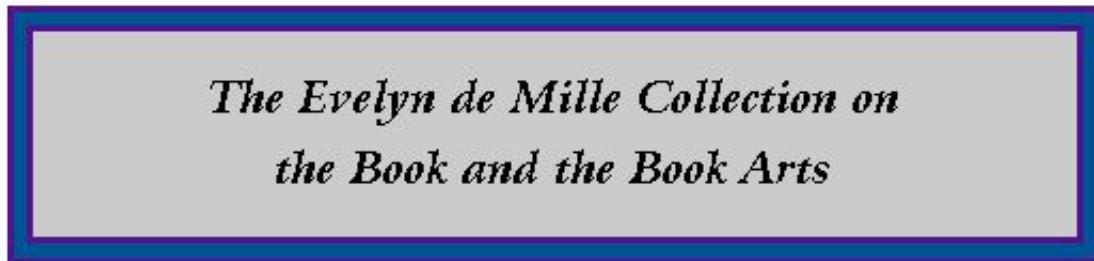


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## Special Collections



# THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS Occasional Paper No. 9

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A fundamental element of the unfolding of human civilization has been the evolution of its written record. Through the book we are able to discern some understanding of the flowering of human progress.

The Evelyn de Mille Collection on the Book and the Book Arts is a marvelous gathering of works that exemplify not only the evolution of the book as an artifact, but also the development of the intellectual life of our species.

We are deeply indebted to the generous enthusiasm of Mrs. Evelyn de Mille whose vision and generosity have caused this collection to come into being and to be made available to scholars from this time and for scholars not yet born.

Through the amazing support of donors and friends of this library such as Evelyn de Mille, it is possible for the University of Calgary to aspire to a Library that can be one of the great research libraries in Canada. We thank her and all who have supported us so generously as we move along the long and challenging road to excellence.

Alan H. MacDonald  
Director of Libraries

**EVELYN DE MILLE**

Evelyn Orser de Mille was born in 1919, a sixth-generation Canadian, on the farm her grandparents homesteaded at Tristram, Alberta. Her father's family had come to New York from the Netherlands and later to Ontario as United Empire Loyalists. She attended high school in Alberta and in 1940 married Harry de Mille. In 1945, she began working at Eaton's Book Department leaving as its head in 1956 for a new challenge.

Evelyn de Mille Books Ltd. opened in Calgary on October 1, 1956, with the backing of \$1200 in capital and the wide-ranging expertise and determination of the owner. By the time the store was sold in 1974, there were 4 other branches (1 in Vancouver) and the original outlet spread comfortably throughout 3 floors. During this time, Evelyn de Mille had become the first woman in Canada to found a bookstore chain as well as a frequent hostess to visiting scholars, researchers, and even entire classes of touring library school students.

In addition, this energetic and knowledgeable woman had become actively involved in the Canadian Booksellers' Association presenting papers, serving on the Board of Directors and, in 1972, becoming the first woman president of the association. She was also chair of the annual CBA conference held in Banff in June 1973.

Upon her retirement from active retailing in 1974, Mrs. de Mille became involved with activities such as helping to create a publishing policy for the National Museums of Canada and serving on the Board of Directors of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation. However, the bookseller's life was her first love and in 1980 she established Evelyn de Mille Technical Books, specializing in technical and reference material.

Evelyn de Mille has always been interested in books and in contributing to her community. A collection of historical books was donated by her to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation; discriminating collections of Medalta pottery and Boy Scout memorabilia are now at the [Glenbow Museum](#); and a representative collection of family papers and historical items exists at the Ponoka Museum (near the family farm.)

Mrs. de Mille's own personal and business papers were donated to the University of Calgary Libraries. The records present a valuable and unique look at the Canadian book industry during the 1960s and 1970s as well as a history of one of those rare institutions, the privately-owned retail bookstore.

As well, Mrs. de Mille's own interest in the book - its production, publication, preservation and sale - is reflected in the collection of Books On Books which she donated to this library in 1985 and which she has continued to build with judicious additions of informative, interesting and rare items.

A few of the titles which deal with all aspects of the history of books in Canada, from early printing to the fine presses of today.



## **THE EVELYN DE MILLE COLLECTION ON THE BOOK AND THE BOOK ARTS A BIBLIOGNOSTIC COMMENTARY**

by Robert Carnie



People like myself, who collect books as well as read them, and are persistent in their collecting, soon become resigned to the fact that many fellow readers are unsympathetic to the book collecting habit. The

very names given to book-collectors reflect humorous scepticism about the utility of the habit, and doubts about the mental health of its practitioners. Most book collectors flinch a little when accused of *bibliolatry* - an excessive reverence for the book as physical object; they will describe themselves ironically as *near-bibliomaniacs*, fearful that their perfectly sane fondness for books be construed as a true mania. Some of them would prefer to be known as *bibliognosts*, i.e., those who are expert in books and bibliography - but they despair of finding more than a handful of people who can pronounce, far less spell, that ghastly word. Most bibliophiles are content with the simple, but not dishonourable, title of mere collector, and take comfort from the views of Charles Lamb, who wrote to Coleridge in this vein: "It is pleasanter to eat one's own peas out of one's own garden, than to buy them by the peck at Covent Garden; and a book reads the better, which is our own, and has been so long known to us, that we know the topography of its blots and dog ears."

On the other hand, the satiric Victorian, Samuel Butler, author of *Erewhon*, was not alone in his belief that public and commercial libraries could provide him with all the reading matter that he could possibly want. As he sardonically put it: "I keep my books at the British Museum and at Mudie's circulating library."

These attitudes persist in our own age, and, in addition, there are many intellectuals who believe, without much supporting evidence, that the physical object called the book is doomed to be replaced by the personal computer, the modem and the data base. They apparently expect to live in some Utopian future world where there are unnumbered thousands of data punchers, ready and eager to put the world's knowledge into data banks; where the electricity supply never fails; the technicians never go on strike, and the computer never crashes.

Most scholars and librarians take a more realistic view of the limitations of a paperless world. They understand the historical significance, for both Western and Eastern cultures, of the age-old and familiar, portable cortex, with its folded leaves of durable rag-paper. It is a communication tool easily consulted by hand and eye. It is hardly surprising that it became the progenitor of all these millions of printed books in private and public collections, which are the major storehouses of the accumulated knowledge and wisdom, and the artistic and musical achievements of the human race. Any careful examination of the current resources of major scholarly libraries makes it abundantly clear that a very substantial proportion of the publicly available material is there only because of the collectors' instinct, and the subsequent generosity and public spirit of these collectors or their heirs. Butler's sarcasm about book collectors loses its edge in the light of these facts, and one turns thankfully to the simple truism of Martin Tupper, the proverbial philosopher: "A good book is the best of friends, the same to-day and for ever."

All books adding to the sum of human knowledge, or to the extension of individual aesthetic enjoyment, are worthy of collection. Particularly worthy of preservation, in my view, are finely printed and crafted books - books whose craftsman-designed types and chaste use of decoration, along with decorated title-pages, illustrations and decorative covers make them a joy to read, handle and own. There are important



cultural values made available to students at all levels who are able to view and touch a Mozart manuscript, a Milton first edition, a Foulis printed page, a Beardsley illustration, or a Talwin Morris cover in the original that no perfection of secondary image on a terminal screen can match. To this particular bibliophile, a world empty of the physical objects called fine books is as unattractive a prospect as a world without dolphins, or the inhabitants of Amazonian forests.



This goes a long way to explain why the custodians of good libraries and individual readers of great books, are so delighted when significant private collections like the Evelyn de Mille Collection, which specialise in the book arts, are given to their universities. The de Mille Collection not only provides the research librarian with a comprehensive collection of current scholarship about printed books, it also makes available to the individual researcher prime examples of that art of fine printing and elegant bookmaking which may well be the main object of his study. It is one of the agreeable vanities of those who practise bibliographical scholarship that they like to see that scholarship presented to the world in a garb worthy of the fine arts they are writing about. This is the case not only with regard to individual books and monographs, but is also true of the specialised journals which publish so much of the new scholarship in the bibliophilic field. An inevitable consequence of this is that the journals of many bibliographical and bibliophilic societies are printed in expensive, finely printed limited editions, which have limited circulation and go rapidly out of print. They are even more expensive to buy in the antiquarian book market. To university libraries whose budgets for buying periodicals are under constant pressure from both inflation and the constant growth in the number of new journals, a donation of substantial periodical material in the bibliophilic field, as has happened with the de Mille gift, is an absolute godsend. There is no other way that much of this class of material could be made available to university readers.



I have not yet had time to examine anything more than a small proportion of the books and periodicals in the de Mille gift. I have used the collection chiefly in connection with my current interest (I refuse to call it an obsession or mania) with the decorative covers, in cloth or paper, found on Victorian and early twentieth century books in the period 1840 to 1920. The covers were designed by contemporary British and North American artists, many of whom sign their original designs with devices, initials, monograms and signatures. I either

own, or have seen in libraries all over the world, scores of examples by artists as distinguished and various as Aubrey Beardsley, Will Bradley, C.R. MacIntosh, Jessie Marion King, Laurence Housman and A.Y. Jackson. What is much more demanding of detailed research is the discovery and identification of hundreds of relatively unknown artists who did distinctive and interesting work in this field. The presence in the de Mille collection of the journal of the *Ex Libris Society* (edited by John Leighton, who designed himself hundreds of decorated covers) has enabled me to identify a number of artists who specialised in book-plates as well as covers. Hamill's rare study of *The Decorative work of Thomas Maitland Cleland*, also in the collection, has identified for me the mysterious 'c' whose initial appears on many fine covers. The de Mille copy of *The Typophiles Chapbook* has increased my knowledge of the design work of Bruce Rogers, and Jane Apostol's privately printed study of Will Bradley was suddenly available to me for the first time. These are but a few examples of the kind of knowledge available to me now in Calgary which in the past I would have had to visit major libraries in the United Kingdom and the United States to unearth.

It would be pleasant if Evelyn de Mille's donation of her fine collection on The Book and the Book Arts, which is, I know, strong on the Canadian book arts as well as those of the United Kingdom and the United States, was to be a stimulus in exciting a Western flow of bibliophiles from Eastern and Central Canada to Calgary.

## **FOUR MEDIAEVAL MANUSCRIPT LEAVES AND A CAXTON LEAF**

by Murray McGillivray

The leaves from mediaeval manuscripts and the leaf from Caxton's *Polychronicon* in the Evelyn de Mille collection are a valuable resource for students of the history of book production technology. They also tell a fascinating story of the changing uses of literacy during the later Middle Ages.

The four manuscript leaves are beautiful examples of the craftsmanship of the mediaeval hand-written parchment book, in which decoration and script combine to produce a utilitarian object that is at the same time a visual delight. The leaves are from examples of two of the "best-sellers" of the Middle Ages, the breviary and the Book of Hours, religious service books for clergy and laity respectively. Both breviaries and Books of Hours were mass-produced in the extensive manuscript book industry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which grew up to cater to the new trend towards private reading and to the spread of literacy.

The leaf from the *Polychronicon*, Caxton's version of Ranulf Higden's fourteenth-century history of the world, is valuable as an example of the work of England's first printer which shows the transitional nature of his use of the new technology as well as the technical innovation that it inspired. But it is also an indication of new uses of literacy - like almost all of Caxton's productions it is written in English, rather than Latin, and it is also one of the first books specifically designed as a reference work. It is one of many Caxton texts catering to the thirst for encyclopaedic knowledge among the newly literate merchant class, from which Caxton himself sprang.

### **Mediaeval Manuscripts**

Before the invention of printing, all books were written by hand on parchment or (later) paper. In the early Middle Ages, when literacy was the almost exclusive possession of the church, monastic institutions controlled the manufacture of parchment and ink, and monks and nuns were both the prime producers and the prime consumers of manuscript books, which were only made when the institutions needed them. By the later Middle Ages, although monastic *scriptoria* were still dominant book producers, they were either competing against or collaborating with a secular mass-production book trade to serve an increasingly less clerical market. The leaves in the de Mille collection come from this later period.

Parchment, a writing surface made from animal skin by scraping it clean of flesh and hair and then stretching it, drying it, and smoothing it with pumice and chalk, can be of varying quality, as the four leaves show. Some parchments are thick, stiff, and rough; others are thinner and smoother - and often whiter - than the finest of the early papers. Differences in the skins from which the parchment was made - pig, calf, sheep, or goat - and in the care with which the material was scraped and smoothed,

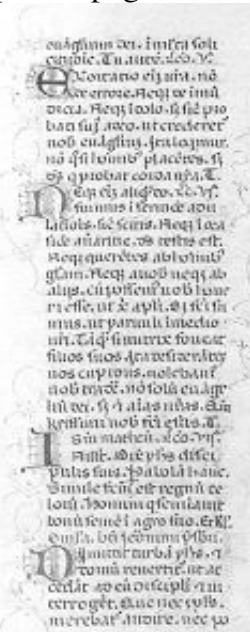


account for the variations.

When the parchment had been prepared, it was cut to size for the book, ruled with faint lines on which the text would be written, and assembled into the booklets of folded sheets, called quires, which would be sewn together to form the finished book. All of the leaves in the de Mille collection have been sliced out of their quires, probably by modern dealers, but some of them still have traces showing how the book they were taken from was made, or holes that result from the process of ruling the lines.

After the page had been set out the scribe would go to work copying the book from a master copy or *exemplar*. In the early Middle Ages, this might be a copy of the book borrowed from a nearby or distant monastery; in the later Middle Ages, workshops where books were mass-produced would likely have set copies aside for the purpose. University students could also rent the separate quires - called *pecia* - of the most commonly taught books, and copy out their own textbooks. Quill pens were used, with ink made from oak galls, iron salts, or lampblack. Ornaments and decorations, including blue or red capital letters and gold leaf, all of which we find examples of among the de Mille leaves, were added afterwards, often by a different craftsman or series of craftsmen.

(partial page of an early



15th century Italian Breviary leaf)

### Breviary Leaves

A breviary is a service-book intended for the use of a priest, monk, or friar, from which such a member of the clergy could read all of the church services appropriate for each day of the year. When most clergy lived in self-sufficient and self-contained monasteries, large service books were used for the communal services of the whole congregation. But the largely monastic organization of the early mediaeval church did not last. A breviary became a necessary possession for those members of the clergy who were unable to attend services in their home churches, since participation in the eight daily services (or "Hours") of the mediaeval church - Matins and Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline - was an obligation for all clergy.

From the thirteenth century on, increasingly large numbers of university students and journeying monks and friars were away from their home churches. Such people were permitted to read the appropriate services privately. Clergy occupied with administrative tasks were also allowed to "timeshift" the services by reading them from the breviary. This permission given to private reading signalled a large change in the way in which the mediaeval church used literacy. Before the breviary, public reading was the norm. Most books that were read, were read out loud to an assembly. By stating that the private reading of the breviary was equivalent to participation in a communal service, the church sanctioned both individual worship and the solitary engagement with the written word that has become our modern norm.

The breviary is the ancestor of modern service books, such as the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Anglican church. Like them, it contains a general order of service (for each of the Hours), to which appropriate readings and other liturgical features are added for any particular service. Breviaries have readings for each day of the year, which allow the complete reading of the Bible abridged - in a single year, or would allow this reading if it were not that special readings for Saints' Days often take the place of the Bible reading. Also included are services for the festivals of the church and special services like the Office of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead.







Flanders, an important town in the wool trade. In 1471-2, in middle age, he learned the art of printing in Cologne, perhaps from Johannes Veldener, a type-founder, and acquired a press and type. The first English book he printed, probably in Bruges, was his own translation of Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troyes*.

Printing with moveable type was a process that had been invented, at least sixteen years before Caxton learned it, by Johann Gutenberg of Mainz. Gutenberg's crucial discovery, because printing from wood blocks had been practised in Europe since the end of the fourteenth century, was a method of casting type from a lead alloy. Printing spread rapidly through the continent in the years after it was discovered. It was an invention for which the west was ripe. Across Europe, the new class of urban merchants and craftspeople, which was to become the middle class, was establishing itself. Manuscript books were so expensive that only the nobility could afford to own more than a few. On the other hand, the new class was a literate one, and its taste for reading had been fed by the few manuscripts, such as Books of Hours, that it could afford. The new process made books available in quantity and at a much lower price.

William Caxton must be counted among those who saw the economic potential of printing most clearly. Caxton's entrepreneurship is striking. Unlike other early printers, he specialized almost entirely in works in the vernacular, and printed only on paper, rather than parchment. He saw the potential in the new technology for reaching a new audience, and realized that the cachet he lost would be more than made up for by larger sales. On the other hand, he understood that the appeal of book ownership was partly its exclusivity, and he was careful to cultivate the patronage of the nobility where he could, so as to associate his books in the minds of his customers with wealth and prestige.

Caxton returned to English by 1476, and set up shop as a printer and bookseller in Westminster, where for the next fifteen years he printed books especially for the growing population of people who were literate only in English, not in French or Latin. The books he chose to print catered to the taste of his middle class public. Books of chivalric adventure, like the Troy stories and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, appealed to the bourgeois aspiration to the nobility; works of religious and moral instruction opened up a new world of learning, hitherto available only to those who could read French or Latin; and works of encyclopaedic knowledge catered to the thirst of the merchant and manufacturing class for practical, factual information about such subjects as geography and history. Higden's *Polychronicon*, which Caxton printed in 1482, was a book of this last type.

## **The Polychronicon**

Ranulf Higden, the author of the Latin *Polychronicon*, was a monk in the Benedictine abbey of St. Werburgh, Chester. A note on two copies of the *Polychronicon* states that he died in 1363/4 after sixty-four years in the religious life. He probably wrote the first version of the *Polychronicon* in the 1320s, and was famous enough for it by 1352 to be summoned to appear with it at the court of Edward III.

Unlike the usual mediaeval chronicle, on the form of which it was partly modeled, the *Polychronicon* devotes little space to recent history. It attempts to encompass universal human history up to Higden's own time, concentrating more than most mediaeval histories did on antiquity. It also, on the way, gives other information, including, besides "the present resting place of the finger of John the Baptist, the symbolical significance of the colours of the rainbow, and whether devils could change men into beasts" (Taylor 46), an extensive geography which Caxton printed separately before he tackled the whole work.

Like other mediaeval historical works, Higden's was based extensively on earlier authorities. His task was to assemble the various authorities into a continuous story of the history of the world, not to go beyond those authorities, as a modern historian would, to discover what really happened. In creating his compendious harmony, he used a wide variety of sources, including works from classical antiquity and saints' lives, as well as recent mediaeval historians, geographers, and encyclopedists.

Higden's work was enormously popular, to judge by the more than 115 surviving manuscript copies and by the several continuations, to say nothing of the translations. Its popularity is probably to be attributed to its concentration on classical antiquity (a subject in which interest was reviving), its plethora of fascinating information on a wide variety of topics, and the many anecdotes and stories that Higden retold.

The *Polychronicon* was translated into English by John Trevisa by 1387. Trevisa, who died in 1402, was chaplain to Thomas, Lord Berkeley, in Gloucestershire, at whose request he did the translation. He was England's greatest translator at the end of the fourteenth century. After the *Polychronicon* he translated Bartholomeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* (*On the Natures of Things*), an encyclopaedia of mediaeval learning on physics, geography, and the natural world. Before working on the *Polychronicon*, he may have collaborated in the Wycliffite translation of the Bible.

Trevisa's style has been praised, but because of the rapid changes that were occurring to the English language his English was antique by 1482, and Caxton modernized it throughout. He also added a continuation to the *Polychronicon*, bringing the history up to the 1460s. Caxton's print kept up the popularity of Higden's work, and it continued to be read until early in the Tudor period.

### **The de Mille Caxton Leaf**

The de Mille leaf from Caxton's *Polychronicon* (19.5 cm x 27 cm) is a fine specimen of his printing. The paper, as is usual in the case of books printed on rag paper before the introduction of wood pulp, is still very flexible and only slightly yellowed, and the print is dark and clear. Caxton used his Type for the *Polychronicon*. Like all his fonts, it reproduced as nearly as possible the forms of contemporary handwriting so as to imitate parchment manuscripts, which were more prestigious for several decades after the introduction of printing. The *Polychronicon* goes further in the direction of imitation of manuscript than most Caxton productions, though, because it is extensively rubricated by hand. After the text was printed in black ink, a specialized scribe called a rubicator or rubrisher went through it, marking sections and adding initial letters in red ink, just as he would have done in ornamenting a manuscript book. In the case of the *Polychronicon*, the rubicator also added a system of marginal rubrics - dates and regnal years - to facilitate the use of the book for reference.

The rubricating of the *Polychronicon* looks backward to the manuscripts it imitates, but also forward to the new uses that books were being put to. The *Polychronicon* is the first English printed book specifically designed for use as a reference work. Besides the rubrics, reference use was aided by numbered leaves and by an alphabetical index. Both were technically innovative features; manuscript books sometimes have tables of contents, but these are not keyed to the pages in any way, nor are the pages numbered.

The introduction of these two systems of reference organization gives a clue to the kind of use Caxton thought the *Polychronicon* would get: he thought people would use it as a mine of striking incidents and anecdotes, rather than reading it through as narrative history. He was almost certainly basing this judgement on the use that manuscript copies of the work already got; Higden's text emphasizes the anecdotal in history. The de Mille leaf contains an example, the striking story (repeated from Bede) of

the Anglo-Saxon pagan priest Cefi, who showed his disdain for his pagan religion on converting to Christianity by riding armed on a stallion - arms and stallions were apparently forbidden to priests in the old religion - to cast down his heathen idols.

The history of the Caxton leaf during the five hundred years since it was printed is unknown. The *Polychronicon* survives in a relatively high number of copies, which suggests that more copies of it were printed than of almost any other work of Caxton's press. Many of the copies surviving into the twentieth century were fragmentary; old books come apart very easily. The de Mille leaf is probably taken from one of these fragmentary copies.

## SELECTED SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

### MANUSCRIPT BOOKS

Bischoff, Bernhard. *Latin Palaeography*. Trans. Dàibhí Ó Cróinín and David Ganz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

*Breviarium ad usum insignis ecclesiae Sarum*. Ed. Francis Procter and Christopher Wordsworth. Cambridge: 1882. Reprint, Westmead, Farnborough, Hants.: Gregg International, 1970.

Hartman, John. *Books of Hours and Their Owners*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.

Lemaire, Jacques. *Introduction à la codicologie*. Louvain-la-neuve: Institut d'Études Mediaevales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1989.

Salmon, Dom Pierre. *The Breviary Through the Centuries*. Trans. Sister David Mary, S.N.J.M. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1962.

Wieck, Roger S. *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Mediaeval Art and Life*. New York: George Braziller, 1988.

### CAXTON AND THE POLYCHRONICON

Blades, William. *The Life and Typography of William Caxton, England's First Printer...* London: 1877. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowan and Littlefield, 1971.

Blake, N.F. *Caxton and his World*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969.

-. *Caxton: England's First Publisher*. London: Osprey, 1976.

Deacon, Richard. *A Bibliography of William Caxton, the First English Editor, Printer, Merchant and Translator*. London: Frederick Muller, 1976.

Painter, George D. *William Caxton: A Quincentenary Biography of England's First Printer*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1976.

Taylor, John. *The Universal Chronicle of Ranuff Higden*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1966.

# A HIDDEN PORTRAIT OF SIR WALTER SCOTT

by Jan Roseneder



The arts associated with the production of a book are many and varied: illustration of the text, printing of the text, design of the book, the binding, the end-papers. All offer scope for artistic endeavors. However, one of the most interesting while infrequent examples of the book arts is the "curious art" of the "vanishing painting"<sup>1</sup>: fore-edge painting. This particular practice, which began in the latter part of the 18th century largely in Britain, enjoyed its greatest popularity before 1850 although examples still appear to this day. Simply put, a fore-edge painting is done in watercolour on the slanted pages of the front edge of a book. Usually the edge itself is gilded and when looked at in the normal way all that can be seen is the gilt edge. The book must be held with the pages slanted to see the painting. In some cases there are two paintings, one on each side of the slanted pages.

The majority of fore-edge paintings are by unidentified artists most of whom were either commissioned by or worked for a binder who would be asked by the owner of the printed text to bind and decorate as required. Some of the paintings reflect the contents of the text while others are landscapes appropriate to the author or the owner.

There are two fore-edge paintings in the de Mille Collection. The first is a view of the city of Dublin and appears on the 1848 Dublin publication of Michael Constable's *Songs and Poems*. This may have been copied from someone else's work or be the artist's own original landscape. The second de Mille fore-edge painting illustrates the statement by Carl Weber that of all the poets whose works are augmented by fore-edge painting "far and away ahead of any other poet is [Sir Walter Scott](#)".<sup>2</sup> This volume, entitled *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, features a portrait of Scott. The unsigned work is based on the 1805 painting by James Saxon: a three-quarter length portrayal of Scott sitting with his dog "Camp" leaning on his left knee and Scott's arm holding him. The portrait was originally for Scott's wife, who later transferred it to Longmans and Company, the London publishers, where it was still housed in 1895.<sup>3</sup> In 1810, James Heath did an engraving for the publication of *The Lady of the Lake* and this became the first published portrait of Scott.<sup>4</sup> Most likely, the artist who painted the fore-edge copied from the uncoloured engraving rather than from the original itself, as the fore-edge shows Scott wearing a brown jacket while the original features him in black.

The delight of the fore-edge painting depends on its originality and its secrecy which reflect both the taste of the owner of the book and the artists who fashioned pages of print into a bound and decorated volume.

NOTES

1. Weber, Carl J. *Fore-edge painting: a historical survey of a curious art in book decoration*. Harvey House: Irvington-on- Hudson, N.Y., 1966. p.v.
2. Ibid, p.183.
3. Kitton, F.G. "Some portraits of Sir Walter Scott". *The Magazine of Art*, 1896, p. 1 -8.
4. Caw, James L. "The Portraits of Sir Walter Scott". *The Bookman* 21, March 1902, p. 196-199.

## **DEUX CONTEURS DE MARIA CHAPDELAINÉ: LOUIS HÉMON ET CLARENCE GAGNON**

par Estelle Dansereau

"Je ferai ce livre comme s'il m'était destiné,"<sup>1</sup> écrit Clarence Gagnon quand il s'engage à créer les illustrations pour une édition de luxe de *Marie Chapdelaine*, le roman de Louis Hémon devenu l'incarnation du patrimoine culturel canadien-français. Grâce à son désir d'atteindre la perfection artistique, l'ouvrage mis en chantier aux Editions Mornay à Paris en 1929 et fini d'imprimer en 1933, deux ans après la date prévue,<sup>2</sup> saisit et marie les talents de son auteur, Louis Hémon, et de son illustrateur, Clarence Gagnon.

Oeuvre commandée par les éditions Mornay à Paris, les cinquante- quatre illustrations en couleur que Clarence Gagnon exécute représentent selon certains son plus grand succès. Ayant à peine terminé les illustrations pour *Le grand silence blanc* de L. F. Fouquette pour Mornay, Gagnon énumère les conditions à son nouvel engagement car il calcule déjà le temps nécessaire pour broyer les pigments, préparer les toiles et imprimer les illustrations: "...je prendrai tout mon temps, je choisirai l'imprimeur et ce sera le meilleur, tous les originaux me reviendront."<sup>3</sup> Les gouaches sont la preuve de l'attention scrupuleuse portée à toutes les facetts de la production.

L'édition est tirée à deux mille exemplaires numérotés dont cent sur papier blanc du Japon à la forme et mille neuf cents sur papier blanc de Rives à la forme.<sup>4</sup> La couverture est ornée d'un morceau d'écorce de bouleau, expédié de la Baie Saint-Paul en France par le docteur Tremblay, ancien ami de Gagnon. Le succès retentissant en France et au Canada<sup>5</sup> de cette édition de luxe avait en partie été préparé par un numéro spécial de l'important magazine littéraire et artistique *L'Illustration*, qui avait reproduit dans son numéro de Noël, 1931 douze des gouaches de *Maria Chapdelaine* et qui avait été tiré à deux cent soixante-dix mille exemplaires.<sup>6</sup> Une lettre écrite par Georges Vanier, ami de Gagnon alors secrétaire du haut-commissariat du Canada à Londres, et, plus tard, possesseur du premier exemplaire numéroté de l'édition de luxe, souligne l'importance de cette offensive commerciale de la part des éditions Mornay.<sup>7</sup>

Depuis longtemps soucieux d'utiliser des couleurs qui sauront garder leur vivacité avec le temps et un procédé d'impression qui rendra la clarté désirée, Gagnon décide que les illustrations de *Marie Chapdelaine* seront des gouaches, mesurant en moyenne une vingtaine de centimètres, qu'il retouche à la main avec des crayons noir et de couleur.<sup>8</sup> Montréalais d'origine mais artiste travaillant à Paris, Clarence Gagnon (1881-1942) jouissait déjà d'une renommée en France pour ses tableaux ayant comme sujet les paysages d'hiver de la Baie Saint-Paul dans le comté de Charlevoix et les aventuriers

du Grand Nord canadien.

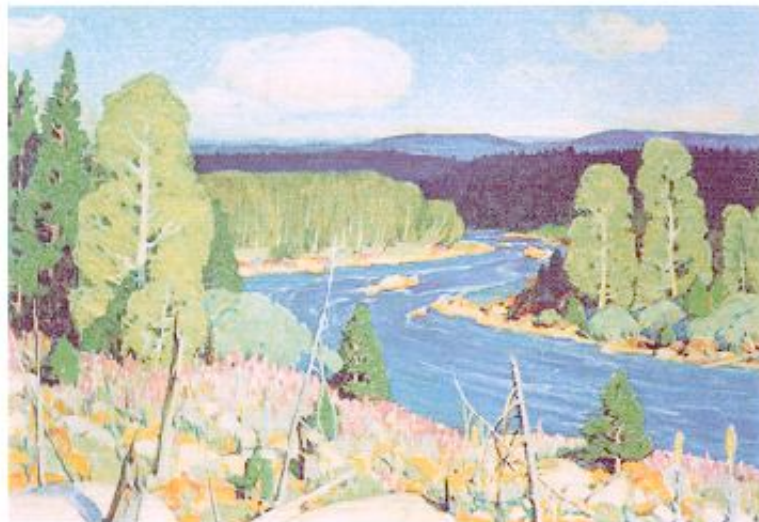
Afin de capter dans ses illustrations de *Maria Chapdelaine* les aspects multiples d'une nature canadienne oscillante et les effets éclatants des lumières saisonnières, Gagnon s'inspire de ses souvenirs de la Baie Saint-Paul, n'ayant jamais lui-même, cependant, visité la région du lac Saint-Jean où se déroule l'histoire de Maria. Les illustrations de Gagnon rehaussent l'aspect documentaire du roman de Louis Hémon en mettant en valeur, par des dessins stylisés, surtout les paysages enneigés, les couleurs vives des saisons, et la vie et les coutumes paysannes qui servent d'arrière scène à la trame du récit.

L'auteur de *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916)<sup>9</sup> avait tenté de donner aux lecteurs français un portrait du Québec imprégné de couleur locale, de coutumes et de superstitions. Louis Hémon (1880- 1913) est né à Brest en France et décédé à Chapleau en Ontario où il est renversé par un train quelques jours après avoir expédié le manuscrit de son roman à sa famille et au quotidien parisien *Le Temps* qui le publiera en feuilleton. Voyageant au Canada entre 1911 et 1913, il travaille comme garçon de ferme à Péribonka, le hameau figurant dans son roman, et documente ce qu'il perçoit de pittoresque et d'original dans le mode de vie et la langue des paysans du lac Saint-Jean.

L'art d'observer, de dessiner et de peindre avec les mots est manifeste dans de nombreux extraits, tout particulièrement celui des bleuets qui met en valeur les jeux subtiles de couleur et de lumière que Clarence Gagnon saura si bien rendre visuellement:

Le beau temps continua et dès les premiers jours de juillet les bleuets mûrirent.

Dans les brûles, au flanc des coteaux pierreux, partout où les arbres plus rares laissaient passer le soleil, le sol avait été jusque-là presque uniformément rose, du rose vif des fleurs qui couvraient les touffes de bois de charme; les premiers bleuets, roses aussi, s'étaient confondus avec ces fleurs; mais sous la chaleur persistante ils prirent lentement une teinte plus pâle, plus bleu de roi, enfin bleu violet, et quand juillet ramena la fête de sainte Anne, leurs plants chargés de grappes formaient de larges taches bleues au milieu du rose des fleurs de bois de charme qui commençaient à mourir.<sup>10</sup>





## NOTES

1. Cité par René Boissay dans *Clarence Gagnon, La Prairie*: Editions Marcel Broquet, 1988, p. 171.
2. Ces faits nous sont donnés dans le prospectus lancé en 1931 et sont reproduits par l'éditeur dans l'édition de luxe.
3. Boissay, 171. Il refuse de vendre les originaux et en 1945, après la mort de Gagnon, sa femme Lucille les cède au col. R. S. McLaughlin d'Oshawa en Ontario pour une somme de dix-sept mille dollars. Ibid., 179.
4. Précisions données dans l'édition de 1933. 5. Boissay, 178.
6. Ibid., 173. L'article sur Clarence Gagnon qui accompagne les reproductions est écrit par Maurice Constantin-Weyer, auteur français dont le roman *Un homme se penche sur son passé* [1928] avait introduit l'ouest canadien aux Français.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 172.
9. Paru d'abord dans le quotidien *Le Temps*, le roman est publié en 1916 chez J.-A. LeFebvre à Montréal, puis en France chez Grasset en 1921. Selon Nicole Deschamps, c'est à partir de cette édition de 1921 que Bernard Grasset lance une offensive commerciale qui transforme le roman en l'idéal d'un peuple simple et fidèle, soumis à l'Eglise et à la Patrie. Voir *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec, 1900--1930*, tome II, p. 664.
10. *Maria Chapdelaine*, chapitre v, p. 57.

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