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Sinner and Saint

The tumultuous life of Oscar Wilde and some illustrators of his work

Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.
–Oscar Wilde

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In one of the very last works he wrote, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) noted: "I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colours of things…." This quote from Wilde's interesting and important essay *De Profundis* in great part sums up what he hoped his life had been.[1] Formulated during the last year of his two-year imprisonment on the charge of gross indecency with men, *De Profundis* was written in the form of a lengthy prose letter to one of Wilde's young lovers, Lord Alfred Douglas. It was also intended, more importantly, as a kind of last testament to posterity, a confession of inadequacies as well as a profession of messiah-like identity, acquired through his two-years of suffering at the hands of English law.

Fig. 1. Portrait of Oscar Wilde, 1882, by Napoleon Sarony.

Indeed, Wilde was messianic even before imprisonment, perhaps the preeminent English raconteur of the late 1880s and '90s, as well as a lecturer, poet, popular playwright, novelist, writer of fairy tales, essayist, and aesthete par excellence of what has been called the *fin de siécle* period of decadence. A close acquaintance of Wilde's during the nineties, the art nouveau draftsman Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) – a favorite artist of mine – illustrated one of Wilde's most notorious late works, *Salome* (English edition 1894), initially written in France in 1891. In this article, I will touch on Beardsley and some later illustrators primarily of the first part of the 20th century in my discussion of Oscar Wilde's notorious life and works.

Wilde became, before his untimely downfall, the very epitome of what the aesthetic decadent represented to the English public, especially in the fashionable salons of London where by the late 1880s his artful conversation was frequently sought. The London dinner party was a powerful and important socializing event in late Victorian high society, where politics and information could be exchanged in a less-formal atmosphere and important decisions suggested. As Lucy McDiarmid notes of Wilde's mastery of this setting, "The Victorian dinner party… was private enough to allow for risk-taking, permitting guests to broach subjects or opinions not possible in a more open space."[2]

Wilde consciously prepared himself for such occasions, sometimes sporting custom-designed clothing, his coat usually set off with a colorful carnation or other flower in the lapel, a style made popular during the aesthetic period. His self-assured personality early in his career is suggested by one of his many stylish poses for photographer Napoleon Sarony in 1882 during his successful yearlong lecture tour in North America (Fig. 1). This early preparation for life on the stage, formal or otherwise, would serve him well as he sought his fame and fortune after returning to England in January1883. A cartoon published in the San Francisco *Wasp* during Wilde's lecture tour in that city in 1882 depicts him as a sort of aesthetic Christ entering the city surrounded by one of the floral symbols of the period, sunflowers (Fig. 2).

That Wilde would eventually immerse himself in upper-class pursuits was more or less assured early on by his Anglo-Irish,

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intellectual Dublin parents. Lady Jane Wilde was a moderately successful writer and poet and his father, Sir William, was a respected member of the medical community. When he was of college age, Oscar was sent first to Trinity College in Dublin, perhaps best-known today as the repository of the famous Book of Kells manuscript, and then to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he continued to excel in his various studies, attracted especially to the writings of John Ruskin and such founders of the aesthetic movement as Walter Pater.[3] Pater's highly regarded book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, as well as Ruskin's writings, were important early influences on Wilde's attitudes concerning aesthetics, beauty, and politics. And Pater's infatuation with young men would ultimately affect Wilde's identification with same-sex relationships.

After a brief courtship, Wilde married Constance Lloyd May 29, 1884, at St. James Church, Sussex Gardens in London. She was a member of an upper class family and came with a much-needed dowry, since Wilde consistently lived beyond his means. They had two sons in rapid succession. But by 1886, Wilde had been introduced to same-sex relationships by a young Oxford student, 17-year-old Robert (Robbie) Ross, who would eventually become executor of Wilde's estate. Wilde was 33. From this relationship and others, including the fateful friendship with Lord Douglas, or Bosie, as he was called by his friends, Wilde embarked on a not-so-secret parallel life of homosexual intimacies.

From his student days, Wilde was fascinated with Roman Catholicism. Being born and raised in a country dominated by the Roman church undoubtedly played an important part in his early exposure to the faith, though his parents were Church of England members. Wilde's father remained adamantly anti-Catholic, but Wilde's mother was more equivocal, having two of her children (one of them Oscar) secretly baptized into the Roman Church by a Catholic priest, the Reverend L. C. Prideaux Fox.[4]

Wilde was especially infatuated by the Roman Catholic faith while at Oxford, and might have joined the Catholic communion after his friend and fellow student David Hunter Blair converted to Catholicism, had not his father been so opposed to the idea.[5] In his rooms at Magdalen, Wilde had photographs of Pope Pius IX and Cardinal Manning as well as a plaster figure of the Virgin Mary as decorations.[6] And during his student trip to Greece and Rome in the summer of 1875, Blair arranged for a private meeting with Pius IX for the two. Finally, it is notable that on his deathbed in late November 1900, Wilde was received into the Catholic church and was given last rites, with Robert Ross, his longtime friend and executor, assisting.

Wilde began writing poetry seriously while at

Fig. 2. Cartoon in the San Francisco Wasp *depicting the arrival of Oscar Wilde during his 1882 lecture tour.*

Trinity College, and found that he was a master of pictorially clever language. But his most popular early publications were his plays, culminating in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, written in 1894, just before his ill-considered libel suit the next year against the Marquess of Queensberry, father of Lord Douglas. Wilde would lose the suit and end up being tried for gross indecency, essentially ending his career as a playwright in England.

But rather than writing about his plays of contemporary British manners, my discussion will concentrate on illustration: first on illustrations for Wilde's enigmatic *Salome*, then the disturbing *Picture of Dorian Gray*, briefly on his fairy tales, and conclude with ones for his *Ballad of Reading Gael*. I will also touch on the thematic threads in some of these works that seemingly parallel his own tumultuous life and reflect the *fin de siécle* decadence that both Wilde and Beardsley so represented to the British (and French) literati.

In early 1891, at the height of his reputation as a leading aesthete in England, Wilde went to France where he consorted with fellow French decadents such as Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), whom he visited in February. Wilde had the idea for a drama centered on Salome prior to his trip, but rather than being based on the traditional Biblical source, the play would, in true *fin de siécle* fashion, be centered on Salome's alleged pursuit of sexual ecstasy with John the Baptist. The drama was completed while Wilde resided in France.

Wilde was influenced by a variety of French sources in the formulation of his play, among them Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, in process at the time (but left incomplete at the author's death in 1898).[7] But even more relevant was a decadent novel written by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), *Á rebours* (*Against Nature*), published in 1884. This was a work much admired by Wilde, who notoriously alluded to it in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as the "little yellow book" Dorian is reading on his way to moral and mental corruption.[8] In his novel, Huysmans refers to two Salome pictures by the French Symbolist painter

photo/Google Images

Fig. 3. Gustave Moreau, Salome Dancing Before Herod, *mid-1870s, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.*

Gustave Moreau (1826-1898). In the works she is depicted as a cruel but sensual *femme fatale* (Fig. 3), a popular theme in *fin de siécle* Europe, and one exploited notoriously by Wilde in his *Salome*. As Rodney Shewan declares, Wilde's Salome "is, among other things, an orgasmic metaphor through which the unspeakable erupts in brief and devastating triumph."[9]

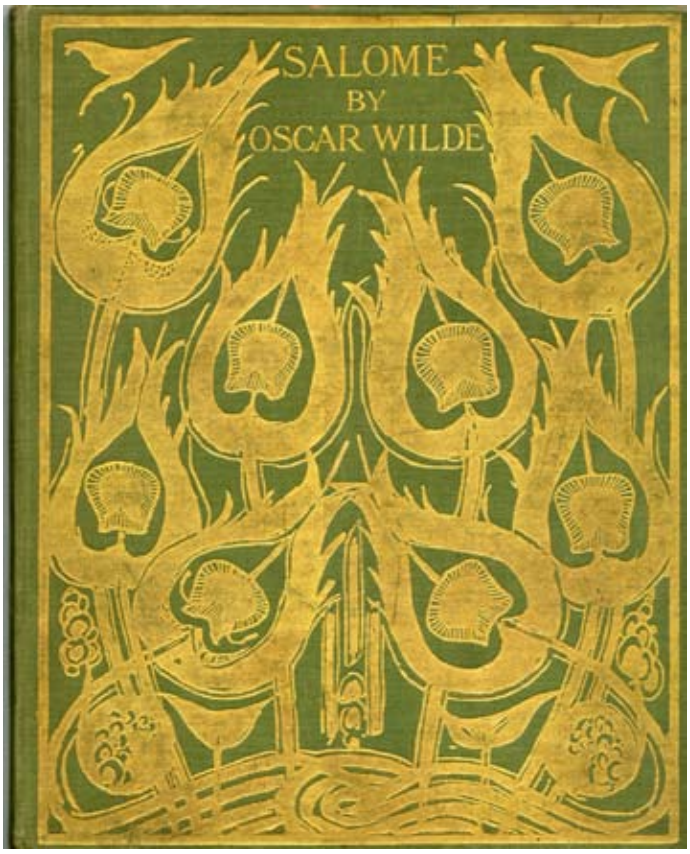
Fig. 4. Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley, c. 1895.

In the process of working on his play, Wilde made several comments about it to friends. He reportedly told Ernest Raynaud in Paris:

> When Benvenuto Cellini crucified a living man to study the play of muscles in his death agony, a pope was right to grant him absolution. What is the death of a vague individual if it enables an immortal word to blossom and to create, in Keats's words, an eternal source of ecstasy?[10]

Fig. 5. Aubrey Beardsley, "J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan," in Oscar Wilde, Salome, *1894.*

Fig. 6. Cover, Oscar Wilde, Salome, *London: John Lane, 1907.*



Wilde completed a French text version of *Salome* in January 1892, and the Lord Chamberlain stopped the play from being staged in London based on the arcane law that it depicted biblical characters. It was staged in Paris with no problems. The French-language play was published in France in February 1893, dedicated to Wilde's friend, French poet and writer Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925). An English-language translation by Lord Douglas with provocative drawings by Aubrey Beardsley was published in 1894 in London.

Wilde happened to meet Beardsley while he and Constance were at the home of English Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones in July 1891. Beardsley, in typical fashion, arrived unannounced.[11] A friendship between Beardsley and Wilde developed, and Wilde was undoubtedly attracted to the young artist's work as well as his mildly sinister, youthful personality. The late-teen Beardsley humorously described himself: "I am eighteen years old with a vile constitution, a sallow face and sunken eyes, long red hair, a shuffling gait and a stoop" (Fig. 4).[12]

J.M. Dent's first edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur* with Beardsley's drawings was published in serial fashion over the next two years (1892-93) to considerable critical success. Beardsley, aware that Wilde was contemplating an illustrated English-language edition of *Salome*, did a drawing of the notorious scene, "J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan," which was published in Vol. 1, No. 1 of the new art journal, *The Studio*, in 1893. Beardsley had used his most advanced art nouveau style, deliberately intended to attract Wilde's attention. It did, and Beardsley received the coveted commission to produce 16 drawings for *Salome*.

A slightly simplified version of Beardsley's *Studio* drawing appeared in Wilde's book, pub-

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lished in 1894 by John Lane (Fig. 5). The drawing is shocking, or at least it was to the gentle folk of England's upper crust. The sensual image of a cruel, disembodied Salome holding the severed, Medusa-like head of John the Baptist, about to kiss its sensual lips, was not the revered scriptural image traditionally supported by orthodox Christianity. It was the next-to-last drawing of the set of Beardsley illustrations in Wilde's book and perfectly translated the sexuality and intense, perverse "gaze" that dominates Wilde's dialogue. Soldiers and pages gaze at Salome, Salome gazes at Jokanaan, and Jokanaan consciously avoids gazing at Salome. In turn, as we will see, Wilde as the face in the moon gazes at a nude page (Fig. 8).

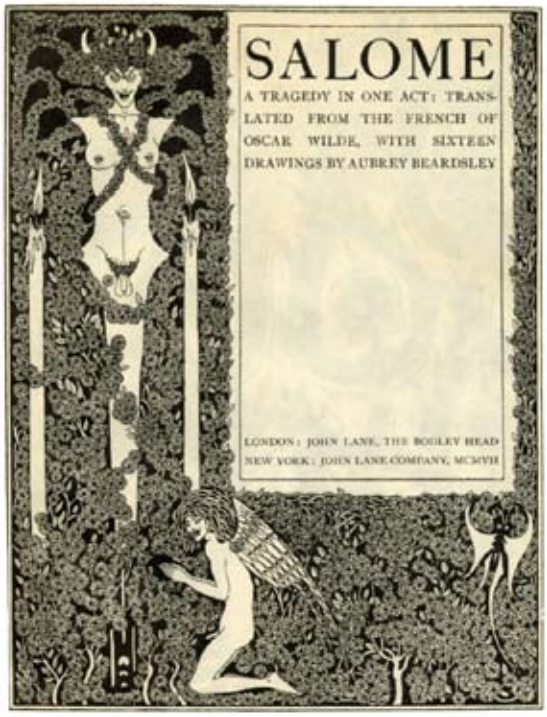

Fig. 7. Beardsley, title page, Wilde, Salome.

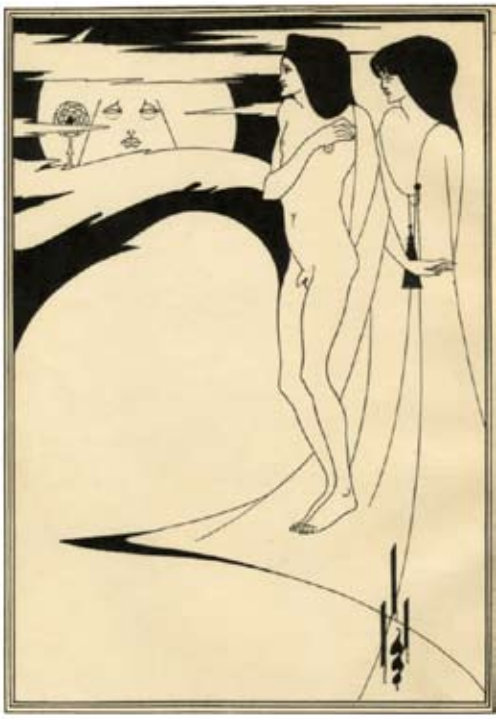

Fig. 8. Beardsley, frontispiece, "The Woman in the Moon," Wilde, Salome.

John Lane, more reserved than Wilde and concerned about censorship, constantly had to caution Beardsley about the sexual nature of his drawings. It was not until the later 1907 edition, well after the notoriety of Wilde's imprisonment had died down, that Lane relaxed some of his earlier restrictions. The 1894 edition has a rather plain blue cloth cover with a small medallion, Lane having rejected Beardsley's rich peacock feather design. But Beardsley's art nouveau cover was rejuvenated for the 1907 edition, embossed in gold against a green background (Fig. 6). By this time both Wilde and Beardsley had been dead for several years. In addition, the title page in the 1907 edition restored the genitals of the priapic herm and naked, kneeling, winged Amor figure deleted in the initial publication (Fig. 7). As Beardsley was to write sardonically to a friend, Alfred Lambart:

> Because one figure was undressed
> This little drawing was suppressed
> It was unkind
> But never mind
> Perhaps it all was for the best.[13]

Beardsley's frontispiece depicts Salome and a naked male page standing at night under the radiance of the moon after having left a dinner with her family (Fig. 8). The moon and Salome are symbolically intertwined throughout the drama, and she initially aspires to be like the moon.[14] She refers to the moon as "a little silver flower…cold and chaste":

> I am sure she is a virgin, she has a virgin's beauty. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses.[15]

However, rather than the face of a woman, Beardsley has mimicked Wilde's own face in the moon and added a carnation. In telling—if rather darkly humorous—fashion, Wilde's face seems to be staring down at the nude somewhat prepubescent page beside Salome.

Beardsley's drawings for *Salome* are in his most advanced art nouveau linear style, shaped in part by the influence of Japanese prints.[16] Added to this was the influence of James A. McNeill Whistler's recently completed Peacock Room (now reconstructed in the original Smithsonian building in Washington, D.C.). Apart from the peacock feather design on the cover of Wilde's book, peacock feath-

Fig. 9. Beardsley, "The Peacock Skirt," Wilde, Salome.

Fig. 10. Beardsley, "Johanaan and Salome," Wilde, Salome.

Fig. 11. Beardsley, "Cul de Lampe," Wilde, Salome.

photo/Google Images

Fig. 12. Titian, Entombment of Christ, *1559, Madrid, Prado Museum.*

ers have also informed the elaborate design of the drawing called "The Peacock Skirt" (Fig. 9) showing Salome and her mother Herodias together. The extremely flat, decorative nature of Beardsley's art is present throughout his *Salome* drawings, notably reinforcing the enmity between Salome and Johanaan in the scene where the two are brought together and she attempts unsuccessfully to seduce him (Fig. 10).

As the two stand facing each other, Jokanaan remarks:

> Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon thine head, and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man.[17]

As Rodney Shewan suggests, Jokanaan in Wilde's drama and Beardsley's drawings is not a particularly sympathetic person, rather grim, unforgiving, and, in fact, Old Testament in his disposition.[18] As the two stand looking at each other, neither figure draws our empathy. Salome, at a minimum, had wanted Jokanaan's loving attention, which he has sternly denied her. Echoing the denial of Christ by St. Peter in the New Testament, Salome had appealed to Jokanaan three times and been rejected each time. In the scene where she holds the head of Jokanaan (Fig. 5), she remarks at length on his "betrayal":

> Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth Jokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit.... Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now.... Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! ...Wherefore dost thou not look at me?[19]

Salome kisses the severed head of Jokanaan and then dies in an ecstatic Liebestod. In his tailpiece, Beardsley has rather humorously depicted Salome being borne to a jewelry-box coffin by two strange figures (Fig. 11), a giant facial powder puff lying nearby as if this were all taking place on a giant toilette table. The model for the scene is the Entombment of Christ, or, the Pieta, used frequently for secular scenes of great emotion by numerous 18th- and 19th-century artists, such as Jacques-Louis David in his famous *Death of Marat* (1793). Such earlier artists as Michelangelo and Titian provided the paradigm for the limp figure of Christ, his arm hanging down as we see in Beardsley's "Cul de Lampe" (Fig. 12).

Fig. 13. Alastair, figure of Salome, Wilde, Salomé, *Paris: Les Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 1927.*

Fig. 14. Alastair, Salome and Jokanaan, Wilde, Salomé.

While not the most readable of Wilde's texts, *Salome* has been republished in several later illustrated versions. I will mention two quite different editions from the early 20th century's art deco period, one illustrated by the German artist Alastair (1887-1969) reflecting the influence of Beardsley, and the other by American graphic designer John Vassos (1898-1985), which is quite different in style. Alastair is the *nom d'artiste* for Hans Henning Otto Harry Baron von Voigt, a rather enigmatic figure (with an impossibly long name), albeit a man of many talents, born of nobility and self-taught: he was a composer, dancer, mime, poet, singer, and translator as well as an artist. He had illustrated Wilde's *The Sphinx* in 1920 and was given the opportunity to illustrate a French edition of *Salome* in 1927.

Alastair's delicate figural style looks back

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in part to Beardsley's work (but without the obvious art nouveau flourish), and in this publication nearly matches Beardsley's feeling of decadence. His stylish figure of Salome (Fig. 13) looks like a fashion advertisement, her pinkish garments giving her the appearance of some willowy insect. In contrast, the black, bleak frontal figure of Jokanaan stands corpselike next to the delicate Salome as she attempts to woo him and turn his gaze to her: "*Ce sont les yeux surtout qui sont terribles.*" (Fig. 14). Finally, in a concluding scene, Salomé clutching the severed head of Jokanaan, collapses in a swoon surrounded by strange black personages, evidently emblematic of approaching ecstasy and death: "*Ah! j'ai baisé ta bouché, Iokanaan, j'ai baise ta bouché.*" (Fig. 15).

Quite different are John Vassos's gray and black monochrome illustrations to Wilde's *Salome* published in 1927. Vassos, born in Romania to Greek parents, immigrated to Boston as a young man in 1919, attended the Fenway Art School, and in 1924 settled in New York City where he practiced as a designer, creating window displays, advertisements, and finally industrial designs.[20] He also illustrated several books, including Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gael* in addition to his *Salome*. (His designs for the latter work will be mentioned at the end of this article.) His semiabstract, hard-edged, but somewhat organic shapes are more obviously related to the industrial aspects of the art deco style than Alastair's work. His visionary image of the moon early in *Salome*, suggests the dialogue of Herodias's page (Fig. 16):

> Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman… [21]

For the scene in which Salome lusts after Jokanaan's body, Vassos has centered the standing figure of Jokanaan in a series of expanding heart-shaped forms, while at the base of the picture Salome stares up toward the Baptist's seminude figure (Fig. 17):

> I am amorous of thy body, Jokanaan! Thy body is white like the lilies of the field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judæa, and come into the valleys.[22]

Finally, in the last, somewhat

Fig. 15. Alastair, "Salomé Swooning with the Head of Iokanaan," Wilde, Salomé.

Freudian, vagina-suggestive scene (Fig. 18), we see the nude figure of Salome holding the head of Jokanaan murmuring the familiar words: "I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth."

Before embarking on a brief look at two of Wilde's late works, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, both texts that touch on aspects of Wilde's own identity, I want to mention his fairy tales, published in a variety of collections over the decades with composite titles such as *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, initially published in 1888 and a second volume, *A "House" of Pomegranates* in

Fig. 17. Vassos, Salome and Jokannan, Wilde, Salome.

Fig. 16. Vassos, "The Moon," Wilde, Salome, *E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927.*

1891. In fact, Wilde's reputation as an author in the public's mind initially rested with *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. These works were perfectly fitted to the late Victorian tastes for stories of children and fictive far-off lands. The *Athenaeum*, in fact, compared Wilde to Hans Christian Andersen.

As Richard Ellmann notes, these stories often begin with disfigurements and end in typical fairy tale fashion with transfiguration:

> Wilde presents the stories like sacraments of a lost faith. Most of the characters are brought to recognition of themselves, and a recognition of ugliness and misery. Wilde celebrates the power of love as greater than the power of evil

Fig. 18. Vassos, "I Kissed Thy Mouth Jokanaan," Wilde, Salome.

Fig. 19. Jessie M. King, illustration for "The Young King," 1914.

or the power of good.[23]

Particularly delightful are the pictures of Scottish artist Jessie M. King (1875-1949). In my opinion her art nouveau style is seldom surpassed in this, the golden age of book illustration. She provided pictures for Wilde's second collection of fairy tales, *A "House" of Pomegranates*, in a volume reissued in 1914 by Methuen and Co., Ltd. of London.[24] Her concluding illustration for "The Young King" shows the subject's transformation as he comes to realize the contributions made by the poor and common people to the riches of his kingdom (Fig. 19).

Fig. 20. Ivan Albright, Title Painting for Albert Lewin's 1943 movie, The Picture of Dorian Gray, *Art Institute of Chicago.*

photo/Google Images

Aside from *Salome*, Wilde's most notorious and often read story – his only novel – is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Since its publication, it has not only been imitated by other writers but served as the basis for a Hollywood film for which, in 1943, the American artist Ivan Albright created a title painting (Fig. 20).[25] It is also a work that many scholars and much of the public in Wilde's own day associated with the writer's increasingly infamous lifestyle which led up to his court case and subsequent downfall. The story was first published in a shorter, novelette version of 13 chapters in the July 1890 issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. The next year a considerably expanded version of 20 chapters with an explanatory preface was published in book form. In its final form, aestheticism rather than stark decadence became the moral focus of the novel, as elaborated by Wilde in his preface.[26]

Fig. 21. Yna Majeska, "Dorian Stepped Upon the Dais," Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, *New York: Horace Liveright, 1930.*

Fig. 22. Majeska, "Dorian Looks at the Evil, Aging Face," Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray.

The story is famous for its horrific climax during which the handsome, ever-youthful Dorian Gray confronts his portrait, which, unlike Dorian himself, has mysteriously aged due to the immoral lifestyle of Dorian. Dorian attempts to slash the horrific portrait of his *dopplegänger*, only, in essence, to commit suicide. Hearing his final, awful scream, his servants hurry to the attic room where

> …they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was.[27]

Scholars such as Barbara Belford have interpreted the novel as autobiographical, even though, when asked, Wilde said that he thought the public would identify him with Lord Henry, a primary narrator in the story,

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and a man of the well-turned, picturesque phrase like Wilde himself.[28]

Among numerous illustrated versions of *Dorian Gray* is a 1930 limited edition illustrated by Philadelphia-born Yna Majeska (1891-1959), an exotic figure who maintained the mystique of being of European origin. She did have formal European training and designed costumes for the New York follies as well as some of the films of Cecil B. De Mille. But her designs also appeared in *Vanity Fair* and several books.

Wilde's story of Dorian Gray begins with Dorian as a young, rather innocent, but strikingly handsome youth who constantly turns the heads of those with whom he associates. His portrait has been freshly painted by artist Basil Hallward who is enthralled with his young model's beauty (as depicted by Majeska) (Fig. 21). Hallward's friend Lord Henry is introduced to Dorian and, like Hallward, becomes obsessed with the young man. The novel in its implication of intimacy among men is considered one of the first attempts to bring homosexuality into the English novel.[29] Conversation between Dorian and his friends turns to the portrait and to the inevitability of old age and death. Lord Henry pointedly remarks,

> Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully.[30]

Dorian looks at his portrait and laments: "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young."[31] This establishes the premise of the novel: Dorian wishes that he could remain young and handsome while his portrait ages. It is a wish that he later discovers has come true. Lord Henry meets frequently with Dorian and lends him a book, presumably *À rebours* by Huysmans, although the specific title is never mentioned. The erotic book leads Dorian to a hedonistic and decadent lifestyle.

Dorian comes to notice that while he continues to look young and handsome, the portrait depicts him as aging and altered by his licentious activities (Fig. 22). He hides the painting in an attic room behind drapery. Eventually, he causes the death of several individuals, including the artist of the portrait. And then, as we have seen, Dorian attacks the picture – ending his own life but restoring the portrait to its initial beauty. Only Lord Henry of the novel's major characters survives.

Fig. 23. Erich Heckel, woodcut illustration for Wilde's The Ballad of Reading Gaol, *1907.*

At Wilde's trial on charges of indecent acts with men, several of Wilde's works, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are mentioned as indications of the author's own presumed salacious lifestyle. Wilde, however, cleverly shifted interpretations of his novel to more complex issues, including aestheticism. This, of course, did not prevent a jury decision of guilty, and within four years of publishing his novel, Wilde found his literary life largely at an end as he was sent off to prison.

In his remaining years, Wilde wrote only two additional works, both formed by his years in confinement: *De Profundis* (mentioned above) and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. The latter work was begun July 8, 1897 and completed July 20, within two months of his release from prison on May 19. It remains the only creative work Wilde was able to write after prison. It was finally published February 9, 1898, and sold well, actually beginning the slow process of reviving some of Wilde's former reputation as a writer. Ultimately, it also had some influence on the revamping of England's penal system.

The poem focuses on a doomed murderer, Charles Thomas Wooldridge, a royal trooper, who had murdered his wife for her infidelity and then was hanged for it. Wilde argues in his poem that society must bear some guilt for its cruelty to those imprisoned even as cruelty exists between persons. Universal love rather than universal guilt should be a governing principle.

Fig. 24. John Vassos, "But Each Man Does Not Die," Wilde, The Ballad of Reading Gaol, *E. P. Dutton, 1928.*

In 1907 Erich Heckel (1883-1970), cofounder of the avant-garde German artists group, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), provided a title page and 11 powerful woodcut illustrations for a German edition of Wilde's poem (*Die Ballade vom Zuchthaus zu Reading*).[31] In style, these stark black-and-white plates represent early examples of German Expressionism, and in fact suggest something of the bleak conditions Wilde speaks of, even though the pictures do not illustrate specific text passages (Fig. 23).

In addition to his illustrations for an edition of *Salome* (see page 6), John Vassos also provided moving black, white, and gray designs

for a limited edition of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, published by E.P. Dutton in 1928. These art deco pictures are in sharp stylistic contrast to the Heckel woodcuts. Vassos's interpretation of the various passages focus on confinement and the desire for freedom (Fig. 24). In the following excerpt, Wilde notes that "each man kills the thing he loves":

I only knew what hunted thought
Quickened his step, and why
He looked upon the garish day
With such a wistful eye;
The man had killed the thing he loved,
And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

After release from prison, Wilde went into exile, living out the last three years of his life in France and Italy. He did meet friends and wrote some letters, but published no major work other than *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. He was to outlive his parents and his wife, who also went into a kind of self-imposed exile. It was largely due to the executor of his estate, Robbie Ross, that Wilde's reputation as an important writer began to be reclaimed. Within a decade or so of the author's death, Ross began the process of publishing Wilde's complete oeuvre. Wilde was initially buried in the Cimetière de Bagneux outside of Paris, but in 1909, as his reputation was being restored, his remains were disinterred and reburied in the prominent Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. Robert Ross commissioned the famous British sculptor Jacob Epstein to design a tomb embellished with the relief shape of a modernist angel. As an epitaph, a verse from *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* was carved on the facade. It reads:

And alien tears will fill for him
Pity's long-broken urn,
For his mourners will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn.

§§

Except as noted, all illustrations have been scanned from books by the author.

NOTES

[1] *De Profundis*, a 55,000 word letter, was written between January and March 1897 while Wilde was in Reading Prison but not published until 1905, and then only in partial form by Wilde's executor and former lover Robert Ross. The complete and corrected manuscript was finally published in full in 1962 in Wilde's collected *Letters*.

[2] Lucy McDiarmid, "Oscar Wilde, Lady Gregory, and Late-Victorian Table-Talk," in Joseph Bristow, ed., *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: the Making of a Legend*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008, p. 50.

[3] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, pp. 50-51.

[4] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 19.

[5] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 53. Wilde's father threatened to withhold his son's inheritance if he joined the Roman church.

[6] Barbara Belford, *Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius*, New York: Random House, 2000, p. 45; as Belford and other scholars have documented, many so-called decadents as well as Uranians (homosexuals) were attracted to Catholicism at the end of the 19th Century, considering it, like Wilde to be sensual and spiritual in the sense of literary Romanticism. Beardsley, as noted later in the text, converted to Catholicism during the last months of his life.

[7] Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011, p. 17. Wilde attended many of Mallarme's famous *Mardis* gatherings and was undoubtedly acquainted with aspects of the author's work, long in progress.

[8] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, p. 34.

[9] Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p. 135.

[10] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 349.

[11] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 307.

[12] Stephen Calloway, *Aubrey Beardsley*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998, pp. 38-39.

[13] Calloway, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 75.

[14] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, p. 24.

[15] Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, London: John Lane, 1907, pp. 10-11.

[16] While Beardsley undoubtedly consulted the large collection of Japanese prints in the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), he also owned a small collection of erotic (shunga) prints by Utamaro; see Calloway, *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 67-68.

[17] Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, p. 20.

[18] Calloway, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 135.

[19] Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, p. 63.

[20] See Vassos's *New York Times* obituary, December 10, 1985; also article in Wikipedia article.

[21] Oscar Wilde, *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1927, p. 3.

[22] Oscar Wilde, *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act*, p. 19.

[23] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 299.

[24] An unabridged reprint edition of this collection was published by Calla Editions in 2011.

[25] While Ivan Albright created the title painting for the movie, portrait painter Henrique Medina executed the youthful portrait of Gray that was altered as the film progressed.

[26] Belford, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 170.

[27] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, illustrated by Majeska, New York: Horace Liveright, 1930, Limited Edition no. 85/1540 copies, p. 282. In a moment of strange harmony with his yet unwritten novel of doomed beauty, Wilde wrote in 1886, "Sometimes I think that the artist's life is a long and lovely suicide, and I am not sorry it is so." Quoted in Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 116.

[28] Belford, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 170. In a letter to Ralph Gray, Wilde said, "Basil Hayward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps"; quoted in Rodney Shewan, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 113.

[29] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 318.

[30] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 29.

[31] In his book, *Expressionist Book Illustration in Germany 1907-1927*, Lothar Lang claims that Heckel's work represents the first of numerous books illustrated by the German Expressionists in the 20th century. The book was not, however, published until 1963. A limited edition of 600 copies was printed by Ernest Rathenau in New York, as homage to the artist who would die seven years later. Unfortunately, the original wood blocks were destroyed in an air raid on Berlin in 1944. Rathenau relied on surviving prints for his publication. See Lang, pp. 35-36.

Club events: Winter and Spring at a Glance

Jan. 9, Luncheon: **John Corbett and Jim Dempsey**, Corbett vs. Dempsey Gallery. "Walter Hamady: Book Designer, Papermaker & Artist."

Jan. 21, Dinner: **Paul Gehl**, George Amos Poole Curator at the Newberry Library. "Collecting Type on the Page: American Printing History Libraries, 1900 – 1950."

Feb. 13, Luncheon: **Anita Mechler**, Director of Libraries & Archives, Union League Club. "Discoveries from the Archives of the Union League Club."

Feb. 18, Dinner: **Caxton Club Celebrates Its 120th Anniversary.**

Mar. 13, Luncheon: **Neil Steinberg**, Chicago Journalist and Author. "The Contributions of Herb Lubalin."

Mar. 18, Dinner: **John Neal Hoover**, Director, St Louis Mercantile Library. "Mississippi Mystery: Henry Lewis and the English Edition of One of the Greatest 19th Century American Illustrated Books, *Das Illustrirte Mississippithal*."

April: No Luncheon

Apr. 15, Dinner: **Nick Wilding**, Georgia State University. "The Discovery of the Galileo *Sidereus Nuncius* Forgery and its Continuing Revelations."

Apr 17, **Symposium Kick Off.** Tours of the conservation centers at the Art Institute, University of Chicago, and the Graphic Conservation Co. followed by dinner with our cohost the Bibliographical Society of America and our Symposium speakers.

Apr. 18, **Symposium** All-Day Event at the Newberry Library. "Preserving the Evidence: The Ethics of Book and Paper Conservation."

May 8, Luncheon: **James Cornelius**, Curator, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, on a topic related to Lincoln.

May 20, Dinner: **Christopher de Hamel**, University of Cambridge. "Coella Lindsay Ricketts materials from the Lilly Library."

Jun. 12, Luncheon: **Glenn Humphreys**, Special Collections and Preservation Division, Chicago Public Library. Highlights from the Rare Books and Manuscript Collection at the Chicago Public Library.

Jun. 17, Dinner: **Arnold Hirshon**, Associate Provost and University Librarian at Case Western Reserve University. Illustrated *Alice in Wonderland*.

Book- and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Lisa Pevtzow
(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: **"Ghosts and Demons in Japanese Prints,"** through January 4. **"Decidedly Surreal: The Bindings of Mary Louise Reynolds"** (bindings by an American who became a central figure in the Parisian Surrealist movement), January 20 through March 23.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **"Succulents: Featuring Redoute's Masterpieces,"** through February 8.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: **"Railroaders: Jack Delano's Homefront Photography"** (the federal Office of War Information assigned photographer Jack Delano to take pictures of the nation's railways during World War II), through June 10.

City of Chicago Expo 72, 72 E. Randolph Street, Chicago: **"Rolled, Stoned & Inked: 25 Years of the Chicago Printmakers Collaborative"** (exhibit by Chicago's oldest printers collaborative), through February 28.

Newberry Library / Love on Paper
Valentine from the Liberty Tree Press, from a Victorian wood engraving. 1985. Wing Ephemera

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: **"Love Me Forever! Oh! Oh! Oh!"** (cartoonist Jeremy Sorese explores the idea of getting married, both gay and straight), through March 8.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **"Chicago, Europe, and the Great War"** (materials that tell the story of Chicago's many and varied connections to the conflict), through January 3. **"American Women Rebuilding France, 1917-1924"** (documents the work of hundreds of American women who volunteered in France during and after the war), through January 3. **"Love on Paper"** (collection items, from proclamations and pictures to cynical put-downs and comical send-ups of love), January 15 to April 4.

Northwestern University Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: **"Toulouse-Lautrec Prints: Art at the Edges of Modernity"** (posters, illustrated books, theater programs, privately circulated portfolios from the last decade of the artist's life), January 13 to April 19.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **"William Hogarth's Modern Moral Subjects: A Harlot's Progress and A Rake's Progress"** (prints from an 1822 edition of Hogarth's works), ongoing.

Pritzker Military Museum and Library, 104 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-374-9333: **"SEAL: The Unspoken Sacrifice"** (features photographs from Stephanie Freid-Perenchio's and Jennifer Walton's 2009 book and artifacts on loan from the Navy SEAL Museum), ongoing.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **"En Guerre: French Illustrators and World War I"** (an examination of World War I through the lens of French illustrated books, journals, and prints, many of which are drawn from the collection of exhibition curators Professor Neil Harris and Teri J. Edelstein and materials donated by them – both longtime Caxton Club members), through January 2. **"I Step Out of Myself: Portrait Photography in Special Collections"** (from the work of Eva Watson Schütze, Carl Van Vechten, Layle Silbert, Mildred Mead, Yousef Karsh, Alice Boughton, Joan Eggan, and Tina Modotti), January 12 to March 21.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections, 801 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, 312-996-2742: **"Visualizing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Pictorial Interpretations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Novel"** (representations of the characters and events in various editions of the book, film stills and. posters, and other popular-culture artifacts), through April 30.

Send your listings to lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net

Art Institute / Decidedly Surreal
Jarry, Alfred. Ubu Roi: Drame en cinq actes, 1921. Paris, Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle. Binding by Mary Reynolds.

Harold Washington Library / Love Me Forever! Oh! Oh! Oh!

Caxtonians Collect: Robert A. Seal

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

I first came under the influence of Robert A. Seal in 2004, and didn't know it. By then he had moved on to Texas Christian University, but a program he started at the University of Texas at El Paso was (and is) still going on. My press, Sherwin Beach, entered a book in competition for the Carl Hertzog Award for Excellence in Book Design, and we managed to be named a runner-up. That prize was Seal's brainchild while at UTEP: he knew about the legendary Carl Hertzog, who had run a press at UTEP, and cooked up a combination of design contest and lecture series to honor him. This clever plan put UTEP on the better-book map. The winners are a who's who of the best book makers of our era, and many of their books have made it to the special collections department at the UTEP library.

photograph by Robert McCamant

Today, and since 2005, it's the university libraries at Loyola, right here in Chicago, that are the beneficiaries of Seal's cleverness. His title is Dean of University Libraries, and he spends most of his time in Rogers Park, at what is called the Lake Shore Campus. Here, he's doing a couple of things that would be of particular interest to members of the Caxton Club.

One project is developing a "Friends of the Libraries" group. This involves a lecture series with occasional special events (most recently a reception and talk by Library of Congress special collections librarian Mark Dimunation) and the opportunity to use the libraries at higher levels of membership. The goal is to increase awareness, and where appropriate, to plant the idea that Loyola libraries might be a good place to put that special collection developed over a lifetime.

A second project is raising $1.5 million to benefit special collections at the library. "Our special collections reading room is crowded, and to encourage use we want it to be a pleasant, welcoming place," he says. There are needed improvements to the HVAC and fire suppression systems as well – not to mention additional funds for acquisitions.

"We have a number of interesting collections already," he continues. Not surprisingly, over the years, Jesuits have given their collections. But Samuel Insull's papers (he was the founder of Commonwealth Edison) are also in the library's archives. "And we have the papers of the Catholic Extension Society, a group which provided traveling church services in rural areas and tried to stimulate the building of churches in small communities. Some of the pictures of the train 'chapel cars' they used are fascinating," he says.

Lately, they have received groups of books of particular interest to scholars of British and American literature and history. Two examples are a recently given collection of illustrated books with drawings by George Cruikshank and his contemporaries, and 1,300 items by Edward Gorey. This last provided material for a multipart exhibit at the Loyola University Art Museum. "We were also given 100 rare volumes from the Chiswick Press in London, which often produced early limited editions of English authors," he concluded.

A bit of the money will also be directed toward digitizing additional parts of the collection. "It's a commonplace among special collection librarians that the way to get people in to use the paper books is to show them what they look like online," he admits.

Seal is a born midwesterner – raised in Canton, Ohio. He was editor of his high school newspaper, and got a scholarship to Northwestern. He had wide-ranging interests but eventually settled on astronomy as his major. In the end, he found his career in the college job he took: he started shelving books in the library, and was the stack supervisor by the time his four years were over. A friendly librarian knew he was having trouble deciding what to do after graduation, so he said, "Why don't you look into library school?"

He left Evanston and married his high school sweetheart, Adela, and they decamped for Colorado where he got his MLS at the University of Denver. Degree in hand, the couple moved on to Charlottesville, Virginia, where she taught first grade and he had a series of jobs at the University of Virginia, the last being Director for Administrative Services. From there he moved to the University of Oklahoma – which he found interesting because their library had very good collections in the history of science. ("If I was going to have another job," he says, "I think I'd pick being a history of science librarian.") From there he moved to UTEP, mentioned above, followed by TCU and now Loyola.

He seems a bit embarrassed that it took him from 2005, when he moved to Chicago, until 2014, when he joined the Club, to discover that he belonged with us. Ultimately David Spadafora and Michael Gorman convinced him. "What I enjoy about the Club is the wide variety of bookish interests people seem to have," he concludes.

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Bookmarks…

Luncheon: Friday Jan. 9, Union League Club
John Corbett & Jim Dempsey on "Walter Hamady, Book Designer, Papermaker & Artist"

You'll want to be ringside as we draw on the storytelling skills of Chicagoans Jim Dempsey and John Corbett to illuminate Walter Hamady's impressive body of work. Hamady is an award-winning book-arts polymath. He is a papermaker, founder of a private press, and an artist whose devilish wit pokes fun at everything, including his own artistic seriousness. His collectible series of eight artists books was brought out under the title of "The Interminable Gabberjabs." Hamady's works reside in libraries internationally. Having recently curated an exhibition of Hamady's works, the team of Corbett and Dempsey will provide a rock 'em sock 'em, lavishly illustrated presentation about Hamady and his legacy. Founders of the Chicago gallery Corbett vs. Dempsey, these engaging speakers have been involved in a variety of independent curatorial projects, including "Big Picture: A New View of Painting in Chicago." Corbett teaches at the School of the Art Institute and Dempsey served as the longtime house manager and occasional programmer at the Gene Siskel Film Center.

January luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet opens at 11:30 am; program 12:30-1:30. Lunch is $32. Please reserve or cancel by Wednesday for Friday lunch. ***Reserved nonattendees will be billed.***

Dinner: Wednesday, Jan. 21, Union League Club
Paul Gehl on "Collecting Type on the Page: American Printing History Libraries, 1900 – 1950"

Paul Gehl, George Amos Poole III Curator of Rare Books and Custodian of the John M. Wing Foundation on the History of Printing at the Newberry Library as well as the Archivist for The Caxton Club, will present a preview of the results of his long-term research project to document American printing history. In this richly-illustrated lecture he will concentrate on four American libraries, born in the first half of the last century, that have particularly notable collections on the history of type design and typography. He will describe the audiences for which these collections were built and invite us to discuss what relevance they have in the present and for the future. Three days later, Gehl will receive the annual award for achievements in furthering printing history from the American Printing History Association at its annual meeting in New York City.

January dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. This will be a reverse program. Timing: spirits at 5, program at 6 with dinner to follow. ***Reservations are essential to attend either the program only or the program and dinner combination.*** *Dinner is $48, drinks are $5 to $9. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org. Please reserve by no later than January 16 at 5 pm.*

Beyond January…

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON
On Friday, February 13, 2015, Head Librarian and Archivist at the Union League Club, Anita Mechler, will speak about some fascinating material from the archives, including the Club's involvement in World War I, the Columbian Exposition, and the career and demise of Al Capone. She will bring with her some original archival materials.

FEBRUARY DINNER
February 18 at the Newberry Library, marking the 120th Anniversary of the Club. Features: highlights of the last 20 years, an anniversary bookmark, anniversary cake, a cavalcade of memories inspired by some "old traditions," grant award winner projects, surprises, and our Caxton Club bar. Speaker: Club expert Dan Crawford!

MARCH LUNCHEON
Herb Lubalin (1918-1981), a brilliant graphic arts designer and director, who delivered shock and delight while profoundly changing our perception of letter forms, words and language, is the subject of artist and teacher Neil Steinberg's March 13 heavily illustrated talk, including Herb's extensive work with Ralph Ginsberg.

MARCH DINNER
We will meet March 18 at the Union League Club to hear John Neal Hoover, of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, talk on "Mississippi Mystery, Henry Lewis and the English Edition of One of the Greatest 19th-Century American Illustrated Books," *Das Illustrirte Mississippithal*. Social hour at 5, dinner at 6, presentation to follow.