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THE ART OF THE CHAPBOOK



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own work you get both a greater feeling of satisfaction, and a smaller bill. I usually publish in runs of 100. It's easier to carry 400 sheets of paper than 800, and you can get a good price from the printer on a run of 100.

When you make a book, first choose the size that the book will be. You can either use letter-size paper folded once, a size best suited for mechanically folded books, or legal-size paper folded twice, a size I like to use; it makes a book of the same dimension as a standard pocket book, is the cheapest to produce as you print twice as many pages at each printing, but the choice of available paper is restricted.

When you design a book, number the pages of your material. Always make a Dummy. Take plain paper of the size and number of pages you are using, fold them into a book, and go through the book and number the pages. That way you won't get a book with the pages in the wrong order.

I like to make books using legal-sized paper folded twice. I like to leave the first and last page uncut as a cover, and not use a special cover stock, so if I have 24 pages of text I will fold four sheets of paper, in half top to bottom, then in half again side to side, then interleave them so I have four folds at the top. I then go through the book numbering the pages: Cover, blank, blank, inside, 1, 2, 3, 4 ... 22, 23, 24, inside back, blank, blank, back. I might have a drawing for the "inside" of the cover, and the "inside back" pages. I number the pages in large figures in the middle of the pages, and stick the text right over those figures.

I open the pages out and use the dummy book as paste up sheets, I then go to the copy shop and print between one and five proof copies, which I fold and sew together to make sure that the pages are in the right order and that otherwise everything looks how I want it. I quiet often refine the design of the book at this stage. I might add more drawings, give the first page a different treatment, correct any spelling mistakes, etc. I show them to a few friends, carry them about, until I feel like printing the edition. That is a good time to relax while putting together a book.

I like to sew my books together, as sewing is permanent, and I don't believe staples belong in a book. Sewing is simple and fast and can be done anywhere. I like to sew in coffeeshops over a cup of tea, a nice leisurely occupation. I thread a needle with enough thread for five books, I prick three holes from the inside of the book through to the outside, one in the centre, one about half an inch down from the top, and one the same distance from the bottom. I sew the thread through the middle hole from the inside, go up and back through the top hole, then down the length of the book to the bottom hole, out the bottom hole and back in the centre hole, making sure the thread is on the other side of the long stitch from the tail. Then I tie the thread across the long stitch. So the pattern goes: Through the middle hole to the outside, leave a couple of inches to tie, up to the top hole, through to the inside, down to the bottom, out through the bottom hole and back in the middle hole, tying across the centre thread. It's easy to understand if you have the book in your hand.

You can really only bind together four folded sheets into a single booklet, if you use any more than that the pages won't lie flat and the whole thing will be quite ungainly. Fortunately there is a simple trick to binding two booklets together, an ancient Coptic trick. Take six sheets of legal-size paper, fold them twice and interleave them into a thick booklet, and sew it with the stitch I have demonstrated, then, here's the trick, count through three double leaves and fold them back, one by one, till you have what looks like two booklets (or signatures, or gatherings) sewn back to back. If you go through the book and number the pages, then cut the thread, you will be able to see how to paste the book up, and this way you will be able to produce a book of over 50 pages, which is no longer a chapbook, having enough pages to be accepted as a book by such bodies as the Canada Council for the Arts and Public Lending Right, bodies that do not accept Chapbooks as Books.

There is another simple technique used to sew books of more than two signatures, using the simplest of tools and nothing more than a coffeeshop table.

It's a good feeling to be able to produce books at no more than the cost of the printing. You can also produce very fine notebooks at a very reasonable price, and if you are inclined towards fine bookbinding this here gives you one of the basic techniques with which to work. Of course there are more sophisticated ways of sewing books, but they tend to require special tools, and workshop space.

If this operation is taken slowly at first, it will be found to be not too complicated, and after a few tries a fairly tight book will be produced. I find that I can sew a book in about 15 minutes, and what is produced is a legitimate book by anyone's standards, and will last until the paper or thread rots away.

I usually design books with wrap around covers that fold into the first and last pages which I leave uncut. The other pages must now be cut. It is better to use a blunt knife rather than a very sharp one for this. If this operation is taken slowly at first, it will be found to be not too complicated, and after a few tries a fairly tight book will be produced. I find that I can sew a book in about 15 minutes, and what is produced is a legitimate book by anyone's standards, and will last until the paper or thread rots away.

We continue into 3(1) up to 3(2) across to 4(2) up to 4(3) back to 3(3) up to 3(4). We might be tempted now to sew on into 4(4), but the top of 3 is still separate from the top of 2 so we have to use what is called a kettle stitch. We sew a stitch by passing our needle between the signatures 2 and 1 without sewing into the signature, then we tease the whole thing tight and sew again between 3 and 2 (this second stitch helps keep the work tight), and then we sew into 4(4), down to 4(3). We don't have a fifth signature so we sew back into 3(3), down to 4(2) and down to 4(1), then we make another kettle stitch between 3 and 2, and 4. As we have no more signatures to sew on we take the thread back to 1 by sewing between the signatures, 3 and 2, and 1, and tying again with a square knot to the tail at 1(1).

whole thing tight (don't pull too tight or the thread will cut the paper), I leave a 2-inch tail at 1(1) and tie the working end to the tail. This is the only time the thread is tied until the very end, and it stops the book from getting loose behind us as we move forward.

I use this method for producing books of a hundred or so pages, sewn in six signatures, each signature being a booklet of three folded legal-sized sheets contained in a wrap around cover. If you take the cover off the book, you will see four lines of stitches across the back of the book, but no threads running up and down, those are all inside the book. This is a good point to remember when trying to figure out my instructions.

To learn the technique, we will make our first book with four signatures, each signature being one sheet of legal-size paper, folded twice, giving us 8 pages or 32 pages in all. Once you understand the technique it's easy to sew thicker booklets, and more of them.

Pick up the four signatures, Number them 1, 2, 3, 4, in large numbers on the front of each. The next job is to mark the sewing holes; block the booklets so the top and the back are both level, then, either using a pencil, or a utility knife blackened with pencil lead draw lines across the back, a quarter inch from the bottom, a third of the way up, two-thirds of the way up and a quarter inch from the top, then, with your needle prick right through, so the needle comes out on the inside of the crease. For this first adventure into sewing a book we shall now number all the holes, from the bottom up, (1), (2), (3), (4), so now we have a code, 3(2) would be the second hole up from the bottom in the third signature. It may sound complicated but if you number the holes on the folded paper it will be fairly simple.

Now we are ready for sewing, and we remember that all the vertical threads are inside the book, the threads on the outside of the book link the signatures together.

I measure off the amount thread I am going to use by winding the thread vertically around the book, for a book of 6 signatures I use 3 winds, bottom to top, for a book of 4 signatures – 2 winds, and then I leave a tail of 4-inches or so for tying.

Sew into 1(1) up to 1(2) out of 1(2) across into 2(2) up to 2(3) back to 1(3) up to 1(4) across to 2(4) down to 2(3) across to 3(3) down to 3(2) back to 2(2) down to 2(1) (up and down inside, across and back outside) then I tease the

The poet can go to the computer, typeset the pages in any one of a hundred different fonts, design a cover and take the whole book to a copy shop which will print, collate, fold and staple and give the work back that afternoon.

There is no need for the poet to go to another agency for anything more than approval and the sort of moral support we all need from time to time, especially after wrestling with the angel in the creation of a work of art. There is really no need for the sort of hierarchies that have grown up around the art of poetry, hierarchies in which the poet is always at the bottom.

For hundreds of years the trade of the printer demanded a high degree of skill and considerable capital outlay, in terms of presses and, in particular, type. The book trade is still largely dominated by the kind of thinking that grew up under those conditions, but typesetting and printing have become democratized, they have never been more readily accessible to the general public, and are often as close as the nearest streetcorner.

The word Chap comes from the Anglo-Saxon "Ceop" which originally meant to swap or barter, and is the root of a whole host of words: Cheap, Swap, Shop, as well as Chapman and Chapbook, (but not Chapter which has ecclesiastical origins). In Chaucer's time a chapman was a respected merchant, but by the 16th century he had fallen down the social scale to be an itinerant peddler, and now he is just any old chap.

The history of chapbooks goes right back to the beginning of printing. From the 16th century until the railroads changed the face of the World in the 19th century, chapmen or peddlers would load up their packs with printed sheets and walk out from London, York or Edinburgh, and wherever they went they would sell ballads, newsheets, and the latest instalment of popular romances, all illustrated with woodblock prints, often as unfolded broadsheets, which their customers would fold and sew together.

IN THE PUBLISHING OF POETRY, the chapbook is once again coming into its own.

Of course one can always go to a trade publisher, and if he is willing to bet his money on you he will do the same sort of operation, then you will see the product six months, or two years later, after a spell in limbo, or maybe purgatory, lost in the huge bureaucracy of poetry. You will be told that this is the more 'legitimate' way to publish poetry, but these structures of legitimacy were only imposed in the last 50 years.

Your book will appear in a design that is calculated to appeal to the bookseller, glued between glossy covers, in a book that will crack ominously when you open it, and will be falling apart in a few years if it gets anything like the use you think it deserves.

Let's face it, the average trade book is designed to satisfy the ego of the poet and the needs of the bookseller. It has too many poems to be read at a sitting, and they are too varied to be enjoyed as a unit. It is like a meal, the greater part of which is carried home in doggy bags, to be stored in the fridge and microwaved sometime next week as a snack over the TV commercials.

A poem is not a novel, it is a little bit of delicatessen for the mind and ear. A poem should be lovingly produced in a volume of just the right proportions that will present it as a discrete work of art, and should be sold at a price that the poet's colleagues can afford. A poem may be worth a million dollars, but it should cost somewhere between the price of a beer and the price of a meal. How much is Hamlet worth? Yet you can buy him for a quarter at the Sally Ann. A poem should be worth so much as to be given away free to all the poor of the city.

Chapbooks, by their nature, are simple and cheap to produce, and are more likely to put change in a poet's pocket than is a trade book, for the only economic benefits gained by being published by a recognized trade publisher are in the grants and competitions for which you are rendered eligible.

I discovered early on in my publishing career that every process you ask the printer to perform costs you money, collating, folding, stapling, etc. so if you learn to do your