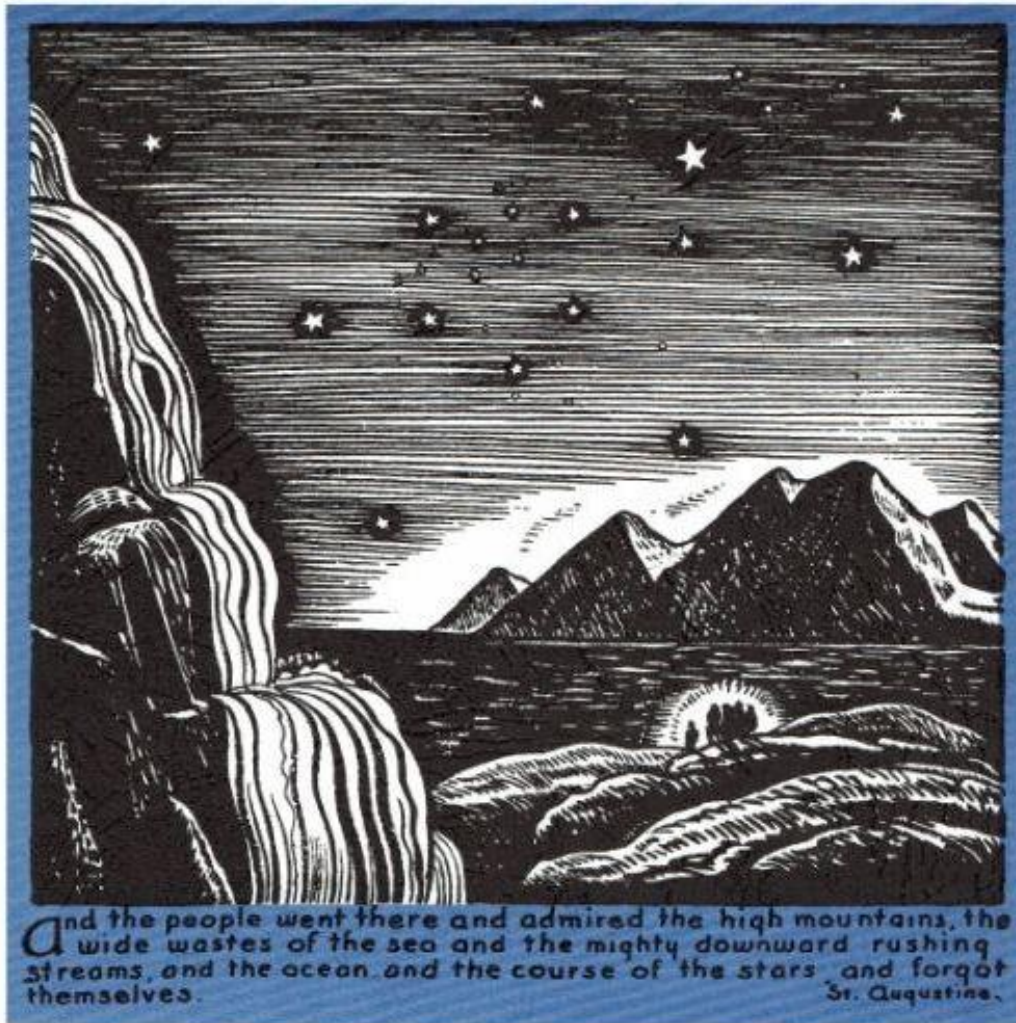
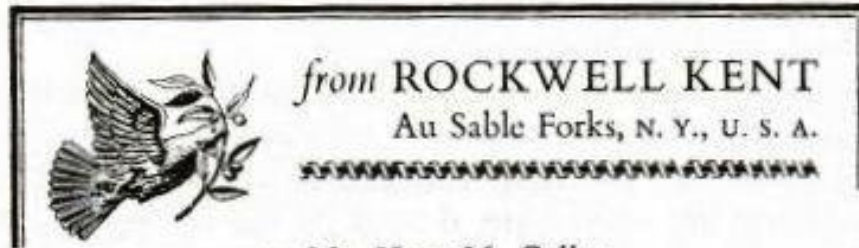


American *AS*  
*B&D* Society of  
BOOKPLATE COLLECTORS AND DESIGNERS



BICENTENNIAL  
YEAR BOOK  
1976

*Correspondence Exchanged in the Designing of a Bookplate*



to Mr. Harry M. Geller

***Background***

YEAR BOOK 1969/70, published in 1972, contained an article about Rockwell Kent; a Kent bookplate unrelated to the article was used as an illustration. Only the initials HMG identified the plate. Two years later when YEAR BOOK 1973/74 was published, the owner of the plate was identified as composer Harry M. Geller, and hope expressed that a future issue would contain the correspondence written by artist Rockwell Kent in the course of designing the Geller ex libris. That hope has now been realized.

It is uncertain whether or not Harry Geller's side of the correspondence still exists; he kept no carbons. However, Harry's letter to Audrey Arellanes sets the background scene and Kent's letters carry the narrative to conclusion.

***About Harry Geller***

Born in Toronto, Canada, at the age of ten Geller moved to Los Angeles. He was a child prodigy who gave violin concerts from the age of seven, and at Roosevelt High School he served as drum major. His interest turned to composition by the time he enrolled at Compton Junior College and continued with graduate courses under Arne Oldberg at Northwestern University.

By the 1930s his musical activities ranged from jazz trumpeter to being arranger and instrumentalist for the Francho & Marco stage show. Geller was with the Benny Goodman band during its epoch-making 1936 season. Two years later he joined the Artie Shaw band and went with it to New York where he also studied with Joseph Schillinger, who had a mathematical approach to composition. This led Geller to write pieces

for the electronic musical devices then available. When the Shaw group disbanded, Geller returned to the West Coast where CBS gave him his own show, *Mood for Moderns*.

During WWII Geller served in Armed Forces Radio as an arranger-composer under Meredith Willson. After the war, he continued his studies in composition and conducting. Gradually he became involved in the record industry and worked with three of the major companies. While with Mercury he produced fifteen Gold Singles in one year. He spent five years with the Ford Motor Company scoring the music and conducting the orchestra and chorus on the *Tennessee Ernie Ford Show*. By the 1960s Harry Geller was free-lancing with assignments to compose and conduct for virtually every dramatic and comedy show originating in Hollywood for both the big and little screens. This productive pace continues now, making Harry Geller one of Hollywood's busiest TV conductor-composers. (Our thanks go to Arnold Shaw, whose article in *BMI The Many Worlds of Music*, March 1971, furnished the biographical details for our sketch on Harry Geller.)



Sketch No. 5 referred  
to in letter of  
November 28, 1961  
on page 44.

Dear Mr. Arellanes:

At long last! Here you will find copies of a series of letters between Kent and myself. I hope they will be of use to you. I am also enclosing the completed bookplate.

If memory doesn't fail me, I think it was in the early thirties that I first read N. by E. It left a deep impression and I was thoroly taken by Kent's content and style. So much so, in fact, that I started a collection of all his published material - a difficult thing to do at that time on the west coast - nevertheless - I was able to get a good start and determined that some day I would have my own bookplate and/or a painting by him.

As you can see by the letters, it was thirty years before I personally contacted Mr. Kent.

My collection had grown and I became a close friend of mutual acquaintances, i.e. Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, etc.

I have a son, Stephen, who was attending Dartmouth College in Hanover N.H. in 1960. It occured to me that Ausable Forks, Kent's home, was not too far from there - at least, closer than Southern Calif. so I determined to

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try and reach Kent on my next trip to Dartmouth. As you can see, I first called him and asked if he was still doing bookplates. He was more than friendly and said that he would be happy to make one for me and further that his price was still the same - \$200 - can you believe that! I was overwhelmed and, of course, delighted to realize that an old ambition would be realized.

So then, that began a series of letters and phone calls between us.

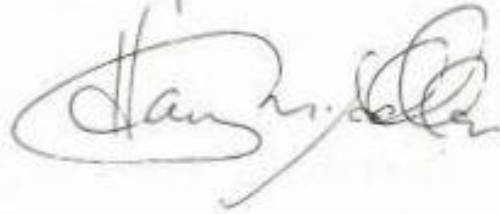
I will always regret that I was never able to visit with him - but as you can see from the enclosed material - I became involved in a traumatic divorce - it was necessary for me to move several times - I was working like a madman at 20th Century Fox as a composer-conductor, and, our schedules never did coincide and make it possible for me to get away when he was home. At any rate, my son graduated and is now living in Rome as an extremely successful screen-writer, (Slaughterhouse Five, Valachi Papers, etc) and I continue here in the sausage-mill as a composer and conductor.

Please forgive the personal off-ramps but as you know, I have just got back from hospital and I don't think my brain is functioning up to par yet.

3

If you have any questions, please call.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Henry Miller".

Self-portrait from *Wilderness*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1920, Knickerbocker Press.



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

June 5, 1961

Dear Mr. Geller:

What a delight to get such a letter as you have written me! We only wish that you had come to see us while you were in our neighborhood. We could have celebrated a new friendship.

You certainly had no need to send me your check. If you don't mind, I will keep it undeposited until I have earned it--though my interest in making the design for you doesn't need the stimulation of this bait. Your own ideas about your bookplate kindle my enthusiasm to do it.

We are hoping that your visit to Dartmouth was not to attend your son's graduation and that his continued attendance there will draw you to our neighborhood for other visits--and that next time you will come to see us.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

Mr. Harry M. Geller  
16727 Bosque Drive  
Encino, California



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

July 10, 1961

Dear Mr. Geller:

I feel less guilty than I might have felt at receiving your letter because I had that very day--yesterday--been working on some book-plate designs for you. Forgive me for being so slow about it, but it is hard for me to undertake any work indoors in the summer time. But I will be sending you some sketches shortly--not waiting, as it might well have appeared I was, until you should come East again and visit us.

Your coming East is a long way off, but we are delighted at the prospect of seeing you in '62--if, indeed, we are still in America in June.

It is most heartening to know that Kenneth Patchen knows and respects my work. Please convey my greeting to him, and to your wife.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

Mr. Henry M. Geller  
16727 Bosque Drive  
Encino, California





AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

October 7, 1961

Dear Mr. Geller:

Here at last are sketches for your bookplate--five of them, each numbered for your convenience and my understanding when you reply to me about them.

You will note--I fear regretfully--that I have only used the baton once. It seemed to me, since my ideas were fairly realistic, that it was perhaps a little incongruous to have a figure waving a baton on a mountain top--as though, like God, he was directing the Universe. But that's for you to say.

Please be as critical as you please about the designs I have sent you, for a bookplate is too personal a matter not to be as nearly as possible what its owner would have it be.

I have put neither your name nor initials on any of them, but that is easily done later--either as chiselled on the stone, should there be room, or lettered in white on the border of the second color that I would use in the design.

Take your time about returning the sketches to me, for we are having such splendid weather that I will be mostly out of doors, and I will presently be starting for two weeks painting in Virginia.

I know that I have been a dreadfully long time in sending you these sketches and can only hope you will not be too provoked at me.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

November 14, 1961

Dear Mr. Geller:

On October 7th. I sent you at last four sketches for your bookplate. Not having heard from you about them, I am beginning to be a bit worried as to whether or not you ever received them. I am, moreover, impatient to complete the design, for the gloomy November weather we are at present "enjoying" makes indoor work virtually mandatory.

Do please let me hear from you. Meantime, I am taking the liberty of cashing your check--which, as you know, we have been impounding.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

Mr. Harry M. Geller  
16727 Bosque Drive  
Encino, California



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

November 28, 1961

Mr. Harry Geller  
16727 Bosque Drive  
Encino, California

Dear Mr. Geller:

When the drawings and your letter came I cried out inwardly "Thank God," for not getting an acknowledgement of them I had begun to fear that you were ill, or worse.

I am convinced from what you have written me that drawing No. 5 is the one that should be made your bookplate. But, if you don't mind, I think I will put it more decidedly in the category of mythology by divesting it, or him, of the last vestige of present day reality--his pants--and make him, if you please, Apollo. A baton is actually more appropriate to Apollo than the traditional lyre.

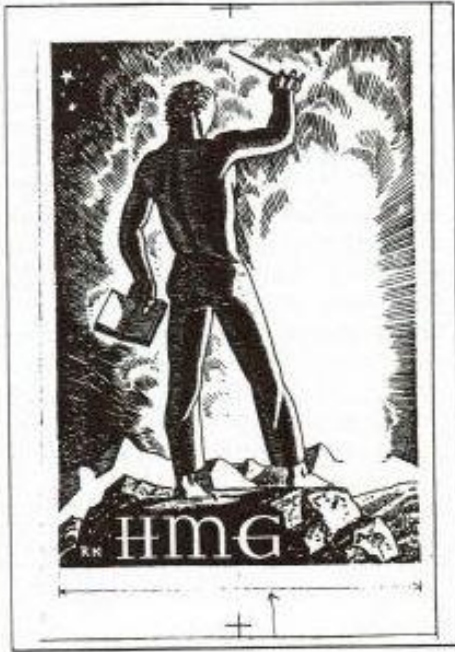
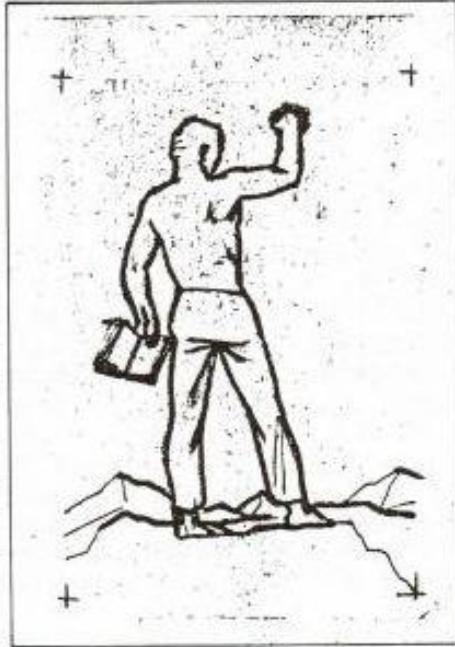
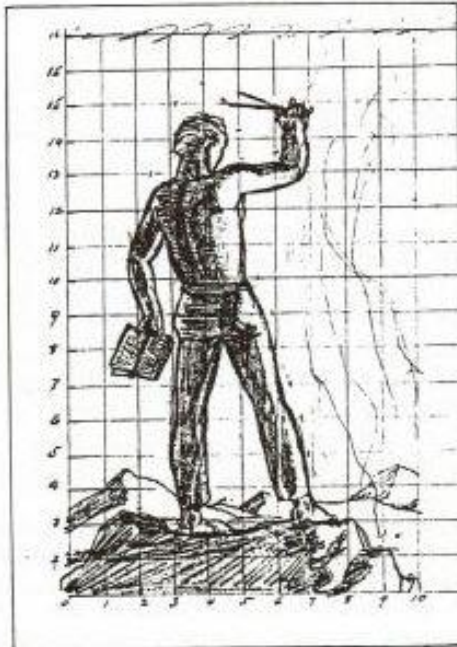
I will get at the bookplate soon, I hope, send you the finished drawing and then, when you return it, either send it to my engraver in the East or to one of your fine California printers, like Ward Ritchie, of Los Angeles.

Now that your letter assures me that you are well, I will only wish that you may keep so and enjoy a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

RK/sj



*Illustration shown 43% of actual size.*

ROCKWELL KENT  
AU SABLE FORKS, N. Y.

January 22, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

At last--thanks in large part to the abominable weather--I am sending you the finished drawing for the bookplate. Though I send the drawing for the second color (gray) it will doubtless be meaningless to you, being a negative--i.e. the black in the drawing will appear as white in the finished plate.

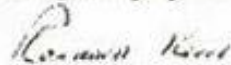
I chose to use just your initials, for "Harry Geller" is too short a name to extend to the full width of the bookplate without making the letters too large to look well. Incidentally, the initials will appear as gray on their black background.

If after considering the drawings you will return them to me I will send them straight to my printer, asking him to send me the plates for possible revision by hand tooling before the design is printed.

You should tell me how large you would like the finished over all design to be (I would suggest 2 1/2" to 2 3/4"), and how many you would like printed. Get plenty, for quantity makes little difference once the design is on the press. Sometimes people want bookplates of two size--for big books and for little ones. Maybe you would also like two sizes. They would cost little more than the additional plates.

You have been a most indulgent client, and I am most appreciative of your tolerance of my procrastination.

Faithfully yours,



Rockwell Kent

P. S. I am also sending the original sketch. Please keep it.

R. K.



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

February 19, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

First of all, allow me to express my sympathy for your present domestic difficulties. At the very least they can be distracting, and at the most heartbreaking. And they, coupled with the disaster of a flooded studio is certainly abundant reason for delay about the matter of labels to stick in books.

About the bookplates, I note with some surprise that you would like 500 as large as the original drawing; though aside from the little added trouble of covering them with paste and sticking them in my only objection would be their unconventionality. But of course if you intend them for large music scores they would be entirely appropriate.

The smaller size is about average--though for the paper books that are now available we use a bookplate of about the size of the peace stamp on this letter.

I will send the drawings promptly to my printer, asking him to go ahead with the plates and meanwhile to send me the cost for various quantities of the bookplate. You could get several times the number you have ordered of each at very little extra cost, for the main cost is the making of the copper plates and then putting them on the press--involving, as that does, trial printings and a lot of what is known as "make-ready," which consists mainly of putting little underlays of tissue to give the darker portions greater pressure than the thin lines. Quite a lot of work goes into making what is called good printing instead of just run-of-the mill stuff.

When I get the prices I will send them to you--probably with a suggestion that you order more than you have now specified.

I would love to have you give your son a picture of mine, but unhappily we don't expect to be here in June, having booked sailings for abroad for the middle of May. To make it good news that I probably won't be here to sell you a painting, I must tell you that my prices run from one to three thousand dollars. But though this may well put the buying of a painting out of your mind, we would love to see you and hope that if for any reason we don't get away in May you will come.

Faithfully yours,



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

March 13, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

I have just received the proofs and plates of your bookplate. I am enclosing a proof of the smaller size. You will note that the gray is printed on a sheet of tissue and laid on the black proof so as to give very much the effect of the final printed work. I hope you like it.

I quote from the printer's (A. Colish) letter about the prices of printing:

"The cost for engravings is \$84.30. The cost for paper stock, printing, etc. in two colors will be as follows: beginning with the first quantity of 500 of each, the cost will be \$70.50, to which you have to add your cost of \$84.30 for plates, making your total cost for the first 500 of each of \$154.80. Additional quantity of 500 (printed at the same time) of each (2 lots) will be \$12.50. Using this basis of cost, Mr. Geller can determine the quantity he desires."

On the basis of these prices, won't you let me know again just how many of each size you would like? And do rush the order right back to me. I would like to get the work wound up and the finished bookplates delivered to you.

As I have written you, we shall be sailing for Europe in May, my only disappointment being that we shall not see you here in June.

May all go well with you.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

Mr. H. M. Geller  
16727 Bosque Drive  
Encino, California



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

March 20, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

I get the impression from your letter that it was written before the proof arrived. I am very sorry for that carelessness on our part, but I am myself so pleased with the appearance of the proof as to believe that you too must have liked it.

I am writing to Colish today, sending him the slightly corrected copper plates, and ordering 2,000 of each size. These are to be sent directly to you. The bill, made out to you, will then be sent to me for my OK. I will forward it straight on to you.

I do wish that in the course of our correspondence we had been able to meet, and I regret that we shall be absent from home when you come East again. It would have been the greatest pleasure to entertain you.

I hope that your immediate troubles will soon straighten out and that all goes well with you again.

Faithfully yours,

Rockwell Kent

RK/sj





AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

April 14, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

I have just received some specimens of the finished bookplates from the printer, together with his bill, made out to you. I am OK-ing that bill and you will find it enclosed. Mr. Colish writes me that the finished bookplates have been mailed to you. I am sure that, since you liked the drawing and the proofs you will be delighted with the finished product. It is beautifully done.

I must tell you again how much we regret not being at home for a visit from you this summer. But, since you are to be at Dartmouth, just across the river from Vermont, you might like to meet the musical members of my family who live there. In Middlebury lives my son-in-law, Alan Carter, and his wife, my daughter, Barbara. He is Professor of music at Middlebury College and was the originator, and is still the conductor and guiding spirit of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. And in Burlington lives his orchestra's assistant concert master, my lovely daughter, Kathleen. We would certainly have had her here to meet you, for she is quite a charmer. Her name is Mrs. Kathleen Finney. I will write Carter that he may expect to hear from you.

We leave on May 15th. But do remember us and, if you ever have an opportunity, come and see us.

Faithfully yours,

*Rowland Kent*

Mr. Harry M. Geller  
1560 N. Laurel Avenue, #218  
Los Angeles 46, California



AUSABLE FORKS  
NEW YORK

April 24, 1962

Dear Mr. Geller:

It's a frantically busy man who is writing you at the moment, for we are in a jam to get our many obligations attended to before we leave in May.

I am very sorry that we are not going to see you this summer--or at least until after our return in late August if you happen then to be in the East. But you will doubtless get to see some of the family--and that, as they say in kids' games, is getting warm.

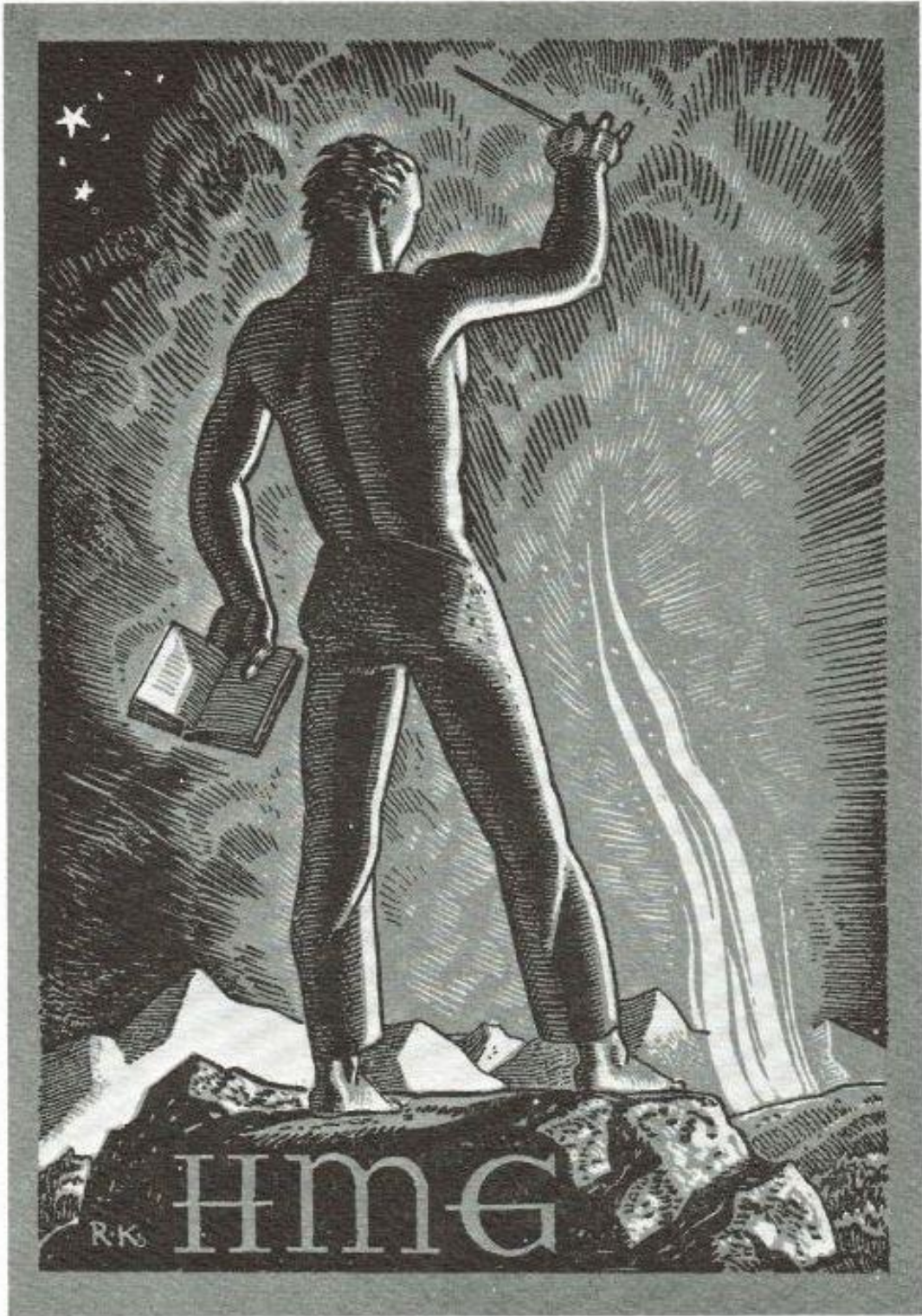
My chief preoccupation at the moment is finishing a book of mine due for publication in October. I will see that you get advance notice of its publication.

I have alerted my daughters and son-in-law to your possibly getting in touch with them.

I am delighted that you like the bookplates and happy at the prospect of your eventually coming here. May all go well with you.

Faithfully yours,

*Rockwell Kent*



Enlargement of the finished bookplate