

## Life Imitates Poetry

What Thomas More and George Orwell owe to Plato's *Republic*

Ed Quattrocchi

In his 16th century treatise, *The Defense of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney found it necessary to explain that poetry was the highest of the arts, because it best told the truth. He defined it as follows: "Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end: to teach and delight." This is a repudiation of Socrates' argument in Plato's *Republic*, who banishes poets from his ideal state because they distort truth and tell lies.

Ironically poets and philosophers have been imitating ideas and images from Plato's *Republic* from his time to our own. Even if you have not read *The Republic*, you may be familiar with its germinal metaphor, the parable of the cave. It has been a template for innumerable poets and philosophers to create their conceptions of an ideal state. Even a cursory review of these conceptions gives credence to Alfred North Whitehead's comment, "Western Civilization is a footnote to Plato." Socrates relates the parable to give a concrete example of why the philosopher/king must know the form of the good in order to rule the state justly. He explains the origin and nature of an ideal state – a picture of order and harmony with three classes: rulers, guardians, and workers, each performing his or her own function. His student Glaucon admits that such a state would be desirable



Woodcut by Ambrosius Holbein for a 1518 edition of *Utopia*

but asks how it could ever come into existence. Socrates answers that it cannot happen unless philosophers become kings. The philosopher can know justice only if he comprehends the form of the good, which Socrates admits he cannot define precisely. It is, however, that which every person strives for, the source of the knowledge of justice, truth, and beauty.

Because these abstractions bewilder

Glaucon, Socrates tells the parable. Imagine prisoners chained deep inside a cave with their arms, legs, and heads immovable so that they gaze fixedly on a wall. Behind the prisoners an enormous fire projects images of shadows of plants and animals on the wall in the front of the cave. On a road behind the cave, people are walking and talking. The prisoners believe that the shadows are talking, and they engage in what appears to be a game, naming the shapes as they pass by. They judge the quality of one another by their skill in quickly naming the shapes.

Suppose a prisoner breaks his chains and climbs out of the cave. The sun would instantly blind him. After his eyes become accustomed to the light he would realize that the shadows on the wall differ from the objects being projected from the rear of the cave. In time, he would learn to see the sun as the object that provides the seasons of the year, presides over all things, and is in some way the cause of all these things.

Socrates continues with the parable. Once enlightened, the freed prisoner would not want to return to his chains, but he would be compelled to do so.

Returning into the cave would require him once again to adjust his eyes to identify shapes on the wall. His eyes would be disoriented by the darkness, and he would take time to become acclimated. He might stumble, Socrates explains, and the prisoners would conclude that his experience had ruined him.

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# CAXTONIAN

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# Letter from the President

Dear Caxtonians:

It is truly a daunting task to succeed Steve Tomashefsky as President of the Caxton Club, but I am eager to continue, for the next two years, the work of Steve and his predecessors who ably continued the Club's activities, programs, and well known camaraderie. Their unselfish dedication reflects the true spirit of the Club.

The team for the next two years consists of Wendy Cowles Husser – VP, Bruce Boyer – Secretary, and Tom Swanstrom – Treasurer, and me, David Mann – President. Each of us urges you to seek out any of us to discuss your ideas for the betterment of the Club.

We continue to count on the dedication of our Archivist/Historian, Paul Gehl, our FABS lifetime representative, Hayward Blake, and our entertaining General Manager, Dan Crawford. These positions are By-Law appointments. These gentlemen are joined by the Chairs of other By-Law committees – Kim Coventry and Susan Rossen for Publications, Skip Landt for Membership, Bill Locke and Dorothy Sinson for the Friday luncheons, and Bob Karrow for the dinner programs. Other committees important to the Club's effectiveness include the audiovisual committee guided by Margaret Oellerich, Website management by John Dunlevy and Matt Doherty, with Martha Chiplis heading up the Scholarship committee. As always, Bob McCamant's talents are visible every month with publication of the heralded *Caxtonian*.

As many of you have heard, the Newberry Library has suffered in this economic downturn, the result of which for the Club is a move from the Newberry facilities for our monthly dinner meetings. We have arranged for the dinner meetings to be at The Cliff Dwellers Club this September, and in January, February, April and May

of next year. The October meeting will be at Petterino's and the November meeting at Adler Planetarium for its telescope exhibit. We will, however, return to the Newberry for the December Holiday Revels. We are currently reviewing possibilities for the March and June dinner meetings next year.

In June, the Council decided that one of the Club's major activities – the symposium, will now be presented

on a biennial basis because the Newberry Library is unable to devote the resources and personnel on an annual basis. Another major Club activity is the publication of important works. Next year, the Club will publish an energetic work on "association copies" under the able guidance of Kim Coventry.

Still another Club activity is the granting of a \$2,500 fellowship to two worthy students. This year's recipients are Kelly Parsell and Sarah Vogel.

The new "team" looks forward to seeing all of you at our dinner meeting at The Cliff Dwellers Club on September 16th.

– David S. Mann



We note with sadness the passing of  
**Bruce Beck '77**  
on July 21. A remembrance will appear in a future issue.

PLATO/MORE/ORWELL, from page 1

He would not be able to identify the shapes as well as the other prisoners. It would seem to them that being taken to the surface completely ruined his eyesight.

So what is the significance of the parable? I suggest three: First the philosopher who grasps the true forms of good, truth, justice, and freedom knows best how to rule the state, but he is, paradoxically, least willing to rule it himself. Second, the philosopher who tells truth will meet with disbelief, ridicule, rejection, persecution, and even death. Third, a state can only be just if the leader is committed to the pursuit of an ideal above the state itself, such as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

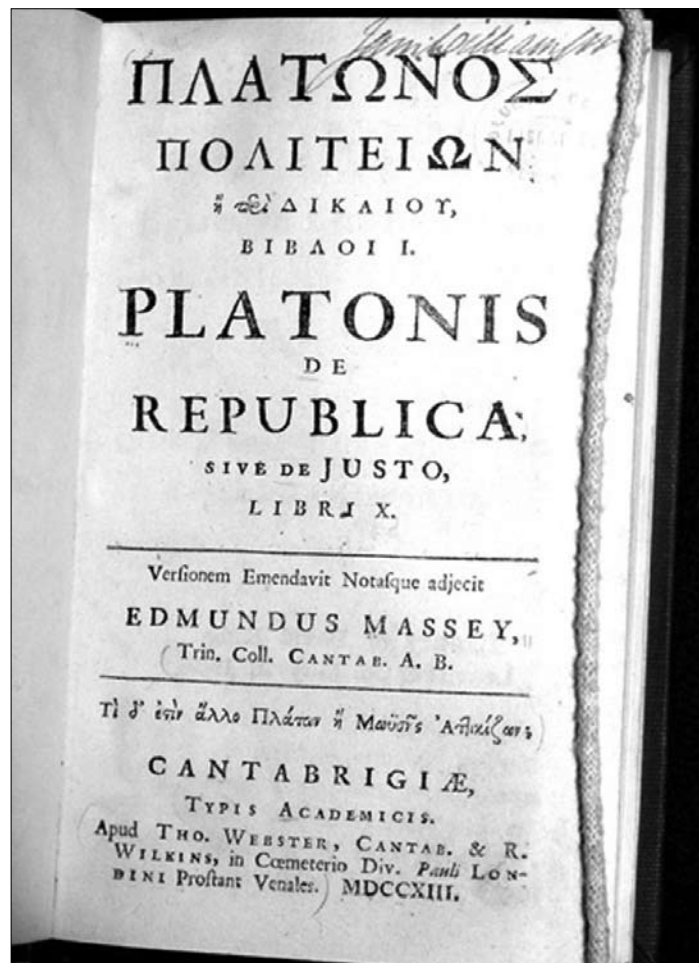
It is remarkable how frequently this parable recurs in works of literature and how often the lives of heroic individuals throughout history imitate the parable. Socrates himself is the most obvious example. In the *Apology* Plato dramatizes the trial of Socrates at which the Senate of Athens indicts and condemns Socrates to death for teaching falsehoods. His enemies, in effect, accuse Socrates of seeing shadows instead of truth. Ironically one of them charges him with the crime of teaching that the sun and the moon are stones and not gods.

Plato's *Republic* has influenced numerous other works since Socrates taught in Athens about 300 BC: Cicero's *On the Republic*, St. Augustine's *City of God*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* to name only the most well known in classical and medieval literature. In 1516, at the beginning of the Renaissance, Thomas More, in his *Utopia*, consciously imitates *The Republic*. Like *The Republic*, *Utopia* is presented in the form of a dialogue among friends after a religious service. King Henry VIII of England had sent Thomas More on a diplomatic mission to Flanders to negotiate a trade agreement with Prince Charles of Castile. In Antwerp, after Mass, he meets an old friend, Peter Giles, in front of the Cathedral. There they meet Raphael Hythlodæus, a Portuguese sea captain, who has recently returned from his fourth voyage with Amerigo Vespucci to the new world. The three men retire to Peter Giles's garden where they engage in a discussion about justice and politics. Whereas no character named Plato participates in the dialogue in *The Republic*, Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, is cast in the person of Thomas More, a character in the dialogue.

In his introduction Thomas More, the author, adumbrates the introduction in *The Republic*, which also occurs after a religious

service. Socrates with two young followers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, are returning from paying their devotions to the goddess when they meet Polemarchus and his friends. They retire to the garden of Cephalus, the father of Polemarchus, where they spend the afternoon discussing the origin and nature of justice. Raphael, the ship captain narrator of his voyage to Utopia, has much in common with Socrates. He is no ordinary ship captain because his sailing as Peter Giles explains, "has

passage from *The Republic*. "Your favorite author, Plato, says that commonwealths will be happy only if either philosophers become kings or kings turn to philosophy. There is no hope if philosophers will not impart their counsel to kings." Raphael responds with his own citation of Plato. He says, "But doubtless, Plato was right in foreseeing that if kings themselves did not turn to philosophy, they would never approve of the advice of real philosophers." That both men quote Plato to



A 1713 edition of Plato's *Republic*, as displayed by Columbia University Library as part of a web site to accompany a symposium on "Classical, Hellenistic, and Late Antique Texts in the Eighteenth Century"

not been like that of Palinaurus but that of Ulysses, or rather of Plato." He is a self-taught philosopher who has returned to Europe after five years in the new world where he purports to have visited the island of Utopia. On his voyage with Vespucci, Raphael takes with him a virtual small library of classical works, most notably the works of Plato. Before he can describe Utopia, however, Thomas More and Peter Giles urge Raphael to offer his services to a king as a councilor. But Raphael persistently resists their arguments. In the middle of their debate, Thomas More appeals to the philosopher's sense of duty by citing the famous

support opposing arguments reveals that neither will accept the full implications of Socrates's parable. Raphael, in refusing to enter into European politics, reflects the natural inclination of a philosopher who has ascended from the cave; that is, those who are most qualified to rule are most reluctant.

Virtually every character Raphael meets on his return from Utopia demonstrates the second concept inherent in Socrates' parable – that the philosopher who returns to the cave will be met with skepticism and disbelief. Raphael argues that corrupt councilors in all the courts of 16th century Europe pervert justice, but his argument falls on deaf ears. Thomas

More and Peter Giles respond like men in the cave. After Raphael graphically illustrates the sorry conditions of European politics, Peter Giles fatuously responds, "You can't convince me that a better ordered people can be found in that new world than the one we have here." But Raphael is undaunted; he proceeds to tell about the island of Utopia, where justice reigns supreme. At the end of their conversation Raphael gives an impassioned peroration on the contrast between the injustice in Europe and the justice in Utopia. But Thomas More also responds with skepticism, "I cannot

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agree with all that he said. But I admit that many features in the Utopian commonwealth would be good, but they could hardly be realized."

The title of my essay is "Life Imitates Poetry," a conscious inversion of Sidney's definition of poetry as an art of imitation. As Socrates's own life imitates the parable of the cave, so too does Thomas More's life imitate the fiction of his *Utopia*. The debate between Raphael, the philosopher, and the fictional character, Thomas More, is an ironic imitation of the internal debate Thomas More (the author of *Utopia*) was having with himself at that time about whether to become a counselor to King Henry VIII.

More wrote *Utopia* in two time frames, dividing the work into Book I and Book II. He began writing the second book before he completed the first, during a recess in the diplomatic negotiations he had undertaken on behalf of the king. When he returned to England, Cardinal Wolsey, King Henry's Lord Chancellor, pressed him to enter the king's service as a counselor. At that time he had not yet finished the first book. In the narrative the debate remains unresolved, but undoubtedly the irresolution reflects the author More's own indecision at that time. Although he personally was inclined to follow a way of life that would allow him more time with his family and for study and contemplation, he relented to the pressures of Cardinal Wolsey and entered the service of King Henry.

For the next 15 years More advanced as one of Henry's most trusted councilors, eventually becoming Lord Chancellor, the highest post ever held by a commoner. Those were turbulent years in the lives of Thomas More and King Henry, and in the whole of politics of Europe. In 1521 Pope Leo X proclaimed King Henry "Defender of the Faith" for his treatise in defense of the papacy against the attacks of Martin Luther. "Defender of the Faith" has been one of the subsidiary titles of the English monarchs ever since. The Pope was thanking King Henry for his book (probably written by More) *In Defense of the Seven Sacraments*.

In 1530 More found himself between a rock and a hard place. Henry had a prolonged dispute with Pope Clement VII over his attempt to annul his 20-year marriage to Queen Catherine. Catherine had failed to produce a male heir to the throne, and Henry wanted to marry Anne Boleyn, an attractive handmaiden of the Queen. His solution was to break with Rome and set himself as the

head of the Church of England. Since More was loyal to Queen Catherine, and a man of unshakeable principle, he took actions which Henry interpreted as snubs, and refused to swear his allegiance to Parliament's Act of Succession. King Henry ordered More beheaded.

More's problems with Henry are much more complicated than I have space to cover in this essay, but they are brilliantly portrayed in Robert Bolt's play, *A Man for All Seasons*, made into the Academy Award-winning movie in 1966 with Paul Scofield playing Thomas More and Orson Welles playing Cardinal Wolsey. Robert Bolt was an agnostic. His title reflects Bolt's portrayal of More as the ultimate man of conscience; as one who remains true to himself and his beliefs under all circumstances and at all times, despite external pressure or influence. Bolt borrowed the title from Robert Whittington, a contemporary of More, who wrote of him: "More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. I know not his fellow. For where is the man of that gentleness, lowliness and affability? a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes, and sometime of sad gravity. A man for all seasons." So Thomas More defied the most powerful monarch England had ever known, and like Socrates, was executed for adhering to what he believed to be a higher truth than that which Henry dictated.

*Utopia* had an immediate impact on More's contemporaries and has continued to grow in influence to the present day. Few books and their creators have had the influence in their own time as well as in ours. His *Utopia*, published in Latin in 1516, became an instant bestseller among European Christian humanists. Since that time it has been translated into virtually all modern languages, and its title has coined a word in the English language. As the first Renaissance author to fictionalize an imitable government in the manner of Plato's, More's work has spawned thousands of imitators, creating a whole new genre of utopian literature.

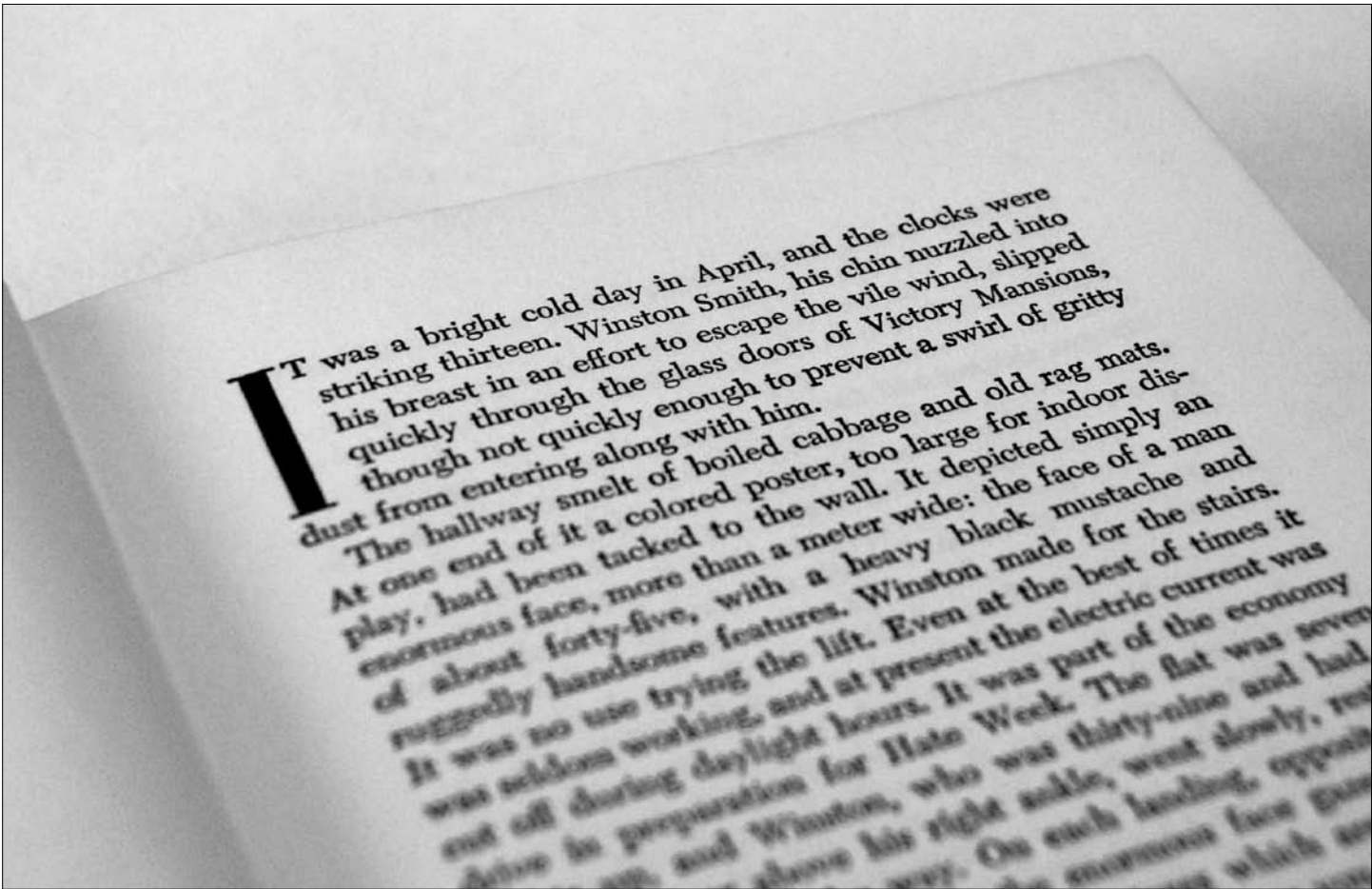
Within 100 years utopian works in three languages were published. All of these works reveal the influence of *The Republic* and *Utopia*. From the 17th through the 19th century works of utopian literature proliferated and became extremely popular, influencing political and social movements. The most famous of this genre written in the United States was Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards*, published in 1888. It inspired several utopian communities that flourished in the 19th century. Likewise *Utopia* had a profound influence on

Marxist ideology. Thomas More holds the unique distinction of being hailed as a prophet in the former Soviet Union and canonized a saint in the Roman Catholic Church.

The horrors of the 20th century, however, brought about a reaction to the 19th century Marxist and socialist idea of progress. The optimistic fantasies of utopian literature gave way to the pessimistic view of dystopian literature. Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* became 20th century classics. The precursor of these works is a Russian futuristic dystopian satire, entitled *We*, by Yevgeny Zamyatin, generally considered the grandfather of the genre. Orwell began *Nineteen Eighty-Four* some eight months after he read *We* in a French translation and wrote a review of it.

Paradoxically the DNA of these dystopian novels, as well as others such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, can be discerned in Plato's *Republic*. Socrates's "Parable of the Cave" is a template for Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Winston Smith, the hero of the novel, is the epitome of Socrates' man in the cave. The cave in the analogy is the totalitarian society of Oceania where the action in the novel takes place. Although Oceania is a far different regime from that depicted as the ideal state in Plato's *Republic*, the story of Winston Smith's struggle to free himself from the iron grip of Big Brother is an ironic parody of Socrates' parable. Orwell's novel became such an icon in the 20th century that even those who did not know the plot recognize the image of Big Brother as a symbol of the ever-present control of the totalitarian state. The role of Big Brother is to condition the members of the perverted society to believe that shadows are reality. Ironically Big Brother does not actually exist but is a fabrication of the Inner Party. The guiding slogans plastered on any available space in the city, "War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; and Ignorance is Strength," epitomize the perversion of the regime.

Like the ideal state described by Socrates, with three classes of philosophers, guardians, and workers, Oceania is divided into three classes: the Inner Party, the Outer Party, and the Proles. In *The Republic* the Philosopher attains the highest level after a lifetime of a rigorous curriculum of gymnastics, arithmetic, logic, rhetoric, and dialectic. The educational system aims to imbue the philosopher with a love and knowledge of truth, beauty, freedom, and justice. The result is that the philosopher/king embodies the virtues of the state he administers – wisdom, courage, temperance,



and justice. Inner Party members occupy the highest place in Oceania in roughly the same proportional numbers, but how they attain this high perch is a mystery. The portrait of Big Brother, with eyes contrived to be looking at the viewer, with the caption, "Big Brother is Watching" adorns every public building as well as the hallways of the decrepit tenement buildings where Outer Party members, like Winston Smith, dwell in apartments. Ubiquitous telescreens in every public and private space in the city reinforce this warning. The aim of the Inner Party is not truth or justice but power.

The first segment of the plot portrays the self-education of Winston's attempt to see and understand reality and escape from the cave. He is an outer party member and works in the records department of the Ministry of Truth, rewriting and altering historical records. This ministry, euphemistically labeled Minitrue in the Newspeak dictionary, the official language of Oceania, is so named to disguise its real function to distort truth. Similarly the names of the other three controlling ministries are euphemistically abbreviated: Minipax, which conducts wars; Miniluv, in charge of law and order with a policy of torture to exact confessions from those accused of Thought Crimes; and Miniplenty, responsible for rationing

scarce consumer goods. Winston has become bothered by his realization that his main function as a party hack is to alter the historical record so that Big Brother can maintain complete control. He comes home at midday for lunch for the express purpose of making an entry in his diary, which he has purchased illegally in a Prole section of the city. This act is a thought crime punishable by death.

The first two-sentence paragraph hits the ironic keynote of the theme of the entire novel. "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him." This image disorients the reader. Since Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and before, a cold bright windy day is not the weather associated with the spring of the year in England. The clock striking 13 conveys an eerie feeling that something is out of kilter. Winston, the name of the hero, evokes an association with Winston Churchill, England's greatest hero in the Second World War. But his last name, Smith, is the most common surname in the English language. This is an ironically appropriate name for the main character, an

everyman, destroyed after a heroic struggle with the forces of evil. It is disconcerting that Winston should struggle to keep out the gritty dust from entering with him in the tenement building with the grandiose name of Victory Mansions.

The Inner Party maintains control by the contrived device of convincing the masses in the cave-like environment of Oceania that the lies they encounter in every aspect of their daily activities are true. The Inner Party's manipulation of reality, especially manipulation of language and propaganda through Newspeak, thwarts Winston's search for meaning in this world of shadows. "Newspeak" is the new totalitarian language, which replaces "Old English." The aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought so that an individual could not even think critical or subversive thoughts. Potentially critical terms like "freedom" are formally defined into their conceptual opposites ("freedom is slavery"), or are simply eliminated from the dictionary and everyday language. In this manner, critical language withers away as the number of words which allow differentiation and critique is increasingly reduced. "Doublethink" for Orwell was the mental activity of simultaneously knowing and not knowing, denoting

*See PLATO/MORE/ORWELL, page 6*

an ability to be conscious of the truth while telling lies, so that one could hold two contradictory views at once and manipulate language to meet the exigencies of the moment. Its control is so absolute that Winston cannot even be sure of the present date. When he sits down to make his first entry in his diary, he writes, "He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was the decisive act. In small clumsy letters he wrote: 'April 4th, 1984.' He sat back. A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be round about that date, since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty-nine, and he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two."

As he continues his self-education, he has an epiphany and comes to realize that freedom and truth are inextricably related. He writes in his diary, "Freedom is the freedom to say that  $2+2=4$ . If that is granted all else follows." But the irony is that while he believes that he is thinking and acting freely, the Inner Party has him under surveillance. O'Brien, the Inner Party member with most control, coerces Winston to love Big Brother with an electric device to torture him to believe in slogans and fabrications that are self-evident distortions of reality, such as  $2+2=5$ . Winston comes to realize that he is being manipulated, but he cannot understand the motive of the Inner Party. O'Brien explains that the object is not truth, justice, and least of all freedom, but simply power. O'Brien convinces Winston to reject his old fashioned ideas by indoctrinating him as a religious teacher might use a catechism. He asks Winston if he now understands the motives of the Party for which he has been searching. Winston answers:

'You are ruling over us for our own good,' he said feebly. 'You believe that human beings are not fit to govern themselves, and therefore –' He started and almost cried out. A pang of pain had shot through his body. O'Brien had pushed the lever of the dial up to thirty-five. 'That was stupid, Winston, stupid!' he said. 'You should know better than to say a thing like that.' He pulled the lever back and continued: 'Now I will tell you the answer to my question. It is this. The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or

happiness: only power, pure power."

*Nineteen Eighty-four* is structured like Thomas More's *Utopia* on the template of Plato's parable. That is, the hero, Winston Smith, is analogous to the man in the cave who recognizes that the shadows on the wall are not reality. Likewise, Winston comes to recognize that Big Brother and the whole regime is a fiction woven out of a tissue of lies. When he attempts to tell this truth to his fellow human beings through the device of his diary he is reduced to a bumbling alcoholic who loves Big Brother, a shadow on the wall.

The history of utopian literature and actual history since Plato's *Republic* has shown that Socrates, Antigone, Jesus, Thomas More, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King are only the most obvious who were executed for speaking and acting on the truth. When *Nineteen Eighty-four* was published in 1949 it made an immediate impact. At the time its evocation of a fictional totalitarian state recalled the tyrants of Germany and Russia, Hitler and Stalin. It served as a warning to those in the free world about what was at stake. It wasn't too many years after that during the tumultuous days of the 1960s, I was teaching a course in utopian literature at Ohio University. My students and I did not have to search beyond the daily newscasts to perceive how life in the 1960s imitated the art of George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

During the Vietnam war we imbibed examples of Doublethink almost as readily as the citizens of Oceania imbibed the slogans, "War is Peace," and "Freedom is Slavery" in *Nineteen Eighty-four*. The destruction of villages was labeled a "pacification program," the village refugees were called "ambient non-combat personnel," and the concentration camps in which they were housed were termed "pacified hamlets." Doublethink prevailed in the inflated body counts and deflated estimates of enemy troop strength, and new forms of Newspeak appeared frequently: bombing one's own troops was called "accidental deliverance of ordinance equipment," while getting killed by one's own forces was referred to as falling prey to "friendly fire." Unprovoked aggression against an innocent village was named a "pre-emptive defensive strike," while the invasion of Cambodia was an "incursion." Periodically rigged elections allowed corrupt military dictatorships in Vietnam to be labeled "democratic." After the war Newspeak and Doublethink proliferated

to such an extent that in the symbolic year of 1984 the National Council of Teachers of English provided Doublespeak awards to Pentagon descriptions of peace as "permanent pre-hostility," for calling combat "violence processing," and for referring to civilian casualties in nuclear war as "collateral damage."

Since then, the lies and the perversion of language have not abated. Never did I expect that our government would enact a policy of torture to exact confessions from recalcitrant enemy combatants. This is called extraordinary rendition. When I first read this description of how prisoners at Guantanamo were being processed, I had to remind my self of the definition of "rendition" by looking it up, and I was assured that my understanding of the word was the one cited in the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Four definitions are cited: 1. The act of rendering. 2. An interpretation of a musical score or a dramatic piece. 3. A performance of a musical or dramatic work, and 4. A translation, often interpretive. But when I looked up the combination "Extraordinary rendition," it is defined as "the extrajudicial transfer of a person from one state to another, particularly with regard to the alleged transfer of suspected terrorists to countries known to torture prisoners or to employ harsh interrogation techniques that may rise to the level of torture." Now that sounds to me like the kind of rewriting of history that was Winston Smith's job in the Ministry of Truth.

Fortunately, most western democracies, including the US, have been able, for the most part, to survive the abuse of power by those in position of influence and power who have tried to practice Orwellian mind control. Our free institutions have called forth many dedicated citizens and officials who have spoken truth to power. In many other countries, however, as we have recently witnessed in Iran, the chances of a hero in the mold of Winston Smith being heard by the ruling mullahs is extremely remote.

It remains the task of poets, philosophers, and prophets to remind us that the truth will make us free. As I grow older I become more convinced that western civilization is a footnote to Plato.

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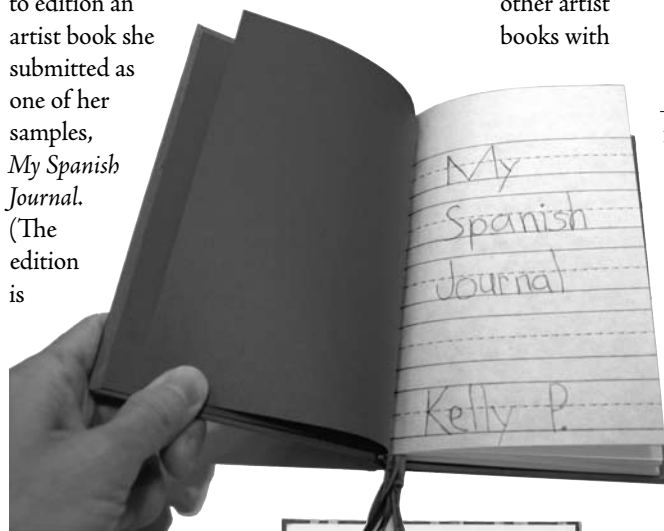
Utopia page from North Carolina State University web site, <http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/users/m/morillo/public/more.jpg>.  
Nineteen Eighty-Four page photograph by Robert McCamant.

# Caxton Club Scholarships Announced

Sarah Vogel and Kelly Parsell named as recipients

On May 19, the Scholarship Committee (consisting of Martha Chiplis, Russell Maylone, and Matt Doherty) met at the Newberry Library to consider seven applicants. After considerable discussion (since many of the applicants seemed worthy), the team came up with the names of Kelly Parsell and Sarah Vogel to propose to the Council, which met the following day and confirmed the choices.

**Kelly Parsell** has a BA degree in studio art and psychology from Albion College in Michigan, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She is currently an MFA candidate at Columbia College in the Interdisciplinary Book and Paper Arts program. Her request to the Caxton Club was for funds to permit her to edition an artist book she submitted as one of her samples, *My Spanish Journal*. (The edition is

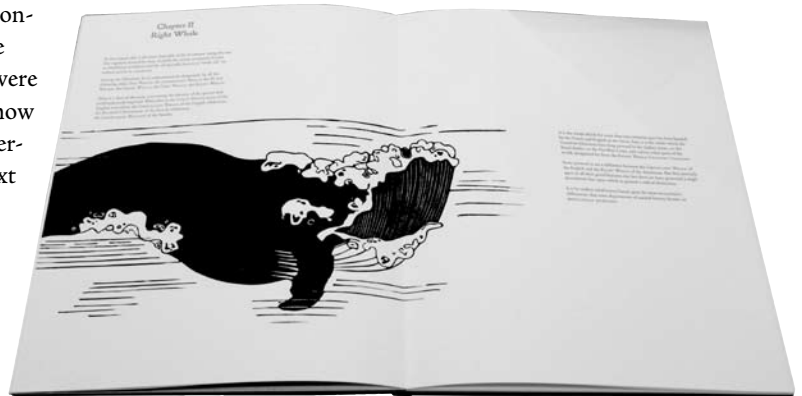


to be called *My Spanish Journal Revisited*.) "It is written in childlike writing on lined paper used for handwriting exercises," she explained in her application. "This overall light-hearted and humorous text focuses on learning Spanish vocabulary, and through the vocabulary lessons, the child reveals the story of her family.... The second text, which is actually the more important text to the overall piece, is a poem titled 'Flying Kites.' The text enters the book not on the pages, but rather on ribbon bookmarkers. Each stanza of the poem enters the book on a dif-

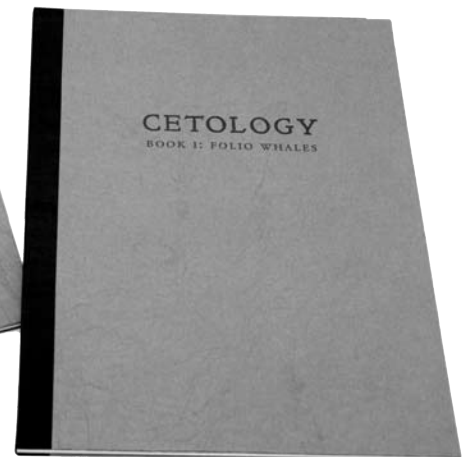
ferent ribbon at a specific place in the child's journal.... The poem is much more serious than the child's text, creating a strange and often disquieting play between the two worlds of the texts and also between two realms of girlhood and womanhood." Not only was the committee impressed with the clever concepts behind the book, but they were also amazed at how Parsell used letterpress to print text onto ribbons.

Kelly submitted two other artist books with

very small number of pure merit-based scholarships given by the UofC. Like Parsell, she is an MFA candidate at Columbia College in the Book and Paper Arts program, and also proposes to use her Caxton Club funds to edition an artist's book she submitted as part of her application. It is



LEFT: *My Spanish Journal and Coughin'* by Kelly Parsell  
RIGHT: *Cetology*, by Sarah Vogel



her application: *Coughin'* emulates cigars with its rolled-up walnut-dyed abaca pages, and *Red Spot* is a nontraditional card game supplied in what appears to be a cosmetic box. In her application, Parsell explained, "As a graduate student, I find myself making a number of artist's books that I cannot afford to edition. This particular project has a number of costly aspects, including the printing of the ribbons and the book cloth. I have spent a great deal of time working on *My Spanish Journal Revisited* and would

greatly appreciate the opportunity to edition this book with the help of the Caxton Club scholarship."

**Sarah Vogel** is a humanities graduate of the University of Chicago, where she was winner of the prestigious Dolin scholarship, one of a

3-volume book with the overall title of *Cetology*. She explains the concept: "Each volume provides original linoleum cut illustrations for one section from chapter 32 from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. In this chapter, Ishmael classifies whales according to their magnitudes, sorting them into folio, octavo, and duodecimo sizes." She goes on: "Melville's playful appropriation of the language of book construction in turn dictates the binding structure.... *Book I: Folio Whales* is a generously sized folio volume; *Book II: Octavo Whales* utilizes one uncut parent sheet folded into eighths; *Book III: Duodecimo Whales* is the same parent sheet folded into twelfths."

Both recipients are expected to attend the September dinner meeting, where they will receive their checks.

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# CAXTONIAN FOOTNOTES

Wynken de Worde

*"It's the economy, stupid"*

How is the state of the economy reflected in the arena of collectibles? Some variant of that question has been heard from the lips of collectors – including book collectors – for nearly a year. Sellers know that business is down. Down and in some cases out.

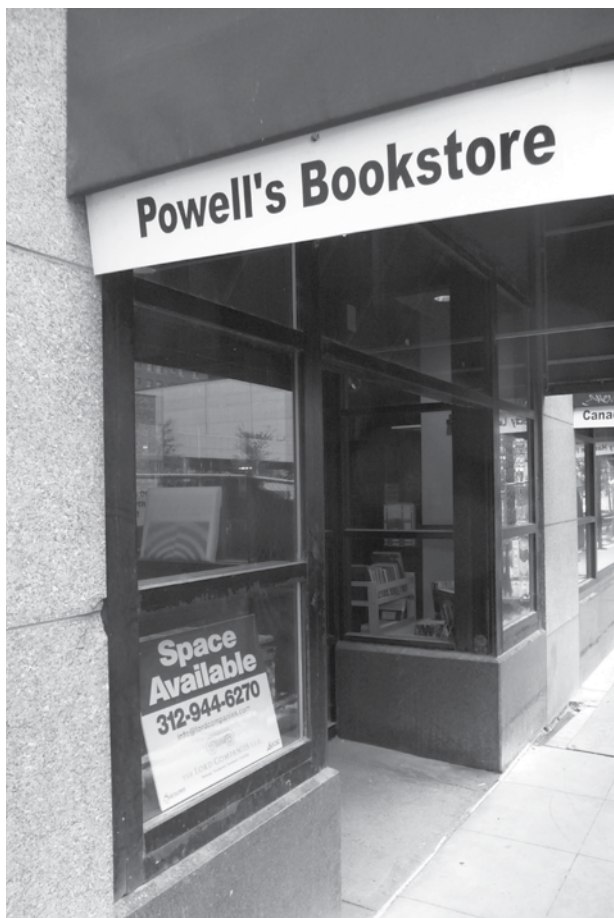
One example is long-time bookseller Howard Cohen, formerly the captain of the chain of the three shops in the Booksellers Row chain, who shut down his brick-and-mortar store, Howard's Books, in Evanston, at the end of June. He continues in operation as an internet presence, but will no longer be tending the store. Similarly, **Bradley Jonas's** ('89) Powell's is consolidating its operations by closing its Lincoln Avenue location and its South Wabash store. Retreating, but by no means disappearing.

For collectors and dealers the flip side of the issue is, "Are prices retreating?" and, "Are hard times bringing better books out from hiding by people who are forced to sell family treasures for quick cash? And, "Are people putting their money into quality collectibles, after suffering shocking falls in their stock market accounts?"

I can make an argument that better items are coming out of private hands into the marketplace, but I am not sure that the pace has truly quickened. I can say that people continue to do research, typically on the internet, and develop an informed idea of where they think the market is, and of how much they will insist that you pay them if you want to buy their treasures. These same people always quote only the highest prices they have found, never the lowest range.

Meanwhile, what buyers there are are happy to buy, but they want to buy low, and they often feel that prices should be retreating.

Another view of that was expressed by Van Allen Bradley, author of *Gold in Your Attic*, who opined that the best buy is a genuinely rare book you actually get. (Having the second right of refusal does you no good if the item is taken by the person with the first right of refusal – and you will likely never know what you might have had. It is only a natural inclination for a seller to offer a rarity to a client who is not troublesome, rather than another who dithers and wants a deal or a delay.)



*Powell's Wabash Avenue store remains open, but the "Space Available" sign predicts the future*

As to the question of putting money into rare collectibles, I offer for your consideration the results of a Leslie Hindman Auctioneers' sale of Fine Books and Manuscripts this past July. Capitalizing on good timing relative to the release of the new Johnny Depp film, *Public Enemy*, **Mary Williams** ('08) assembled some John Dillinger memorabilia. Lot 16 in the sale was a non-book item, specifically a .38 caliber Colt Army Special Revolver, which belonged to Capt. Timothy O'Neil of the East Chicago Police Department. Of the five shots fired at Dillinger outside the Biograph Theater, one of the two deadly shots was fired from this gun. Against a pre-sale estimate of \$8-12,000, its auction price was \$36,600.

There were multiple bidders, and there was a lot of pre-sale publicity for that holstered gun in the *Chicago Sun-Times* and elsewhere. There were certainly some serious gun collectors bidding against some Hollywood types, and other fans of the gangster era of the Roaring Twenties in their bidding.

But take heart o ye hardware-challenged

afficionados.! The subsequent lot, no. 17, featured a Dillinger Autograph Letter Signed, written from the Crown Point, Indiana jail, to his niece, in mid-December, 1932. Dillinger described his desire to be with family members at Christmas, and that it would be his last Christmas in jail (note: his famed jail break with a wooden faked gun did not occur until March, 1934). The letter was framed with a small photo of Dillinger and an official wanted poster. Its pre-sale estimate of \$4-6000 was dwarfed by its eventual hammer price of \$50,000. It was a victory, a vindication if you will, of paper and ink over blued steel, of words over weapons.

And it was an example of a rare collectible commanding a new, record price. (Note: in 1997 a 2pp. A.L.S. [*ed. note: Autographed Letter Signed*] from Dillinger to the same niece, written in 1930, sold at auction for \$10,000.)

One of the most memorable sales of books on record was that of White Knight's Library, by Mr. Evans of Pall Mall.

The many fine and rare specimens which this library contained from the presses of Caxton, Pynson, and Wynkyn de Worde; the splendid collection of books; the taste, care, and liberality with which they had been collected together; with the uncommon occurrence of some of them being supposed, some allowed, to be unique, produced a most extraordinary degree of interest in the literary and bibliographical world. Mr. Evans's room was in consequence, for many days preceding the sale, a magnet of attraction to all the most eminent book collectors of the day; and when the sale took place, the crowd each day was excessive. The most remarkable day of sale was that fixed for the following lot:

'Boccaccio. *Il Decamerone* (Venezia) per Cristofal Valdarfer di Ratisfona. MCCCCLXXI.'

This book had been purchased by the Duke



of Marlborough, at the sale of the late Duke of Roxburgh's books [1812], for the enormous sum of TWO THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY POUNDS ! Notwithstanding the publicity of this fact, all researches throughout Europe to procure another copy of the same edition had proved entirely fruitless; this volume still continued to be the only known perfect copy of that edition. Besides its merits as an unique, it contains many important readings which have not been followed in any subsequent edition.

Never, perhaps in this country or any other was so great an interest excited about the fate of a book. Its extreme rarity, the enormous price it had realized at the Roxburgh sale, and the anxiety to see who would be the fortunate purchaser on this occasion, were irresistible attractions; and at the very early hour of the day, although the book was to be the last article sold, the auction room began to fill, and the company kept increasing until four o'clock, when it became crowded to suffocation, and admission was no longer to be obtained to hear or see what was going on. A number of gentlemen then made their way to the roof, which is a flat one with a dome sky-light, and were contented to snatch a sight from that situation through the glass at this wonderful book! All those more fortunately situated near the table, eagerly got hold of it; others, at greater distance, glugged their curiosity with a peep at it; and others, at a still greater distance were obliged to be content with hearing the bidding.

Immediately after the last lot preceding the Decameron, all became eager anxiety; and as soon as the clerk had, with difficulty, brought the book to the table, every one pressed forward to obtain a sight. The cry then became general for 'hats off,' which was complied with. Silence being obtained, Mr. Evans addressed the company in a most elaborate and eloquent speech, which he delivered with great effect, and concluded amid loud plaudits. The bidding then commenced, which were nearly as follows:

Mr. Rodd, bookseller, put it in at  
 100 pounds  
 100 guineas  
 260 pounds  
 270  
 300 guineas  
 350  
 360  
 370  
 380  
 400

410  
 415  
 420  
 460  
 500  
 510  
 515  
 600  
 610  
 615  
 620  
 625  
 630  
 650  
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 670  
 680  
 700  
 710  
 720  
 730  
 740  
 750  
 755  
 760  
 770  
 780  
 790  
 800  
 805  
 810  
 850  
 860  
 870

875

The last bidders (at 875 guineas) were Messrs. Longman and Co. of Paternoster Row. The bidding chiefly lay with Mr. Triphook, the bookseller; and Mr. Griffiths, for Messrs. Longman and Co. Earl Spencer was present, but did not bid more than two or three times.

— p. 73-75 in *Curiosities for the Ingenious*. London, 1821

There it is. The only perfect copy of the earliest dated edition of *Decameron*. Holbrook Jackson reported its sale price in 1812 as the highest price ever paid for a book. When the White Knight's Library, formed by the Marquis of Blandford, the Duke of Blenheim, was sold in 1819, the successful firm sold it to the Earl of Spencer for £750.

I have not been able to determine its current whereabouts, nor have I found any record of its appearance at an auction since the sale described above. However, *Notes & Queries* reported in 1878 that certain British worthies were shown the book when visiting Althorp, the home of the aforesaid Lord Spencer, the great-great grandfather of Princess Diana. The great book – and not the Earl – was known as “the lion of Althorp.” If it were to reach the market, today, in an age that scarcely knows Boccaccio, at least one estimate of its value is 4 million dollars.

While researching this I learned a neologism, or, more precisely, an internet neologism: it is the descriptive term of UNCLE. That is short for Unique. No Copy Located Elsewhere. That Decameron copy is an example of an uncle because, despite the existence of other copies of the book, they are all imperfect, frequently lacking leaves; but, more broadly, in this internet age, it means that no other copies of the book are currently known to be for sale in the world marketplace.

As Van Allen Bradley might say, about having such gold in your attic, that just owning a unique item such as Roxburgh's *Decameron* is reward enough, no matter the cost.

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# Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Bernice E. Gallagher

(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

The Art Institute of Chicago: “Good Order and Consequent Beauty: Planning the Future of Chicago” (letters, diaries, committee minutes, reports, and photographs that show the evolution of planning concepts, the gathering of data, and the process of publishing the Plan of Chicago, all selected from the Ryerson Library’s archival collections), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through September 28; “Modern and Contemporary Works on Paper” (works rarely exhibited due to their sensitivity to light, including ephemera and artists’ books from the Ryerson Library’s prized Mary Reynolds Collection), Galleries 124-127, through September 13; “Picture Perfect: Art from Caldecott Award Books, 2006-2009” (seventeen books that have merited the annual Caldecott Medal), Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10, through November 8; “Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago” (an exhibition presented in five separate, insightful rotations, including maps, diagrams, perspective drawings, and watercolors, historically significant and artistically exceptional, many of them in fragile condition and rarely displayed publicly), Gallery 24, through December 15; all at the Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600.

“Kew: 250 Years of Science at the Royal Botanic Gardens” (a selection of publications of the Royal Botanic Gardens which made a significant impact on science over the past 250 years), Lenhardt Library, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202, through November 15.

“The Cartoons of John T. McCutcheon: Chronicles of a Changing World” (seldom-seen original ink drawings and representative examples of McCutcheon’s published works, produced when he served as editorial cartoonist for the Chicago Record and Chicago Tribune newspapers, 1889 to 1946), Chicago Rooms, Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, Chicago, 312-744-6630, through September 27.

The Harold Washington Library Center of the Chicago Public Library is currently offering several interesting exhibitions: “Make Big Plans: Daniel Burnham’s Vision of an American Metropolis” (developed by the Newberry Library staff in collaboration with Dr. Carl Smith and an advisory panel of scholars, including documents and artifacts showing how the Burnham Plan continues to influence ideas about urbanism, regionalism and planning), Congress Corridor, through September 13; “Inspiring Dreams! Promoting the Burnham Plan” (featuring documents and artifacts used to promote the “selling” of the Burnham plan to the City Planning Commission and the public as well), Chicago Gallery, 3rd Floor, through February 2010; “Tall Man of Destiny: Images

of Abraham Lincoln” (images of Lincoln made during his lifetime and from his death in 1865 through to today, all from the Chicago Public Library’s Grand Army of the Republic and Civil War Collections), Special Collections Exhibition Hall, 9th Floor, through February 2010; all at the Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300.

“Pearl of the Snowlands: Buddhist Printing at the Derge Parkhang” (from the collection of the only surviving traditional printing temple in Tibet, a living cultural institution that stores the woodblocks used to publish sutras/holy scriptures, commentaries, and histories of traditional Tibetan Buddhism), Center for Book and Paper Arts, Columbia College Chicago, 2nd Floor, 1104 S. Wabash Avenue, 312-369-663, September 11 through December 5.

“Building the Business of Architecture: The Burnham Brothers and Chicago in the Golden Twenties” (architectural drawings, photographs and archival documents, tracing the history of skyscrapers built in the 1920s by the architectural firm of Burnham Brothers – Hubert and Daniel, Jr., sons of Daniel H Burnham – whose buildings established corporate identities and advertised successful businesses), North Gallery, DePaul University Museum, 2350 N. Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, 773-325-7506, through September 16.

“Red, White, Blue & Black: A History of Blacks in the Armed Services” (featuring more than 100 artifacts, objects, images, and documents, honoring the 14 million black men and women who have served in the armed forces of the United States, from the Revolutionary War through the Vietnam War), DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600, ongoing.

Deering Library of Northwestern University: “Sound Design: The Rise and Demise of Album Art” (featuring highly creative and arresting cover art as well as liner notes, selected from the 25,000 LPs in the Northwestern Music Library’s record collection), main gallery, through September 10; “Best of Bologna: Edgiest Artists of the 2008 International Children’s Book Fair” (featuring the work of 100 cutting-edge artists from Germany, Russia, Iran, Japan, and around the world, whose work breaks new ground in children’s book illustration), upper lobby, through October 8; “Burnham at Northwestern” (featuring documents, photographs, blueprints, and sketches of Daniel Burnham’s 1905 “Plans of Northwestern,” a redesign of the University’s Evanston campus), Special Collections and Archives, ongoing; all at the Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658.

“Your Pal, Cliff: Selections from the H. C. Westermann Study Collection” (art work, sketchbooks, printing blocks, personal papers and correspondence by Westermann, a central figure in post-World War II American art and known to the art world as “Cliff”), Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5500 S. Greenwood, Chicago, 773-702-0200, through September 6.



Daniel Burnham at AIC, HWLC, DePaul, NU  
FROM WIKIPEDIA

Bernice Gallagher will be happy to receive your listings at either 847-234-5255 or [gallagher@lakeforest.edu](mailto:gallagher@lakeforest.edu).

# Caxtonians Collect: Florence Shay

Fifty-seventh in a series of interviews with members

Interviewed by Lise McKean

Knowledgeable, incisive, and witty, Florence Shay has been a Caxtonian since 1986. Florence recalled that when women were finally admitted as members in 1976, the club “wouldn’t let them flood in,” and at first only a few women members were accepted each year.

Florence grew up in Brooklyn and met her husband Art Shay when they were working as counselors at a summer camp. Art’s job with *Life* magazine brought them to the Chicago area. They settled in Deerfield where they raised their family and continue to reside. Florence and Art have four children: one son is a reporter/photographer on a Seattle newspaper, another son is a photographer of special events, a daughter is a free-lance photographer for news assignments, and another daughter is a lawyer specializing in intellectual property.

Florence’s collecting interests include first editions signed by authors she has met, including Joseph Heller and Nelson Algren. In addition to her collection of various signed editions of *Catch-22*, she has many letters from Heller that were part of an exchange prompted by her letter in appreciation of Heller’s second novel *Something Happened*. As Algren aficionados are likely to know, Florence’s connection to Algren is closer than simply collecting his works. Algren was a personal friend. Several of her husband’s photography books document the writer’s gritty world. Other highlights of her collection are a first edition of *Oliver Twist* with the original cloth binding and a first edition of *The Mill on the Floss*.

When it comes to collecting children’s books, Florence doesn’t pursue the acclaimed classics of children’s literature. For a children’s book to gain entry into her collection, it must captivate her and evoke childlike wonder – “isn’t it adorable!” This aesthetic and emotional response must occur immediately upon opening the book and can be triggered by the qualities of the story, the illustrations, or both. Although

Florence is undoubtedly devoted to her family – she has a separate telephone hotline at her store just for them – she observes a collector’s strict discipline in keeping her children’s book collection out of the hands of her grandchildren: “They know they mustn’t touch my books.” In fact, as a neophyte-to-serious book-collector myself, Florence patiently explained to me (as she might have explained to her grandchildren) that collectors preserve the value of their books by keeping them as



pristine as possible, which means not opening and reading them. She added with a knowing smile, “Some collectors won’t even open a first edition and will wait until the paperback comes out to read the book.”

Popup books are another of Florence’s collecting interests. Also referred to as paper engineering, popup books can be delightfully ingenious. Her connoisseur’s eye is particularly attracted to “ones that are intricate with lots of depth and layers that fold into themselves.” She counts among her favorites a popup book with a “clothesline that has long Johns hanging

from it and doesn’t get tangled up when you open and close it.”

A profile of Florence for the *Caxtonian* would be incomplete without mentioning her professional accomplishments. She is the doyenne of Chicago’s antiquarian booksellers. During a summer Saturday afternoon in her store, we not only became better acquainted but also I had a chance to see her in action, welcoming new and familiar faces to her realm where books hold sway.

Florence launched into the book business through her volunteer work at the ORT charitable resale store in Highland Park, becoming friendly with the book dealers who came to store and learning about the value of books by observing what the dealers bought and what they left behind. After a while, she and another volunteer, who became a close friend, decided to take the plunge and become booksellers. Her partner’s husband was transferred soon after they opened their store but with the help of assistants, Florence’s Highland Park store has been a haven for book lovers for over thirty years. She has been on the panel for appraising books that had been hosted many years by the Newberry Library and has been a guest speaker at various libraries in the Chicago area on the popular topic, “Is my book valuable?” She also chaired the biennial ABAA International Antiquities Book Fair in Chicago for 20 years, putting it in the spotlight with her publicity

know-how and media connections.

Her principle of selection when acquiring books for the store, “I buy what I like,” sounded similar to the way she collects children’s books. For a while she enjoys these books like a private collector – “until it’s sold, it’s mine.” As book collectors know, bibliophilia can run amok. It’s possible that the shelves in her store labeled Bibliomania are a tacit warning. It’s certain that Florence’s salon beckons regulars and newcomers alike to revel in the world of books and collecting.

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Photograph by Lise McKean

# Bookmarks...

## Luncheon Program

Friday September 11, 2009, Union League

Dan Crawford

“Caxtonians You Didn’t Expect”

One expects to hear that the Caxton Club membership has included the Great: type designers, calligraphers, librarians, collectors etc. In his sequel to “Famous Caxtonians You Never Heard Of” (2005), Dan Crawford once again turns away from the obvious to discuss Caxtonians whose fame or notoriety might seem less Caxtonian, but yet demonstrate the incredible diversity of our membership. Members you will hear about include an owner of the largest fenced land area in the USA, a person with a most famous father-in-law, a union-buster so brutal that fellow anti-union leaders objected, a fellow who bought his son a (still famous) Major League Baseball franchise, a member involved in the greatest turn of the century (20th) sex scandal, a military Caxtonian known for an epic retreat and a star of Gilbert and Sullivan’s HMS Pinafore.

Besides being the Caxton Club’s General Manager, Dan has authored 10 books and has been the head of the Newberry’s very successful annual Book Fair for the past 16 years, producing a new sales record for 2009.

Dan welcomes those with Caxton stories: “Please add to the mix.”

*The September luncheon will take place at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (in the main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30 pm. Luncheon is \$30. Details of the September evening event: it will take place at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan. Timing:*

## Beyond September...

### OCTOBER LUNCHEON

On October 2, Ann C. Weller, Head of Special Collections at UIC, will host a luncheon at Hull House, followed by a short walk to the library where Valerie Hotchkiss, Director of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at UIUC, will lead a tour of “English In Print: from Caxton to Shakespeare to Milton.”

### OCTOBER DINNER

On October 14, Nicolas Barker will speak on “Some Book Collectors I Have Known.” Barker grew up in Cambridge, England, where collectors were thick on the ground. Since 1965, he has been proprietor of *The Book Collector*, the pre-eminent English magazine for collectors.

## Dinner Program

Wednesday, September 16, 2009, Cliff Dwellers

Bill Hesterberg

“Observations on Thomas Bewick (1753-1828)”

*“He could draw a pig if you liked, but not a Venus.” –John Ruskin*

For those interested in Art, Birds, Quadrupeds, Fables and wry humor in the hands of a master engraver in Georgian England, here’s your chance to enjoy Bewick at his best. His insightful and inventive work appealed to all levels of society from children to notables, such as Wordsworth, Charlotte Bronte, Ruskin, and Audubon.

A thirteen minute film on Bewick will be shown, and original blocks, books and prints will be available for hands-on examination. An overview of his life and work in Northern England includes interesting anecdotes and photos of the Northumberland countryside and his home, Cherryburn, which is now a museum.

William Hesterberg is a retired art director and a member of the Caxton Club. He is also a private press printer and a Bewick collector who has produced three books and a film on Bewick.

*spirits at 5 pm, refreshments at 6 pm, program at 7:30 pm. Dinner is \$48. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email [caxtonclub@newberry.org](mailto:caxtonclub@newberry.org); **reservations are needed by noon Tuesday for the Friday luncheon, and by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.***

### NOVEMBER LUNCHEON

On November 13th, Kathleen McCreary, wife of the great-great-grandnephew of the founder of the Newberry library, will present a well-illustrated talk about Walter Loomis Newberry and some of his fascinating relatives, including (most specifically) his daughter, Julia Newberry.

### NOVEMBER DINNER

The dinner meeting on November 18 will take place at the Adler Planetarium, where Caxtonian Marvin Bolt will guide us through artifacts and volumes on display in the Adler’s new exhibition, “Through the Looking Glass: 400 years of telescopes,” which is the nation’s (and quite possibly the world’s) most complete exhibition on the topic.