of books and broadsides. A range of printing methods have been used to realize a variety of different typographic designs, with different layouts and formats. The input of the text’s author is actively sought in the design process, which also responds to material constraints, such as edition size and budget, as well as to opportunities like the chance availability of unusual paper stocks, or (in the case of one recent booklet printed in Hoxton (June 2016)), the chance to use a specially mixed cyan blue risograph ink.

As well as books and broadsides, Face Press also publishes an occasional magazine of new writing, *No Prizes*. One issue has appeared annually since 2012.

**Crater Press**

The Crater Press began in 2009 with Crater 0, an A6, 16 page group pamphlet containing very short poems by Michael Kindellan, Harry Gilonis, Jonty Tiplady, Robert Rehder, Joel Duncan, Francesca Lisette, Sara Crangle, Daniel Kane, Gareth Farmer, Tom Raworth, Stephen Rodefer and Alex Pestell. This was produced on letterpress in a run of 58. Until 2014 everything we produced was done on letterpress, using a mixture of FAG and Vandercook proofing presses, printing on a variety of paper stocks (mostly Fabriano Accademia) and with various types of ink. Elizabeth Guthrie’s *X Portraits* (2011) features hand-painted sections and a hand-made block, while Sarah Kelly’s *TONO* (2014) is printed on hand-made paper.

Among the most ambitious volumes we’ve published so far are Keston Sutherland’s *The Stats on Infinity* (2010), a fifteen page black and white A4 pamphlet, and Gwen Muren’s *Glitch* (2014), an eight-page, six colour pamphlet which features lots of complicated, multi-colour over-printing.

Our first few years’ worth of pamphlets were printed at Inkspots Press in Brighton, with the assiduous help of John Packer and Les Ellis. Crater 2, Jonty Tiplady’s *Above Shoes by Some Margin*, was printed on a Vandercook press at Central Saint Martins in
London in October 2009, while Crater 20, Jeff Hilson’s *FROM ORGAN MUSIC: AN ANTI-MASQUE NOT FOR DANCING* was printed on a terrifying old Spanish machine in Mataró in Catalunya in July 2012. From 2014 our letterpress work has been printed at the London Centre for Book Arts, while we have also begun publishing a number of full-length volumes using digital Print On Demand methods. Among our POD volumes are Tim Atkins’s *Petrarch Collected Atkins* (2014) and *Leg Avant: The New Poetry of Cricket* (2016). We have also done some conventionally printed poster-poems, including Jeff Hilson’s *A Ritual Poem Against the Sea* (2014) and Amy De’Ath’s Crater 31 (2015).

The Crater Press won the Michael Marks Prize for poetry pamphlet publishing in 2011.

**Barque Press**

Barque Press was founded by Andrea Brady and Keston Sutherland in Cambridge in 1995, where they produced books on the Caius College photocopier late at night with the aid of the college librarian, and hand-collated and stapled pamphlets for distribution in local bookstores and at CCCP. With the aid of a grant from the Arts Council in 2005 it expanded and developed an online presence and distribution network, and now exists as a small enterprise split between them in London and Brighton.

It specialises in non-conformist Anglophone poetry. Authors include J. H. Prynne, John Wilkinson, Stuart Calton, Amy De’Ath, William Fuller, Peter Manson, Sean Bonney, Tim Atkins, Simon Jarvis, Emily Critchley, Timothy Thornton, Chris Goode, David Marriott, Peter Middleton, Brian Kim Stefans, Elena Rivera, and others; Brady and Sutherland have also published their own work with the press. In addition to numerous books and pamphlets, Barque has produced a DVD from a poetry conference held in Guangzho, China, and four CDs, which include spoken word performances by a variety of artists alongside improvisational music. The latter are an offshoot of the press magazine, Quid, an irregular and motley array of poetry, prose, and critical essays.

Though Barque has always been a haphazard and slipshod enterprise, it is recognised as one of the most important small presses in the UK at the start of the 21st century. Barque books have been included in displays at the Bury Text Festival,

West House Books & Gargoyle Editions

Between 1995 and 2011 West House published fifty titles ranging from modest pamphlets to substantial volumes. The earliest were issued from The Poetry Bookshop in Hay-on-Wye; these included Gavin Selerie’s *Roxy* and Kelvin Corcoran’s *Melanie’s Book* alongside my own *A Robin Hood Book*. After my move to Sheffield in 1997 the press entered its most productive phase and the books published in this period were typeset and produced by Glenn Storhaug at Five Seasons Press, continuing an association and friendship reaching back four decades. Books published 1999-2005 included major collections by Richard Caddel, Martin Corless-Smith, Bill Griffiths and Geraldine Monk. In later years the output was largely restricted to locally-printed pamphlets, most notably early collections by Catherine Wagner and Sean Bonney, as well as co-publications with Chax Press and BookThug ensuring that Karen Mac Cormack’s work appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. As publisher/designer and on several occasions co-author/artist I always considered West House a collaborative venture.

Gargoyle Editions sprang up under the West House umbrella and have survived its demise. Handmade either by Geraldine Monk or myself these pamphlets and ephemera use digital technology aiming to recover some of the urgency and immediacy of the mimeo editions we encountered as cub poets in the 1970s: page and format as extension and expression of a poem’s form, often produced in a handful of copies for a specific event such as reading or bookfair. Or birthday or wedding. Sometimes I think this is the ideal mode of poetry publishing, made with care and yet off the cuff, inexpensive to produce and so to give away without serious loss – in all probability to survive by chance or, to be more optimistic, for love.