CAXTONIAN

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The Joys of Joseph Wechsberg

A life well spent, colliding with the English language over food and music

Bruce Hatton Boyer

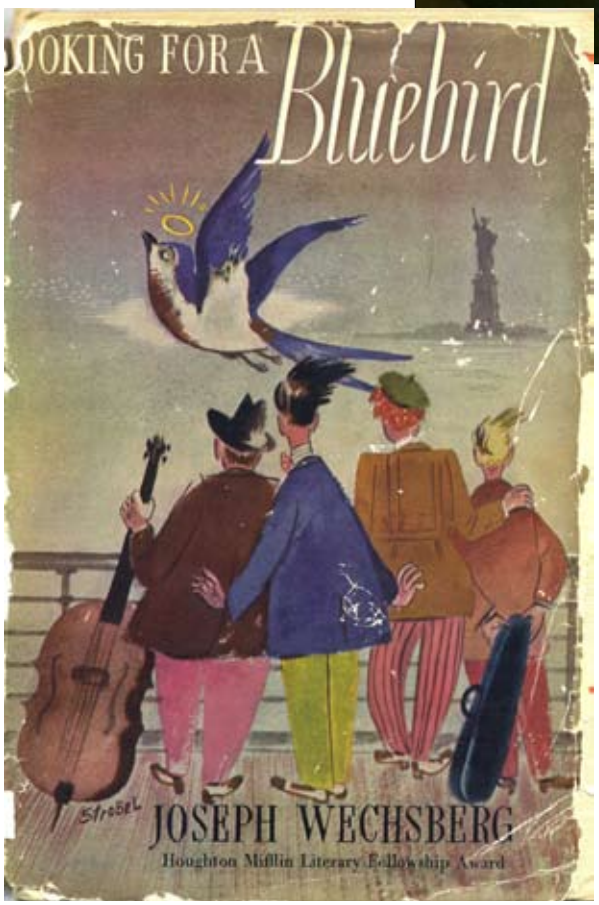
I first encountered the world of Joseph Wechsberg exactly 50 years ago, and in a most appropriate place – in the library aboard the *S.S. Flandre*, then the workhorse of the French Line's trans-Atlantic run. I was 15 years old and headed for a three-month tour of Europe with my family. The book in question was a battered Penguin paperback of *Looking For a Bluebird*, the first compilation of Wechsberg's writings. I say the setting was appropriate because half the adventures related in *Bluebird* centered on Wechsberg's life as a ship's musician aboard – what else? – the French Line.

Joseph Wechsberg has been gone for 25 years now and while his writing is both timeless and of the moment, pigeonholing his oeuvre is hard. He could be classified a bon vivant, though that word conjures up images of Lucius Beebe, and Wechsberg was far wiser and more accomplished. To call him a travel writer is to put him with peddlers of Chamber of Commerce encomiums. He was above all a staff writer at *The New Yorker* for 30 years, adhering to Wallace Shawn's dictum to "delight and satisfy" the readers. He contributed, by my count, 156 pieces (an essentially complete list is at www.josephwechsberg.com/html/wechsberg-new_yorker-articles-1950s.html) and published 27 books.

The New Yorker is a temple of Strunk & White prose, and most writers can only dream of making the grade there. Wechsberg was one of its most fluid, engaging writers, and when we consider that English was his *fourth* language, we can only shake our heads in awe. And if to be a writer is to be an observer of life, even more a participant, Wechsberg was in a class by himself.

Joseph Wechsberg was born in Ostrava, Moravia in 1908 and grew up both in the countryside and in Prague. Like his contemporary in the "Paris of the East," Franz Kafka, Wechsberg was Jewish, so he had three languages right off – Czech, German and a smattering of Yiddish. His family shipped him off to Paris for schooling after World War I but instead of studying law as his mother had wished, Wechsberg spent his time playing violin in seedy Montmartre nightclubs. *Bluebird* contains hilarious anecdotes from those years.

http://josephwechsberg.com/



There was, for example, Sebastiano, a piano player so lazy that he never went home to sleep, preferring instead to sack out at the nightclub beneath his piano. One day his tuxedo was stolen so he played the evening set in his pajamas. Two Americans discovered him behind a potted plant, shouted with joy, and for five nights, all the patrons of the *Rendezvous des Americains* danced in their pajamas. *C'était le rage*. The Bluebird of the title came from a black American jazz band known as the Blackbirds, with whom Wechsberg had to play one night entirely without rehearsal. Since this was when Josephine Baker was electrifying Paris with American jazz, Wechsberg and his five fellow string players were supposed to accompany a chorus line of crinoline-clad dancers in a Southern plantation number to the tune of Boccherini's "Minuet." Don't ask. On the second repetition opening night, the 50-member band blared in, turning the 18th-century Italian chamber piece into a jazz can-can, and one of the dancers broke into "I'm a Little Bluebird Looking for a Bluebird." The audience loved it. The revue played for

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months.

Wechsberg's Paris sojourn ended when he returned at 2 a.m. to his hotel in Pigalle – one which rented more by the hour than the night – to find his patron and uncle Siegfried sitting at a sidewalk table surrounded by females of the night and looking not at all pleased:

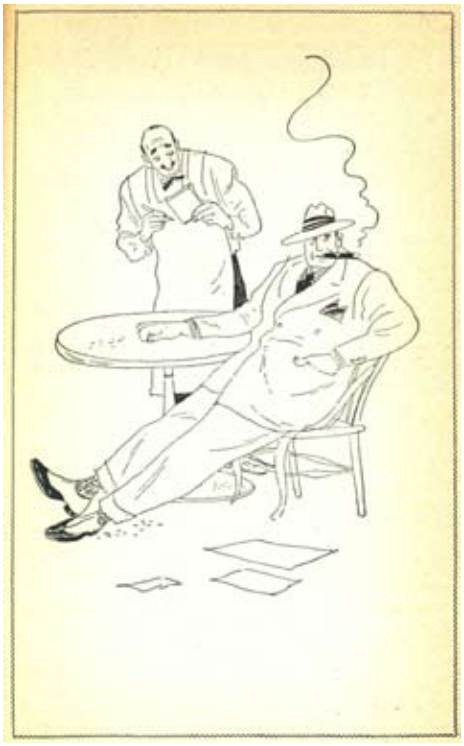
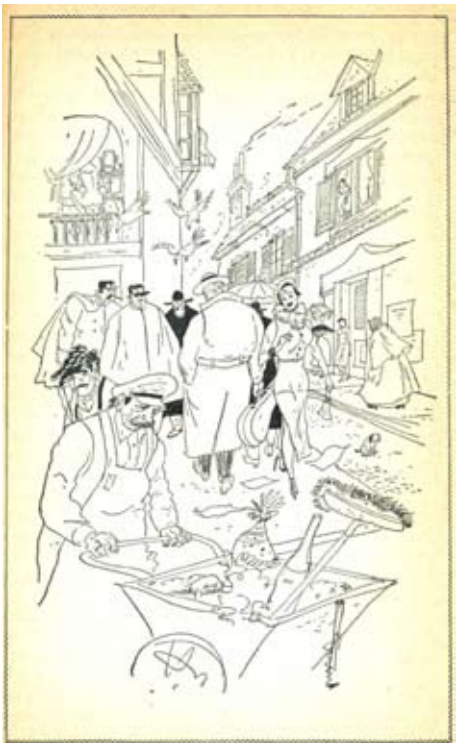
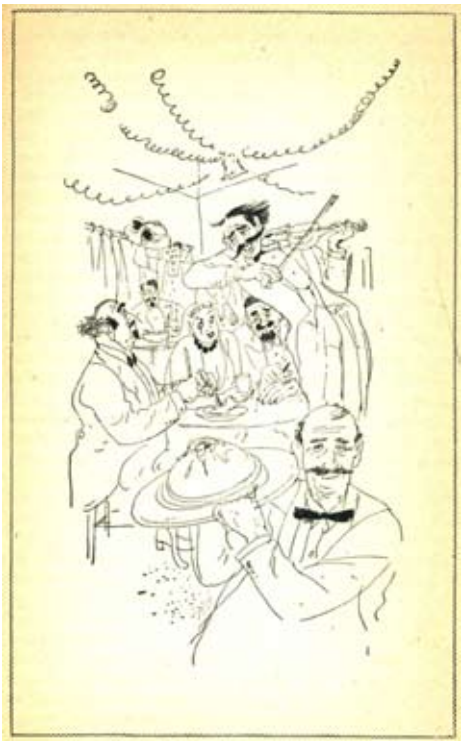
> I sat down next to him on the terrace. That, it turned out, was a mistake. Several of my North African economics teachers came by and tried to sell my uncle genuine Tabriz rugs from the Boches-du-Rhone department, and one, Mohammed ben Ali, sat down beside us, offered my uncle his young sister and the white stuff that looked like, but wasn't, sugar, and told me that he'd just won a three-hundred meter race against an aging *brigadier* [policeman]. Then Theophile and Claudia dropped in. Claudia kissed me on the cheek and Theophile paid me thirty francs for last Sunday's work. My uncle wanted to know what the money was for. I told him proudly about my job playing with Theophile and Son Orchestre. My uncle said nothing but his face took on the hue of moldy herring. Miss Vintage Bordeaux ambled by, stopping at our table, giving me a kiss on the cheek and asking, "*Ca va, cherie?*" She winked at my uncle and said there was nothing she would deny a friend of mine, and then gave *him* an affectionate kiss on the cheek and pulled up a chair." (*Blue,* pp.49-50).

An escape to sea seemed best at that juncture, so Wechsberg signed up with the French Line. This being during Prohibition, he spent his days in New York harbor selling overpriced whiskey in cramped ship cabins to alcohol-deprived New Yorkers. Later, traversing the Red Sea on the Oriental run, the ship's orchestra got into a labor dispute with the purser and rebelled by rolling the piano overboard. Then there was the overbearing woman dubbed the High Voltage Lady because the pianist "would rather sit in the electric chair than in her lap." When she insisted on entertaining fellow passengers at the Captain's Gala with a rendition of "Vissi d'Arte," said pianist quietly neglected to transpose the piece down as requested, killing any possibility of her hitting the high D at the finale and assuring her humiliation. Sabotage richly deserved.

There were other adventures for Wechsberg during the Thirties as well, as in the time he met a printing-press salesman from Pittsburgh in Ostrava. Business was horrible, the man told him. Nobody wanted to buy from him because they didn't believe he was an American. No problem. Wechsberg dressed him up in a zoot suit, stuck a fat stogie in his mouth and instructed him to talk like Al Capone. The act established his bona fides, and the man had the best sales trip of his career. Shortly after that encounter, Wechsberg spent time as a *claquer* – a professional applauder – at the Vienna Opera, and his descriptions of jealous prima donnas and tenors outbidding each other for his services are unbelievable. He even did a stint as an assistant croupier in a Riviera casino.

In the later Thirties, Wechsberg fled Hitler and

Wechsberg, left, with his wife Ann and Clark Gable. Note that the official studio caption on the photograph called him Joseph Warren.

Illustrations from Bluebird *by Eugen F. Strobel*

settled in Los Angeles, at the time a haven for Central European artistic refugees. It is hard today to jibe our image of West Coast surfers with the likes of Bertolt Brecht, Igor Stravinsky, Gregor Piatigorsky, Jascha Heifetz and Arnold Schoenberg, but they were all there. A stint at Paramount Pictures taught Wechsberg the difference between Hollywood "writers" and the real thing:

> At a dinner party in the house of a Hollywood producer (I seem to have been invited by a clerical error), the guest of honor was an English novelist whose minor literary talent was camouflaged by his major conceit. He was treated as though he'd won the Nobel Prize. Way down the table sat Thomas Mann, who *had* been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. He was ignored by the host and hostess. Later, another move mogul slapped Mann on the shoulder and called him "Tommy." (*First*, p. 119)

It was in those years that Wechsberg decided to become a writer by, as he put it, "continuing my lonely collision course with the English language." He wrote six, eight and ten hours a day, sending manuscripts out by the dozen and receiving rejection slips by the same number. After many attempts, he landed one at *The New Yorker*, where he stayed – with time out for Army intelligence work during World War II – until his death.

Wechsberg could have written just about his own adventures and held audiences captive. But he was also a journalist who pursued stories with tenacity and warmth, a rare combination. His range was extraordinary. Among his *New Yorker* pieces in the 1950's were an article about the Leipzig Trade Fair, the newly-reopened Bristol Hotel in Vienna, the 500th birthday celebration for Columbus in Genoa, the reconstituted Greek National Army, the independence of Libya, reports of corresponding visits to Morocco and Tangier, a piece on rubble removal on postwar Berlin, on the Haydn Society in Vienna – a group dedicated to recording all of the master's music, profiles of the director of the Hamburg State Opera and Albert Schweitzer, a review of a performance of *Nozze di Figaro* at the Gran Teatre de Liceu in Barcelona, a visit to the *Casa Verdi* in Sant' Agata, the opening of the reconstructed *Staatsoper* in Vienna, and even a profile of the inventors of Kodachrome film.

The New Yorker sent him to report from Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest and Budapest as they struggled to rebuild themselves after World War II. Speaking the native languages as he did, his reports combined the journalist's eye with the novelist's feel for the human. And, like any good journalist, he always stayed on the lookout for stories that his editors had not imagined. Indeed, his favorite piece was his most serendipitous.

In 1954, he was motoring through St. Anton-am-Arlberg, a small Tyrolean village. Thinking his brakes were overheating, he pulled off onto a small dirt road. Forced to a stop by crossing cattle, he noticed the eastern portal of the Arlberg Tunnel, one of the longest railroad tunnels in the world – six and a quarter miles – and saw a man walking out of the tunnel in overalls and carrying a carbide lamp. He looked like a coal miner. Intrigued, Wechsberg discovered his name was Johann Raffeiner, and he was the *Streckenbegehrer,* or track inspector. His job was to walk the tunnel every day and check for loose ties. Since the trip took eight hours, Raffeiner would inspect the rails in one direction one day, then the other track the next, 32,000 railroad ties in all. Intrigued, Wechsberg accompanied him.

> Eight hours later I stumbled and almost fell down when we reached the western exit at Langen. I stared at the lovely picture of blue skies and white clouds, of mountains and trees and colors, framed by the tunnel portal. Walking through a long, dark tunnel may be a poor substitute for an astronaut's walk through space, but to me it was a little like getting back to earth. . . Fellow mortals, if you ever get bored with life on earth, walk through a long tunnel. (*First*, p. 305)

Wechsberg's major loves were food and music. Being a man of so many differ-

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ent places and cultures, an interest in food was perhaps inevitable. He never claimed to be an epicurean – "my promotion to gourmet coincided with my inability to eat a gourmet meal. Nowadays, my delicate stomach refuses to underwrite my palate's excursions into the realm of gastronomy." (*First*, p. 369). He wrote of his mother's vernacular cooking, of nights in Paris bistros, and a whole piece on the way Viennese chefs searched out and chose just the right cuts for their legendary boiled beef:

> Old-time Viennese butchers with the steady hand of distinguished brain surgeons were able to dissect the carcass of a steer into thirty-two different cuts, and four qualities, of meat. Among the first quality cuts were not only tenderloin, porterhouse, sirloin and prime rib of beef, as elsewhere, but also five cuts used exclusively for boiling: two *Scherzls*, two *Schwanzls*, and *Tafelspitz*.... In Vienna, only the very best beef was good enough to be boiled. (*Blue*, p. 71)

Wechsberg wrote what was perhaps the introduction to the *Guide Michelin* for American audiences and a piece about the Lindt & Sprungli chocolate factory at Kilchberg, Switzerland. Inevitably, there were pieces on famous chefs – Alexandre Dumaine of the Hotel Cote d'Or, Roger Topolinski of the famous Paris restaurant Lapérouse, Henri Soule, who opened le Pavillon in 1939, America's first real haute cusine restaurant, and Fernand Point, the legendary *proprietaire* of La Pyramide, considered the greatest French restaurant in history. Point was six foot three, weighed over 300 hundred pounds, and had a face like a traffic cop but his love of cooking made him seem almost elfin:

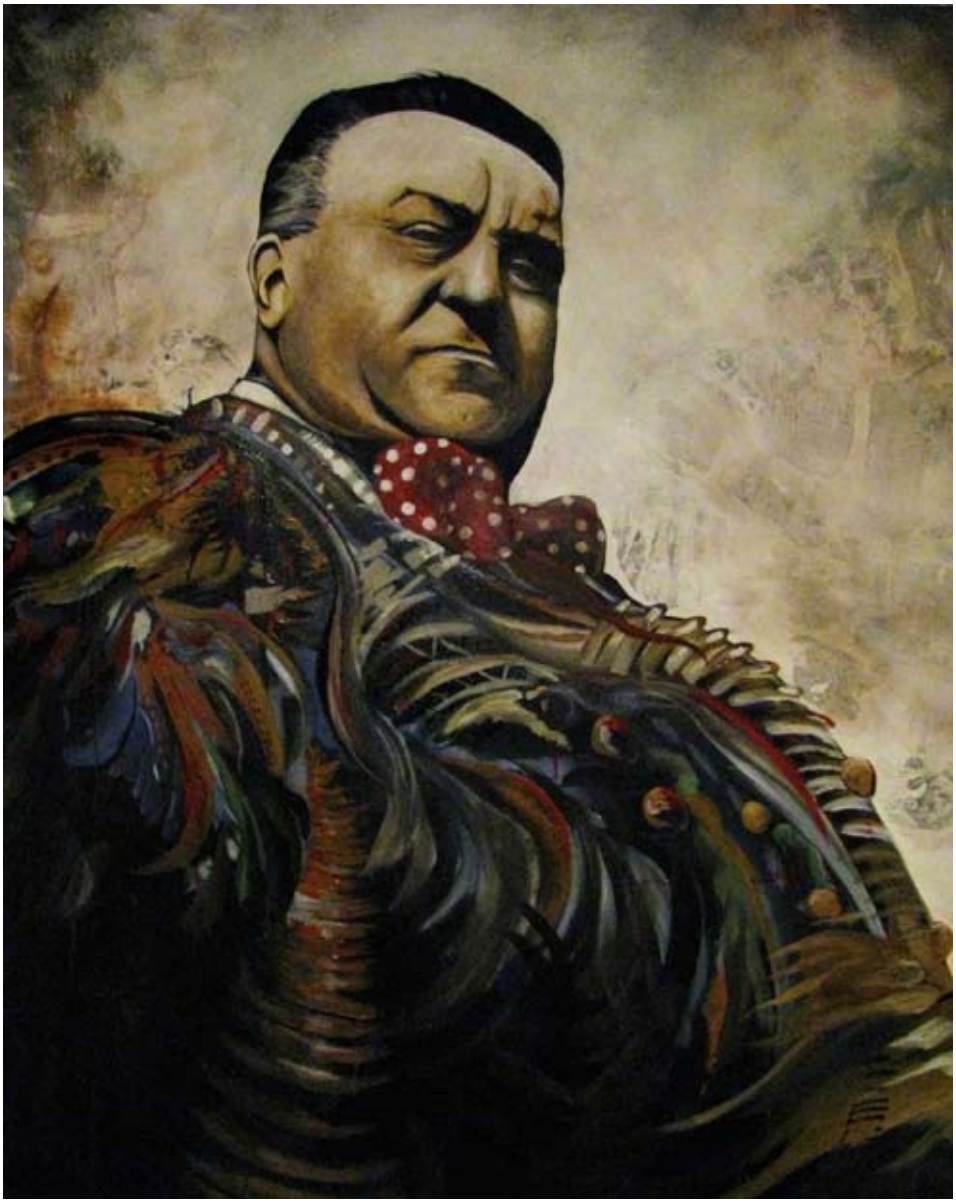
> "Of course, there is no such thing as perfection. But I always try to make every meal," he closed his eyes, searching for the right words, " – *une petit merveille*. Now, you wouldn't believe it, but I gave a lot of thought to your lunch. I said to myself, 'Maybe he should have a *sole aux nouilles* instead of the *truite au porto*.' I decided against it. It might have been too much, and I don't want my clients to eat too much. Only in bad restaurants is one urged to order a lot. *Enfin*, you are satisfied." (*Blue*, p. 281).

When Point died in 1954, his wife took over the restaurant and aficionados around the world wondered if the Michelin third star would disappear. It did not, and Wechsberg returned again in 1963 to write a profile of *her*.

In the end, it was music that ruled Wechsberg's life. His years as a professional musician gave him insight into the making of music, and he wrote masterful pieces about it from every conceivable angle. He profiled musicians – Isaac Stern, Artur Rubenstein, George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, the Budapest String Quartet, Anton Karas, the Viennese zither player who composed and played the famous theme from *The Third Man*, and Franz Allers, the man who sold the idea of adopting *Pygmalion* to Lerner and Lowe, a feat that took five years to bear fruit. He wrote a biography of Verdi, and he interviewed and/or hobnobbed with opera singers of three generations.

Above all he wrote about his greatest love, the violin. Like any violinist, Wechsberg started on cheap factory instruments back in Czechoslovakia, and had more than his share of mishaps with violins during his itinerant years, including the time he forgot to refrigerate his while on a hot run through Indonesian waters and found it the next morning a pile of melted glue. In the 1950's he made a pilgrimage to Cremona in search of Stradivarius, Guarneri and Amati's ghosts, and managed to locate Stradivarius' great-great-great grandson.

Like any violinist, Wechsberg dreamed of one day owning a Stradivarius. He wrote a profile of Emil Hermann, the premier violin dealer in New York and purveyor of instruments to the world's great players. One day Hermann invited Wechsberg to his country house in Connecticut – nicknamed Fiddledale – and walked the writer through his vault of priceless antique instruments. At that time, Wechsberg had already managed to afford an Amati, but then Hermann showed him a Strad the master had made when he was 86:



http://www.flickr.com/photos/37263611@N05/4404953415/

Painting of Fernand Point by Michelle Ochs. Wechsberg wrote about both the oversize chef and his wife, who took over for him.

> He handed me the violin and a bow. The violin responded to the slightest pressure of the bow, and it sang like a human voice. Its tone was both soft and penetrating, sweet and forceful. With this violin I would no longer be outplayed by my *ta-ta*-ing fellow players.

Of course there was no choice but to buy it. Getting used to it took Wechsberg three years. "Sometimes I envy my Stradivarii. At the age of two hundred and forty years, [it] shows no sign of growing old."

After traveling almost everywhere in the world, after meeting hundreds of extraordinary people and coaxing out their stories in four different languages, and after living in dozens of different cities on four different continents, Wechsberg decided to spend his last years in his most beloved city, Vienna, where he died in 1983.

But his words live on. I know of no other writer who wrote about so many different topics with such clarity, such enthusiasm, and such empathy. His life could have been a bitter one – his mother died at Auschwitz – but it was instead one filled with wonder and such a sheer passion for the beauties of life that his work can be read and re-read endlessly.

Isaac Stern

So where should the intrigued reader begin? At the beginning with *Looking For a Bluebird*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1945 (I have both the first edition and the same battered Penguin paperback I first read back in 1962!). For those interested in food, I suggest *Blue Trout and Black Truffles* (Knopf, 1966), *The Best Things in Life* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964) and *Trifles Make Perfection*, an anthology put together in 1999 by David Morowitz, a devoted fan. Some of the essays are duplicated between these volumes but they are all worth perusing. Wechsberg also wrote *The Cooking of Vienna's Empire* for Time-Life Books in 1968, an experience he described as filled with fancy lunches in New York mixed with unending memos from anonymous readers from all over the Luce empire.

For music lovers, there is an embarrassment of riches – *The Glory of the Viol* (Viking, 1973) and *The Opera* (MacMillan, 1972), a combination of history and analysis that is as good an introduction to the form as I know. Along the same lines is his biography *Verdi* (Putnam's Sons, 1974). It stands between two classic works – Francis Toye's *Verdi: His Life and Works* (Knopf, 1946), a clean biography combined with highly-opinionated analyses of the operas, and Mary Jane Phillips-Matz' monumental *Verdi* (Oxford, 1993), a book so completely definitive it numbs the mind. Wechsberg's book is popular in the best sense of the word – easily-engaged, knowledgeable but never pedantic, clear and bright but never breezy.

And finally, there is *The First Time Around* (Little, Brown, 1970), as close to an autobiography as Wechsberg ever wrote. It is filled with behind-the-scenes anecdotes as well as trenchant observations, among them one of the finest explanations of the writer's craft I have ever read:

> Sometimes I work on a story, talking to people and taking notes, but it's all dull and pedestrian, and I'm beginning to wonder whether I wasn't wrong about the story – whether there *is* a story at all. I seem to be up against an invisible wall, and I feel, unhappily, that it just doesn't work. There is no inner excitement. If I am not fascinated, how can I convey my fascination to others? I've wasted my time, and I can't even write it off to experience.
>
> And then, suddenly and inexplicably, it happens. Something sparks inside me. I've established a secret connection with the other person who tells me what I hoped all along he would. The story is there, and it's an exciting story, and I have a sense of exhilaration. My blood pressure goes up, my hands begin to tremble. I write fast now, much too fast that sometimes I'm later unable to decode my own notes. It is like the sensation I noticed around the roulette table when a gambler has a winning streak. Unless he keeps a cool head, it may all be gone. The gambling writer, too, is afraid of losing the story, of not being able to hold onto it. One needs discipline and a sense of self-control, to remain intent and alert until one feels that one has got the story. (*First*, p. 329).

Wechsberg always got the story. Hundreds of them, each one honest, intriguing, compassionate and above all, thoroughly delightful.

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to make. "In the last five years all three librarians have made trips to the African continent for multiple purposes including acquisitions," he says. (Other reasons include grants, conference participation, etc.). "But I go most frequently."

David moved to Chicago in 1983 with his partner, Richard Bough, an artist and teacher. After teaching painting and drawing at the Latin School for 17 years, Richard now devotes himself completely to his own artwork. Whenever possible, Richard accompanies David on his African trips. Several summers ago they drove across the South African karoo from Cape Town to Durban along with a South African book dealer friend visiting artists' studios, regional museums, and bookshops.

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Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Robert McCamant
(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: "Torii Kiyonaga and Ideal Beauty in Japanese Prints" (ukiyo-e prints), Gallery 107, through December 11. "Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention" (retrospective of the architect's work), Galleries 283–285, through January 15. "Jürgen Mayer H.: Wirrwarr" (envelopes lined with patterns and codes designed to keep the contents private), Gallery 24, through January 22.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "Highgrove Florilegium" (an official chronicle of the plants growing in the gardens of the Prince of Wales at Highgrove in Gloucestershire), through February 12.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: "Out in Chicago" (150 years of urban history through the lens of gender, sexuality, and nonconformity), Bessie Green-Field Warshawsky Gallery, through March 26.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "One Book, Many Interpretations: Second Edition" (commemorates the program's 10-year anniversary with a juried exhibition by bookbinders and book artists interpreting the 10 most recent selections; judges were Caxtonians Paul Gehl, Audrey Niffenegger, and Norma Rubovitz), Special Collections Exhibit Hall, Ninth Floor, through April 15.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Everywhere with Roy Lewis" (a narrative of the African American experience spanning five decades), through December 31.

Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society, 361 E. Westminster Avenue, Lake Forest, 847-234-5253: "Uncanny, Unabridged, Unforgettable: 150 Years of Lake Forest" (honors Lake Forest's Sesquicentennial), through December 29.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "Ron Terada: Being There" (work that includes paintings, photographs, video, sound, books, and graphic design by this Vancover artist), through January 15.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "Indians of the Midwest" (items from its collections, including: early colonial maps denoting Indian communities; rare books and manuscripts related to indigenous cultures from the early colonial period to the present; and drawings and paintings depicting Indian life in the Midwest), through December 31.

Northwestern University, Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910–1917" (the dramatic transformation of book art during the years before the Russian Revolution), through December 11.

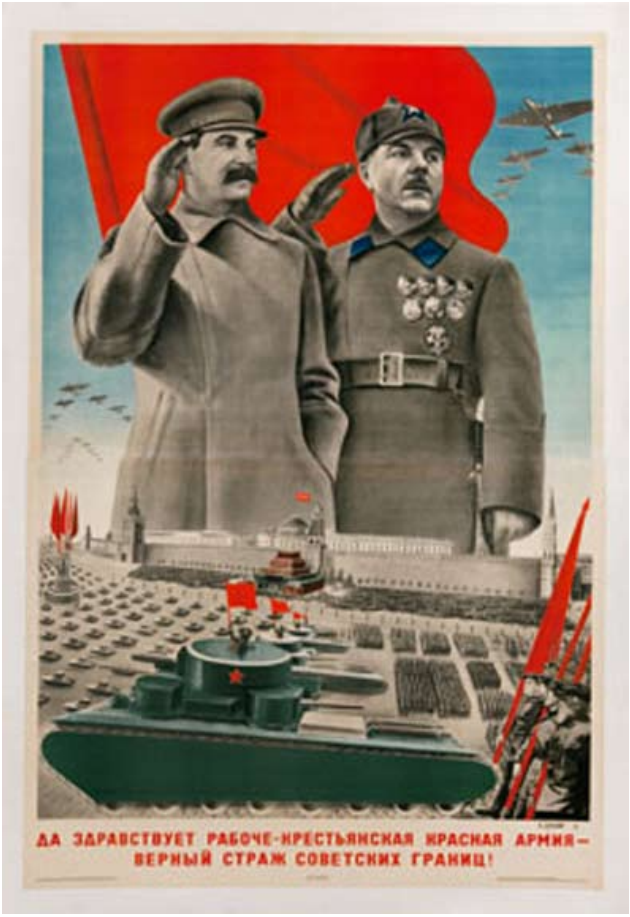
Northwestern University, Charles Deering Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Papering Over Tough Times: Soviet Propaganda Posters of the 1930s," Special Collections, through June 15.

Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Before the Pyramids: the Origins of Egyptian Civilization" (the most fundamental aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization – architecture, hieroglyphic writing, a belief in the afterlife, and allegiance to a semi-divine king – can be traced to Egypt's Predynastic and Early Dynastic eras), through December 31.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702- 0200: "Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard" (exposes the experimental creative processes that generated iconic Soviet propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s), through January 22.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary" (the Soviet Union as a world in pictures, facilitated by a vibrant image culture based largely on new media technologies, is explored through two of its most striking manifestations – the children's book and the poster – looked at in the wake of the Russian revolution of 1917 and followed by periodic re-makings – during Stalin's Great Leap Forward, 1928–1932; World War II, 1941–1945; the Thaw, 1956–1964; and Perestroika, 1987–1991), Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, through December 31.

For complete information on events and exhibits of the The Soviet Arts Experience, see www.sovietartsexperience.org.



Smart Museum: Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard
Gustav Klucis, Long Live Red Army of Workers and Peasants, 1935. Poster. © 2011 Estate of Gustav Klutsis / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Until a replacement exhibit editor is found, please send your listings to bmccamant@quarterfold.com, or call 312-329-1414 x 11.

Caxtonians Collect: David Easterbrook

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

As it turns out, if you want to research Africa – its history, its languages, its economics, even see pictures of it – the best place in the world to do that is right up in Evanston at Northwestern University. The Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies is there, and its curator is the club's own David Easterbrook.

"I always loved libraries. I worked in them part time while in both high school and college," he explained. "But then when I was in college I went to Nairobi on a special program, and I was hooked on Africa." After graduation, he went back to Kenya with the Peace Corps. When that was over, he began to think about whether there was a way to combine his two interests, Africa and libraries.

"Two of my Africa mentors at Kalamazoo College were graduates of the PhD program in African Studies at Northwestern. They gave me a resounding yes, and said that the job I really wanted was to curate the Herskovits Library." He got the requisite degrees and worked in other Africa collections. Then he came to Chicago and was Principal Bibliographer at UIC with Gretchen Lagana. When the Northwestern curatorship opened up in 1991, he was a convenient choice.

He says the last twenty years have been quite a ride. The University intensively built the collection from its founding in 1954 with a focus on the ever-expanding publishing output of the developing continent plus what current materials were being published around the world (as of today, the Herskovits Library has 400,000 volumes and subscriptions to 2800 periodicals). But Easterbrook and the Library's Development Office had bigger ideas. If major funds could be raised in advance, then when important retrospective collections became available, Northwestern would be first in line to purchase them.

As it turned out, donors liked the idea. Two of the Library's major sub-collections (the Winterton Collection of East African Photographs and the E.H. Duckworth Nigerian Photographic Archive) were acquired early this century with such funds. Another important sub-collection, Arabic Manuscripts from West Africa, was acquired primarily with NU funds thanks to the diligent efforts of several Northwestern professors who painstakingly assembled the collection during years of travel and negotiation. Of course, Easterbrook's eyes are always open to other important groups of material which are susceptible of being snatched up.

Photograph by Robert McCamant

But an increasing part of his time these days goes toward finding ways to share the material they already have with the world. The Winterton collection as well as portions of the map and poster collections have been digitized, and are now available for study to anyone online. And academics – from high school teachers to graduate students – are constantly making the pilgrimage to Northwestern to use the materials in person. There are even regular on-site seminars for high school teachers to suggest things that can be done with the materials.

A staff of six, three librarians and three library assistants, make it all possible with enormous support from the NU Library Technical and Digital Services operations. The world is quite interested in the collection, it turns out. When there was publicity after the Winterton collection was digitized, inquiries came in on diverse topics, including one person who wanted a photo of Freddie Mercury's birthplace in Zanzibar (which they didn't have). And the election of Barack Obama has inspired even closer examination of the Kenyan material in the collection. Among the things that have been discovered: a description of the clan to which the Obamas belong; a book (in Luo, a Kenyan language) from 1959, and journal article, from 1965, by his father; and the various addresses his father lived in Nairobi, discovered from the many Nairobi telephone directories in the collection.

When Northlight and Remy Bumppo theater companies were producing Africa-related plays last season, they came to Northwestern for images. When the Folio Society republished *Scramble for Africa* last month, they illustrated it with pictures from Northwestern. The Smithsonian's 2010-11 Lorenzo Dow Turner exhibit (held at the Anacostia Community Museum) relied mainly on its own Turner collection, but came to Northwestern for missing pieces.

Easterbrook's personal collecting is not a great distance from his work. He likes paperbacks, and has amassed a collection of paperbacks with African-themed covers. The library has a facsimile of the Hogarth Press edition of *An African Speaks for His People*, but Easterbrook got a copy of the original (Leonard and Virginia Woolf were responsible) for his collection. *Rebel Destiny* is one of Herskovits's standard works; in honor of his 100th birthday (celebrated in 1995), Easterbrook scoured the country for a copy with a dust jacket.

One of the things Easterbrook most enjoys about his job is the occasional trips he gets

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Luncheon: Friday December 9, 2011, Union League Club
Sam Ellenport
Harcourt Bindery Stories, especially including Linked-Spine Bindings

Caxtonian Sam Ellenport – author, lecturer, and teacher – has been proprietor of Harcourt Bindery in Boston for the past 40 years. It is the last large book bindery in America still working in a 19th century tradition, on a par with Bayntun's in Bath, England. Through spectacular images, Sam will uncover a rare aspect in bookbinding: the use of the spines of books as a canvas on which binders create designs that span several volumes. He'll also talk about the history of the bindery (including some early racy stories) – special commissions include a slipcase to hold Charles Dickens' sleeping cap – and a bit about his finishing department's 2,500 hand tools, and much more.

Sam contributed a piece to *Other People's Books* and his leather-bound hide-your-valuables books have been popular auction items.

Dinner: Wednesday December 14, Newberry Library
Annual Holiday Revels
plus Benefit Auction
Note: Second Wednesday!

Our Holiday Revels will take place at the Newberry Library. In addition to good food, generous libations, and each other's company, we have the opportunity to benefit the Club by bidding on books and book-related items donated by fellow members. (There may be still time to make donations as you read this: Dan Crawford is accepting them at the Newberry through Friday, December 9. The latest list of items on which to bid can be found at the Club's web site, www.caxtonclub.org .) Special entertainment is also planned.

The December 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. Luncheon is $30. Details of the December dinner: it will take place in Ruggles Hall at the Newberry Library. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, followed by live auction and entertainment. Dinner is $48, drinks are $5. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org; ***reservations are needed by noon Tuesday for the Friday luncheon, and by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.***

Beyond December...

JANUARY LUNCHEON

On January 13, 2012, Caxtonian Junie Sinson will speak about many aspects of the Nobel Prize for Literature, including: just how does the Swedish Academy reach their decisions, are criticisms of recent selections justified, and what effect do the choices have on the direction of American and world literature.

JANUARY DINNER

Wednesday, January 18 at the Cliff Dwellers, Regina Buccola (of Roosevelt University and Chicago Shakespeare Theater) will talk about the continuing authorship debates over the Shakespearean ouvre. Recent films and books will be considered.

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

On February 10, Caxtonian Susan Levy will speak at the Union League Club. She is the longtime editor of the prized Lakeside Classics, a once-a-year publication begun by Thomas E. Donnelley in 1903 and published every year since to show beautiful blending of technology and craftsmanship. Susan's title: "Adventures While Editing the Lakeside Classics."

FEBRUARY DINNER

We will meet Wednesday, February 15 at the Cliff Dwellers. Suzanne Karr Schmidt, of the Art Institute of Chicago, has tentatively agreed to talk about the exhibit "Altered and Adorned: Using Renaissance Prints in Daily Life."