

# *Aldus Society Notes*

Spring 2023

Volume 23, No. 2

## Upcoming Programs and Events

Dan Brewster — May 11, 2023

Thursday, May 11 at 7:00 pm at Thurber Center

Dan Brewster is the owner and manager of Prologue Bookshop in the Short North area of Columbus. Originally from Northeast Ohio, Dan has worked in book-adjacent jobs all his life, from being a Page in the Cuyahoga County library system to working as a software engineer at Goodreads in San Francisco. In 2018, he returned to Ohio to open Prologue Bookshop. When he's not slinging books, Dan enjoys playing the piano, cello, or handbells, going on a bike ride, or swimming. He lives in downtown Columbus.

The title of his talk is **"Stepping Away."** (And, no, he's not stepping away from the bookstore!)



Dan Brewster

Gallery Talk by Eric Johnson, Head Curator of  
OSUL Rare Books and Manuscripts Library

Date TBA at OSU's Thompson Library

Eric will be offering the Aldus Society a special tour of his latest exhibition in the main gallery of Thompson Library at Ohio State for anyone who may be interested in attending. The date will be announced soon, so watch for it on the Aldus email listserv.

The exhibition is called **"Deathless Fragments"** (March 20 – August 6, 2023) and it focuses on the magnificent collection of medieval manuscript fragments at Ohio State—one of the best such assemblies in North America, including nearly 1,500 pieces from more than 430 discreet medieval manuscripts, ranging from ratty and worn parchment pieces recycled in later medieval or Renaissance bindings, pages cut apart for their illuminated initials or for conversion into lampshades, deluxe decorated and



Prologue Bookshop

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Aldus Society Meetings

*Regular meetings of the Aldus Society are held at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month between September and May. Meetings are held at **Thurber Center, 91 Jefferson Avenue, Columbus, Ohio** (unless otherwise announced). Socializing at 7:00 p.m. Free parking on Jefferson or behind Thurber House and at State Auto rear parking lot (between 11th St. and Washington).*

## *The Aldus Society*

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George Cowmeadow Bauman

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Newsletter deadlines are August 1st, December 1st, and April 1st.

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*(Continued from page 1)*

illuminated fragments from medieval Bibles and Books of Hours, and more. The exhibition focuses in particular on Ohio's part in the breaking and international dispersal of manuscripts--principally by Otto Ege and Bruce Ferrini--and the opportunities for teaching, scholarship, and inquiry that such fragments afford. You'll have the chance to see "old favorites" such as the magnificent Hornby-Cockerell Bible (more than 30 illuminated pages on display), numerous examples of the MSS destroyed and dispersed by Ege and Ferrini, manuscript "carcasses," and many other fascinating examples of manuscript fragment in various forms (from a saint's bone relic to spine-lines, pastedowns, broken bindings, and fine art pieces). And for those of you more interested in non-manuscript topics, such as conservation, exhibition design, etc., the exhibit also features some fantastic work by our exhibition preparation team (displaying more than 100 manuscripts was not an easy organizational task to pull off!).

"Deathless Fragments" — March 20–August 6, 2023. For the official exhibition blurb, please visit this page: <https://library.osu.edu/exhibits/deathless-fragments>

## Sandy Watkins

The Aldus Society extends condolences and deepest sympathy to Paul Watkins and his family after the death of his wife, Sandy, on March 1, 2023, after a long illness.

### *Columbus Dispatch* Obituary

Sandra (Notestine) Watkins of Worthington passed away peacefully on March 1, 2023 at the OSU Wexner Medical Center after living the final decades of her 83 years with a series of chronic illnesses. Sandy was born on June 25, 1939 in Bellefontaine, Ohio to Robert J. Notestine, Sr. and Dorothy (Koch) Notestine and is survived by her husband Paul, daughters Wendy and Susan, son Rob, granddaughters Emily and Kate, brother Robert J. (Dorothy) Notestine, Jr and several generations of much-loved nieces, nephews, cousins and pets. Sandy's life revolved around her family and friends and she had the uncanny ability to find out the life story of anyone she met. As neighborhood mom, she is fondly remembered by her kids' friends as keeping the best-stocked snack cupboard in Worthington. In spite of her many health challenges, she retained her cheerful disposition and her boundless capacity of finding pleasure in life until the end. She will be deeply missed by all those who had the good fortune to know her. Please visit [www.schoedinger.com](http://www.schoedinger.com) to leave a special memory or condolence.





# Program Recaps

(All program photos by George Cowmeadow Bauman)

## Recap: February 9, 2023 Program

Publisher Michael Nye

The Aldus Society was treated to a telling of Michael Nye's revival of the literary journal *Story*, here in Columbus, Ohio. The original *Story* began publication in 1931 and continued fitfully for decades, until its shuttering in 1967, having presented the short stories of many of America's greatest authors. Michael described his efforts to revive the journal in 2018, and the continuing challenges of keeping a literary journal alive and relevant. *Story* now features the works of many established and up-and-coming writers.



## Recap: March 9, 2023 Program

Letterpress Printer Sarah Brown



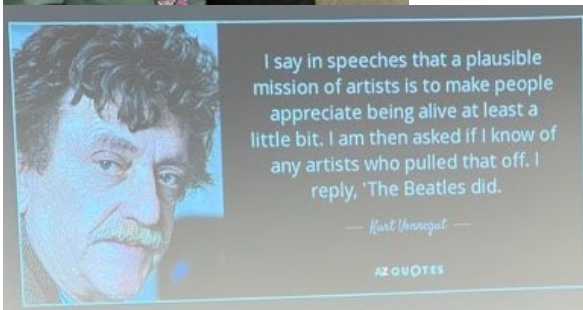
Sarah Brown, a letterpress printer based in Lancaster, Ohio, and owner and operator of **Questionable Press**, described her work making posters, paper sculptures, and cards by hand-carving images, pairing them with hand-set type, and printing them, one color at a time, on old letterpress machines. This was a lively presentation describing the admirably determined journey she has been on to master the mechanics and innovative use of equipment which has mostly been superseded and abandoned by today's printing and publishing industries.

## Recap: April 13, 2023 Program

Curator Chris Lafave



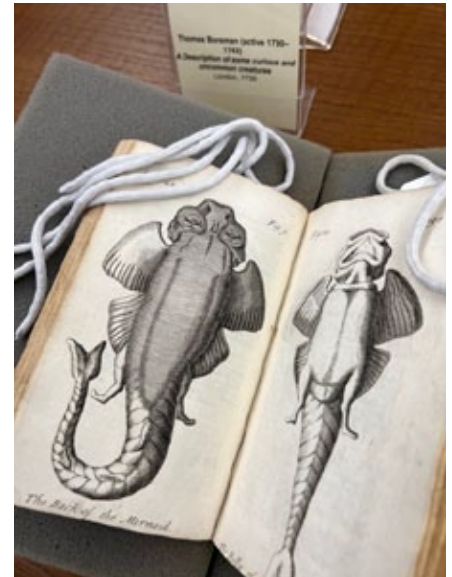
Chris Lafave, curator for the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library, discussed Vonnegut's life and work as represented by treasures from the museum. Chris Lafave (Master of Library Science, Indiana U.) has been studying and speaking about Vonnegut since 2012, when he became curator of the museum, an organization dedicated to maintaining the ideals and memory of a man novelist Jay McInerney described as "a satirist with a heart, a moralist with a whoopee cushion." (Actually, not a bad description of Lafave, himself!)





## Recap: March 4, 2023 Saturday Spotlight

This Saturday Spotlight was curated by OSU Department of English Ph.D. student Eileen Horansky. The event showcased a variety of materials from RBML collections to explore the history and impact of book illustration as a means of knowledge production across the arts and science. She has a background in rare book cataloging. Her research interests lie in the history of the material book in the early modern period as well as in the early print history of medieval texts, particularly relating to bibliographic history, textual transmission, and the conceptualization of authorship during the first decades of print in England. Eileen is also a Trustee of the Aldus Society.



# Aldus Poetry Corner

## If the Aldus Society Were in a Dickens Novel...

Aldus member Roger Jerome is a London-born, still-working actor, who trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and was a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1950s. After many years of working and teaching in England, he came to the U.S. in 1989 to teach theater at Rio Grande College in southern Ohio.

Charles Dickens is one of his favorite writers and is a character that Roger has portrayed numerous times. As he was perusing the recent Aldus membership directory, he kept thinking of how Dickens would have named or characterized certain members of Aldus.

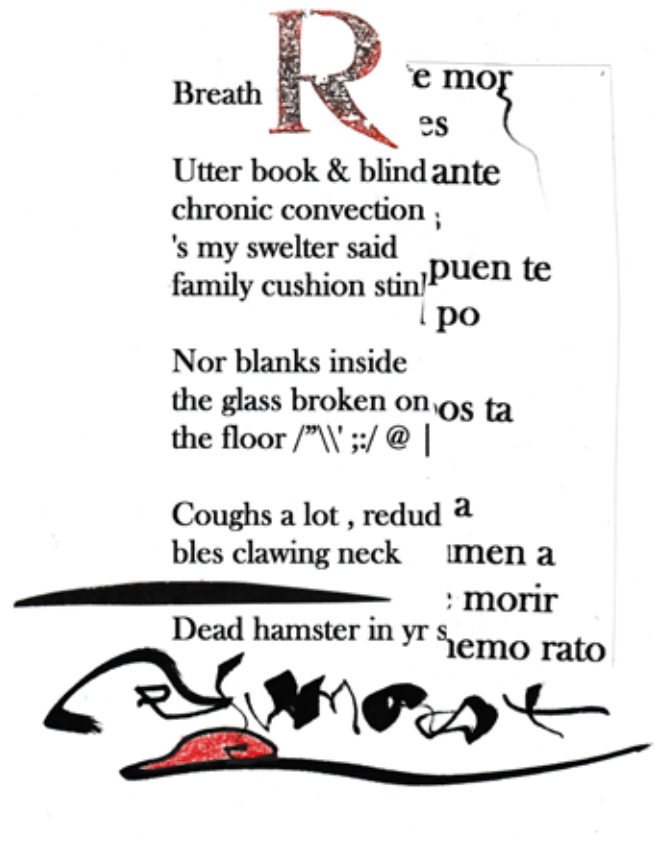
"With great delight.... did I pore over the recently distributed Directory," Roger emailed the Aldus listserv. "It was a Dickensian name list for his unwritten novel set in Ellis Island.

"There is the ever-snacking Rice  
the genial Hoffman  
Appalachian Struble  
Founder Smith  
Statistical Tootle  
the inspiring Campbells  
the ever-missed Kahn  
carol-singing Bauer  
Tai Chi's Celebrezze  
the affable Gilbert  
retired coffee maven Hayes  
the inscrutably Celtic Watkins  
the indefatigable Braun  
Stetson Bauman  
the charming Groseck  
Postcard Williams  
the Dr Who and super quilting Thackers  
the sympathetic Saup  
the Spanish expert surrealists Bennetts  
Polymath Johnson  
the unrepentantly Minnesotan Boomgaarden  
Baltic Jensen  
Jack-at-the-back  
flawed casting director Herban  
the Californian firm Brightman and Metz  
...these and many other impressive characters."

## A Spring Haiku By Nancy Campbell

After months sitting  
In front of the fire, today  
We sat in the sun.

## Breath By John M. Bennett 1.22.23



## The Night the Rain By John M. Bennett 2.23.23

Out window a shout  
slambang gainst wall  
yr cheek contains

Is flailing air a  
lens' gravel sed  
su luz

Pulsante lengua  
era , es un muer  
centraje de tu bhook

: Lihbro lubrec ante  
lipbre pues , portazo  
inside yr rain

*El cochecito de tu espera  
se acuerda con tu ida*



# PLAY BALL!

## Short Bookstore-ies

By George Cowmeadow Bauman

The 2023 baseball season has opened and I'm a happy camper.

The first major league game I attended was in 1953, in Cleveland's old Municipal Stadium. The Indians were hosting a Fathers and Sons Scout Day. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts and their dads from Ohio and Pennsylvania were heading to the park to see Cleveland play the famous Yankees, who were the defending World Series champs, who had won four Series in a row.

From New Castle, PA, a P&LE (Pittsburgh and Lake Erie) train had several cars full of really excited kids ready for their first train ride as well as their first big league game. We all had our ball gloves with us, ready to catch a foul ball from Mickey Mantle or Yogi Berra or Larry Doby. Dads had their wallets ready to shell out for hot dogs and Cracker Jacks and a Coke.

Oh, what a thrill to be walking into the huge stadium and see all the famous ballplayers out on the field for batting and fielding practice.

As we walked into the stadium, each of us was handed a free comic book celebrating the story of Larry Doby, first black man in the American League, the parallel to Jackie Robinson in the National. Sure would like to still have that copy, but they were made from very thin, cheap paper.

I'm sure I had it read before the first pitch was thrown. Baseball and reading; what a combination.

And the following stories feature that same combination, baseball and books, in the Acorn Bookshop.

Play Ball!

## A BASEBALL LOVING BOOKSHOP

Mitchell Conner, a longtime Acorn regular, was booking with his two sons and a brother. Mitch was featured in my story "Honeymooning with Baedakers," published in the "Aldus Notes."

I hadn't seen them walk in, for I'd been down in our secluded basement, pulling books to restock from the blue steel shelving we'd bought when Pengwyn Books had had a great going-out-of-business sale.

When I first joined Acorn in '98, the basement had been empty and dark, with no inventory stored in a retrievable manner, just a few full boxes from recent trips to customers' home to buy their libraries. Eventually the basement became almost as organized and full as the upstairs.

Coming back up with a few books for Christine to shelve, I saw a boy, about 6, wearing a Columbus Clippers T-shirt. The Clippers were Cleveland's AAA farm team here in Columbus.

I'd been walking around squeezing a baseball much of the day for flexibility in my right hand, which helped keep the pain of post-elbow-surgery at bay. This ball was stamped with "Columbus Clippers."

I couldn't help but notice with a smile the synchronicity of the Clippers' connection as I passed by the boy.

When I came back up with another armful of books, the youngster was standing with the group he arrived with.

"Hi, George," Mitchell said, "I brought my sons with me," and proudly introduced me to Jim and Evan. Jim was the baseball shirt guy. Evan was carrying a book that his father had already bought for him.

I bent down to Jim and said, "That's a great T-shirt you're wearing. Have you been to a Clippers' game this year?"

Very shyly he shook his head.

"Well, until you get to a game, I've got something for you." I handed him the baseball I'd been carrying around. "This was given to me by a man who caught it at the ballpark, and I think you should have it because it matches your shirt." He opened his palms and accepted the ball with wide eyes.

Then, sensitive to the fact that I wasn't giving anything to his brother, I said, "Evan is taking a book home, and you are taking a baseball home, so you both got something at the Acorn Bookshop."

The boy ducked his head in shyness, while Mitchell, with a big smile, thanked me on behalf of his son.

Interacting with customers is not necessarily about the moment's profit. It's about ensuring that the experience has been positive enough for them to feel good about bookstores in general, to want to return to this one in particular, producing not only warm and fuzzies, but also long-term profitability for the shop.

Happy Days for everybody on an early summer Saturday afternoon in Booktopia.

"Play Ball!!!"

## BASEBALL, BOOKS, AND A BIRTHDAY

John Carlin was a big baseball fan, which made him exceptionally welcome when he came in to buy a paperback mystery or an Edgar Guest poetry book for his brother-in-law. He was a former employee of Acorn.

Baseball lover that he was, each spring he took a week's vacation from managing a hotel's gift shop to go to Florida to stay with a cousin and her husband. They were both doctors, with a large house featuring a swimming pool. But the real attraction in the South wasn't the family visit or a warm break from a cold Columbus winter. He was there to sit in sunny bleachers, attending spring training games every day. He came back north and brought me stories of which teams and players looked good and, yes, of how beautiful the weather was.

One year, before he left, he brought me a gift baseball from the Library of Congress, with colorful books pictured on the black cowhide, which I displayed with my other collectible baseballs at the shop. Books and baseball. (I also kept my ball and glove behind the counter for a game of "catch" in the parking lot if someone was so inclined.)

John and I always talked baseball when he visited. One morning upon entering, he asked me how I was doing.

"Depends on what the Pirates did last night," I replied. "I haven't had a chance to read the morning paper yet."

He tried to recall what he'd read/heard about the previous night's scores but knew only that his favorite Mets had lost yet again. "They can't hit; they can't throw; they can't catch. And for this they have a hundred-million-dollar payroll?!!"

After a quick spin around the store, he walked out the open side door without saying goodbye, which was unusual for him.

A minute later he returned with that day's *Columbus Dispatch* for me to check out the scores.

I loudly reported that the Bucs had won their fourth straight, and we engaged in a little diamond chatter while Elvis' greatest hits were playing and other customers browsed on the overcast Saturday morning.

A man who has bought and sold us a number of illustrated vintage children's books walked in the front door, bringing his son with him for the first time. As the bells jangled their entrance, I looked up from the paper and welcomed them with a "good morning."

A moment later, I heard on the other side of the newspaper a quiet "Excuse me." I lowered the paper and saw that it was the son; he was asking for Hardy Boys books.

That made me feel good, as reading the Hardy Boys was a large part of my growing up. I *always* had a book in front of my face, so much so that I got teased on the country school bus for reading to and from school, and while waiting for the bus instead of horsing around with the other kids. The bus kids called me "Four Eyes," as I was one of the youngest kids to get glasses back in the early 50s.

While I was into the Hardy Boys, my sister, Sally, was reading the Nancy Drew books. I finished reading all 57 of the Hardy Boys eventually and needed more reading material. Sadly, we didn't live near a library. So, I would sneak into Sal's closet and nick one of her Nancy Drews for a day's reading. She never did catch on, and, as an adult, laughs with me when I tell that story.

And here was a young boy wanting Hardy Boys books, and memory-lane-ing me.

I took him to the Children's Fiction section and pulled down a couple dozen of the bluebacked books for him to go through. He bought one with his own money—making a big production of it, and father and son headed out to a sunny afternoon.

A few minutes later a father and two sons walked in the side door. The tall red-bearded, black ballcapped father was carrying the one boy, and when I noted that he'd brought a young browser with him, he replied, "We've got a birthday boy with us today."

So I "Happy Birthday"-'d the youngster, who was put on his feet, then ran down the paperback Fiction aisle, and in response he shouted, "Happy Birthday to *me*!" I followed him and sang the first line of "Happy Birthday to You" and stopped, for he had begun singing with me, and carried the tune to the end. I gave him a high-five, and he giggled.

"He's been singing that all day to himself," said his dad, shaking his head as one who has heard and will hear the song way too many times today. He then spied the Hardy Boys books, still sitting on the stool in the Children's Fiction section.

"The Hardy Boys!" he exclaimed, which brought his other son—a curly-topped cherubic-looking boy—away from the Science Fiction paperbacks.

"My oldest there," he nodded at the angel-boy, "is just now getting into them, which really pleases me."

"When I was growing up, my friends and I were all into the Hardy Boys together, and we used to have Hardy Boys Conventions," he remembered. "I would pack all my Hardy Boys books into a suitcase, and go to one of my friend's houses, where we would gather to read and talk nothing but Hardy Boys. It's a great memory for me."

So I wasn't the only traveler on the memory road that day who was inspired by the Hardy Boys.

As they left, I said "Happy Birthday" one more time to the youngest, and instantly he started singing his special song as an exit melody.

I was inspired to sing a bit myself. I wandered back to the counter singing, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

## BASEBALL AND BEER

"Are you into beer?" demanded a gray-haired man, who walked in wearing an OSU sweatshirt over a belly that evidenced a love of the brew.

Not sure where he was coming from, or where the conversation was going, but wanting to be affable, I answered, "Yes, sir, I do like a good beer now and then."

He sauntered over to the counter and went on. "Do you ever get to Pittsburgh?"

Before I could enlighten him about driving there every month or so to visit Linda's mother and siblings he continued, "If you ever do, then you've got to go to..."—and I could have finished the sentence for him as I knew what he was going to recommend—"...to the old Penn Pilsner Brewery. They serve great beer in a great atmosphere."

When I stated my preference for Penn Dark, his eyes lit up like I'd just handed him a sudsy six-pack, and he pushed his face forward, and asked, "You've been there?"

So, I had to 'fess up to being from Pittsylvania and having been to the brewery he admired.

"Have you ever had Nittany Ale?" he then asked.

"Nope."

Satisfied that he was the sole expert on this brew, he described the beer and bottle it came in. "Those blue bottles are the dangest thing you ever saw. The bottle alone goes for a buck 'n a half or two bucks on the Internet. But heck! You can go to the brewery in some little town southeast of Pittsburgh and for 45¢ get a bottle that's full of beer!"

He tried without success to recall the town's name, but said with a grin, "I do remember the motel, though. Staying in a motel right next to a brewery is about as good as it gets!"

He left on that declaration and left me with a thirst for a good beer.

Things got a little busy then, and it must have been a half hour later when the lager-lover walked back in and handed me a bottle of Nittany Ale—a full one.

"Thanks!" I said in surprise. "I'll pour this one for the first pitch of the World Series tonight!"

"Beer and baseball," he replied. "Does it get any better than that?!"

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### Book Review: Manuel Maples Arce, *Stridentist Poems, Translated and with an Introduction by KM Cascia*, New York: World Poetry, 2023.

worldpoetrybooks.com

By John M. Bennett

Finally a good bilingual compilation of one of the founders of Mexico's great and unique avant-garde cultures, Estridentismo! Estridentismo was one of the more influential avant-garde movements in Latin America in the 1920's (and the world, I would say), with manifestations in all the arts and genres. This collection, thankfully, is bilingual, and the English translation by Cascia, a largely literal one, is well-done. (It is impossible, but necessary, to translate poetry, and I think a literal approach is most often the best and most useful.) Maples Arce had a long and varied career as a poet and Mexican diplomat. This volume includes his early avant-gardist work, and was written in a style reminiscent of the international vanguard aesthetics of the time. There is some resonance with Italian Futurism or Spanish Ultraísmo, for example, but Maples Arce's work has a much richer content, greater complexity and stylistic experimentation, than, say, Marinetti. [Editor's note: Filippo Tommaso Emilio **Marinetti** was an Italian poet, editor, art theorist, and founder of the Futurist movement.]

For example, consider this, from his poem "Prisma":

Yo soy un punto muerto en medio de la hora,  
equidistante al grito náufrago de una estrella.

I'm a still point in the middle of the moment,  
equidistant to a star's castaway shout.

This is more lyrical, intimate, and subjective than Marinetti, and has much more in common with other Latin American poets of the period such as Vicente Huidobro. This could be seen as a strong presence of Latin American Modernismo, which might be considered a late Romanticist aesthetic that Maples Arce's work here tries to expand or



explode with vanguardist ideas and style. Consider, for example, from the poem “Por las horas del cuento...,” with its echo of poets like Rubén Darío, the best-known promotor of Modernista ideas and aesthetics:

Por las horas de cuento de estos parques sin rosas,  
abulan, un diptongo de ensueño, nuestras sombras.

At story time in roseless parks,  
they wander, a dream diphthong, our shadows.

Or, from the poem “Como una gotera...”:

Las canciones florecen  
a través de la lluvia,  
en la tarde vacía sin teclado y sin lágrimas.

Songs flower  
by means of rain  
in empty afternoons, no keyboard, no tears.  
(The Spanish for line 2 more literally says “through the rain”)

The same poem concludes with some much more vanguardist lines:

¡Y el humo de las fábricas!  
.....  
Un piano tangencial se acomoda en la sombra  
del jardín inconcreto.....  
en las esquinas nórdicas hay manifestos rojos.

And Factory smoke!  
....  
Tangential piano settles in abstract  
garden shadow.....  
Red manifestos on Nordic corners.

Maples Arce’s long poem “URBE (CITY)” is much more consistently political and vanguardista (Oh ciudad toda tensa / de cables y de esfuerzos, / sonora toda / de motores y de alas. .... Los asalta braguetas literarios [*sic*] / nada comprenderán / de esta nueva belleza / sudorosa del siglo..... Oh city all tense / with wires and effort, / all noisy / with motors and wings. .... Literary dick groppers / will understand nothing / about the century’s / sweating new beauty.....

But even in this book, there is a steady background *continuo* of Modernista aesthetic, which I think has as much to do with Latin American culture and history in general as with any aesthetic theories or ideas. Some of that flavor, so present in this book, simply cannot be rendered into English.

The fact that Maples Arce’s work is so vivid, so alive, is partly due to his position between Modernismo and Vanguardismo; his poetry of this period is one of an agitated transition. In this and other ways his poetry is, again, reminiscent of Vicente Huidobro’s, who wrote at about the same time. While promoting Estridentismo, it is also true that in this early poetry, Maples Arce is often intimate in tone and perspective, more literarily Mexican, and Modernismoistic (in the Latin American sense). This conflict creates his very effective and compelling voice.

The volume includes an English-only version of *Actual No. 1*, Maples Arce’s long Estridentista manifesto published as a broadside, and stuck up as a poster around Mexico City. Like many such vanguardist manifestos and declarations, it is enthusiastic and provocative, and rather more “estridentista” than his estridentista poems. This is the case with many such documents and texts, being perhaps somewhat more aspirational than a true *Ars poetica*.

Maples Arce’s work here is most clearly understood in the context of Mexican poetry in general. Estridentismo, in its concern with both politics and aesthetics, was an important stage in its evolution, and its presence and tradition is very much alive in Mexican literature today, as may be seen in the work of poets like Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, César Espinosa, Araceli Zúñiga, and many others. Roberto Bolaño, of course, devotes a whole and wonderful novel, *Los detectives salvajes/The Savage Detectives*, to a search for a lost Estridentista poet, the probably fictional Cesárea Tinajero.

The publisher, World Poetry, is to be congratulated for bringing Maples Arce’s work to a wider audience. Their ambitious list of international poets is a wonder to behold. Cascia’s introduction to this volume is interesting and useful, especially for understanding the poet’s life and extensive works. This book is a treasure!

# Visiting Siberia & The Great Aurora Borealis of 1867

By Scott Williams

It was after 1:00 in the morning on a crystal-clear winter night. Full moon beaming down on a mountainous snow-covered landscape. I and a group of foreigners on the Trans-Siberian Railroad reveled at the view northward upon unfrozen Lake Baikal stretching to the horizon. We were rounding the southern end of Lake Baikal, the deepest, largest and most ancient lake on the planet whose volume holds more water than *all* of The Great Lakes.

Suddenly a gasp among the Russians and foreigners in my rail car occurred—to our right, we all saw rounding a mountain edge, miles away in the east, the other, tiny, lit-up Trans-Siberian. Two ships in passage. It was the end of October 1972. The ever present *eight-days of clickity-clack, clickity clack* on the Trans-Siberian would leave a lifelong audio memory. We transiting foreign tourists all agreed that the other highlight on our world-famous train was that each sleeper rail car had its own samovar! We could request at any time a surprisingly great-tasting glass of Russian Chai (tea), served in an ornate metal tea cup holder. Chai sustains!

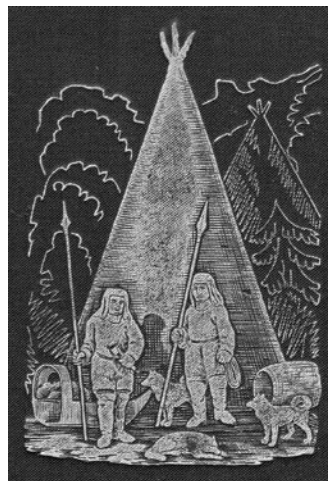
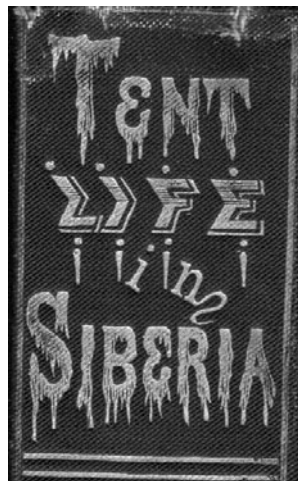
I had learned the Cyrillic alphabet (somewhat) and there was a Cyrillic chart in some of the rail cars that gave the number of minutes at each stop—some only two minutes! We would rush out and into the station and surrounding area to absorb “whatever.” At one stop I bought a picture of Tolstoy; at another, I got into a snow-ball fight with Russian kids. Around 1971 I had read Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and then saw the movie with a date—not a good idea! Produced and directed by a Finn, its cinematography by the Swede, Sven Nykvist, was praised. As my journey on the Trans-Siberian was ending, one night we passed a well-lighted and high-fenced compound off in the distance that looked *exactly* like the gulag concentration camp in the movie. Is there a word to describe the feeling?

Siberia is not a normal destination for tourists during “off-season.” But for those of us taking the boat to Japan, we reveled at the off-season price of our adventure. For me, my over 7,500-mile journey from Copenhagen to Yokohama on boats and trains cost \$350. This included about two weeks of room and board incorporating a two day stop-over in Moscow. In a dorm room at Moscow State University, I was able to sell my “black market” record albums and clothing to a Ukrainian, thanks to a Finnish student friend who showed me around town. I ended up with more money than I could spend! I kept my carton of Marlboros for the train and gave it to a newly-wedded Russian couple who got off at a tiny station to live on the frontier.

Always looking for print material to collect, while waiting in a large Russian embarkation lobby for my Russian boat to Japan, I picked up a pamphlet titled: *Trotskyism—A Weapon of Anti-Colonialism, An Urgent Task of Ideological and Political Struggle*, written by B. Ponomaryov and published by Novosti Press, Moscow, in 1972. The Russians were still worried about Trotsky whom Stalin had dispensed with in 1940! I tried reading the pamphlet to relieve my boredom, only to induce brain fog and sleepiness. I retain my copy to this day; and I find there are *no* listings on OCLC’s World Cat and *only one* copy of it for sale on the Internet ...going for \$12.00! At disembarkation in Yokohama, a Japanese friend would greet me.

**Right image:** “Frozen-in-Time” font! The two weird fonts used for the spine’s title of my 15th impression copy of G.P. Putnam’s Sons’ 1st edition.

**Rightmost image:** The cover’s gilt illustration on dark blue cloth to *Tent Life in Siberia*.



The Rossiya (Russia) rolls from Moscow to Vladivostok in eight days. SOURCE: ITAR-TASS.

**Whether selling hot potatoes or not, women vendors like this are a tradition at stations along the Trans-Siberian.**

The Great Aurora Borealis Event of February 1867 in Siberia observed by the American George Keenan drove me to write this article! In diary like form, he would write one of the more popular travel books of the 19th century. *Tent Life in Siberia and Adventures among the Koraks and other Tribes in Kamtchatka and Northern Asia*. He spent over two years of his life (1865-1868) exploring the northeast corner of Siberia and Kamchatka Peninsula, some of

which had yet to be explored even by the Russians. Thanks to fellow Aldine, George Bauman, I own a *fifteenth* impression of this book first published in 1870, in London and New York. I already owned a paperback version published in 1986 with an introduction by Larry McMurtry, the American novelist, screenplay writer, book collector, and “most famously” Archer City, Texas’ *antiquarian book town founder* where he passed away in 2021. McMurtry labels Kennan’s book, “one of the most appealing classics of nineteenth century travel. ...a thrilling account of a jinxed 1860s effort to telegraphically link America and Europe via Siberia (across the Bering Strait).” McMurtry further argues that, “the origins of black humor lie in travel writing, and *Tent Life in Siberia* would be an excellent book on which to base such a thesis.”



**Cropped image to the book’s foldout map depicting Kennan’s travels (dots) and planned telegraph (line) to Alaska.**

Larry McMurtry states that “the greatest passage in *Tent Life in Siberia* is the “description of an extraordinary display of the aurora borealis... In the annals of Arctic travel there is nothing to surpass Kennan’s description... It is the kind of writing that once would have been called sublime.”

But before we turn to this “truth is stranger than fiction” travel passage, I beg the reader to brush up a little more on Siberia!

Things fall apart. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia still held Siberia for which Russians often refer to it as three broadly named regions which incorporate a confusing array of provinces and autonomous zones. **Each** of these three broad regions of Siberia are **larger** than the entire “lower 48” states of the USA! (Mote, p. 13)

An eye-opening post-Soviet Union overview of Siberia is by an American geographer, Victor Mote and titled *Siberia. Worlds Apart*. Mote’s chosen frontis-quote to start his book is by an Alexander Smirnov: “We live far away in Siberia, the land of gulags. We have rebel blood.” In the last chapters, Mote grapples with the

**Right: A laughing 92-year-old Nanay woman (with a full pipe!) on Sakhalin Island off the east coast of Siberia. In the background is a typical single story Russian wooden house with their truly beautiful detailing.**

Alas, to this day, no “physical” link across the Bering Strait between our two continents has been consummated! Railroad bridges started being proposed as early as the 1890s. In the early 21st century we have people like Neil Bush (yes, of the presidential family) working with Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon (yes, the Moonies’ founder) attempting to raise money to bridge that Bering Strait! In 2014, the Chinese proposed a 120-mile undersea tunnel to pop-up in Alaska with a high-speed rail line. Plans for an “east-west” dam across the strait exist. But Putin in 2012 re-established the “north-south” *ice-curtain* of the Soviet era and declared their side of the strait to be a forbidden military zone again. To put Keenan’s era into perspective, Imperial Russia operated through commercial licenses “Russian America” between 1799 and 1867. Thus, “Russian America” was just a few very small coastal trading posts in Alaska, California and Hawaii. Long discussed, Seward in 1867 finally executed on the sale of Alaska to the USA, which goes unmentioned in Keenan’s book.





last few years of its politics leading up to the book's 1998 publishing date. For example, the "Association of Peoples of the North" formed in 1989 to advocate for reform under Gorbachev, renamed themselves in 1997, the "All-Russian Association of the Numerically Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East." Remnant regions of these decimated indigenous peoples began to declare autonomy and control over *their* natural resources. But, so too, did everyone else! Gulag mining towns, counties and cities all defined and declared their own autonomy. Even the Jewish Autonomous Region (Oblast) founded by Stalin in 1928 demanded more autonomy despite it being the "only autonomous oblast" allowed in Russia's new 1993 constitution. Talk about "Shangri La" misnomers, the 2021 census reports that there remain 827 Jews in the oblast, dominated by 133,625 Russians. Like so many other "troublesome" populations in Soviet Russia that were exported to Siberia, such groups then fled to old or new lands after the 1991 collapse. There were strikes everywhere as there was no money to pay workers (where did it go?!). A few visionaries emerged, for sure, but each "popularly elected" mayor and provincial governor described by Victor Mote seemed to be the head of a mafia! Gradually Moscow would take over the provincial governorships and change the constitution so that Putin now controls each governorship.

Siberia is the home to *Shambala*, a mythical, utopian, country geo-located near Mount Belukha in the heart of the Altai Mountains, of the Russian Altai Republic, where the borders of Russia, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan meet, **at the geo-center of Eurasia**. With the opening of Russia, beginning with Gorbachev, Westerners jumped at the chance to explore the Altai Mountains! Seattle's, The Mountaineers, published in 1994 *Trekking in Russia & Central Asia* by Frith Maier. Maier warns: "The Altai Mountains are remote and vast... It is a place only truly committed adventurers go." During this era of re-opening, cut-off Western historians began to learn from Russian archaeologists about the earliest roles that Siberia played in human history (the DNA findings continue to unfold!). We find that iron was being made in the southern Urals *a thousand years* before it went viral across the continent. The Silk Road, it was learned, is far more ancient and fragmented than thought. It had its own routes going northward to supply Rome and China with Arctic Ocean, tundra and taiga luxury goods over the millennia. "Historical (written) evidence about the Uralian population is extremely sparse and vague. It goes back to Herodotus, later to the Arabian travelers and merchants." (Koryakova & Epimakhov 2007, p. 1). The Russians would not venture over the Ural Mountains into Asia until the 11th century and not begin to slowly colonize it until the 15th.

What else can be said of the remarkable George Kennan before we hear from him? Ohio State University Press in 1968 published *To Russia and Return. An Annotated Bibliography of Travelers' English-Language Accounts of Russia from the Ninth Century to the Present*. In it, is cited, Kennan's second book published in 1891, in two volumes, totaling 880 pages, titled *Siberia and the Exile System*. Here is the annotation: "Kennan, hoping to refute the allegations of brutality in the Russian exile system, journeys to Siberia with George Frost, a *Century Magazine* journalist. After an 8,000-mile journey from June, 1885—March, 1886, with the full support and help of the St. Petersburg authorities, he shocks the world and angers the Russians by his full description of venality, harshness, brutality, and inefficiency as he found them."

And now from Kennan's "Chapter XXX. An Arctic Aurora." in *Tent Life in Siberia* we let him speak: "Among the few pleasures which reward the traveler for the hardships and dangers of life in the far north, there are none which are brighter or longer remembered than the magnificent Auroral displays..."

"On the 26th of February, while we were all yet living together at Anadyrsk, there occurred one of the grandest displays of the Arctic Aurora which had been observed there for more than fifty years, and which exhibited such unusual and extraordinary brilliancy that even the natives were astonished. ...

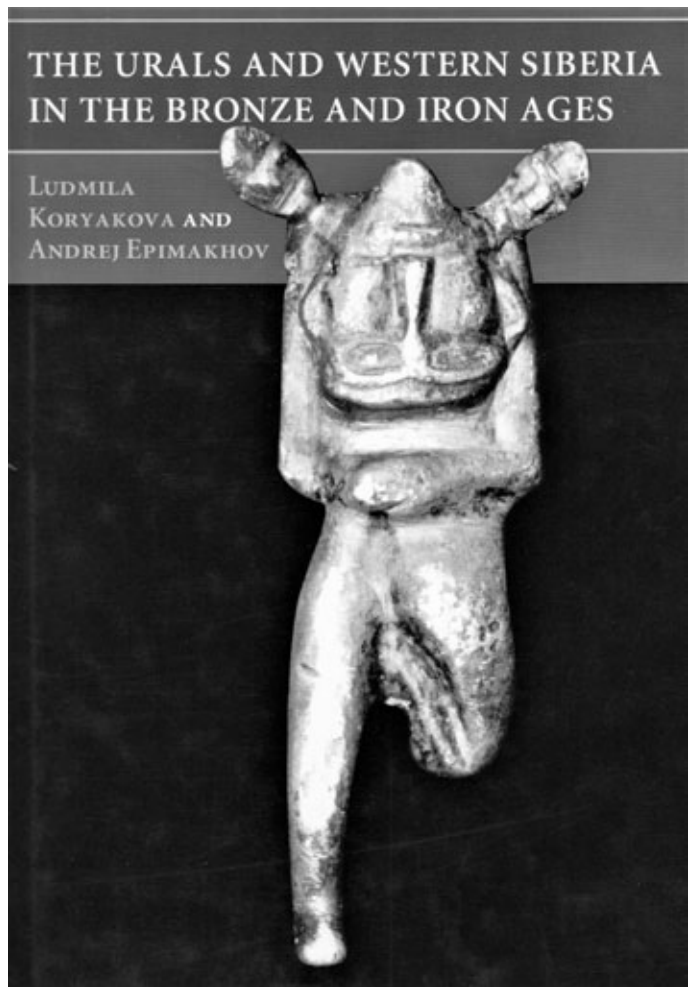
"Late in the evening, just as we were preparing to go to bed, Dodd happened to go out of doors for a moment to look after his dogs; but no sooner had he reached the outer door of the entry than he came rushing back, his face ablaze with excitement, shouting 'Kennan! Robinson! Come out, quick!' With a vague impression



**At the end of his adventure in early 1868, George Kennan poses in his new fashionable winter outfit! From the Russian Pacific coast, he would now travel overland, in winter, to St. Petersburg and grab a boat home to complete his round the world journey.**

that the village must be on fire, I sprang up, and without stopping to put on any furs, ran hastily out, followed closely by Robinson, Harder, and Smith. As we emerged into the open air there burst suddenly upon our startled eyes the grandest exhibition of vivid dazzling light and color of which the mind can conceive. The whole universe seemed to be on fire. A broad arch of brilliant prismatic colors spanned the heavens from east to west like a gigantic rainbow, with a long fringe of crimson and yellow streamers stretching up from its convex edge to the very zenith. At short intervals of one or two seconds, wide, luminous bands, parallel with the arch, rose suddenly out of the northern horizon and swept with a swift, steady majesty across the whole heavens, like long breakers of phosphorescent light rolling in from some limitless ocean of space.

"Every portion of the vast arch was momentarily wavering, trembling, and changing color, and the brilliant streamers which fringed its edge swept back and forth in great curves, like the fiery sword of the angel at the gate of Eden. In a moment the vast Auroral rainbow, with all its wavering streamers, began to move slowly up toward the zenith, and a second arch of brilliancy formed directly under it, shooting up another long-serried row of slender colored lances toward the North Star, like a battalion of the celestial host presenting arms to its commanding angel. Every instant the display increased in unearthly grandeur. The luminous bands revolved swiftly, like the spokes of a great wheel of light across the heavens; the streamers hurried back and forth with swift, tremulous motion from the ends of the arches to the center, and now and then a great wave of crimson would surge up from the north and fairly deluge the whole sky with color, tingeing the white snowy earth far and wide with its rosy reflection. But as the words of the prophecy, 'And the heavens shall be turned to blood,' formed themselves upon my lips, the crimson suddenly vanished, and a lighting flash of vivid orange startled us with its wide, all-pervading glare, which extended even to the southern horizon, as if the whole volume of the atmosphere had suddenly taken fire. I even held my breath a moment, as I listened for the tremendous crash of thunder which it seemed to me must follow this sudden burst of vivid light; but in heaven or earth there was not a sound to break the calm silence of night, save the hastily-muttered prayers of the frightened native at my side, as he crossed himself and kneeled down before the visible majesty of God. I could not imagine any possible addition which even Almighty power could make to the grandeur of the Aurora as it now appeared. The rapid alternations of crimson, blue, green, and yellow in the sky were reflected so vividly from the white surface of the snow, that the whole world seemed now steeped in blood, and then quivering in an atmosphere of pale, ghastly green, through which shone the unspeakable glories of the mighty crimson and yellow arches. But the end was not yet. As we watched with upturned faces the swift ebb and flow of these great celestial tides of colored light, the last seal of the glorious revelation was suddenly broken, and both arches were simultaneously shattered into a thousand parallel perpendicular bars, every one of which displayed in regular order, from top to bottom, the seven primary colors of the solar spectrum. From horizon to horizon there now stretched two vast curving bridges of colored bars, across which we almost expected to see, passing and repassing, the bright inhabitants of another world. Amid cries of astonishment and exclamations of 'God have mercy!' from the startled natives, these innumerable bars began to move, with a swift dancing motion, back and forth along the whole extent of both arches, passing each other from side to side with such bewildering rapidity, that the eye was lost in the attempt to follow them. The whole concave of heaven seemed transformed into one great revolving kaleidoscope of shattered rainbows. Never had I even dreamed of such an aurora as this, and I am not ashamed to confess that its magnificence at that moment overawed and frightened me. The whole sky, from zenith to horizon, was 'one molten mantling sea of color and fire, crimson and purple, and scarlet and green, and colors for which there are no words in language and no ideas in the mind... The month of February wore slowly away, and March found us still living in Anadyrsk, without any news from the Major, or from the missing men, Arnold and Macrae."



**Siberia is renowned for its shamans and Kennan finds himself too crude to write about their use of magic mushrooms. This bronze age human image, probably of a shaman, has its head *upside down* with little heads popping out of the shoulders.**

# Coming Aldus Society Programs 2023-2024

Thursday, SEPT 14th, 2023:  
**TBA**

Tuesday, OCT 10th, 2023 (Tuesday!):  
**Ashley Perez** on Banned Books

Thursday NOV 9th, 2023:  
**Mark Dawidziak**, On the Mystery of Edgar Allen Poe's Death. His book, *A Mystery of Mysteries: The Death and Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, focuses on Poe's "final days" with chapters on a different theory that has been circulated about Poe's death, which Dawidziak then debunks through new information provided by Poe scholars and researchers, before sharing a brand-new theory in his conclusion.

Thursday, DEC 7th, 2023?:  
**Holiday Party**

Thursday, JAN 11th, 2024:  
**Aldus Collects**

Thursday, FEB 8th, 2024:  
**Sarah Neville**, OSU English professor, Early Modern Herbals and the Book Trade, Columbus, OH

Thursday, MAR 14th, 2024:  
**TBA**

Thursday, APR 11th, 2024:  
**Betty Weibel**, Author of *The Ohio Literary Trail*, Cleveland - on tracking down the great writers from Ohio

Thursday, MAY 9th, 2024:  
**TBA**





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