

MAHLON BLAINE
Illustrations and Brief Biography
from *erbzine.com*



1894~1969

"Blaine's personal life was and remains mostly a mystery, because he wanted it that way."

Gershon Legman in his *The Art of Mahlon Blaine*

Most of what is known about Mahlon Blaine is presented in the book, *The Art of Mahlon Blaine* (Peregrine 1982) by Gershon Legman with an introduction by Robert Arrington and bibliography by Roland Trenary. Even much of the biographical information in this book by Blaine's longtime friend is either questioned or countered in the book's introduction by Robert Arrington.



Keeping this in mind, the following events in Blaine's life stand out: Mahlon Blaine was born in California in 1894. He served in World War I and Legman says that he had a metal plate in his head and shrapnel wounds on his wrist from injuries he suffered. He only had one eye the result of an accident "at an early age while chopping wood for his father."

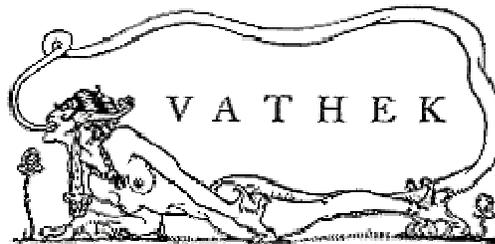
He is supposed to have designed sets for Hollywood films in the twenties. He told Legman that he designed the 1925 film, *The Thief of Bagdad*, but Arrington says that his name doesn't appear in any of the published credits. He also claimed to have worked on Howard Hawks' *Scarface*.

The earliest work listed in Roland Trenary's *The Art of Mahlon Blaine* bibliography is the rather erotic *Girdle of Chastity* that appeared in Paris in 1923. In 1926 he produced illustrations for *Limehouse Nights* - a collection of sordid tales centered around the Oriental community of London's Limehouse district, and a Howard Pease seafaring potboiler titled *The Tattooed Man*. The prestigious literary magazine, *The Golden Book Magazine*, featured Blaine art on a regular basis in 1930, often under covers by Artzybasheff, and even once as accompaniment to a poem by Lord Dunsany.



His stylistic black drawings, often highlighted and textured with crosshatches of pure white, were novel and unique. They added a visual texture to the books and magazine in which they appeared. Blaine was primarily self-taught as an artist (if we can believe him) and credited the "museums of the world" as his classrooms.

It was in William Beckford's *Vathek* (1928) followed by Hanns Ewers' *Alraune* (1929), and in his own *Venus Sardonicus Portfolio* (1929) that his more erotic side appeared. Blaine's women could be beautiful and sensuous, but they were most often satanic and dangerous. Lots of cloven-hooved women with sinuous tails in dominating



situations made the portfolio as much a depiction of a psyche as of erotica.

As the Depression deepened, Blaine tried to return to the more commercial children's book market where he found little success. His work through much of the '30s, however, was work produced on demand for a variety of publishers and patrons. In 1941, using the pseudonym G. Christopher Hudson, he illustrated *The Maniac. A Realist Study of Madness from the Maniac's Point of View* - rather intriguing and often disturbing piece of work. At some point during the 1940s he is supposed to have moved to Arizona where he worked as art editor of *Arizona Highways* magazine during the war years. For many years most of his work was done while living in dives and scrounging food and clothing from friends. Blaine lived in California during the late 1950s and returned to New York in the early 1960s where he produced the [ERB Canaveral Press illustrations](#) while living above the bookshop of the publishers. His bohemian lifestyle was such that no one really knows when he died but it was probably around 1970.

Blaine's work throughout his long career was prodigious and eclectic with published appearances in over 150 books and magazines. Sadly, he has received little acclaim among critics or collectors, probably because of the mildly erotic nature of some of his work, and much of his art has been lost.