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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY

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Special Issue: Fisher Staff Pick their Favourites from the Library's Collections



In honour of the Library's fiftieth anniversary, this issue is dedicated to our collections. Fisher Library Director, Richard Landon, begins with an overview of the wonderful exhibition of highlights from the Library's holdings, which he curated. For those of you who have not seen the exhibition, or the impressive catalogue Richard has written to accompany it, we hope this will whet your appetite for both.

Richard's essay is followed by short pieces by members of the Library's staff describing their favourite items, ranging from individual titles to collections of works, in a variety of media. We hope this list of personal favourites will deepen the reader's appreciation of the range and depth of the Fisher Library's collections.

Barry Walfish, editor



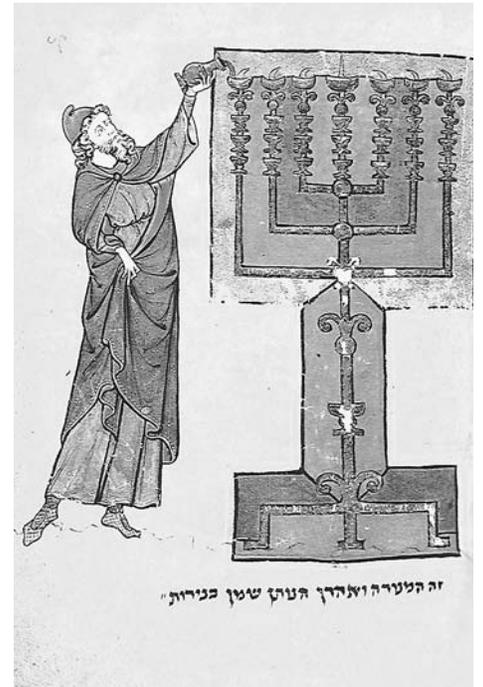
Above and below: more theatre characters created by Derek Walcott.



On the left, Lot and his daughters flee Sodom, while his wife, having looked back is turned into a pillar of salt (her figure is totally white). On the right, the destruction of Sodom. A walled city sits in the jaws of Hell, while fire and brimstone rain down from the clouds above (NFHM).



Above left: Plate from Richard J. Wolfe's *Marbled Paper: Its History, Techniques, and Patterns* (Philadelphia, c1990). Above right: *The menorah from the Tabernacle, with the High Priest Aaron pouring oil into the candles* (NFHM)



Marbled Paper

I'd like to tell you about my favourite book in the Fisher collections. It isn't an old book or a rare book but its value to me is immeasurable. I came to be interested in marbling paper because I couldn't find the traditional marbled papers needed to restore old bindings. Richard J. Wolfe's book *Marbled Paper: Its History, Techniques, and Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, c1990) is that rare combination of information, inspiration, and solid technique. He begins with a detailed history of the origins of marbled paper in the east and traces its migration from Japan through the Middle East and Europe. Wolfe's intricate knowledge of the tools and chemistry of paper marbling

allows one to learn the old techniques that alone can recreate an art that is almost lost to us. In the final section of the book are page after page of full colour plates detailing historical European styles and the composition of the patterns. It is a stunning resource that has enabled me to recreate some of these papers on my own. The Fisher Library's collections hold a wealth of knowledge and inspiration

for bookbinders, conservators, and anyone who enjoys the art of the book.

John Toyonaga

The North French Hebrew Miscellany (NFHM)

British Library manuscript Add. 11639, written in Northern France ca. 1280, is one of the most beautiful Hebrew manuscripts ever created. One of the most

precious possessions of a great library, it is an extraordinary work in every regard. Its 1494 pages include 84 different groups of texts, including sections of the Bible, prayers for all occasions, various legal texts and hundreds of poems, reflecting the tastes of its wealthy medieval patron. The manuscript is extensively illuminated, with numerous full-page miniatures, portraying biblical figures and scenes from biblical stories. Marginal decorations, showing a variety of grotesques, arabesques and various animals and flowers are found throughout the manuscript. The quality of the artwork rivals that of the finest artists of the High Gothic period. Many of the figures portrayed in this manuscript have become almost iconic. Images of Moses, Aaron the High Priest, Kings David and Solomon, to name a few, have become part of the Jewish cultural heritage and are frequently reproduced in books and art calendars. When I was looking for a suitable cover illumination for my book *Esther in Medieval Garb* (Albany, NY, 1993), I turned to this manuscript for its image of Esther standing before Ahasuerus. Yet, very few scholars have been able to hold this manuscript in their hands and examine it in detail.

Recently this manuscript was reproduced in facsimile by Facsimile Editions of London, England, whose publications are distinguished by their meticulous attention to every detail, in an attempt to produce as close a copy of the original as is humanly possible. The quality of this publisher's work is extraordinary. The facsimile is produced on vegetable parchment specially milled to match as closely as possible the texture and thickness of the vellum of the original. The photography was done over several months in order to achieve proofs that were virtually indistinguishable from the original. Gold leaf, both raised and painted, was applied by hand to every copy. Pages were cut to the outline of the original and aged to match. Natural holes in the skins are replicated in the facsimile. The final result, bound in dark calf skin with gold tooling is truly magnificent.

The Fisher Library is fortunate to own this and other works of this publisher, all facsimiles of medieval Hebrew manuscripts (including *The Kennicott Bible*, *The Rothschild Miscellany*, *the Barcelona Haggadah* and *the Parma Psalter*). The price of these fine facsimiles puts them out of the reach of most individuals. I am grateful that the University of Toronto Library has been able to acquire them, and thus afford its patrons the privilege of being able to examine some of the finest manuscripts produced in the Middle Ages.

Barry Walfish



Paul Clifford

"It was a dark and stormy night." So begins Edward George Bulwer-Lytton's tale of a chivalrous highwayman who wants to reform himself. The language is overblown by today's standards, but what attracts me to this novel, the author's fifth, is that its popularity during the nineteenth century is reflected in the Fisher's collections today. It is part of three different collections, in three different formats, thereby exemplifying the Fisher's broad and comprehensive collection policy.

Of course, the Library has the first edition, published in London in 1830 by Colborne and Bentley in the three-volume set known as a triple-decker. The novel is also represented in the Yellowback Collection. According to Chester Topp, there were nine editions of the novel published in this cheap, popular format between 1854 and 1896, years which coincide with the popularity of the Yellowback itself. The Fisher edition is from 1879, published by Routledge.

Finally, "Paul Clifford" as a stage-play is found in the Juvenile Drama/Toy Theatre Collection, published by both John Redington and William George Webb. The Fisher has a nearly complete set of coloured and uncoloured sheets of characters and scenes by each publisher, along with a playbook. Redington's production is in three acts, Webb's is in two. In addition, Redington published an individual actor's portrait showing Mr. [John] Collins in the role of Paul Clifford, possibly intended for tinselling.

The author has long since lost the literary popularity he once enjoyed. However, he has been forever immortalized by having his name attached to an annual Fiction Contest "that challenges entrants to compose the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels." Moreover, readers of the ever-popular comic strip *Peanuts* will recall that Snoopy always begins his attempts to write his best-selling novel with the same words: "It was a dark and stormy night ..."

Mary Garvie Yohn



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