

A consideration ...

On Hannah Arendt — A life of the mind

Laurel M. Church

What I propose...is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experience and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness — the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which have become trivial or empty — seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.

Hannah Arendt
from Prologue to *The Human Condition*

For more time than I care to think about, Bob Cotner and I have been talking about a series on the life of the mind, based on the title of Hannah Arendt's final volume. Bob asked me to discuss Arendt's work for this journal, while he would cover the works of other contemporary writers, relating to their contribution to the contemporary understanding of the life of the mind. Each time we would come close to a decision about publication date, I would say "I need more time to reacquire myself with Arendt's thought after so many years." Bob would reply, "What I want is a personal response to how her work influenced your thinking — not an exegesis — you talk about her work all the time."

But, of course, talking and writing are two separate things, and, as Arendt was at pains to point out, we must make distinctions — which for me are more easily made in the give and take of conversation than in the intractable act of writing. The irony for me is that Arendt's writing style — until Mary McCarthy began editing for her — was abysmally difficult. I have often said that it took ten years for my own writing to recover from the years of poring



Hannah Arendt just prior to her death in 1975. Courtesy of the Hannah Arendt Trust. From the American Memory website of the Library of Congress, through whose courtesy it is used.

over her early books — even to the point of parsing her more convoluted sentences. As is true of many philosophers, Arendt spends as much energy telling us what an idea is not, as she does telling us what an idea might, in fact, be. Her works are not political primers, but contain within them her own (often contradictory) approach to a history of political thought. Sifting through her work for clear thematic content, at times, verges on the surreal.

This being said, I believe Bob is right: it is important to consider her contribution to the idea of the mind, written in a century that was itself surreal — a century that contained the breakdown of political civility on such an unprecedented scale that an estimated hundred and fifty million people lost their lives in the violence of world wars, civil wars, secret wars, and extermination camps.

In the '60s, I wrote my Master's thesis in Political Science on Hannah Arendt's thought, focusing mainly on the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, *On Revolution*, and *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* — the latter book having brought her work to my attention because of my intense interest in understanding the factors that allowed the Nazis and their followers, internationally, to murder millions of Jews and others under the cover of world war. (It should be pointed out that for a number of years immediately after the war, there seemed to be a moratorium on serious discussion of what is now known as the "Holocaust" and so-called "holocaust studies" did not take shape until late in the '60s.)

"The Banality of Evil"* Arendt's Most Notable Phrase

I first became interested in Hannah Arendt in 1964, when I heard about the controversy surrounding *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* — a book I hoped would help me begin to answer for myself the question of how such evil could have taken place. And more important: what could lead an Eichmann, who reported he had no animosity for the Jews, to become the leading bureaucratic perpetrator of the Final Solution? What made a man of the calibre of Albert Speer, a highly-cultured, well-

*Arendt herself attributed the coining of the phrase "banality of evil" to her friend and mentor, philosopher Karl Jaspers.



Musings...

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I was a lad of 13 or 14, I suppose, when our pastor said something from the pulpit one Sunday that was very un-Baptist — and I have never heard it from the pulpit since. Speaking of the afterlife, he said, “If anything of my being survives death, it will be the mind, and I do all in my power to enhance the mind every day of my life.”

I mark that Sunday morning in a small Baptist church in northern Indiana as the beginning of an intellectual pursuit that has grown and intensified over the years. Therefore, you can imagine how pleased I was to learn from my good friend and fellow Caxtonian Laurel Church more than a dozen years ago, of Hannah Arendt and her posthumous book, *The Life of the Mind*. I devoured the book. I read it mornings; I read it as I drove interstates; I read it evenings. And then I reread it. It did for me at 50 what Thoreau’s *Walden* had done at 25.

The life of the mind! If there is a more euphoric phrase in the English language, I don’t know what it is! What Arendt does so magnificently is trace the history of this spiritual entity, the birthright of all and the responsibility of every living human being. She begins with the domain of *Thinking*, an entity as ancient as the Greeks, who defined so well its parameters. This domain is that human faculty, through which a person lives richly apart from all other human beings, performs in absolute silence, and invests fully in the unseen realm. The act of thinking begins as a dialog with the self, in which the two aspects of the person silently converse. Through the process of thinking, we become who we are to be known as to friends and to the world.

But Arendt takes us beyond this process most commonly associated with the mind: she introduces us to the faculty of the mind call *Willing*. The Greeks knew little of this function. It was, as she so beautifully details, St. Augustine who gave the world the intellectual faculty of willing. Arendt, who did her doctoral dissertation on the concept of love in St. Augustine, is at her finest in discussing this faculty. The intellectual process of willing carries thinking beyond the self: “This Will,” she writes, “...is so busy preparing action that it hardly has time to get caught in the controversy with its own counter-will.” The redemption of the will comes volitionally as the will ceases “to will and [starts] to act.” The natural inner conflict within the will is resolved “through a

transformation of the Will itself,...into Love.” Citing St. Paul’s essay on “Love” in I Corinthians 13 — “the greatest of these is love” — she defines love as “enduring and conflictless Will,” which provides “weight” to the soul, “thus arresting its fluctuations.” I would extend the metaphor and say that love is the *ballast* in the voyage of life, giving stability and direction as we go.

The third element in the life of the mind is *Judging*. Unfortunately, Arendt died before this final portion of her book was completed. But she had written enough to reveal the direction of her thought. Emmanuel Kant is the first of the philosophers to give us judging as a function of the mind. Judging opens the mind to public scrutiny and interchange. Judging enlarges the mind, Arendt says, “through the force of imagination.” The imagination then leads to the “operation of reflection” — the “actual activity of judging something.” And, in a sense, we’ve come full circle — back to contemplation before action.

I don’t know today whether the mind, or anything, lives in the afterlife. And, you’ll pardon my saying so, I don’t much care: I’m neither optimistic nor afraid. The pursuit of the life of the mind has been and is such a grand experience — truly an experience without end — that what I have and where I’ve been are sufficient. And the great pleasure in association with family and friends who share the pursuit of *Thinking*, *Willing*, and *Judging* — a life of the mind, if you will — makes life these days satisfying almost beyond measure. A person can ask for little more.

Robert Cotner
Editor

Two poems in homage to Hannah Arendt

by Robert Cotner

I Leave You, My Love

I leave you, my love,
that I may be with you.
I walk from your elegance
as from a sunrise,
toward remembrance of you,
woven in tapestry hanging
at entrance to my home.
All comings and goings
in my private world
are thoughts clothed
in black woolen dress,
flowing to ankles, adorned
by pearl of hair and pendant.
Reason's need is love's response:
Evanescent as a kiss though
eternal in the mind's domain.

Sable Friend

A blackbird settled on a highway guardrail,
board wings tracing arcs in morning light.

"Good morning," I said to sable friend.

His only answer, quick pierce of yellow,
and I was gone to early morning duties,
more urgent than his — less noble, perhaps:
He, being whose vision cries to be seen.
I, appearance whose glance veils all
but shadows shaping arcs of daily intent.

Arendt

Continued from page 1

educated German, who was Hitler's architect and a high ranking administrator, take part in what he should have known was an evil undertaking? Arendt's exploration of what might have led normal people to take part in this darkest of contemporary events constitutes her most original contribution to 20th Century political discourse: how the condition of *thinking* impacts doing, and, as a consequence its opposite, *thoughtlessness*, becomes the telling factor in evil-doing.

After reporting on the trial of Adolph Eichmann, Arendt set about to understand him, not as a monster or even a criminal, but in terms of his *banality*— in other words, of his "thoughtlessness." In her final book, *The Life of the Mind*, she attempts to answer this question: "Could the act of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass...could this activity be among the conditions that make men [sic] abstain from evil-doing or even actually condition them against it?" The question she posed, of course, contains the seeds of her answer.

While her critics contended that Arendt exonerated Eichmann by refusing to demonize him as a monster for his crimes by, among other things, her use of the term "banality" to characterize his evil acts, what Arendt wants us to understand goes beyond simplistic demonization of such perpetrators: what we must understand is that their crimes reflect something even more frightening — the capacity of otherwise "normal" people to take part in horrendous acts because they have not understood their responsibility to engage in authentic acts of *thinking*, which is most critical when they are involved in political action.

Radical Evil Eradicates Thinking

I know Arendt as a philosopher of the political, defining politics as speaking and acting in public, defining politics not as "who gets what — where, when, and how," but ideally as the process whereby humankind determines what shall be included in the political space of speech and action: an end itself, rather than a means to an instrumental end. And it is the act of *thinking* which must serve as a guide to speaking and

acting in public. Let me note here that I will often use the term "authentic thinking" to differentiate Arendt's definition of thinking from the less rigorous definition, which you and I would commonly use.

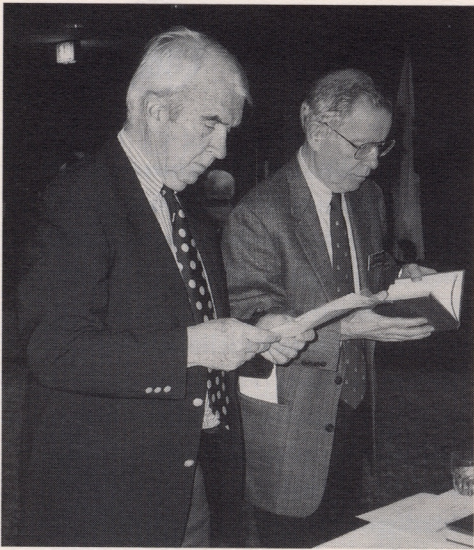
The arc of Arendt's political thought takes us from the Greeks (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics) through the great Christian thinkers, and finally to modern philosophers, such as Marx, Hegel, Jaspers, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. As she takes us through the ideas of each of these philosophers, it is apparent that she is modeling the internal dialogic nature of the act of thinking, which ultimately involves judging. And by going back to Christian thought from Paul to Augustine she arrives at the idea of willing — the will providing the ground for ultimate freedom of mind in the spontaneity of thought.

Thinking, as Arendt defines it, separates the internal state of the human being from the external world of common sense, i.e., the sense we hold in common with one another, which, as the history of the 20th Century proves, has the potential to lead us into deadly mob behavior. Paradoxically, while the act of authentic thinking separates us from the world, it also has the capacity to re-establish our human connection with the world of things and of action.

It is not Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" but *thinking* as the controlling essence of what it means to be part of a shared humanity; however, once that controlling essence is served up to an outside authority as pernicious as a Hitler or a Stalin, human beings lose their internal bearings: their will to freedom (spontaneity) — their will to judgment — and can ultimately sink into a state of radical evil, allowing them to exterminate fellow human beings in the name of a received idea, such as the Master Race or the New Man.

As I understand Arendt, and I am using my own terms here, authentic thinking has the potential for being the ultimate freeing activity, saving the individual from two traps, the solipsistic "I" of pure ego and the "Non-I" of rapturous surrender to the dictates of monoma-

See ARENDT, page 6



Caxton President Jim Tomes and our gracious Mid-Day hostess Mary Ann Kalkowski pause a moment for a pose. (All photos provided through the courtesy of Caxtonian Kim Coventry.)

Revels 2001 is a grand success

Jim Tomes, President

Congratulations to all for creating such an exuberant and successful Revels 2001! Peggy's introduction of Ned Rosenheim was wonderful, Ned was classic Ned, and Ed Noonan was an inspired pick for auctioneer. And we had a record auction sales result. Gene Hotchkiss was the perfect Santa Claus greeter. Karen Skubish provided lovely harp music and did yeoman's duty, with Dan Crawford, shlepping the auction books, dealing with BankOne Security guards, and cleaning up afterwards. All well done. ❖



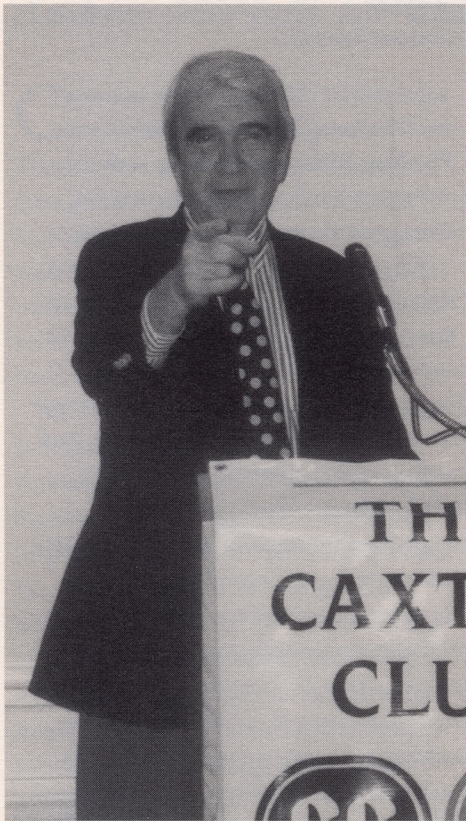
Auctioneer Ed Noonan and Caxtonian Ed Quattrocchi consider auction items.



Former Caxton president Karen Skubish at her harp, providing a delightful background for the evening's activities.



A cluster of very serious bidders contemplate their prospects.



Our entertaining auctioneer for the evening, Ed Noonan, urges just a bit more from his guests.



Caxtonian Anthony Mourek and Caxton Historian Frank Piehl concentrate on possible purchases.



Caxtonians Bruce Boyer, Susan Rossen, Ned and Peggy Rosenheim visit before dinner and Dr. Rosenheim's stimulating and witty lecture.

Up your bid! Records broken but books sold at 2001 Revels

Dan Crawford

Caxtonians turned out in record numbers and spent a record amount of money without a phonograph in sight. Those of you who love statistics may like these. (As usual, names and dollar amounts are omitted to protect the guilty.)

- Number of donors to auction: 37
- Number of items for sale: 114, in 70 lots
- Number of bidders: 57
- Number of buyers: 34
- Number of donors who were also buyers: 16 (but none bought their own book back)
- Most items bid on by one person: 7 (that bidder did win two of these)

Bid coming from farthest away: bids were e-mailed from a member in Florida

Oldest item in the sale: William M. Thackeray's unfinished novel, *Denis Duval*, published in 1867 with his notes for the last chapters (donated by T.S. Vandoros)

Newest item in the sale: Actually, there were six items published in 2001

Heaviest item for sale: Nobody weighed the 1961 facsimile of the Gutenberg *Bible* donated by Tom Drewes, but estimates ran from 50 to 70 pounds. (This item also carried the heaviest price.)

Most numerous item for sale: One lot comprised 18 signed volumes of the poetry of noted historian and bibliophile Nolie Mumey (donated by Tom Joyce)

Most hotly bid on item, to the point that some bidders will not be speaking to each other again until well into this millennium: Harriet Hammond McCormick's *Landscape Art*, donated by Morrell Shoemaker, had 19 bids

Book with the largest number of disappointed bidders exclaiming "Oh! Didn't I win that?": *The Fisher-Boy Urashima*, donated by Jean Dewey, had at least three bidders exclaiming "Aw!" (In fact, everything in the children's section had at least one such disappointed bidder.)

Most active books: the four pop-ups donated by Mary Jane Anderson

Miniature books in the auction: 3

Prints in the auction: 3

Volumes left from the 2000 auction, which sold this year: 7

Number of items written by, designed by, printed by, or otherwise involving Caxtonians (other than as donors): 24

Number of items sold in the live auction: 10

Number of laughs generated by auctioneer Ed Noonan: roughly 2.7 per minute

Number of people attending the Revels: 106, the second largest Revel in five years, and the fourth best meeting overall in that period

Amount of money raised through sale of Caxton Club scarves, neckties, and pins (still available at popular prices): \$79

Money raised at the auctions, live and silent (\$6,063, including IOUs - you know who you are)

Increase over the proceeds of last year's auction: almost exactly 50%

Number of seats still available for the 2002 Caxton Club auction: You'd better reserve now; it's getting to be a hot ticket. ❖

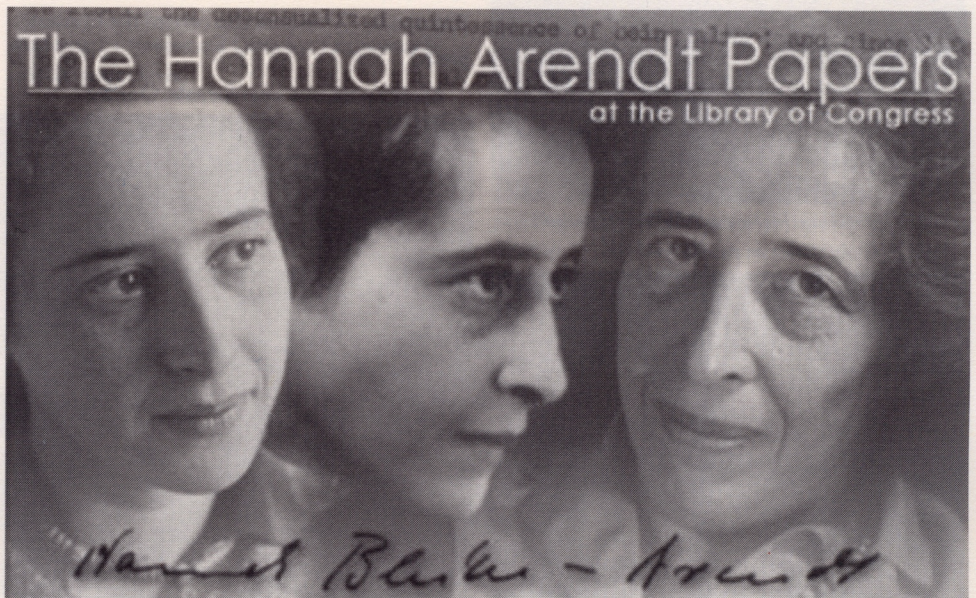
A bibliography of works by Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

Arendt

Continued from page 1

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- niacal leaders. The life of the mind — Thinking, Willing, and Judging — in my estimation, has the power to become the saving grace of compassionate humanity.
- This to me is the significant part of — in Arendt's phrase — the "story told by events," that led her to a lifetime of work seeking to understand the human essence that might keep us from the chilling potential to recreate continually the ground for radical evil. And perhaps what should be foremost on our minds today is: How do "we" contain humankind's potential for radical evil without falling into the accompanying trap of thoughtlessness ourselves? A reconsideration of the lessons we might have learned from the violence of the 20th Century might begin with a reconsideration of the life of the mind so ardently presented by one of that century's most perceptive witnesses. A consideration of Hannah Arendt's thoughts on *thinking* might be our best hope. ❖

Editor's note – Caxtonian Laurel M. Church, Ph.D., Artist in Residence at Aurora University, is continuing her focus on the effects of the wars of the 20th Century, this time in the form of a long narrative poem, "Music Hall Warrior," featuring a woman whose "story told by events" takes her from her childhood during the Great War and culminates in her experience of the London Blitz and its aftermath.



From the Manuscript Division, the Library of Congress; Taken from the American Memory website of the Library of Congress, through whose courtesy it is used.

Andrew McNally III dead at 92

Caxtonian Andrew McNally III died in his sleep at his home in Chicago on Thursday, November 15, 2001. He was the great-grandson of the co-founder of Rand McNally & Company. The company began as a small printing shop that specialized in guide books and train tickets. It grew to become the world's premier provider of geographic and travel information.

Mr. McNally was born in Chicago, grew up in Evanston, and graduated from Yale University in 1931, when he joined the family business. After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers Map Services Department in World War II, he returned to the company and became its president in 1948. In the next year, he diversified the company into book publishing. Under his leadership, the company moved from Chicago in 1952 to a massive suburban headquarters and printing plant in Skokie.

Andrew was an active and dedicated member of many civic organizations. He served as trustee and/or president of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chicago Historical Society, the Girls Latin School of Chicago, and the Geographic Society of Chicago. He was a past governor of the Northwestern University Library Council, and served as chairman of the Illinois Bicentennial Commission. Mr. McNally donated his personal map collection and the Rand McNally & Company archives to the Newberry Library, where he was a trustee.

Andrew McNally III has been a member of The Caxton Club since 1959. He served on the Council from 1967 to 1972. His death leaves a void among a distinguished group of Chicago business pioneers who have enriched the cultural life of Chicago. ❖

Frank Piehl



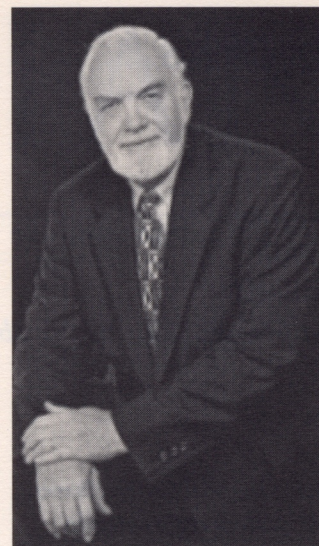
Photograph of Andrew McNally in 1956 provided through the courtesy of the Newberry Library.

Durrett Wagner dies

The first time I met Durrett Wagner, in 1991 or so, he said, "I've got the original printing press of Swallow Press in my garage, and you can have it if you come and get it." I seriously considered accepting his offer and began making arrangements for it in my basement and to move it from Evanston. Before I became a printer, however, I discovered I was a publisher – and I didn't really want to get my

hands dirty. But Durrett and I talked on the phone occasionally after that, and we always visited at dinner meetings, usually about Swallow Press.

When I published the Janet Lewis-Yvor Winters story in the March 1999 *Caxtonian*, Durrett wrote me, thanking me for the story and telling me there was more to it than I had written. "Write it up, and I'll publish it in a future issue," I told him.



Durrett Wagner

He did that, and the May 1999 issue carried his splendid story, "The Lewis-Winters Chicago Connection Revisited." In that article, Durrett told of his acquisition, with a partner, of Swallow Press of Denver, upon the death of the founder, Allan Swallow, in 1967. Durrett moved the printing house to Chicago, where he printed Yvor Winters' *Forms of Discovery* (1968) and *Quest for Reality* (1969).

In 1970, Durrett brought Janet Lewis' *Poems, 1924-1944*, back in print. And he reprinted the covers of Janet's novels, improving the artwork and keeping them in print. In the process, he championed Janet's *The Wife of Martin Guerre*, which Durrett and I both considered one of the great novels of world literature.

In 1980, Durrett and his partner sold Swallow Press to Ohio University Press, where it still flourishes – saved from possible extinction by its short stay in Chicago under the care of Durrett.

I am saddened to report that Durrett, a Caxtonian since 1971, died of cancer in his home on November 21 at the age of 72. Caxtonian Steve Masello, his across-the-street neighbor in Evanston, reported that, though his Hemingway-like physique was ravaged by disease toward the end of his days, Durrett ordered a copy of Nick Basbanes' *Patience and Fortitude* and remained involved with books until the end. We shall miss this gentle person, whose critical mind and keen eye made him one of our finest printers and editors. To his family, every Caxtonian extends sympathy and best wishes. ❖

Robert Cotner

Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program

February 8, 2002

Dr. Steven Masello

"The Joys of Marginalia: the Newberry's 1561 'Book of the Courtier'"

Our own Caxtonian and Councilor Steven Masello has a history as scholar and a reputation as one witty professor. Since he took his Ph.D. in Renaissance studies from Loyola University, he has had a penchant for things esoteric, and the Newberry is one of his favorite haunts. Thus, this is a luncheon lecture you won't want to miss.

Steve will focus on the "gem of the Italian courtesy books" from the Newberry Library's incomparable Renaissance collection. He will bring us a scholar's view of Baldessar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561.

This is the first English edition of this profoundly influential work. The provenance of this particular volume is extraordinary. This copy, amply annotated within its margins, was owned by the famous Cambridge don, Gabriel Harvey, mentor to the great Elizabethan poet Sir Edmund Spenser, author of *The Faerie*

Queene. Both text and marginalia make for a fascinating study of the 16th Century and underscore the cultural interplay between England and Italy in the Renaissance.

Steve will illustrate his lecture with a few selected slides of the 1561 edition. He will share photographs of the fascinating marginalia, made by the several owners through the centuries. Most particularly, he will feature the commentary made by Gabriel Harvey.

You are cordially invited to join Steve, other Caxtonians, and guests, to hear this delightful look into a time that brought forth much of what we know to be Western Civilization.

Edward Quattrocchi & Leonard Freedman
Co-Chairs

Dinner Program

February 20, 2002

ShawChicago

"Love Scenes from GBS"

Have the winter blahs? Suffer from too much Valentine sweetness? You and your friends will enjoy this touring presentation by two actors from ShawChicago.

In 1997, ShawChicago, which has performed regularly at the Chicago Cultural Center, started an outreach program. "Love Scenes" is one of the hits, performed as staged readings by actors who know and love George Bernard Shaw. Moods range from the bittersweet to the hilarious, ShawChicago promises, and selections will be from a variety of GBS' plays.

Harold Bloom has said that Shaw is as much a part of the inventions of the human for our time as Shakespeare was for his time. And Shaw lives on, as does Shakespeare.

Whether you're interested in losing the mid-winter blahs, or tempering Valentine's sweetness – or maybe celebrating the Modern literary Renaissance, which Shaw was part of — The Caxton Club dinner meeting in February may be the place for you.

Parking Note: Since parking is no longer available in the BankOne garage, you may use the valet parking service at Nick's Fish Market, Clark and Monroe, for \$10 (after 5pm). Or you may take advantage of special arrangements made with the Standard Parking self-park lot at 172 W. Madison (Madison at Wells) for Caxtonians to park for \$5.25, between 3:30 to 9:30pm. Identify yourself as a Caxtonian for the special rate at this lot.

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.