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Reflections on Robert Frost's 'The Black Cottage'

Peter J. Stanlis

***Editor's note:** Caxtonian Stanlis is working on the final chapter of a book on the intellectual life of Robert Frost. The book goes beyond biographical, analytical literary, and comparative criticism. and employs the history-of-ideas method of description and analysis. The book promises to be one of the most important studies of Robert Frost's basic beliefs ever published. The following essay is a foretaste of what we shall read when Stanlis' book is published.*

Peter Stanlis (l) and Robert Frost look at a copy of From Snow to Snow, *November 13, 1962, at the University of Detroit. Frost had inscribed the book for Stanlis on New Year's Eve, in Boston, 1940. From the collection of Peter Stanlis, through whose courtesy it is used.*

For the past seven years a small group of literary critics and scholars, who are devoted to Robert Frost, has met annually in September to discuss informally some aspect of his life, thought, and poetry. This past year the group met on September 21-22 at the University of New Hampshire and at the poet's farm in Derry. The poem that preoccupied the group on that occasion was "The Black Cottage."

During a lengthy discussion, which was based on the assumptions of analytical literary criticism, many excellent insights were presented regarding the structure, the form, and the narrative technique of the poem and its subject: the functional setting of the remote black cottage in rural New England, so like a hermit's refuge from a corrupt world. Much perceptive comment was also offered on the language, imagery, characters, and thematic content of the poem.

But since the poem includes Frost's unconventional interpretation of the Civil War and his acceptance of a political principle upon which the colonial war of independence was launched and upon which the American republic was possibly founded, a reader might well question whether the limited conventional literary criticism is adequate for a full and valid understanding of the poem. The problem of interpretation is further complicated, more indirectly, since "The Black Cottage" includes references to Frost's beliefs regarding the very positive nature and creative contribution of New England Puritanism to the development of American society and culture.

Frost himself believed that there were occasions when readers should not limit themselves strictly to the internal elements in a poem. He warned against the "danger of too much analysis," but he wished readers to perceive the "ultimate meanings" of a poem. He believed that the "ultimate refinement" is "to know how to take a hint when there is one and not to take a hint when none is intended." Through tasteful and judicious "feats of association" enforced by knowledge, a reader can "go beyond any symbolism" to experience "the pleasure of ulteriority." In the preface to "The Death of the Hired Man" he wrote: "I am always glad to give my poems every extraneous help possible." In "On Taking Poetry" he said: "You can almost say in a poem that you see in it the place where it begins to be ulterior... where it carries you on somewhere." In "The Black Cottage" there are several places where it carries readers beyond the intrinsic texture established by its metaphorical language.

A good initial step toward perceiving the rich implications of "The Black Cottage" is to compare its theme and language with those of such poems and prose statements as "The Gift Outright" and Frost's commencement address at Oberlin College (June 8, 1937), entitled "What Became of New England?"

Some additional insights may also be gleaned from "The Generations of Men," "America is Hard to See," and "On Taking Poetry," as well as from other poems and prose statements on subjects that reflect Frost's organic view of American culture. Beyond such comparative criticism, however, a more fruitful reading of the poem may be obtained using a history-of-ideas

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Musings...

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A Reader Summoned by the World from his Book

'I had a lover's quarrel with the world.' — Robert Frost

"ANTHONY!"

"You're being summoned."
"I hear, but I don't want to go; not yet anyhow."
"Don't reply; maybe they'll stop calling."
"They never stop calling, never!"
"You don't want them to, really."
"I just won't reply yet."
"And if you don't?"
"They'll think I've gone away."
"Or come to carry you away."
"In a straight jacket at that — both of us!"
"But we are already united."
"Two-in-one."
"A minor deity, maybe?"
"Absolutely! A divinity of pure harmony."
"Very Socratic."
"Very unmodern, to say the least."

"ANTHONY!"

"Where will you tell them you've been?"
"Out of touch, where else?"
"In our very own land of Nowhere."
"Exactly! That vast and unexplored territory."
"The territory of the Void."
"Infinity!"
"Everywhere and nowhere."
"That should bring the straight jacket immediately."
"Let's ignore them for now; they mean no harm."
"With them, there's no harmony in solitude."
"They call because they're lonely."
"Maybe we *should* answer."
"And pretend that *Koinonia* lies out there?"
"*Koinonia* of the soul."
"Infinite plurality."
"The law of the universe."

"ANTHONY!"

"Do you find it strange we never argue?"
"About what?"
"About everything, anything, nothing."
"As they do?"
"Incessantly, without meaning."
"Contradicting themselves in perpetual debate."
"In synch through disagreement."
"Becoming one-vs-one."
"Can you imagine an artist seeing herself as One?"
"Very modern."
"Or a poet who thinks he sings for All?"
"Very Whitmanesque."
"Very Rimbaudian."
"Yes, the Modern Age began in a drunken boat."
"And ended on cocaine."
"A modernist: One singing solo out of harmony."
"What comes next?"
"We do. Again."
"Because we never jog with earphones and radio?"
"Or escape through fantasy TV."
"All of the above."
"And because wonder is the whole of life."
"And perhaps of death, as well."
"You mean the Ultimate Dialog?"
"And miles to go before I sleep."
"And miles to go before we weep."

"ANTHONY! This is the last call!"

"Better go, I guess; it *is* getting late.
"I hear you; later . . ."

"Yes, my dear, what is it"
"Where have you been? I've been calling."
"Just reading — thinking."
"I thought maybe you'd died."
"Perhaps I had, for a moment."
"A disappearing act of sorts?"
"A Jonah act — in the belly of consciousness."
"You moved from here to time?"
"Maybe to no-time, from the no-more, the not-yet."
"And back again — welcome home!"

Robert Cotner
Editor

Frost

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approach that can adduce Frost's beliefs about the Civil War, the conflicting views over Jefferson's principle regarding the equality of man, and the New England Augustinian Puritanism embodied in the minister-narrator and the Civil War widow.

The reader may best begin by noting Frost's essential understanding of the Civil War and how that is reflected in "The Black Cottage." In his "Sermon," delivered in Rabbi Victor Reichert's Temple in Cincinnati (October 10, 1946), Frost noted how far the Civil War transcended the regional and partisan secular differences between the Confederacy and the Union. "...Beyond the wisdom that clashed there — the two wisdoms that clashed there — was something of God." To truly "see America," he insisted, "is this wisdom beyond wisdom," which constitutes Frost's very definition of religion. To him there was "something of God" in colonial America and in the founding of the republic, which later manifested itself in the great crisis of the Civil War. In essence, Frost believed that, beyond the conventional view of the political and racial issues of that great struggle, there was a religious conflict.

This conflict is well expressed in two passages in which the minister describes the war widow's beliefs about the Civil War:

> *One wasn't long in learning that she thought*
> *Whatever else the Civil War was for,*
> *It wasn't just to keep the States together,*
> *Nor just to free the slaves, though it did both.*

The Puritan widow's serene confidence that her covenant with God provided her with the gift of grace, and enabled her to perceive as "self evident" that the races of mankind are somehow equal in the sight of God, their Creator:

> *White was the only race she ever knew,*
> *Black she had scarcely seen and yellow never.*
> *But how could they be made so very unlike*
> *By the same hand working in the same stuff?*
> *She had supposed the war decided that.*

It was but a simple step in logic from the war widow's belief in the spiritual equality of the races to her acceptance of Jefferson's principle

Robert Frost at Bread Loft, 1956. Photo by and from the collection of Peter Stanlis, through whose courtesy it is used.

that all men are created equal in their legal and political rights as later instituted by the American system of constitutional law. In light of the Civil War and the issue of slavery, Frost himself refined upon Jefferson by adding "free" to "equal." He thereby complicated the whole subject by introducing an apparent contradiction, like that supposed to exist between justice and mercy, which requires of human nature the most profound ethical understanding of how the respective claims of self-interest and social benevolence can be resolved into an harmonious national unity. To Frost, as to the widow in the poem, such conflicts are not merely to logomachies; they are ultimately ethical, and they are based upon religious faith.

It is very likely that, provided it is well explicated, the following passage, introduced by the minister's account of the widow's sacrifice of her husband in the Civil War, contains perhaps the most important theme in "The Black Cottage":

> *Her giving somehow touched the principle*
> *That all men are created free and equal ....*
> *That's a hard mystery of Jefferson's.*
> *What did he mean? Of course the easy way*
> *Is to decide it simply isn't true.*
> *It may not be. I heard a fellow say so,*
> *But never mind, the Welshman got it planted*
> *Where it will trouble us a thousand years.*
> *Each age will have to reconsider it.*

The poem fails to disclose the identity of the "fellow" who decided "the easy way" that Jefferson's principle "simply isn't true." To identify the allusion and to understand the importance of his denial, it is necessary to scrutinize Frost's personal beliefs. That course alone can disclose the full significance of this vital passage.

Fortunately, Frost has identified, beyond cavil, the man who denied Jefferson's "hard mystery." Some 30 years after he wrote "The Black Cottage," around 1907 (but published in 1914.), he said: "In 1897 I was sitting in a class in college when I heard a man spend quite the part of an hour making fun of the expression that we were all born free and equal. So easy to dismiss .....

"You can get disillusionment of a phrase such as fearing God and equality. And then you can form a religion like George Santayana. He lets you see that there is nothing but illusion, and it can be just as well one kind as another ...."

The full significance of Frost's allusion to Santayana as the "fellow" who satirized Jefferson's principle becomes apparent when it is also recalled that for at least 50 years the poet had a running, albeit intermittent, battle with his former teacher regarding New England Puritanism and its influence on American society. This epical battle was of special importance in the development of Frost's intellectual life. Even as an undergraduate, the poet was not intimidated by Santayana's great reputation as a profound philosopher. His commencement address in 1937 was a powerful rebuttal of Santayana's *The Last Puritan* (1936). Moreover, for years, as Lawrance Thompson has

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The strange fate of Arthur Rimbaud, Boy Poet

Pierre Ferrand

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) is undoubtedly one of the most puzzling figures among the world's famous poets. As a result, he has been the subject of endless controversy, and he is forever quoted and interpreted out of context.

A case in point is Henry Miller's 1946 essay, called *The Time of the Assassins*. Not that Miller didn't work at trying to understand Rimbaud. He said that he adored him "above all other writers," and read and reread his writings and correspondence in French as well as in English, though he confessed that "I come to him through the fog of a language I never mastered." (Shame on him, since he spent nearly a decade in France in the 30s!). Miller pored over scholarly interpretations of his life and art (in English), such as the well-regarded studies by Enid Starkie and Wallace Fowlie.

Miller is not the only commentator to consider Rimbaud a "voyant," a seer or a prophet, though he is presumably the first to suggest that he somehow predicted the atomic bomb with his phrase about "the time of the assassins." While this was clearly timely in 1946, it remains nevertheless absurd. In the first place, Rimbaud himself, who used what he knew to be the fashionable romantic term, "voyant," to describe his artistic intentions in a letter to a friend, clearly meant little more by it than novel ways of poetic expression. His mention of "the time of the assassins" in his prose poem entitled "A Morning of Intoxication" has no conceivable prophetic meaning in context and may refer to experimentation with hashish.

While Rimbaud was, like many teenagers, a very self-centered and self-absorbed young man, he was somewhat more socially-conscious than Miller, a model of immature irresponsibility. He showed some awareness of the horrors of the Franco-Prussian war in one of his poems, indicated his sympathy for the revolutionary French Communards of 1871, and, in several prose poems, clearly denounced colonialism.

Woodcut of Jean-Arthur Rimbaud from Francois Ruchon's biography of Rimbaud, Paris, 1929. Used through the courtesy of the Newberry Library.

He was on the side of the victims and the oppressed, and also rejected with violent sarcasm and, indeed, blasphemy, the religious practices of his childhood and, during his later teens, most aspects of conventional morality.

Miller said that he identified with Rimbaud "as in a mirror." We may question the similarity between the two writers. True, Miller, too, was a narcissistic outsider, wishing to shock the establishment. He also had something of the French poet's gift of gab, though he is not memorable, like Rimbaud, for his many haunting and quotable phrases, nor for poems of remarkable intensity and beauty. He had the same urge to scandalize his readers by his often scatological excesses of language and to boast about his wicked ways. Like the French poet, he was very willing to be just a parasite, supported by his friends. Rimbaud, however, had the excuse of extreme youth.

Miller admits that he started to be creative literarily at an age when Rimbaud was dead, after nearly four decades of drifting through dull and frustrating professions. Rimbaud's dull and frustrating workaday life (in exotic places), began after he had stopped being creative.

Rimbaud had been a gifted youngster who revolted against his petty bourgeois upbringing in the dull provincial town of Charleroi, in the French Ardennes. His family was not poor, but he was raised by an exceedingly devout mother who did not want her teenage boy to read such immoral books as Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, frowned at her son's interest in literature and planned for him some respectable profession, such as businessman, teacher, or engineer. His father (a French colonial officer) had abandoned her and her children when he was a small child.

A good student, Rimbaud read voraciously and without much discrimination, won several prizes in Latin composition and attracted the attention of a young teacher of liberal views, Georges Izambard, some five years older than he was. The very proper and decent Izambard lent him books, encouraged him to write, and treated him like a younger brother. Among the poems directly inspired by his teacher (who had given him Latin homework on the subject) is the lovely one about Shakespeare's Ophelia, one of my favorites. It has always reminded me of the fine painting by John Everett Millais.

A few weeks after the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War, so disastrous for France, Rimbaud, 15 years old, fled from home against Izambard's advice to go to Paris by train. Arrested for traveling without a ticket, he was rescued from prison by his teacher. He fled Charleroi two more times during the next few months, but had to return home, mostly walking all the way because he had no money.

He tried to interest some established poets in his own verse, with little success, until he was placed in contact with Paul Verlaine, who was enthusiastic. He particularly admired Rimbaud's best-known poem, "The Drunken Boat," just completed. Verlaine, a decade older than Rimbaud, had already published several well-regarded volumes of poetry, which Rimbaud had read and appreciated. Verlaine

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wrote, off and on, some the loveliest French 19th Century verse. He had married less than two years earlier after promising to mend his ways in a beautiful series of poems dedicated to his fiance (he had bohemian morals and was a heavy drinker). He did not hesitate to invite the 16-year-old boy to his Paris home in September, 1871, at a time his wife expected a child, sending him a money order to cover the expenses for the trip.

The liaison with Rimbaud contributed to the break-up of Verlaine's marriage. So did their drunken debauchery, especially since Verlaine was apt to be quite violent when drunk, even to his own mother and baby son. His wife, fearing for her life, eventually secured a separation and then a divorce from her husband, despite attempts at reconciliation. Rimbaud and Verlaine lived together, off and on, for nearly two years, chiefly in England, where Verlaine supported Rimbaud and his own drinking habit by teaching French. On July 9, 1873, while in Brussels, Rimbaud stated his intention to leave Verlaine. The next day, Verlaine, drunk as usual, shot and wounded Rimbaud in the wrist. Verlaine was arrested and spent over a year in prison though Rimbaud did not press charges.

Shortly after this incident, Rimbaud, now 19 years old, tried to publish *A Season in Hell*, a remarkable 54-page sequence of significantly confessional sketches or prose poems, which also include some of his most haunting verse. As he could not pay for the 500 copies printed, they were never distributed and were discovered only half a century later in a warehouse.

A Season in Hell contains a wickedly sarcastic account of his relationship with Verlaine (whom he does not name), and passages indicating his feeling that his revolt against social norms had been a meaningless folly. He also says that his creative efforts, undertaken with great enthusiasm, were equally foolish. Few students of his writings have agreed with this judgment.

After this little booklet, Rimbaud still wrote other prose poems which are part of a collection of 42 pieces known as *The Illuminations.* While some of them are pleasant or striking, most of them have defied interpretation to this day. He had transmuted French phrases into rich and strange imagery. Even when well-read students can trace his motifs (such as his visions of gigantic cities) to sources like Baudelaire's prose poems, his own presentation remains fresh and novel. Moreover, his oracular fragments are often eminently quotable.

Arthur Rimbaud

A Season in Hell

Translated by Delmore Schwartz

for New Directions

Norfolk, Conn.

Title page of the first American edition, by Delmaor Schwartz, of Rimbaud's A Season in Hell. *Used through the courtesy of the Newberry Library.*

Apart from three minor poems issued in out-of-the way periodicals and his own abortive attempt at publishing *The Season in Hell*, nothing of Rimbaud's French prose and poetry had been printed by 1875, when he was 21. He seems to have considered himself a failure, and totally lost interest in literature.

He then drifted for some five years through much of Europe and the Near East, was a dock worker in Marseilles, an interpreter for a circus in Scandinavia, tried to enlist in the U.S. Army and did enlist in the Dutch Army in Indonesia (but deserted), and supervised a construction site in Cyprus, looked for jobs in Alexandria, periodically returning to the family farm in the Ardennes, exhausted and defeated.

From 1880 on, he stayed in Aden and in Ethiopia as a clerk and later as a trader for his own account. Over 100 letters by him to his family during this time are evidence that after nearly a decade of drifting, he stubbornly stuck for another decade to his dull commercial jobs in the oppressive heat of Aden and the more temperate but dangerous highlands of Abyssinia. He dreamt of further travels to China and elsewhere, but constantly wrote about his need for staying on to accumulate gold. He always carried his hoard around his waist for fear of being robbed. His stated ambition was to retire eventually to France on his accumulated earnings, marry, and raise a family. He lived very soberly, without any drinking or taking of drugs, though, for a couple of years, he had an Abyssinian mistress.

His only readings at this time were technical manuals and treatises on native languages he had asked his family to get him. He also procured some photographic equipment (he did not do well as an amateur photographer). His employers and associates testify that he was hardworking, honest, taciturn, and generally decent, though given to outbursts of rage.

It makes little sense to glamorize the last 16 years of his life as many have done. True, he did organize a trading caravan into an area of Ethiopia where no white man had gone before and wrote to geographic societies and others about his trips which were exhausting and dangerous, but his brief memoirs about them are dull and uninspiring. Contrary to a legend which has survived to this day, he traded in coffee and other products, but never in slaves. He did sell some guns to Menelik, later the ruler of Ethiopia who defeated the Italians, but this was no gun-running venture but a routine business transaction. He apparently lost money on the deal.

Indeed, his long stay in the Middle East, far from being a great adventure, was more of the nature of penance for his excesses as a teenager. Except for religious feelings, he had adopted the conventional bourgeois values of his family with a vengeance. Like his self-proclaimed "mirror image," Henry Miller, he

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never escaped the bondage of his childhood, and he never really grew up.

Rimbaud was unaware of the fact that by the mid-1880s, he had been published and promoted in prose and verse by his erstwhile bosom friend Paul Verlaine and had become famous in Parisian literary circles. Verlaine, who had taken copies of much of Rimbaud's literary production a decade earlier, was definitely a drunken bum by then, despite his talent, though he proclaimed that he had "got religion." He simply exploited Rimbaud's work to earn some money for himself, and did not know or really cared whether his former companion was living or dead. He featured him and his verse in his series of essays, "Les Poetes Maudits," and elsewhere.

Rimbaud returned to France, a very ill man, in 1891, and died after his leg was amputated. He had no idea of his literary fame and no interest in the subject. His pious kid sister Isabel theatrically claimed that he converted on his deathbed, but this is most questionable. There is no independent evidence, and Isabel openly admitted that she omitted and distorted facts to create a myth of her brother's ultimate quasi-sainthood, and with her husband and some others, engaged in wholesale alteration of documents. ❖

Bibliographical Note: *Henry Miller's* The Time of the Assassins: A Study of Rimbaud, *was originally published in 1946 by New Directions. Though not without some insights, it is a striking illustration of the way books about Rimbaud take on the subjective characteristics of Rorschach tests. Enid Starkie's and Wallace Fowlie's biographies of Rimbaud, though valuable, still perpetrate a few myths and contain questionable interpretations. Fowlie has also translated Rimbaud.*

In French, the best overall guides are several studies of the Rimbaud myth by Prof. Etiemble of the Sorbonne, though perhaps overly negative, and the Edition de la Pleiade *edition of Rimbaud's works, with a full bibliography. The most thorough investigation of the last decade of his life I know is Alain Borer's* Un Sieur Rimbaud, Soi-disant Negotiant, *Paris, 1984, who, among other things, effectively debunks the myth of Rimbaud as a slave trader, still accepted by Starkie and Etiemble. The account of his teacher, Georges Izambard,* Rimbaud Tel Que Je L'ai Connu, *Paris, 1946, is still worth reading. Those by Verlaine are usually misleading and disingenuous.*

Frost

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recorded, Frost frequently criticized the philosopher: "'Santayana is the enemy of my spirit,' Frost said repeatedly to LT and others." (*Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph 1915-1938*, p. 691).

In his commencement address, Frost did not merely identify Santayana as Jefferson's critic; he castigated him harshly for his attacks on New England Puritanism and American society, arraigning him particularly for his failure to understand how Puritanism maintained "the renewal of words" and therefore "the renewal of meaning" in such phrases as a "god-fearing man" and man's "equality." This was one of Frost's grand themes in his Norton lectures at Harvard. In his commencement address, he noted that just as poetry involved "the renewal of words,"

> *The lady from the Deep South, mind you, whose father had been an officer — he'd been a fighting Bishop, been fighting on the Southern side as a Bishop — you know some did.*
>
> *I said: "Which side was God on in the Civil War?"*
>
> *We were making a little light of wisdom, you know, so she just spoke right up and said: "My father was a Methodist Bishop, Southern, and a Bishop ought to know, and he thought God was on the Southern side."*
>
> *And I said: "That settles it!"*
>
> *...But that was, you see, the way. All of us (knew) better than that. But anyway, all of us knew that beyond the wisdom that clashed there — the two wisdoms that clashed there — was something of God.*
>
> From a Sermon by Robert Frost
> at Rockdale Avenue Temple
> Cincinnati, OH
> October 10, 1946

and "the making of words mean again what they meant," so too, "the thing that New England gave most to America was... a stubborn clinging to meanings: to purify words until they mean again what they should mean. Puritanism had that meaning entirely; a purifying of words and a renewal of words and a renewal of meaning. That's what brought them to America and that's what kept them believing ...." In sharp contrast to Puritanism, Santayana's "disillusionment" was the result of "a theory that meanings go out of things, " because "when the meaning goes out of anything, as happens, forms crumble."

The allusion to Santayana as the total antithesis of the war widow raises an important question: how is it that an intellectually brilliant and sophisticated philosopher, with a powerful, rational mind, failed so utterly to comprehend the great truth in Jefferson's principle, whereas the simple Puritan war widow, with no intellectual qualifications, understood and accepted the "hard mystery" that Frost believed "will trouble us a thousand years" as one of "the truths we keep coming back and back to." A full answer to this question goes to the heart of "The Black Cottage" as well as to much in the intellectual life of Frost. It involves his criticism of the separation of the moral virtues, rooted in religion, from the intellectual virtues so esteemed in secular thought. As Frost once put it: "an ounce of faith is worth a ton of theology." Frost's sympathetic portraits of the latitudinarian minister and the tradition-oriented war widow as 19th-Century representatives of New England's revised Puritan tradition in religion and culture reflect his own Old Testament and Augustinian Christianity, in which belief precedes both reason and knowledge. Santayana made his own rational understanding the measure of his belief or disbelief. Conversely, like the war widow, Frost believed in Jefferson's principle in order to understand it; he did not make his rational understanding the measure of his belief. "The Black Cottage" is one of his most profound expressions of the "seat to faith assigned," of the strength of the "man of prayer" and the "woman of faith" in understanding on moral grounds what such self-styled "intellectuals" as George Santayana cannot comprehend. His defense of the moral virtues as superior to rational brilliance frequently led critics to charge Frost with being "anti-intellectual," even though his own mental powers and knowledge were far superior to those of his critics.

Although "The Black Cottage" is not a personal religious poem, such as Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," it is rooted in Frost's belief that religious faith is the ultimate basis of man's secular convictions about human nature and society, and is the fount of the forces that give shape to events in history. Perceived in terms of the history of ideas, the poem is multifaceted in ways that extend far beyond these reflections. ❖

Caxtonians to see 'Empire of the Sultans; Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collection'

Michael Thompson

The Program Committee of The Caxton Club is planning a field trip to see a major exhibition highlighting the rich calligraphic and artistic heritage of the Ottoman Empire, one of the most impressive states in the history of Europe and the Middle East. The exhibition opens at the Milwaukee Art Museum on February 28, 2002, and runs through April 28. With over 200 objects, ranging from Holy Kur'ans, manuscripts, and architectural calligraphy to arms, armour, and scientific instruments, this exhibition embraces every aspect of Ottoman art and explores a dynasty that spanned more than six centuries.

The trip, scheduled for Saturday, March 16, 2002, will depart the Newberry Library by bus at 7:00 a.m. We will have a box lunch at the museum and will be personally escorted through the exhibit by Christopher Goldsmith, the Museum's Executive Director. Another lecturer, in addition to Mr. Goldsmith, is a possibility, but there's no confirmation at press time. Estimated cost per person is $75, inclusive of transportation, lunch, and admission.

An added feature of this field trip will be the chance to see the stunning new addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum, designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The addition, called the Quadracci Pavilion, features a 90-foot high glass-walled reception area covered, when wind conditions are right, by a Burke Brise Soleil, a unique wing-like sun screen that folds and unfolds to create a spectacular architectural sculpture. The Pavilion is Calatrava's first building in the United States.

The art and calligraphy in the exhibition were drawn from the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, one of the largest collections of its kind. This exhibition marks the first time this important collection has been seen in the United States and also presents a number of objects that have never before been displayed publicly.

Historical Background

The Ottomans emerged in the late 13th Century as a minor Turcoman (Turkish) principality. They became a world power in 1453, when Sultan Mehmed II overthrew the Byzantines and captured Constantinople (now

Calligraphic Lion by Ahmed Hilmi, 1913, Ink on Card, CAL242. Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. The exhibition is organized and circulated by Art Services International, Alexandria, VA, through whose courtesy it is used.

Istanbul). In 1516 the Ottomans defeated the Mamluk dynasty of Egypt, occupied the Hijaz, and assumed control of the Holy Places of Islam in what is now Saudi Arabia. But it was the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) that marked the golden age of the Ottoman Empire in terms of military achievement. Suleyman extended the empire west to the gates of Vienna in 1529.

The Exhibition

The exhibition emphasizes the primary importance of calligraphy within the wider context of Ottoman art. The written word is shown in the many aspects it assumed within the empire: religious, administrative, and cultural. It became the vehicle of Kur'anic texts and mosque decoration, and it had the imprimatur of authority in the literature of the dervish orders and imperial decrees.

On view are numerous copies of the Holy Kur'an which, for Muslims, is the literal Word of God as received by the Prophet Muhammad. The copying and embellishment of its text are among the highest expressions of Islamic piety and are considered some of the most beautiful works of Ottoman art. Included in this exhibit are fine examples from every era of Ottoman rule, exquisitely illuminated with gold leaf medallions, scrolling arabesques, and floral motifs in bright colors.

Collectors of a cartographic bent will find the exhibition equally enthralling. Because geography and astronomy were necessary to Muslims for determining correct times and directions for prayers and the dates of festivals, the exhibition also features elaborate compasses, sundials, astrolabe quadrants, calendars, illustrations of towns and shrines, celestial charts, maps, and atlases.

The exhibition and the catalogue are arranged in four different sections, three of which will be of particular interest to Caxtonians. The first is entitled *In the Service of God* and features architectural calligraphy, Kur'ans, deeds of endowment, and other intricately lettered manuscript pieces. The second, entitled *Sultans, Soldiers and Scribes*, features arms and armour, as one might expect, but also has imperial decrees and documents of administration, all beautifully written and in some cases illustrated with miniatures. The last, *Books, Paintings and Scripts*, explores the interesting world of Islamic bindings and the tools of Ottoman calligraphers.

The Collector

Dr. Khalili has made notable contributions to the scholarship of Islamic art, having founded under the auspices of the Khalili Family Trust the Nasser D. Khalili Chair of Islamic Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, the first chair at any university devoted to the decorative arts of Islam. He is a graduate, Visiting Professor, Member of the Governing Body at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Honorary Fellow of the University of London. He is the co-founder and chairman of the Maimonides Foundation, which promotes peace and understanding between Muslims and Jews, and is one of the founders of the Iran Heritage Foundation, which promotes and preserves the cultural heritage of Iran.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 302-page catalogue, fully illustrated in color and written by Prof. J.M. Rogers. Introductory essays focus on a political outline of the Ottomans and the collecting of Turkish Art. Individual entries describe in detail each work in the show.

Members wishing to take the trip should contact the Secretary/Treasurer Dan Crawford, at 312/255-3510, or send a message to him at caxtonclub@newberry.org. ❖

Background image: *Quadracci Pavilion of the Milwaukee Art Museum, from a web site photo by Jim Brozek.*

Bookmarks...

Dinner Program
January 16 , 2002
Glen Wiche
"Samuel and Elizabeth and Me: A Pepysian show and tell"

Our own Glen Wiche will tell us about a man he calls, "inarguably, the author of the greatest diary in the English language, and, arguably, the author of the greatest diary ever penned" — Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) and his *Diaries*, which chronicle everyday life in Restoration London

After a brief view of the life and times of Pepys, Glen will show slides on his extensive collection of Restoration books, manuscripts, and artifacts, which he has collected over the past 30 years,

Included in the presentation will be his most prized items. These are a personal letter by Pepys, the first edition of his *Diaries*, and a number of contemporary maps and prints illustrating Restoration London and England of Pepys' time.

A Caxtonian since 1979, Glen was an antiquarian bookseller for a quarter of a century. For the past several years, his time has been devoted to writing, public speaking, and serving as an historical consultant. While it is rumored that Glen attires himself daily in 17th Century fashion and that he will make an appearance before The Caxton Club dinner meeting so attired, both rumors are false. You may expect you see him at our dinner meeting in his usual 21st Century sartorial style.

Currently, he is working on two books. One is an autobiography of Charles Maxwell Allen, Abraham Lincoln's consul to Bermuda during the American Civil War. The other is a book on sightless authors and blind bibliophiles.

Glen has recently written "A Few Words about Blindness" for Chicago's Consumer Services Department, which is being distributed by the Mayor's Office.

This will be a rare opportunity to hear one of our greatest collectors and a man well known for his public speaking. Join your friends and other bibliophiles for the first dinner meeting of 2002.

Parking notice

A minor flaw occurred following the December dinner meeting in the arrangement with the Standard Parking self-parking lot at 172 W. Madison (Madison at Wells). I apologize for that difficulty, for those who experienced it.

The lot manager neglected to tell the night cashier that Caxtonians were to have a discount. As a result, they were charged the regular $10.50. I have called the garage manager, Mike Hurley, and he was properly apologetic and will be sending us a refund for the total amount for the 15 Caxtonians who were denied their discounts.

Those who parked at this lot and were charged full price may get their $5 refunds by contacting Dan Crawford or me either before or at the January 16th meeting. Hurley assures me that the parking garage cashier will be properly informed for our future meetings.

James Tomes

Luncheon Program
January 11, 2002
Charlie Miner
"A collection within collections"

Caxtonian Charles Miner collects George Ade, Ben Hecht, and other Chicago Writers. He also collects Chicagoania and private presses of Chicago. While cataloging his collection he has put together a selection of books — a collection within a collection — which were owned by dozens of well known Chicagoans.

He discovered, for example, that he has books owned by Jane Addams, Nelson Algren, and W. A. Deering. He has, as well, a book owned by book thief C. Blomberg. And there are books owned by politicians — Alderman Tom Bowles, Mayors John Wentworth, Thomas Hoyne, and Anton Cermak, and Governor Dan Walker.

There are newspaper people represented in his collection, including Col. Robert McCormick, Fanny Butcher, and George Barr McCutcheon. And there are Caxtonians represented, including Paul Angle, John McCutcheon, and Gwendolyn Brooks.

If the Caxton Historian Frank Piehl is in attendance, Charles will feature one of Frank's favorite collectees, Eugene Field.

And what holds all these and many more notably-owned books together? We won't even give you an "edge" on that matter — you'll have to join your fellow Caxtonians and other friends to hear Charles kick off 2002 — our 107th year — with what promises to be a remarkable talk on "A Collection within Collections."

Edward Quattrocchi & Leonard Freedman
Co-Chairs

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, BankOne Plaza, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30pm. Dinner meetings begin with spirits at 5pm, dinner at 6pm, lecture at 7:30pm. ***Members planning to attend luncheons or dinners must make advance reservations by phoning the Caxton number, 312 255 3710.*** *Luncheon for members and guests, $25. Dinner, for members and guests, $45.*