



ONE FOR THE BOOKS

BY MARCELLA MEHARG

SYLVESTER & ORPHANOS: Beachwood Canyon's Publishers Extraordinaire

"Living-room publishers," that is how Stathis Orphanos describes his and partner Ralph Sylvester's book publishing business. His eyes twinkle as he says this and hands me a book, one of a dozen or more he brought in a cardboard carton to our meeting.

The book, "Christopher and His Kind" by Christopher Isherwood, exemplifies the work of Sylvester & Orphanos and nullifies the phrase "living-room publishers." Issued in 1976, "Christopher and His Kind" is one of 130 editions elegantly hand-bound in raw Indian silk, illustrated with a portrait of the author and endpaper drawings by artist Don Bachardy; each book was signed by the author and the artist. Every aspect of the book—from state-of-the-art fine printing to title page and cover design—complements the book's contents.

The Isherwood book was a first for Sylvester & Orphanos, who have subsequently published twenty-five more books, all by world famous authors, among them three Nobel laureates. To name but a few of the authors: Graham Greene, John Cheever, Nadine Gordimer, James Merrill, Joyce Carol Oates, John Updike, V.S. Naipaul, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal. All but the Isherwood book at 130 copies and one of three by Graham Greene (a miniature at 185 copies) are runs of 330, each one signed by its respective author. Such rare, limited editions are a far cry from some variety of cottage industry and are seldom stored in the bookcases of just anyone's living-room.

These unique volumes (priced from \$125 to \$275) enhance the libraries of private collectors, university archives and museums. Orphanos hands me another book to examine, then another, and another; all hand bound in either silk, linen or decorated cloth; a few in slipcovers; each an aesthetic tribute to its author.

"Impressions" by John Updike is a collection of essays on art, illustrated with fourteen hand-tipped color plates. (Orphanos explains that Updike when young wanted to be an artist but after assessing his potential turned to literature.) "Town and Country Lovers" by Nadine Gordimer narrates the tales of two couples: a black man who loves a white woman and vice-versa. The book's design, conceived by the publishers, echoes the racial theme with black hearts on white and white on black. The cover design on Gore Vidal's "Sex Is Politics and Vice-versa" emphasizes the author's ironic viewpoint

with a red, white and blue color scheme, about which Vidal commented "How patriotic."

There are three books by Graham Greene: the story "How Father Quixote Became a Monsignor" which was later developed into a

books. James Merrill praised their edition of his book "Samos" as "...a dreamworld of gorgeousness. Thank you!" Of their edition of "Sentimental Education," Joyce Carol Oates wrote, "...it's a delight to see the beautiful job you've done."

of such master craftsmen as Grant Dahlstrom, Patrick Reagh, Lillian Marks at Plantin Press, and master bookbinder Max Adjarian, as well as well as many others, have contributed to the consummate beauty of the books. Sylvester &



Gutenberg Press.

Even so, Sylvester & Orphanos carry on, but with a change of pace. Their two most recent publications are art books. One, "Tsarouchis: the Face of Modern Greece," is a folio edition (36 color plates) on the work of Greece's greatest modern artist, Yannis Tsarouchis. Contained in the book is also a preface by Melina Mercouri, a forward by the artist, and tributes to the artist by well-known, international authors, artists, film-makers, composers, photographers—twenty four in all with each contributor's signature. The book is bi-lingual (in Greek and English) and limited to 424 copies. It is easily Sylvester & Orphanos' piece de resistance, the rarest of their rare books, priced at \$5000 and worth every drachma.

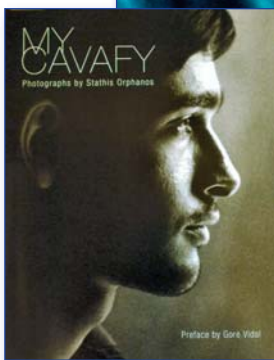
Sylvester & Orphanos' most recent art book, "My Cavafy—Chance Encounters," is a collection of Greek poet Constatine Cavafy's verse and Stathis Orphanos' photographs. (Orphanos is a well-known, often exhibited, published portrait photographer.)

Cavafy's poems were translated by Evangelos Sachperoglou; Gore Vidal wrote the preface to the book. The book's subtitle, "Chance Encounters," refers to the unanticipated collaboration between the poet and photographer. Though

originally the poems and photographs were conceived, created and intended by each artist to stand alone, the alliance works fortuitously, perhaps serendipitously—as if by "chance."

For more about Beachwood Canyon's "living-room publishers" e-mail them at Sylvanos@aol.com or log on to the photography website: www.orphanos.com.

—Marcella Meharg, book-loving Beachwood neighbor



novel; "A Quick Look Behind," a collection of his verse; and "A Weed Among the Flowers," a travel book about China. In 1990, Greene wrote to Sylvester & Orphanos, "I would like to see a fourth volume published... but as I have reached the age of eighty-five it seems unlikely." (Greene died the following year.)

Greene has not been the only author to express his personal appreciation of the publishers'

Sylvester & Orphanos have been preeminently selective in their choice of designers, printers and bookbinders. The collaboration and creativity

Orphanos' edition of Paul Bowles "In the Red Room" prompted Bowles to write that the book was "proof that the making of fine books is still within the realm of possibility."

Writer's Cramp—Ouch!

It's not easy obtaining an author's signature—330 times a pop. Author's available time and whereabouts complicates the task and also involves the cooperation of a sometimes recalcitrant postal service. For example, because of Nadine Gordimer's political activism, mailing colophon sheets to South Africa for her signature was risky. Consequently, she postponed signing until in New York. Graham Greene was in Italy. His secretary warned against using the Italian postal service because it was so untrustworthy. (Carrier pigeon, perhaps?) Obtaining the signature of Paul Bowles, who resided in Morocco, had all the makings of a spy film. First Customs seized the blank sheets to inspect under special light for hidden codes. Once cleared, the Ministry had to approve the papers' release—a protracted bureaucratic process. The final obstacle involved the local post office, which was guarded with armed soldiers and rarely open anyway because of lengthy religious holidays. Despite such difficulties each author signed every book.

However, according to Orphanos this is no longer the case. With the passing of many fine craftsmen, the low cost and convenience of off-set printing and cybertext reproduction, the art of fine book-making will soon be (if not already) as obsolete as the

Photos-Top: A selection of Sylvester & Orphanos publications. Left: My Cavafy cover. Center: Yannis Sarouchis with the publishers, Stathis Orphanos & Ralph Sylvester. Right: Gore Vidal.
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"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss