

 Offprint from Matrix 21

Outside my window juncos and chickadees perch on a swaying bird feeder. Behind them the late afternoon sky has partially broken up. I watch the transition from white to grey slowly change in these frigid winter clouds as the sun sets. I'm also looking at John DePol clouds, and an image from *Wrenching Times* (Gwasg Gregynog, 1991, see *Matrix 12*, pp. 40-50) in which I overprinted opaque white on distant mountains. I have a plan for the clouds over the Black Mountain Ridge. The image will be printed from three blocks: the first, a blue block with the clouds and borders of the image defined; the second, a block with both the foreground and the distant mountains. This will be a reduction block of two, possibly three printings; the third, a small block of opaque white, to subdue the mountains.

30 DECEMBER 2000

When printing *Emerson Wulling: Printer for Pleasure* [reviewed on p. 232], I printed the wood-engravings on the Vandercook proofing press because I was unsure of registration and inking on the Heidelberg. After the book was finished, I had to print 1000 impressions of one of the images for *Matrix 20*, plus 500 more for a prospectus – too many copies for the Vandercook – so I put it on the Heidelberg. Much to my surprise, not only was the registration perfect, but the inking was cleaner than I would have gotten from the Vandercook. One tends to think the Vandercook offers the ultimate in control. When it comes to inking, this is not the case. The Vandercook has no ink fountain, so you have to hand ink every so often, and the amount of ink varies from impression to impression. With the Heidelberg, however, once the ink fountain is adjusted, the inking stays perfectly consistent from impression to impression.

details from various books under one title? Was he making things up as he went? The dilemma brings up an interesting issue: the integrity of documentation versus that of the subject. I could reproduce the feeble, single-colour pen-and-ink drawing, giving rise to the same questions in the reader's mind that have occurred to me, along with another, more obvious one: 'Why on earth did he choose to reproduce such a feeble book cover?' This might produce an interesting effect, luring the mind of the reader into speculation. But it might also cast a shadow on Ernest Morgan's integrity.

*Engraving
a Dead
Man*

I face a similar dilemma with the *New York*. There is an image of Grand Central Station which Ken Auchincloss (the Grolier Club member with whom I'm working) objects to because it is under construction. He suggests I try the other side of the building.

The images which I brought home in my digital camera are the accurate documentation of my New York experience. Ken is concerned with showing the best view of the city from a New Yorker's point of view. I am the artist. The club is the patron. An age-old dilemma.

I had the pleasure of working with the great sculptor Siah Armajani on a book of his bridges (*Bridge Book*, Siah Armajani, Walker Art Center and Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1991). Occasionally we would have meetings with administrators from the Walker Art Center and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, co-publishers of the project. The administrators would come to the meetings with concerns and demands. Siah would brush them off if he didn't like their ideas, saying, 'I am the artist. We will do it my way.' They would back off immediately.



SCHAVILEC

prospectuses for *New York Revisited* is on its way to New York. The Heidelberg is quiet.

The anticipated four-colour wood-engraving turned into five, and the fifth colour, the reduction block, proved to be a real problem. The colour was black, and I inked up the press with Roberts and Carelson Woodcut Black from an unopened can which Henry Morris gave me a few years back. The ink smelled good, and started out printing just fine, but then I began to notice white spots showing through the black. What was this? To make matters worse the ink refused to distribute properly at the ends of the distribution rollers.

A call to Henry Morris confirmed what I suspected, that the black ink was pulling off bits of ink from the previous colours, exposing the paper below. I had been adding Lanco Matte 2000 to the ink of the previous colours in order to reduce their shine. Lanco Matte 2000 is granular in nature, and this, coupled with the heavy anti-setoff spray which I was using, was leaving plenty of material for the black ink to pick off of the surface. Henry's suggestion was to lessen the tack of the ink with a reducer. Ahh.

7 FEBRUARY 2001

Snow began falling at noon. The expectation is for nearly a foot of new snow by morning. The meteorologists are giddy with anticipation.

In the 1930s Ernest Morgan commissioned eight bookplate images each from Rockwell Kent and Lynd Ward. The images they produced are quite good, and I hope to reproduce them in the book. Before he died, Ernest loaned me his sample book containing the images, and I scanned them into the computer. After several fruitless attempts to locate the actual blocks, I'm resigned to ink-jet reproduction. I contacted the Antioch Bookplate Company and they gladly gave permission to reproduce the images. It seems they have no written record of transactions between Ernest, Kent, and Ward, and assume a gentleman's agreement. They haven't used the images in many years.

Besides the bookplate designs, there are two Ward images from his book *God's Man* which had been adapted for bookplates. I decided these too might be useful, and remembered that Barbara Henry of Bowne and Company Stationers in New York had given me the address of Lynd Ward's daughter Robin Ward Savage. I decided to contact her regarding the two images, and to ask if she knew of the whereabouts of the blocks. The reply

A year later I took the block down from the shelf and gave it another try. Again I was able to make very little progress. The pencil sketch I was working from was done in the classic manner – a heavy concentration on the eyes, with detail diminishing to a few suggestive lines as the composition moves away from its centre. My intention was to engrave the block in a similar way, but I was having a devil of a time. Again the block was shelved.

The other day I was sorting through blocks I have on hand to use for the Morgan images, and I came upon the discarded block for Ernest's portrait. I had given up on it completely, and was considering cutting it up to use the uncut portions for smaller blocks in the book. I took a close look at it, and didn't like what I saw. I had nearly finished one eye, and had begun working my way down a cheek. The lines looked forced, and awkward.

Today, three days later, I gaze at the finished block. Ernest looks back with intensity. He looks great. The decision to return to the block was sudden, and seemingly required no thought. I think Ernest's ghost sensed my trouble in finding enough images to engrave for the book, and concluded a sober portrait was better than nothing. The facility with which I was suddenly able to render the lines was miraculous. It was a major breakthrough – a sudden melding of the black line techniques of Leonard Baskin and David Moyer, with a line quality that has slowly been evolving for years around the edges of my own images.

The spirit of Ernest Morgan has eased its grip.

Ernest Morgan is published by Midnight Paper Sales, w11469 Schaniler Lane, Stockholm, Wisconsin 54769 at \$225 and \$475 (deluxe).