

## Ben Hecht, Wallace Smith, and Fantazius Mallare: A Crisis of Censorship at the Crest of the Chicago Renaissance\*

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For the last several years, my wife and I have spent several months during the cold northern Illinois winters in southern Arizona near Tucson (I know, it's a dirty job, but someone has to do it). While this is an opportunity for sun, and relaxation from the rigors of living in the politically-challenged state of Illinois, my mania for collecting books and *objets d'art* continues, although somewhat curtailed by the depressed economy (we are not talking about really expensive stuff). Not too far from our Arizona community, about 20 miles or so from the Mexican border, lies the artsy community of Tubac, full of art galleries and a couple of bookstores. My wife and I visit these frequently, looking for just the right object *we do not need*, to fill an unfilled space in our cottage or our home back in DeKalb. It was during one of these visits to Tubac that I discovered an unusual collection of rare books (in a large, locked glass cabinet) in one of the bookstores.



Figure 1. Ben Hecht, 1948 (photo from the on-line Wikipedia material on Hecht)

I learned that much of the collection had recently arrived and been consigned for sale from the estate of a former New York University librarian, John Houghton Allen. A carefully annotated list of the books in the

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Figure 2. Anthony Angarola, black and white illustration for *The Kingdom of Evil*, 1924. Book in the collection of the author.

collection and the price to be charged for each volume was included. "No haggling over prices allowed," I was told.

Locked cabinets have always appealed to me. They are locked because there must be something very desirable within. I asked to look at the books and spent an hour or so perusing the various volumes. Over a couple of visits, I settled on the purchase of several illustrated books. I do read books (although my mouth moves as I read), but my collecting interests are particularly focused on books with illustrations, interesting covers, or other decorative

or unusual design elements. Two of the volumes I eventually purchased especially intrigued me, both authored by the iconic Chicago literary personality and Hollywood screen writer Ben Hecht (Fig. 1): *Fantazius Mallare: A Mysterious Oath*, published by Chicago-based Covici-McGee in 1922, and a subsequent volume, *The Kingdom of Evil: A Continuation of the Journal of Fantazius Mallare*, published in 1924, also by Covici-McGee. Both were limited-edition books, sold only by subscription, and both contained interesting and arresting, bold black-and-white illustrations. The Midwestern artist and teacher Anthony Angarola (1893-1929)<sup>1</sup> had provided the drawings for the latter book (Fig. 2), and while I found them very intriguing, it was the set of illustrations to the first volume by Wallace Smith (Fig. 3) that I felt were more compelling.

I had never heard of Wallace Smith and knew very little about Ben Hecht. On a whim, I had occasion to show my volume of *Fantazius Mallare* to bibliophilic sage and fellow Caxtonian Tom Joyce. Tom indicated that this publication had been an early inspiration in his own book collecting business, and that the intertwined lives of Hecht and Smith were especially fascinating. He provided me a number of clues for further research and suggested that I might find it rewarding to explore them. With Tom's sage advice, I embarked on the road to further illumination.

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BEN HECHT, from page 1

As scholars of the literary Midwest have noted, Ben Hecht (1893-1964) is one of the central personalities of the Chicago Renaissance, a period that is variously dated from the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century through the early to mid-1920s. In addition to Hecht, it included such noted writers and literati as Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Sherwood Anderson, Vincent Starrett, Maxwell Bodenheim, Theodore Dreiser, and Margaret Anderson. For Vincent Starrett, however, it was Hecht who served as the central, cohering personality of the movement. In his memoirs, Starrett proclaimed that, "...there could have been no renaissance without him."<sup>2</sup>

Hecht, who was born of Russian-Jewish immigrants in New York City, was actually raised in Racine, Wisconsin. At the tender age of 16, he left Racine to begin an undergraduate degree in Madison at the University of Wisconsin. But, in July 1910, after being on campus for only three days and without contacting his parents, he decided to forego a college education and boarded a train for Chicago to seek his fortune.

He had read books voraciously as a youth and was naturally attracted to writing as a profession. "The magic of words still remains for me. I prefer them to ideas," he summarized much later in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> The day after his arrival in the Windy City, a distant uncle was able to set Hecht up with his first job at the *Chicago Daily Journal*. Within a relatively modest period of time, he became one of the city's star



Figure 3. Wallace Smith, *Second full-page black and white drawing for Fantazius Mallare*, 1922. The book is in the collection of the author.

reporters, first at the *Journal* and then by the late teens at the *Chicago Daily News*.

It is interesting to note that most of the important personalities associated with the Chicago Renaissance began their writing careers as newspaper reporters. Of his reportage and novels published in those heady days of a wide open city in the midst of Prohibition (Chicago was frequently cast as a prairie Gomorrah), Hecht said, "my earliest writings were full of an excited contempt for all moralists. I dedicated myself to attacking prudes, piety-mongers, and all apostles of virtue."<sup>4</sup> He eventually found that he had the ability "to write gaily of that which was gruesome, macabre and exotic,"<sup>5</sup> and, aside from his early novels, such as *Eric Dorn* (1921), these sorts of stories were gathered in his famous *Daily News* column, "Around the Town: A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago."

Hecht's column was inaugurated on the 21st of June 1921 and ended October 10, 1922. The series of stories were then brought together as a book titled *A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago*, first published in 1922 by Pascal Covici (who also published *Fantazius Mallare* the same year) and then reissued in several later editions, the most recent in 2009 by the University of Chicago Press. The first edition included a cover and numerous black and white illustrations provided by Chicago artist Herman Rosse (Fig. 4). Hecht later wrote that it was "the most beautiful-looking book I have ever seen."<sup>6</sup>

Rosse's work, while not aggressively abstract, was well within the more progressive, somewhat expressionist works being fomented in America and Europe in the second and third decades of the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> His illustrations for Hecht capture something of the raw kinetics of the big, American city of the period (Fig. 5) and effectively parallel the



Figure 4. Herman Rosse, *Cover of A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago*, 1922 (while the interior illustrations are in black and white, the cover is printed in a variety of bright colors). The book is in the Special Collections of the Northern Illinois University Libraries.



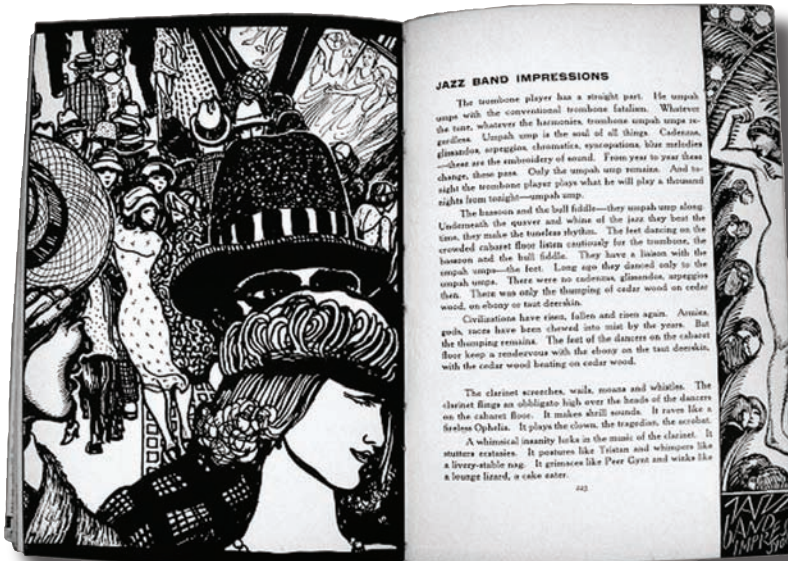


Figure 5. Herman Rosse, Double-page black and white illustration and text in *A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago*, 1922, pp. 222-223.

dynamics of Hecht's text. As Northwestern University Professor Bill Savage concludes in his preface to the 2009 edition of *A Thousand and One Afternoons*, "...Hecht's Chicago persists, as immigrants still come here, corrupt politicians line their pockets yet, cops and crooks continue to dance their *pas de deux*, and writers still struggle to find the language and form in which to express this place."<sup>8</sup> Of course, Hecht's book and many of his early novels reflect his experiences as a Chicago reporter and were the basis for perhaps his most famous play, *The Front Page*, co-written with Charles MacArthur, and published in 1928. The play was to be adapted for film several times, beginning with a 1931 version produced by Howard Hughes and directed by Lewis Milestone, for which Hecht was the unaccredited scriptwriter.

*Fantazius Mallarme* was published at the height of Hecht's fame as a Chicago reporter, and the controversy surrounding the book was to be the basis for his termination from the *Daily News* and his eventual decision, two years later in the late spring of 1924, to leave Chicago and seek his fortunes elsewhere. He would subsequently become perhaps the greatest movie screenwriter of his generation, sometimes called "the Shakespeare of Hollywood" in his heyday. And Hecht's departure from Chicago also coincided with the decline of the Chicago Renaissance.

Hecht's first novel, *Eric Dorn*, was published a year before *Fantazius Mallare* and was a breakthrough in his publishing career as an aspiring fiction writer. Like so much of Hecht's early work, it was fabricated in part based on his experiences as a reporter,

and, in this instance, specifically drew on his year or so as a correspondent for the *Daily News* in Berlin immediately following the end of World War I. But while *Eric Dorn* drew considerable, if mixed, praise from literary quarters, Hecht's next novel, *Fantazius Mallare*, was too extreme in its exploration of existential depravity to elicit much more than bewilderment from his supporters.

Harry Hansen, literary editor of the *Daily News* and a friend and confidant of Hecht, found the novel "uneven" at best and remarked that "Ben Hecht, himself an admirer of subtlety and cleverness, failed to discern any difference between frankness and vulgarity."<sup>9</sup> Another close Chicago friend of Hecht's, Vincent Starrett, also felt that the writer had gone overboard in his effort to bring an aura of French decadence to American literature: "Although its author claimed a notable morality for that production..., it was in fact a morbidly decadent work in the manner of his admired French diabolists, and I was not surprised by the government's action."<sup>10</sup> That government action was to have both Hecht, the publishers Covici and McGee, and the illustrator of *Fantazius Mallare*, Wallace Smith, arrested and charged with a violation of federal laws prohibiting the transport of "lewd, obscene and lascivious" literature through the U.S. mails. The famed Chicago lawyers Clarence Darrow and Charles Erbsstein were hired by Hecht to defend him and Smith. The trial soon became a *cause célèbre*.

At the time that Hecht wrote *Fantazius*

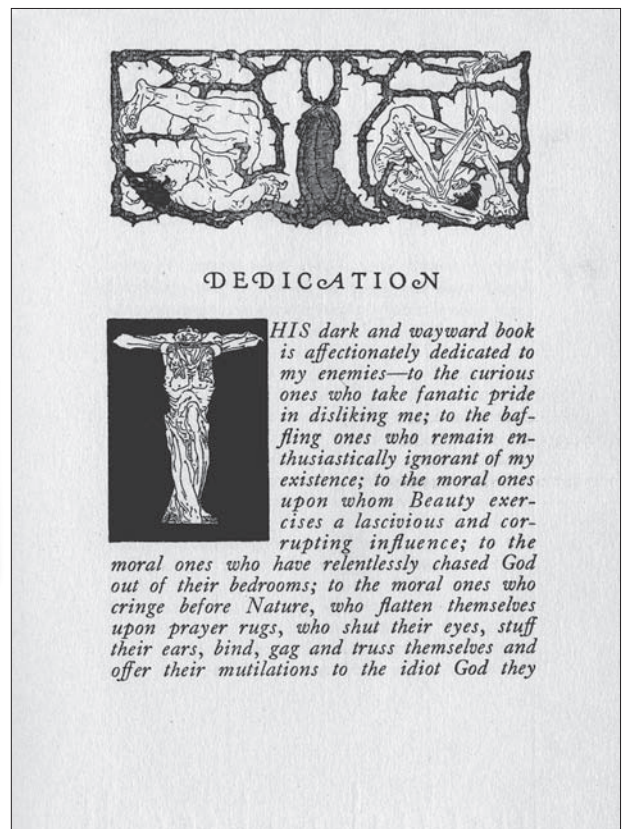


Figure 6. Opening page (p. 11) of Hecht's book dedication in *Fantazius Mallare*, featuring Wallace Smith's end piece.

*HIS dark and wayward book is affectionately dedicated to my enemies—to the curious ones who take fanatic pride in disliking me; to the baffling ones who remain enthusiastically ignorant of my existence; to the moral ones upon whom Beauty exercises a lascivious and corrupting influence; to the moral ones who have relentlessly chased God out of their bedrooms; to the moral ones who cringe before Nature, who flatten themselves upon prayer rugs, who shut their eyes, stuff their ears, bind, gag and truss themselves and offer their mutilations to the idiot God they*

*Mallare*, he was especially drawn to the writings of Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907) whose work, especially the famed novel *À rebours* (Against the Grain), espoused a disgust with bourgeois life and seemed to promote sexual debauchery. Hecht also admired Huysman's facility with language, declaring that the French novelist was

... the rajah of writing, his brain the splendid macaw of all literatures. ...Huysmans' decadence is the most virile and furious manifestation of beauty in any language. It is the apocalypse of imagery, the tortuous hal-lalujah of style. His vision is of a demonic intensity....<sup>11</sup>

Of course, America of the 1920s was not France, Hecht was not Huysmans, and the voices of morality and decency could raise a loud cry in this country, quickly bringing censorship to their aid. After all, the purity and innocence of American minds needed to be protected against the depravity of the Old World Europe.

Hecht had already experienced the fury of censors when the Rev. J. Franklin Chase, a former Methodist preacher and head of the Watch and Ward Society, won a conviction against him in Boston on charges of indecency for the content of his 1922 novel *Gargoyles*.

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BEN HECHT, from page 3  
 Earlier, of course, Margaret Anderson, editor of the Chicago-based *Little Review*, was also convicted of obscenity for publishing fragments of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the first piece of this famous work to appear in print in America.

Hecht had carefully planned the release of his book privately and by subscription only. It was to be published by the owners of a favorite Chicago haunt for Hecht and others associated with the Chicago Renaissance, the Covici-McGee Bookshop, owned by the Italian Pascal "Pat" Covici and a defrocked Catholic priest, Billy (William P.) McGee. They were to be active in a number of publishing ventures until Hecht departed Chicago.

A prospectus for the book, probably written by Hecht himself, promoted the publication as "without question the most daring psychological melodrama of modern writing...destined to arrest the cultural attention of the century that it mirrors."<sup>12</sup> Wallace Smith (ca 1889-1937), a fellow reporter but little-known as an artist, provided drawings for the end pieces and ten full-page illustrations for the book.<sup>13</sup> Smith's powerful and sensational approach to the nude human figure in these illustrations, often with sexually explicit overtones, became one of the notorious aspects of the publication. It was to be released in an edition of 2,025 numbered copies, although it is questionable whether or not the full edition was ever printed. A number of books were presumably confiscated and destroyed, although how many is unclear.

Hecht's novel exaggerates the writer's own philosophy of life at this point in his career. In his newspaper reportage, he had experienced the most corrupt and depraved aspects of human life in the big city and, as noted above, had early on developed "an excited contempt for all moralists." Hecht anticipated in advance the philistine attacks on *Fantazius Mallare* and seems to have relished testing the limits



Figure 7. Wallace Smith, first full-page black and white drawing for Fantazius Mallare, 1922.

of censorship. His remarkable preface to the novel takes the form of a dedication to all those who would denounce the book and is comprised of a single sentence running eight pages in length. It begins, "This dark and wayward book is affectionately dedicated to my enemies – to the curious ones who take fanatic pride in disliking me; to the baffling ones who remain enthusiastically ignorant of my existence..." and ends on the last page with, "...to these and to many other abominations whom I apologize to for omitting, this inhospitable book, celebrating the dark mirth of Fantazius Mallare, is dedicated..."<sup>14</sup> As if to underline the sexually explicit nature of Hecht's tome, Wallace Smith designed a vignette for the top of each page of the preface showing two grotesquely bent nude figures interlaced within thorny vines symmetrically framing a phallus (Fig. 6).

*Fantazius Mallare*, emulating the decadence of Huysmans' *À rebours*, takes the form of a journal in which a mad artist, a recluse with the appearance of "a somnambulist," attempts to rise above existence outside of his own



Figure 8. Wallace Smith, tenth full-page black and white drawing for Fantazius Mallare, 1922.

senses, to liberate himself from the strictures of rationality, and to find a woman who will devote herself completely and unquestioningly to his authority. The opening paragraph of the novel (p. 21) sets the stage for the antihero's descent into complete megalomaniac madness and depravity:

Fantazius Mallare considered himself mad because he was unable to behold in the meaningless gesturings of time, space and evolution a dramatic little pantomime adroitly centered about the routine of his existence.... His eyes were lifeless because they paid no homage to the world outside him.

A bit later (pp. 29-30), Hecht continues,

An intolerable loathing for life, an illuminated contempt for men and women, had long ago taken possession of him. This philosophic attitude was the product of his egoism. He felt himself the center of life and it became his nature to revolt against all evidences of life that existed outside himself.

Hecht designated his anti-hero, Mallare, an artist, since, like God, Mallare had experienced the power to create and to destroy (p. 35):

There is but one egoist and that is He who, intolerant of all but Himself, sets out to destroy all but Himself. Egoism is the despairing effort of man to return to his original Godhood; to return to the undisputed and triumphant loneliness which was His when



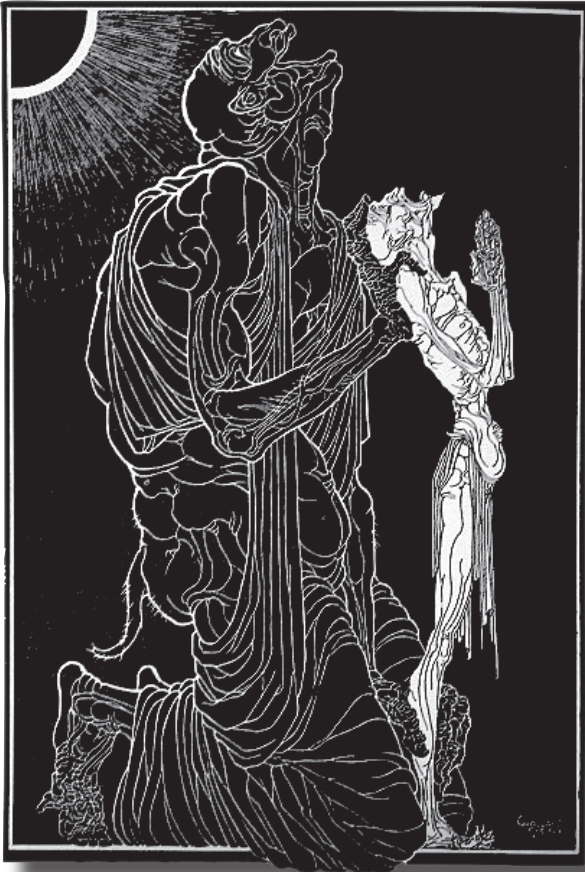


Figure 9. Wallace Smith, Frontispiece for Maxwell Bodenheim, *Blackguard*, Chicago: Covici-McGee Publishers, 1923. The book is in the Special Collections of the Northern Illinois University Libraries.

as a Creator He moulded the world to His whims....

Of course, the first quarter of the 20th century was still very much obsessed with the relatively new “science” of psychology à la Sigmund Freud and Freud’s attempts to unravel the mysteries of sexual fixation. But Hecht’s Chicago friend Harry Hansen writes that in his portrayal of Mallare’s descent into madness, Hecht consulted a compact little book, *The Psychology of Insanity*, published by Bernard Hart of University College, London, which provided him “a survey of the simpler forms taken by mental disease.”<sup>15</sup>

As emblematic of Mallare’s descent into madness and irrationality, Hecht early on decides to have his brilliant but disturbed anti-hero destroy his artwork rather than, as first contemplated, killing himself. One of the works he shatters is a sculpture entitled *The Lover*. The narrative surrounding this episode is the first of several instances in the book in which Hecht explicitly describes an image or event of graphic sexuality (p. 39):

Its legs were planted obliquely on the pedestal top, their ligaments wrenched into bizarre



Figure 10. Wallace Smith, Frontispiece for Arthur Machen, *The Shining Pyramid*, Chicago: Covici-McGee Publishers, 1923. The book is in the Special Collections of the Northern Illinois University Libraries.

muscular patterns. Its body rose in an anatomical spiral. From its flattened pelvis that seemed like some evil bat stretched in flight, protruded a huge phallus. The head of the phallus was enlivened with the face of a saint. The eyes of this face were raised in pensive adoration. At the lower end of the phallus, the testicles were fashioned in the form of a short-necked pendulum arrested at the height of its swing.

In their tortured angularity and frequent eroticism, Wallace Smith’s various illustrations for *Fantazius Mallare* perfectly emulate the language used by Hecht to allude to the human figure in its various depraved and emotional states. This is represented in two of Smith’s most often referenced illustrations for the novel, the first setting the tone for the fantastic story by showing a nude male in copulation with a female form depicted as a leafless tree, her head apparently thrown back in ecstasy (Fig. 7).<sup>16</sup> The second illustration adds a distinctly mystical, if demonic element, presenting the viewer with a remarkable, haloed, nude male equestrian figure, emerging from the darkness, the sinewy, nightmarish horse he is riding evoking an apocalyptic vision (Fig. 3). The rider possesses a sword, the hilt of which, resting across the horse’s neck, becomes a large, dark phallus emerging from the groin area of

the rider.

In his search for a woman who will become his obedient, unquestioning servant and sexual object, Mallare meets a young gypsy girl, Rita, and entices her to follow him home. Over time, he becomes obsessed with her and finds that, instead of completely dominating her, he has been enslaved by his sexual urges:

Your body alone confronts me. In this way I am reduced to enjoying my dream with my senses. Then it means only that I have achieved nothing more by my madness than the privilege of masturbating with the aid of an erotic phantom. Alas, the reason of it is clear. Man’s fiber is fouled throughout with sex. ....To possess! What a delusion! And for its sake I threw my genius away (pp. 85-86).

In an effort to escape his compulsive allure to her, Mallare tells the reader that he has murdered

Rita, but we are unsure of the reality of this claim, so irrational has his life become. It makes no difference whether or not Mallare physically killed Rita, because he continues to be haunted, entrapped by her apparitional presence. Finally at the close of the novel, beset by phantoms of others and himself, tortured by his obsessions, his madness becomes his crucifixion:

I become a little phantom. A useless little phantom. I drift like Rita. And they attack me. Hands, voices and trembling ones. They are brave because it is dark. Your worshippers, Mallare, they turn on me. They break windows. Pity me. This is the cross (pp. 173-174).

Appropriately, Smith’s final illustration for the book shows a grotesque, angular, haloed and crucified Mallare, his tongue protruding from his mouth (Fig. 8).

Smith’s illustrations for Hecht’s novel immediately gained him notoriety as an artist in spite of his and Hecht’s tribulations with the charge of obscenity. But the particularly mordant, *fin-de-siècle* style Smith originated for several publications between 1922 and 1923 was not to be sustained beyond these couple of years in Chicago. He, like Hecht, was to leave Chicago before the end of the decade See BEN HECHT, page 6



BEN HECHT, from page 5

to seek his fortunes in Hollywood and elsewhere, writing a handful of novels, short stories, movie scripts and some columns, but not pursuing a parallel career as an illustrator in the mode of his pieces for *Fantazius Mallare*.

In 1923 Smith created an evocative, highly original frontispiece for Maxwell Bodenheim's novel, *Blackguard* (Fig. 9), the story of a young man, Carl Felman, who rebels against the wishes of his Jewish parents and travels to a Midwestern city (Chicago) to seek his fortune as a poet.<sup>17</sup> Smith's drawing does not specifically illustrate any one aspect of the novel, but, like most of his work in this vein, establishes something of a visual ambience for the youth's fateful life journey.

Smith's frontispiece for Arthur Machen's *The Shining Pyramid*, also published by Covici-McGee in 1923, is, like the Bodenheim illustration, broadly interpretative, showing a complex mélange of intertwined, rather ghoulish nude figures futilely struggling against each other as if trying to escape some dark pit (Fig. 10). For Hecht's *The Florentine Dagger* (1923), Smith provided five illustrations and the book jacket design. Again, these drawings, as Hecht notes in a preface, "illustrate the spirit of the text rather than its letter" creating a "dark opulence [which] curiously interprets the moods of the story's hero..." (Fig. 11).<sup>18</sup>

In the development of his approach to these various drawings, was Wallace Smith consciously influenced by some of the more notorious late-19th or early-20th century illustrators of *fin-de-siècle* fame, like Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898)? In his autobiography, Hecht remarked that Smith "...drew like Heinrich Kley, Aubrey Beardsley and Félicien Rops."<sup>19</sup> Based on the tortured, angular anatomy of Smith's figures, one might also add the name of the early 20th century Austrian artist Egon Schiele (1890-1918), a student of the *fin-de-siècle* painter Gustav Klimt and an artist whose expressionist figures are often explicitly sexual and severe in their angular delineation. But it was Beardsley, in particular, whose name had cropped up in several discussions, among Hecht and his friends, speculating on sources that may have had an impact on Smith's stylistic approach. And certainly, the diabolic and strongly sexual aura of Smith's work seemed to suggest Beardsley as a likely source of inspiration (Fig. 12).



Figure 11. Wallace Smith, Illustration for Ben Hecht, *The Florentine Dagger: A Novel for Amateur Detectives*, New York: Boni and Liveright Publishers, 1923. The book is in the Special Collections of the Northern Illinois University Libraries.



Figure 12. Aubrey Beardsley, Illustration for Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, London: J. M. Dent, (1892), 3rd ed., 1927: "How King Arthur Saw the Questing Beast." Collection of the author.

In the final analysis, however, Smith's style lacks the strongly art nouveau preference for curvilinear line that so often dominates Beardsley's most familiar work. And, Smith

also denied even knowing who Beardsley was. Vincent Starrrett wrote that Smith's drawings for Hecht's *Fantazius Mallare* "were finer works of art than Hecht's sophomore narrative..."<sup>20</sup> But when he suggested to Smith that "Aubrey Beardsley was clearly visible" in those illustrations, Starrrett reported that "...he opened his eyes wide and asked, 'Who was Aubrey Beardsley?'"<sup>21</sup> Some more recent comments, online and elsewhere, have suggested such additional comparisons to Smith's drawing style as the work of the Hungarian-born Willy Pogany (1882-1955) and the Irish-born Harry Clarke (1889-1931), contemporaries of Smith who themselves frequently looked to Beardsley for inspiration (Figs. 13 and 14).<sup>22</sup>

In the final analysis, all these comparisons ultimately underscore, at the very least, that Smith's work was itself a creature of its time, whether or not Smith owed any conscious debt to Beardsley and his circle. Unlike Hecht, whose voracious reading and international experience in Europe had broadly exposed him to the contemporary art and literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Smith's knowledge of international

art was evidently minuscule. And he pretended, at least, to have no knowledge of art history.

In his autobiography, Hecht writes of his friend,

[Smith] was cynical as a coroner and disdainful of all humans except Mexicans.... [H]e held to a code that seemed half jest and half mania. Artists were impostors, poets were fakes, actors were idiots, politicians were doormat thieves, women were Delilahs, poor people were bums and rich people were degenerates.... I have never known anyone more contemptuous of existence.<sup>23</sup>

Harry Hansen, who has written perhaps the lengthiest essay on Smith as an artist, recounts his friend's comments about having no formal training and having little interest in the art of others:

...I have never had any art training. And I know nothing about artists.... Ben [Hecht] and I used to wander over to the Art Institute once in a while, and I would absorb valuable pointers on what not to do. I used to hear Ben talk about Botticelli. Once he stopped abruptly before a large painting and said:



'Who painted that?' 'Botticelli,' I said because that was the only word I knew. And it was true. After that nothing could shake Ben's faith in my knowledge of painting.<sup>24</sup>

Smith, as Hansen comments, always stood out from his fellow reporters at the *Daily News*, carefully attired, "a study in black carrying a black cane with a silver head."<sup>25</sup> He purported to owe his talents to no other person, having burst on the scene fully formed through his own efforts. But Hansen suspected that as an accomplished, original artist, Smith was "playing down" his knowledge of art, hiding behind this claim his feelings of insecurity:

...it was a manifestation of a lack of confidence in himself, of a discouraged feeling that the world with its standardized painting would never accept him.... Keenly sensitive, sometimes nervous often haunted by moods of depression, he became a victim of the delusion that the heights were not for him. He avoided art and artists...<sup>26</sup>

Smith used his small Chicago apartment as his studio, with his sketches tacked about on the walls. He preferred to draw men, the main reason being that he only used males as his models, claiming,

You can't conveniently take hold of a woman's limb and trace a muscle or a ligament. They would yell for help. I'm pretty hard on my models, so my brother is my principal victim.... I nearly put his shoulder out of joint once when I drew a crucifixion...<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that in spite of the praise he received for the drawings of tortured, twisted, and distended figures, commissioned by Hecht and others in the period 1922-1923, the illustrations he provided for his own books and for the newspaper columns and stories he wrote were competent but very conventional. Typical are the sketches he incorporated in one of his first novels, *The Little Tigris*, published in 1923 and based on his experiences

as a veteran of four Mexican campaigns, two of which were served with the famed fighter Pancho Villa.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of the furor surrounding *Fantazius Mallare*, Hecht lost his job as a reporter for the *Daily News*, and both he and Smith eventually had to seek their fortunes away from Chicago. Hecht published his last *Daily News* column October 22, 1922. As noted earlier, Hecht, Smith, and the book publishers Pascal Covici and William F. McGee were all indicted on "conspiracy to circulate obscene matter by means of interstate common carriers." Robert A. Milroy, First Assistant United States District Attorney, who helped conduct the inquiry, said that the book was "one of the most filthy, inexcusable assortments of rubbish that has come to the attention of government officials in ten years."<sup>29</sup>

With our enlightened (maybe snobbish) hindsight today, we might sneer and tend to discount the literary critique of a mere assistant district attorney (after all, what do lawyers know about fine literature!), but Hecht soon discovered that his loyal supporters and friends in the Chicago Renaissance community also had their misgivings

concerning the inherent qualities of *Fantazius Mallare*. None of them would go on court record attesting to its status as high literature. Only New York writer and friend of Hecht, H. L. Mencken, offered his support, unsolicited.

It is worth noting that even the English writer of notoriously erotic literature, D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), found no redeeming grace in Hecht's book, a copy of which had been given to him in the fall of 1922 by Willard ("Spud") Johnson. Johnson was co-editor of the American literary magazine *Laughing Horse*.<sup>30</sup> Lawrence had arrived in the United States in September from a trip to Australia and was to spend three months in residence in Taos, New Mexico. Johnson wanted Lawrence to review *Fantazius Mallare* for his magazine. In the final analysis, Lawrence instead sent Johnson an informal letter dated 12 October 1922 describing his reaction to the novel and its illustrations. He told Johnson he could publish the letter if he chose.<sup>31</sup> Johnson did edit Lawrence's remarks and published them shortly thereafter in *Laughing Horse* (iv, December 1922).

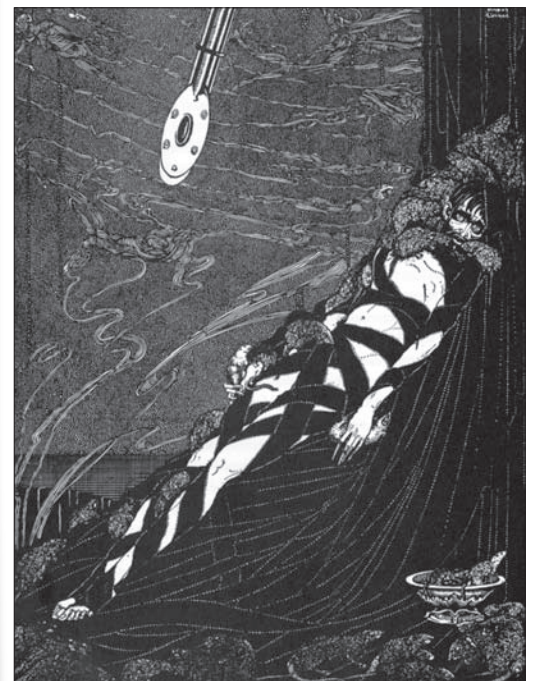
Lawrence's "review" was a damning dismissal of Hecht's and Smith's attempts at literary and artistic merit. Referring to Smith's illustrations, Lawrence wrote,

Think of the malice, the sheer malice of a Beardsley drawing, the wit, and the venom of the mockery. [Smith's] drawings are so

See BEN HECHT, page 8

Figure 14. Harry Clarke, illustration for Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum," in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, various editions, 1913, 1919, 1923 (also re-released in several much later editions).

Figure 13. Willy Pogany, illustration for Richard Wagner, *The Tale of Lohengrin*, T. W. Rolleston, transl., New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1913: "And art thou come to fight for Princess Elsa..." Book in the collection of the author.



completely without irony, so crass, so strained, and so would-be. It isn't that they've got anything to reveal, at all.

And Lawrence had nothing redeeming to say about the text:

Really, Fantasius Malare (sic) might mutilate himself, like a devotee of one of the early Christian sects, and hang his penis on his nose-end and a testicle under each ear, and definitely testify that way that he'd got such appendages, it wouldn't affect me. The word penis or testicle or vagina doesn't shock me. Why should it? ...It isn't the names of things that bother me: nor even ideas about them. I don't keep my passions, or reactions or even sensations, in my head. And really, Fantasius, with his head full of copulation and committing mental fornication and sodomy every minute, is just as much a bore as any other tedious modern individual with a dominant idea. One wants to say: "Ah, dirty little boy, leave yourself alone."

...all these fingerings and naughty words and shocking little drawings only reveal the state of mind of a man who has never had any sincere, vital experience in sex....

Fantasius Malare (sic) seems to me such a poor, impoverished, self-conscious specimen. Why should one be self-conscious and impoverished when one is young and the dark gods are at the gate?<sup>32</sup>

With the federal indictment of Hecht and Smith and the evident confiscation of some of the copies of *Fantazius Mallare*, now nationally proclaimed a sexually explicit book with "obscene" drawings, the novel, as Harry Hansen notes, became highly sought after.<sup>33</sup> Gossip about efforts to obtain a copy of the now banned book appeared in a number of newspapers. In the popular "A Line O' Type or Two" column which ran regularly in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, readers would write in soliciting copies of *Fantazius Mallare*. In the October 22, 1922 issue of the paper (p. 8), a reader pleads:

Mr. L: Will you please tell Henna Helen that I will swap three good bromides for a copy of *Fantazius Mallare*, and will throw in two dandy wise cracks – one about the christening of Chicago's little sun and the other about why is a flapper like an Easter egg. Oh for the weeping audibly!  
Dolly Ann.



Figure 15. Front page of the March 16, 1924 (Vol. 2, No. 3) issue of the *Chicago Literary Times*. Special Collections of the Northern Illinois University Libraries.

In the January 3, 1923 copy of the same newspaper column (p. 8), a reader writes:

Dear R. H. L.: Speaking of wealth, I insist my claim be seriously considered. Croesus, Henry, and John are all pikers – listen – yea, and more – I've just finished reading *Fantazius Mallare* – Mlle. De Maupin and *Madame Bovary* were given me for Christmas. Jurgen, Casanova; and *Women in Love* I bought today of a booklogger. I can truly say I envy no man.  
Geo. M.

In spite of the underground popularity of his book, Hecht had little faith in the people of Illinois supporting him in court against the claims of the government. Hecht and Smith were both scheduled for trial on February 4, 1924. Since they had been able to gather little support from friends to testify on their behalf and faced possible imprisonment, they decided to plead *nolo contendere* and place themselves at the mercy of Federal Judge William C. Lindley. He fined each of them \$1000 and gave them three months to pay the fine. Both eventually found the money, although Hecht had more assets at his immediate disposal than Smith.<sup>34</sup>

Following his dismissal from the *Daily News*, and with the financial backing of the Covici-McGee Bookstore, Hecht established his own newspaper, the *Chicago Literary*

*Times*, with the subtitle, *Modern Sardonic Journal*. It was published semi-monthly from March 1, 1923 until June 1, 1924, with Hecht's circle of friends and artists all contributing regularly. It was printed in various colors including blue and pink in addition to white, and often sported outrageous headlines and satirical columns (Fig. 15).

On the front page of the February 15, 1924 issue of the *Chicago Literary Times* (Vol. 1, No. 24), following his and Smith's trial a week and a half earlier, Hecht explained at length their decision to plead "no contest" and throw themselves on the mercy of the court. They had appeared, he said,

...our bosoms bared and a fanatic gleam in our eye. It was and is our pious contention that the words and pictures of *Fantazius Mallare* are achievements which reflect credit upon our skill, our talent and our industry. We had, however, before the opening of court discussed our predicament. The business of defending the thing we had done before a jury of our peers recruited from the lowlands of Illinois depressed us with its humor. Mr. Smith and I agreed that we were doomed....

My disrespect for my fellows and my contempt for their vicious and illiterate minds made my own predicament humorously acute....

In his diatribe, however, Hecht does give credit to the judge for recognizing that they were not criminals deserving prison for what they had written, but were, instead, perhaps naïve as to the public reaction. Consequently, the judge was fair in only fining them and, in fact, giving them three months to raise the money. Hecht's entire column, while seeming to placate the judge, was written with considerable tongue-in-cheek irony. By the first of June, the last issue of Hecht's newspaper had been published, and he had decided to leave Chicago for the East Coast to pursue other writing adventures. They were, as we know, to be fabulously successful years with Hollywood connections making him a very wealthy man several times over. A going-away luncheon was held at Schlogl's on Wells Street, a restaurant where in the early 1920s Hecht had established his famous noon "Round Table" of Chicago writers and reporters. This was, however, a male-only club, as Fanny Butcher



somewhat enviously noted.<sup>35</sup>

Pascal Covici left Chicago for New York in 1928 and formed, with Donald Friede, the Covici-Friede publishing firm a year later. They remained in business until the mid-1930s. Like Covici, Smith did not leave Chicago as soon as Hecht, but did end up spending most of the last eight years of his life on the West Coast, much of his work also connected to the Hollywood scene. According to various obituaries published at the time of his death in Hollywood in February 1937, Smith, in addition to publishing several books, short stories, and screen plays, had ranched in Oregon, “tramped the world in steamers,” lived for a time in Paris, and had married a girl named Echo, “...to the end maintaining that was the smartest and most exciting thing he ever did.”<sup>36</sup> With Hecht’s departure from Chicago, Smith’s most alluring artwork ceased to be produced and remains an unexpected find for those delving into the literary and artistic culture of Chicago of the 1920s.

§§

## NOTES

- 1 Anthony Angarola was a graduate of the School of the Art Institute in Chicago and taught art at several institutions in the Midwest, including the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee, the Minneapolis School of Art, the Kansas City Art Institute, and his *alma mater* the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. It is interesting, as several sources have noted, that horror writer H. P. Lovecraft found the work of Angarola fascinating. Lovecraft specifically referenced the artist in his short story, *The Call of Cthulhu* as well as in *Pickman’s Model*.
- 2 Vincent Starrett, *Born in a Bookshop: Chapters from the Chicago Renaissance*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965, p. 92.
- 3 Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954, p. 67.
- 4 Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, p. 26.
- 5 Doug Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*, Toronto: Lester & Orpen, Ltd., 1977, p. 15.
- 6 Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, p. 339.
- 7 Rosse was, in fact, one of several artists in Hecht’s circle of friends, along with Wallace Smith, Anthony Angarola, Stanislaus Szukalski (a Polish émigré painter and sculptor), and the German artist George Grosz, the latter who had made Hecht’s acquaintance in Berlin just after World War I. Grosz would in fact provide illustrations for a later edition of *A Thousand and One Afternoons* as well as other Hecht publications. He even provided some paintings for the 1936 movie comedy *Soak the Rich*, the screen play written by Hecht, who also directed the filming; see Florice Whyte Kovan, *Art and Architecture on 1001 Afternoons in Chicago by Ben Hecht*, Vol. II, *Rediscovering Ben Hecht Series*, Washington, D.C.: Snickersnee Press, 2002, p. 44.
- 8 Ben Hecht, *A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago*, “Introduction” by Bill Savage, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009 (Introduction has no page

numbers).

- 9 Harry Hansen, *Midwest Portraits: A Book of Memories and Friendships*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1923, pp. 342-343.
- 10 Starrett, *Born in a Bookshop*, p. 227.
- 11 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 343.
- 12 Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*, pp. 52-53.
- 13 I have been able to find little written on Smith outside of references by some of his acquaintances living in Chicago in the 1920s. As far as I can determine, no full biography exists. While the *Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* (Viking Penguin, Inc., 1986) in a brief paragraph on Smith mentions that he was Chicago-born and gives his birth and death dates as 1887-1937, Smith’s official Hollywood obituary, dated January 31, 1937, and published by *The New York Times*, February 1, 1937, indicates that Smith was 48 years of age at the time of his death. For a brief period in 1924-1925, Smith had written some quasi-autobiographical columns for *The New York Times* based in part on his earlier Mexican sojourns. If Smith’s obituary is correct, he could not have been born as early as 1887.
- 14 While Hecht’s book itself seems to have had little impact on American writing in general, his unusually lengthy dedication to the novel did exert influence some years later on Allen Ginsberg’s seminal poem *Howl*, included in a 1956 collection entitled *Howl and other Poems*. The poem remains one of the hallmarks of the “Beat Generation” and Ginsberg’s most familiar piece. See Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*, p. 53.
- 15 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 344.
- 16 Smith’s sexually explicit drawing of the nude man embracing the tree/woman was revived as a popular poster image during the counter-culture youth movement of the 1960s. See Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*, p. 54. Variations can still be purchased via the web.
- 17 *The Shining Pyramid* was published by Covici-McGee. Bodenheim was very much a part of the Chicago Renaissance scene in the 1920s where he made his initial reputation as a poet and writer. However, he left Chicago and eventually became a leading personality in the Bohemian scene in New York’s Greenwich Village. In some ways, he could have been a model for one of Hecht’s strange characters in *Fantazius Mallare*. Bodenheim married three times and by the time he was living in New York, he had become an alcoholic and panhandler, selling his handwritten poems for money or drinks. He and his third wife Ruth were brutally murdered in February 1954 by a psychotic man who had offered them his Bowery room to sleep in. Ben Hecht presumably paid for the funeral and burial of Bodenheim and his wife in Cedar Park Cemetery, Emerson, New Jersey.
- 18 In the September 22, 1923, column, “Gossip of Authors – News of Books,” (p. 9) in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (ancestor of the current *Chicago Tribune*), it was reported that “Rodolf (*sic*) Valentino is to be the hereditary complexed hero of Ben Hecht’s ‘The Florentine Dagger’ when it is made into a movie. Wallace Smith, who drew the designs for the book...will design the sets for the picture. The press agents think the picture will be another ‘Cabinet of Doctor Caligari.’” The reference is to director Robert Wiene’s highly influential, German Expressionist silent movie of 1920. *The Florentine Dagger* was made into a film in 1935, with Robert Florey directing and Hecht writing the screenplay. But Smith evidently designed none of the sets for the picture, and Rudolph Valentino, who

died unexpectedly in August of 1926, obviously played no part in the film.

- 19 Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, p. 237.
- 20 Starrett, *Born in a Bookshop*, pp. 227-228.
- 21 Starrett, *Born in a Bookshop*, pp. 227-228.
- 22 See in particular artist and designer John Coulthart’s blog/journal, “Feuilleton,” and his comments on *Fantazius Mallare and the Kingdom of Evil*, posted on January 31, 2007 at [www.johncoulthart.com](http://www.johncoulthart.com).
- 23 Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, pp. 236-237.
- 24 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 293. Italics are mine. Hansen’s extensive comments on Smith are found in Chapter 10 of his book, entitled “Wallace Smith and the Symbolical and Diabolical Straight Black Line,” p. 287 ff.
- 25 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 292.
- 26 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 294.
- 27 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 299.
- 28 Before his death in 1937, Smith published more than 75 short stories and several other books, among them: *Are You Decent?* (1927), *The Captain Hates the Sea* (1933), *Bessie Cotter* (1934), and *The Happy Alienist* (1936). Interestingly, *Bessie Cotter*, the story of a female Chicago prostitute, was banned in Great Britain as “indecent.” See *The New York Times*, April 11, 1935, p. 19.
- 29 “2 Writers Here Face Arrest for Obscene Book,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 7, 1922, p. 17.
- 30 Even though Lawrence’s notorious *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* would not be published until 1928, he had already made his reputation as a writer of sexually explicit material earlier with several short stories and novels, among them *Sons and Lovers*, published in 1913.
- 31 *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. IV, *June 1921-March 1924*, edited by Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton, and Elizabeth Mansfield, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 321 and note 3.
- 32 D. H. Lawrence, *Introductions and Reviews*, edited by N. H. Reeve and John Worthen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 215-217. Lawrence’s remarks about *Fantazius Mallare* (which he misspells throughout his letter) are quite lengthy, but I believe that the quotes I have selected capture Lawrence’s basic objection to the Hecht’s book: superficial, sexual thrills and language at the expense of an in-depth understanding of the complexity of human sexuality. I have also quoted directly from Lawrence’s letter rather than the edited version published as a book review in the *Laughing Horse*.
- 33 Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, pp. 343-344. Hansen also reports that the book was circulated “*sub rosa*” at various colleges at 25 cents an hour or more for the reading alone, “and has helped pay many a student’s bill for taxicabs.” Students at the University of Wisconsin (in the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*) and at the University of Chicago (in the *Circle*), reproduced Smith’s illustrations from the book. See Hansen, pp. 350-351.
- 34 While some later publications repeat the statement that Smith served prison time for failure to pay his fine, there is no evidence that this was the case.
- 35 Fanny Butcher, *Many Lives – One Love*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p. 65. A photograph of Hecht’s going-away luncheon at Schlogl’s, a gathering of nearly 20 people including Wallace Smith, is reproduced in Vincent Starrett’s memoirs, *Born in a Bookshop*.
- 36 See Smith’s obituary, published in the February 1, 1937 issue of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, p. 14.

# 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.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: "The Books of Mikhail Karasik" (works by one of Russia's leading contemporary figures in the Artists' Book movement), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through April 12; "Chicago: Lost and Found" (archival documents, photographs, and rare books depicting lost Chicago buildings and communities), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, beginning April 13; "Heart and Soul: Art from Coretta Scott King Award Books, 2006-2009" (picture books by African American authors and illustrators), Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10, through April 18; "Everyday Adventures Growing Up: Art from Picture Books" (works by award-winning illustrators Nancy Carlson, Peter McCarthy, and Timothy Basil Ering), Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10, April 30 to November 28.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "The Orchid Album" (written by Robert Warner, illustrated by John Nugent Fitch, and setting the 19-century standard for orchid description and illustration, with more than 500 stunning chromolithographic plates in eleven volumes), through May 9.

Chicago Public Library, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, 9525 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, 312-747-6900: "Chicago Alliance of African-American Photographers Presents a Ten Year Retrospective" (work that informs, educates and records history, by Pulitzer Prize winning photographers Ovie Carter, Milbert Brown, Jr., and John H. White), through January 7, 2011.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-642-4600: "Abraham Lincoln Transformed" (over 150 artifacts and manuscripts, reflecting how the President's views were tested and ultimately transformed), Benjamin B. Green-Field Gallery and The Mazza Foundation Gallery, through April 12.

Columbia College, Center for Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S. Wabash Avenue, 2nd Floor, Chicago, 312-369-6630: "Among Tender Roots: Laura Anderson Barbata" (books, handmade paper, printworks, video and photographs, documenting how the artist collaborated with diverse communities and cultures), through April 9.

Loyola University Museum of Art, 820 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-915-7600: "The Papercut Haggadah" (artist Archie Granot's fifty-five page Haggadah, using geometric and abstract shapes to tell the traditional story of Passover), through May 9.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "The Play's the Thing: 400 Years of Shakespeare on Stage" (highlights from the Library's extensive collection of manuscripts and archival materials), Spotlight Exhibition Series, through May 1;

"Exploration 2010: The Chicago Calligraphy Collective's Annual Juried Exhibition" (including handmade artists' books and broadsides as well as three-dimensional works executed in various media and styles), Herman Dunlap Smith Gallery, through May 28.

Northern Illinois University, NIU Art Museum, 116 Altgeld Hall, DeKalb, 815-753-1936: Exhibitions exploring the impact of the artwork and arts projects of the New Deal era, including "This Great Nation Will Endure" (a traveling exhibition of photographs by Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, Walker Evans and others, organized by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum); "Coming of

Age: The WPA/FAP Graphic Section and the American Print" (New Deal prints and graphics that gave fine art status to printmaking); "New Deal Era Images and Objects" (including depression era novels on loan from Rare Books and Special Collections of University Libraries), all through May 28.

Northwestern University, Charles Deering Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Only Connect - Bloomsbury Families and Friends" (books, manuscripts, letters, photographs and drawings from the Bloomsbury group as well as their siblings, parents, children and lovers, many from the recently acquired Garnett Family Archive), through April 30; "Burnham at Northwestern" (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.

Northwestern University, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "The Brilliant Line: Following the Early Modern Engraver, 1480-1650" (engravings by German, Dutch, Italian and French

artists, illustrating how ideas and techniques were exchanged by the medium's visual language), Main Gallery, April 9 through June 20.

Oriental Institute of Chicago, University of Chicago, 1155 E. 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919-20" (never before exhibited photos, artifacts, and documents about the daring travels of James Henry Breasted, founder of the Oriental Institute), through August 29.

Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5500 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850-1900" (prints, drawings, illustrated books and small sculptures from private collectors, many unsuitable for public display and stored away in cabinets, including works by Kathe Kollwitz, Max Klinger, James McNeill Whistler, and others), Richard and Mary L. Gray Gallery, through June 13.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Richard J. Daley Library, Special Collections and Archives, MC 234, 801 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, 312-996-2742: "An Architect's Library: Books from the Burnham and Hammond Collection" (selections from the working library of the firm of Daniel Burnham, Jr., Hubert Burnham, and C. Herrick Hammond, architects of famous structures like the Carbide and Carbon Building, now known as the Hard Rock Hotel), through May 31.

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



*Only Connect: Bloomsbury, at Northwestern*  
R. A. GARNETT'S FRONTISPICE TO  
DAVID GARNETT'S "LADY INTO FOX" (1922)



# Caxtonians Collect: Michael Thompson

Sixty-fourth in a series of interviews with members

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Michael Thompson has been accumulating books since he was in junior high. When he was in his twenties, he took up mountaineering. When he was in his thirties, the idea of putting the two interests together came to him, and he started collecting books about mountaineering.

But somewhere along the way he realized that collecting worked better if you had a more specific area of interest. So he decided to collect only first editions of first person accounts of first ascents of specific mountains.

This proved to be a good field to collect in the days when Thompson was a corporate lawyer, moving frequently in jobs for the New York Public Service Commission, the Missouri Pacific Railroad, Teléfonos de México, and AT&T. It was a research problem, mostly: studying about ascents, who had written about them, and their publishing history. Once a title was determined, the internet usually provided a copy.

But then, in the early 00s, Thompson decided to settle down in Chicago and start his own private practice. He could begin to collect books which required a home: "If you're going to buy books and manuscripts that are hundreds of years old, you need to provide reasonable climate-control to preserve them," he explained. He was fascinated by illuminated manuscripts and by the books produced in printing's first fifty years: incunables. So he started to collect them; usually individual leaves were what he could afford.

He also allowed his collecting to broaden a bit into fine press editions of mountaineering and exploration subjects. (Here he mentioned the Argonaut press of Great Britain in the 1920s and 30s, two beautiful Limited Editions Club books, and a signed extra-illustrated limited edition of *Across East African Glaciers* by the German Hans Meyer.)

And he started to collect prints, drawings, watercolors, and paintings for his walls. Always one to define a specific collecting area, he decided upon works by artists who exhibited at the 1913 Armory Show, the groundbreaking exhibit which introduced Americans to modern art. It was not long before Thompson discovered that forty of the almost four hundred artists who exhibited at the Armory Show had created *livres d'artistes*.

"After a pretty serious fall off a rock face at

the age of fifty-two, my approach to mountaineering became one of benign neglect," Thompson exclaims. "With my interest in fine printing and modern art, *livres d'artistes* became a logical next step. They involve more than bibliographical research: you naturally want to collect items that appeal to you aes-



Thompson with a bound *livre d'artiste* illustrated by Maurice de Vlaminck and bound by Pierre-Lucien Martin.

thetically and since most of the *livres* from this period were issued in wrappers, with the collector expected to hire his own binding, there is the additional task of figuring out who should bind them and how."

Among the "household names" from the Armory Show who produced *livres d'artistes*, Thompson has so far been able to purchase works by Georges Braque, Emile Bonnard, André Durain, Marcel Duchamp, Aristide Maillol, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, and Maurice de Vlaminck, among other lesser known artists. But that leaves him plenty to keep looking for: Rodin, Renoir, Léger, Gauguin, and Brancusi to name just a few.

The binding challenge is one Thompson is just approaching. "It's been great fun learning about contemporary binders. There are exhibits to visit (such as the forthcoming one at the Grolier Club of an international competition), people to meet, and technical information to

master." He's not certain, but he hopes to commission his first binding this year.

"Of course, part of the trick is deciding which books should be bound. Some come in elaborate wrappers and even boxes constructed to house them. The French tradition is to be sure to include the wrapper in the

binding somehow. But sometimes it seems almost destructive to add a binding."

Thompson shops for his *livres d'artiste* mainly by attending auctions. "Paris would be the classic place to look," he explains. "But I've decided not to do that, even though the prices and selection would both be better there. The problem is export controls. While the French would be happy to have an American bid on and own French cultural property, they are not so happy to have it removed from the country. Since my library is in Chicago, it's just easier to look

at works which have been out of France for many years."

Another choice Thompson has made is to stick with "major" artists. "Many *livres d'artiste* were created by artists whose only known work is in books. While much of their work is quite important in its own right, I have chosen to collect artists whose reputations were established in other media, in particular painters and sculptors, largely as a means of narrowing my choices," he says.

Thompson grew up in Des Moines, Iowa. He attended the University of Iowa for his master's in economics and law degrees. The two fields of economics and law worked well together for his career in regulated industries. He joined the Club in 2001 (nominated by John Chalmers), and served as President from 2003 to 2005. During his tenure as President the Club held the Leaf Book exhibition with accompanying book and symposia.

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## Bookmarks...

### Luncheon Program

Friday, April 9, 2010, Union League Club  
Nathan Mason  
"Chicago's Fantastic Public Art"

Who and why is that person balancing on a beam high above LaSalle Street? Have you Chicago's part of Frank Stella's *Moby Dick* series (at the Metcalfe Federal Building), or "An Open Book Waiting for Comprehension" at a branch library, or a police station ceiling full of colored neon tubes attached to raceways? What is the story behind the fountain on the Art Institute's eastern facade by Isamu Noguchi? Nathan Mason will deliver a beautifully illustrated presentation, enriching our knowledge of public art favorites, while revealing lesser known treasures and, finally, telling us about recent commissions and coming attractions. Nathan is Curator of Special Projects for Chicago's Public Art Program which includes the City Gallery in Historic Water Tower, the Chicago Rooms at the Cultural Center, outdoor exhibits and percent-for-art commissions: (1.33% of the budgets for new public buildings goes into a fund for art work acquisition).

Do not miss this.

The April luncheon will take place at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (in the main dining room on the sixth floor) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$30. Details of the April dinner: it will take place at the Union League Club in the 5th floor Crystal

### Beyond April...

#### MAY LUNCHEON

On May 14, the Friday luncheon meeting will take place at the Union League Club. Speaker to be announced.

#### MAY DINNER

Wednesday, May 19, Thomas Hahn of the University of Rochester will talk (at the Union League Club) about the Americanization of Robin Hood through Howard Pyle's 1883 classic book.

#### JUNE LUNCHEON

The luncheon will be Friday June 11 at the Union League Club, with a speaker to be announced.

#### JUNE DINNER

On Thursday(!), June 17, British Wodehousian Tony Ring will speak at Petterino's on "Beyond Jeeves and Bertie: The Quirks, Peculiarities, and Uses of a P. G. Wodehouse Collection."

Note: the April dinner is at the Union League!

### Dinner Program

Wednesday, April 21, 2010, Union League Club  
Joan Houston Hall  
"American English Dialects are Alive and Well"

Despite dire predictions that the media and the mobility of the population are "homogenizing" American English, there is plenty of evidence that words, phrases, and pronunciations still retain their regional flavors. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* (familiarly known as *DARE*) records and documents these variations. *DARE*'s Chief Editor Joan Houston Hall will describe how this project has proved to be invaluable not only to librarians, teachers, and researchers – the expected users of such a reference work – but also to forensic linguists, physicians, psychiatrists, and dialect coaches.

Having lived in Ohio, California, Idaho, Georgia, Oregon, Maine, and Wisconsin, Joan Houston (pronounced HOUSE-TON) Hall is ideally suited to her task of recording regional variation in American English. Her Ph.D. is from Emory University, where she studied the speech of rural southeast Georgia.

Room. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. Dinner is \$55. drinks are \$4 to \$12. 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 Tuesday dinner.**