

The background of the entire page is a monochromatic wood engraving. It depicts a natural scene with a waterfall cascading down a rocky ledge into a pool of water. The water's surface is rendered with fine, horizontal lines, creating a sense of movement and reflection. In the background, several trees with bare, intricate branch structures stand against a light sky. The overall style is characteristic of 19th-century fine printmaking, with fine lines and cross-hatching used for shading and texture.

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PRESENT**

**THE ART AND WORK
OF GAYLORD SCHANILEC
WOOD ENGRAVER, FINE PRINTER**

**An Exhibition of Materials from
Special Collections and Rare Books**

**T. R. Anderson Gallery
4th Floor, Wilson Library
July 5 – August 31, 2007**

THE COLLECTIONS

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The Art and Work of Gaylord Schanilec

Introduction by John Randle
proprietor and printer, The Whittington Press

Essay by Betty Bright
independent scholar

Exhibit Curator, Tim Johnson

Exhibit Coordinator/Designer, Darren Terpstra

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Word and Image

I've always been interested by the fact that Gaylord came to printing as a poet. In other words, language has been the priority in his work. Consequently he writes beautifully, directly and imaginatively, and his images seem to flow from this interest in describing the pageant that unfolds before him.

So it is hardly surprising that the unusual series of books he has produced over the years show a uniquely satisfying blend of word and image. He would have made a fine journalist. His quiet Midwestern manner encourages others to reveal themselves, and his books can be seen as a series of encounters with those he has met along the way.

Speaking of his book *Farmers*, he wrote in our annual *Matrix* in 1990, "The interviews were recorded on tape and then transcribed verbatim. Great care was taken to write down every utterance as phonetically accurately as possible. I wanted to present the farmers' words without any interpretation on my part. I sent them each a copy of their interview in this raw state, and the responses ranged from 'this is OK with me' to 'I understand you're wanting to be accurate, but couldn't you do it in such a way that it made me sound less like an idiot?'"

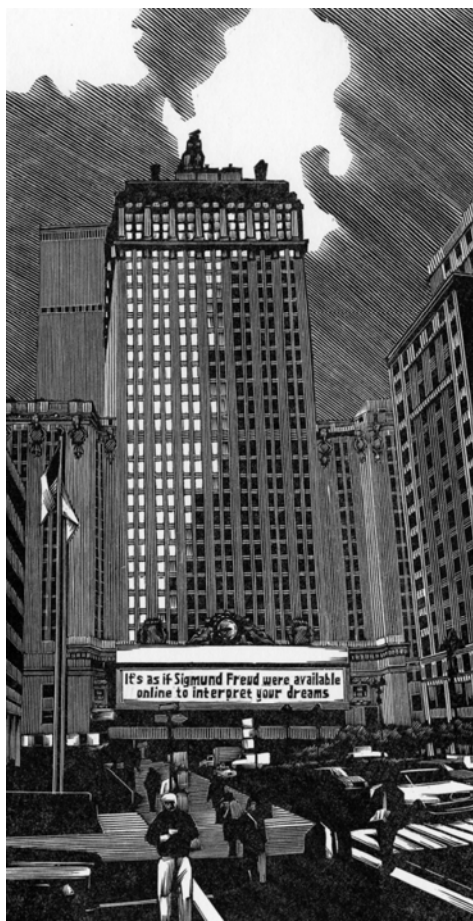
His well-disguised powers of observation stand him in good stead when he begins to add the images to the page. At the end of the same article he wrote, "With each book I do, my knowledge and familiarity with letterpress printing and multi-colour wood-engraving increases. I set up specific challenges at the beginning of a project. In *Farmers* I worked larger and paid more attention to one layer of colour affecting another.... I would like to move the text into the image, with the language absolutely raw."

His most satisfactory books are organic in the sense that they have grown naturally from his own enthusiasms and experiences. He has no typographical hang-ups, words are for reading, not for making typographical statements. These priorities are refreshing in a world that sometimes focuses so intently on word spacing that it overlooks their meaning. His typography is clean and pure, a perfect backdrop for the coloured wood-engravings he has made his special interest.

We all have much to learn from the output of this modest and apparently languid, yet surprisingly physical man, who built himself a beautifully

equipped shop not far from the Mississippi, from which he continues to turn out some of the most finely executed books of the last three decades. Which comes first, the word or the image? In many printers' work the answer is only too obvious, one or the other is obviously lacking. In Gaylord's case the jury is still out, the verdict is too close to call, and long may it remain so.

John Randle



Page by Page: the Art of Gaylord Schanilec

Gaylord Schanilec has been inviting us into his world for three decades, through his poetry (first published in *Mainstreeter* journal in 1973), and through his wood engravings, which appeared in small press publications beginning in 1978. Schanilec joined image with text with the founding of Midnight Paper Sales Press in 1979, fed by paper cadged from the discarded off-cuts of Anchor Paper Company in Saint Paul, Minnesota. His books and broadsides persuade us of the integrity and longevity of the book form.

In Schanilec's books, the history of fine printing is embodied, expanded, and renewed. The content of his books resonates from a sense of place informed by the elevation of the everyday. One of Schanilec's first books, *High Bridge* (1987), celebrates the historic Saint Paul High Bridge, after a near-century of its linking the city from one bank of the Mississippi River to the other. In documenting the bridge before it was demolished to make way for a new structure, Schanilec's wood engravings accompany newspaper accounts (edited by Clayton Schanilec) that were published to mark the bridge's inauguration. They appear here in a Plantin text type and a boxy Onix titling evocative of that era. The news reports carry a language infused with wonder for the new bridge, even as those accounts collide with the reader's contemplation of the bridge in its final moments.

To create the wood engravings, Schanilec invested traditional fine press printing and colored wood engraving, with the contemporary character of the photographic process that served as the source material for his illustrations. He circled the bridge, camera in hand, hunting an angle, visually poking among the girders below, and ultimately capturing the bridge's collapse on film. He then transformed that evidence into wood engravings built from five to seven colors, each color a separate run through the press.

With Schanilec's move from Saint Paul to the rural idyll of Stockholm, Wisconsin in 1987, his notion of place grew intensely personal. *Farmers* (1989), is Schanilec's paeon to life in a rural community. The book consists of interviews with four families (edited by Clayton Schanilec), that reflect on the realities of farming as the twentieth century winds down. Schanilec printed the interviews in Eric Gills's elegant Joanna type, with each conversation preceded by an expansive two-panel colored wood engraving. The airy vistas of land and sky stretch across the page

opening, like an invitation to breathe, in sharp contrast to the graphic steel struts that circumscribe the page in *High Bridge*.

High Bridge and *Farmers* demonstrate that, from the founding of the press, a sense of voice often drives the content in Schanilec's books. This is due in part to Schanilec's beginnings as a poet, a crafter of language, which he combines with an artistic sensibility. Schanilec demonstrates that a book's voice need not originate solely in poetry or fiction, but rather, voice can emerge by any means to craft a narrative. He has found voice in news stories culled from a past century, and through interviews with his rural neighbors from the present. Here is a key to the variety and integrity of Schanilec's books: at their heart is a conceptual strategy that responds to an idea, then tells that story however it must be told, informed by Schanilec's unerring tracking of each book's expressive lodestar.

Schanilec's gift for developing voice, and his evocation of place, are two key ingredients in his memorable books. More than any other wood engraver at present, Schanilec makes his books out of his own life even as he honors it, and in so doing he invests the ordinary with a recognition of a larger whole, not in a clichéd manner, but in the tradition of the visionary. This is not a visionary sitting in meditation on a mountaintop; this is a visionary absolutely grounded in the here and now. It is about focus, and about sight. Schanilec takes scenes that are so recognizable as to be invisible to us (a combine working a field, the iron struts of a bridge), then with the eye and heart of an artist, he looks, and sees, and in so doing, teaches us again to see. We see as clearly as in the lines of his wood engravings, their photographic translation revealing to us the essentials.

Indeed, Schanilec has consistently widened the varieties of voice associated with fine printing, to create a near-chorus that resounds through his books. In 2003, he printed *Ink on the Elbow*, perhaps the first fine press book of email correspondence. The book carries a selection of exchanges between Schanilec and his friend of thirteen years, Wales printer David Esselmont, who contributed fourteen color linocuts of his own to the book. The decidedly scholarly tone sounds yet another note in Schanilec's luminous *Mayflies of the Driftless Region*, which was honored with the Carl Herzog Award, the most prestigious recognition for fine printing in the United States. Here is focus of a different sort. The text of *Mayflies* consists of commentary by entomologist Clarke Garry, on the identification of the thirteen species of mayflies collected by Schanilec from Wisconsin streams. Paired with the text are engravings of the

mayflies that Schanilec rendered with the aid of a microscope. The colors are vibrant, the effect other-worldly, as the reader encounters a species, especially one so tiny, now isolated and magnified. Once enlarged, Schanilec presents the resulting images frontally. The mayflies shift back and forth into decorative patterns only distantly related to their once-living state, yet enchanting in their awkward beauty.

Schanilec's books are timeless in that they represent the past, present and future of the fine press book. Past, because of Schanilec's ability to create an ideal book that can quench a bibliophile's thirst for handling, reading, and living with fine press books. Schanilec's books also live in the present; in fact, his books represent the best of fine printing today. Letterpress printers continue to make books here and abroad, in designs attuned to the character of type, the demands and expressive possibilities of materials, and the structural requirements of a book.

Schanilec's books rise above the compelling works of many of his contemporaries, however, in that his subjects encompass his own life, yet also touch us with a universal appeal. So often their content is formed out of the stuff of this printer's life in the bucolic setting of his house and studio—as in his present project, *Sylva: Farm 590*, a book inspired by the trees that populate the twenty acres that surround Midnight Paper Sales Press.

The best artists make us care about something we hadn't cared about before, say, the fate of the family farm, or a demolished bridge as a metaphor for a growing city's gathering force a hundred years distant, or, even, the incongruous beauty of the many varieties of the mayfly. Reading these books, absorbing their stories, you feel you can walk the fields with Schanilec, grumble with him over a recalcitrant press, cast a line for fish, and glory with him in the overarching life of a tree. These are not dated or irrelevant activities; in truth, Gaylord Schanilec's books live in the future, because they remind us that, as our lives trip forward, and as the media streams around us converge into a flood, we must turn to such books for the gift of clarity of mind and spirit gained from them, page by page.

Betty Bright

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ITEMS ON DISPLAY

BACK WALL – LEFT CASE

Phillips, Jayne Anne. *How Mickey Made It : short story / eight illustrations*, Gaylord Schanilec. St. Paul : Bookslinger Editions, 1981.

LaVoie, Steven P. *Erosion Surface : poem / drawing* by Gaylord Shanilec. West Branch, Iowa : Coffee House Press, c1984.

Updike, John. *More Stately Mansions : a story / wood engraving* by Gaylord Schanilec. Jackson, Miss. : Published by Nouveau Press for the Mississippi Civil Liberties Union, 1987. Minneapolis : Coffee House Press.



Foss, Phillip. *Somata : poetry* / illustrations by Gaylord Schanilec. Saint Paul, Minn. : Printed and published by The Bieler Press, c1982.

HAMPL, Patricia. *Resort : a poem* / St. Paul, Minn. : Bookslinger Editions, 1982.

Carver, Raymond. *My Father's Life* / frontispiece wood engraving by Gaylord Schanilec. Derry, N.H. : Babcock & Koontz, c1986. Minneapolis : Minnesota Center for Book Arts.

Abbott, Keith, 1944- *Harum Scarum : short stories* / illustrations by Gaylord Schanilec. Saint Paul : Coffee House Press : Distributed by Bookslinger, c1984.

BACK WALL – CENTER CASE

Whitman, Walt. *Wrenching Times : poems from Drum-taps* / selected by M. Wynn Thomas ; wood engravings by Gaylord Schanilec. Newton, Powys, Wales : Gwasg Gregynog, 1991.

Mura, David. *The Natives*. Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1993.

Farmers. Schanilec, Gaylord.; Miller, Elaine.; Schanilec, Herman., and others. Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales Press, 1989.

Mohawk Paper Mills

Progressive Prints for *Farmers*. Schanilec, Gaylord.; Miller, Elaine.; Schanilec, Herman., and others. Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales Press, 1989.



BACK WALL – RIGHT CASE

Logue, Mary. *A House in the Country* / with wood engravings by Gaylord Schanilec. Minneapolis : Midnight Paper Sales, 1994.

Morris, Henry. *My Colorful Career* / Newtown, Pennsylvania: Bird & Bull Press, 1996.

Holm, Bill. *Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death* / with visual interpretations by Barbara Tetenbaum ... [et al.]. Minneapolis : Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1997.

Hautman, Pete, 1952- *Bad Beat : With Joe Crow's Rules for Poker and Life* / Pete Hautman ; & wood engravings by Gaylord Schanilec. Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales, 1998.

TALL CASE – BACK

Hungry Midnight 1 / Gary Snyder [et al.] ; with wood engravings by Gaylord Schanilec. Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales Press, 1996.

TALL CASE – FRONT

Emerson G. Wulling : *Printer for Pleasure*. Midnight Paper Sales, c2000.

Morgan, Ernest. *Ernest Morgan : Printer of Principle*. Midnight Paper Sales Press, 2001.

The background of the page is a grayscale illustration of a river scene. On the left, there are several trees with bare branches. In the center, a river flows, with a small bird in flight above it. On the right, more trees are visible. The overall style is that of a woodcut or engraving.

CUBE CASE

Arey, Richard Fred. *Waterfalls of the Mississippi : the story of eight waterfalls found in Saint Paul & Minneapolis : descendants of the late, great River Warren Falls, and the only waterfalls along the entire Mississippi River / conceived & written by Richard Fred Arey ; with color wood engravings by Gaylord Schanilec.* Saint Paul, Minn. : Minnesota Outdoors Press, 1998.

Auchincloss, Kenneth. *New York Revisited / engravings by Gaylord Schanilec.* New York : Grolier Club, 2002.

SMALL PEDESTAL CASE

Heynen, Jim. *Old Swayback /* Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales, 2006.

Schanilec, Clayton. *The Intruder /* Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales, c2004.

Schanilec, Gaylord. *Mayflies of the Driftless Region : wood engravings / with identifications by Clarke Garry.* Stockholm, Wis. : Midnight Paper Sales, 2005.

Pichaske, David R. *Rooted : Seven Midwest Writers of Place / foreword by Wayne Franklin.* Iowa City : University of Iowa Press, c2006.