



From James Merrill's Dogs to the  
Alfred A. Knopf Borzoi Devices

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In the process of describing the poet James Merrill's books published by Alfred A. Knopf for a descriptive bibliography of his work, Bill Morgan and Jack Hagstrom encountered the borzoi device (or "logo" or "trademark") and the phrase "This is a Borzoi Book Published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc." repeatedly.

Merrill grew up with dogs. He remembers his father's dogs in the poem "My Father's Irish Setters." Late in life, Merrill and his companion, Peter Hooten, would cherish a little long-haired Jack Russell terrier "Cosmo," remembered in a poem with the same title. But also, from the publication of his first trade book, First Poems, in 1951, until long after his death, another breed of dogs populated his life--borzois.

Handling Knopf books and recurrently seeing the borzoi challenges one to accurately describe the device in its many forms and to confront the question "What is a 'Borzoi Book?'" One of the aims of descriptive bibliography is not only to record evidence in an organized way but also to supply a historical context for that evidence. This article attempts to explain the concept of a "Borzoi Book," give a history of the borzoi device, and illustrate and enumerate those borzoi devices that are available. George Salter in Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965 says, "There is a Borzoi



Style."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to extol the diversity of distinguished book designers engaged by Knopf over the years and to call the Borzoi style a "mode" rather than a fixed graphic form, referring to it as an "editorial system." This is the result of the care and interest Alfred A. Knopf himself took, and Knopf as a part of Random House takes, first of all in the subject and contents of the book. Moreover, Knopf credits the book designer, and most of the hardcover editions have a colophon that names the typeface used and gives a bit of its history, in addition to listing the compositor, the printer, and the binder of the book. All of these elements play a part in a "Borzoi Book."

Geoffrey Hellman, in his delightful 1948 "portrait" of Alfred A. Knopf for The New Yorker, says

A picture of the borzoi has always appeared on the title page and jacket of every Knopf book, in every Knopf colophon, on nearly all Knopf office stationery, and in practically all Knopf advertising. A carved wooden borzoi, three feet long, is nailed to the wall of the company's reception room. Mrs. Knopf, who has been associated with her husband's business since the start, was crazy about borzois in 1915, or thought

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Bennett (editor), Portrait of a Publisher 1915-1965 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), volume 2, 280-283.



she was, and suggested that they use a drawing of one as a trademark.<sup>2</sup>

Alfred. A. Knopf, reminiscing about his publishing career in a 1948 address to the Grolier Club, said "The original Borzoi [figure 149], I might say, was drawn by an artist whose name I have completely forgotten, if indeed I ever knew it, who worked in the art department of Barron G. Collier's organization."<sup>3</sup> Knopf took the Borzoi very personally, both as a symbol and as a concept. In a 1927 advertisement for Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain he wrote, "I can only say that the Borzoi has been blessed again." Hellman continues quoting Mrs. Knopf "'I bought a couple of them [borzoi dogs] later and grew to despise them. They were cowardly, stupid, disloyal, and full of self-pity, and they kept running away. One died, and I gave the other to a kennel. I wish I'd picked a better dog for our imprint.'"<sup>4</sup> John Carter, in A B C for Book Collectors, called the borzoi device "among the most distinguished of contemporary designs."<sup>5</sup>

Over the years, Peter Andersen of Knopf has assembled a collection of borzois that Alfred A. Knopf might have called

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Durable Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf" The New Yorker, November 20, 1948; November 27, 1948; and December 4, 1948. Collected in Geoffrey T. Hellman, Mrs. DePeyster's Parties (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 268-314.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred A. Knopf, Some Random Recollections: An Informal talk Made at the Grolier Club, New York, 21 October 1948, (New York: The Typophiles, 1949.)

<sup>4</sup> Hellman, "Durable Publisher."

<sup>5</sup> John Carter, A B C for Book Collectors (London: Granada, 1980), 77.



"from the borzoi kennel."<sup>6</sup> This was done for production purposes at Knopf. Recently, we diligently reviewed the archives and compiled a composite representation of all of the logos known. They are grouped together according to their graphic attributes and are arbitrarily numbered based on the order in which they were recently digitized. The designers, when known, are noted.

Any information about missing design attributions, and representations of any borzoi devices not listed herein, is welcome. The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Peter A. Andersen, Design Vice President for the Knopf Publishing Group in New York, and John Lancaster, Curator of Special Collections, Amherst College Library.

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<sup>6</sup> Knopf, Some Random Recollections.