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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Chicago Art Institute Alumnus Dalton Stevens Covers a Criminal Chloroforming



The administration of ether and of chloroform were associated with anesthetic morbidity and mortality severe enough to inspire the search for alternative inhalational anesthetics. Ethylene and then cyclopropane were added to the anesthetic armamentarium in the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s, respectively. However, another driving force behind abandoning chloroform was the anesthetic's criminal use in assaults, kidnappings, and murders, many of which were sensationalized in news reports and pulp fiction during the first half of the twentieth century. One classically trained artist who turned to illustrating covers of popular "pulp" magazines was Virginia native E. Dalton Stevens (1878 to 1939). After attending the Art Institute of Chicago, Stevens moved to New York and eventually to New Jersey. He illustrated covers, particularly for adventure and detective magazines. Plagued by gradually worsening hearing and vision, Stevens managed to compose the cover image (above) of a criminal chloroforming. Despondent over his blindness, the 61-yr-old artist finally committed suicide in 1939, not by (chloro-) rag but by bullet. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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