USE BOOKS AS BEES
USE FLOWERS
Margaret Mead: "The one thing you really ought to be allowed to do is choose your ancestors."

James Baldwin: "Because finally, in a sense you do, don't you?"
[Napoleon Bonaparte]. Pen Sketches of Napoleon I. Italy, circa 1825. Oblong album, measuring 10.5 × 8 inches. Later nineteenth-century morocco gilt. Thirty-nine mounted pen-and-ink and wash drawings, measuring 4 × 6 inches each. $20,000.

Album of dynamic original drawings chronicling the Napoleonic era, with an emphasis on the Italian campaigns. Events depicted include sieges and battles (Mantua, Lodi, Trebbia, Marengo); the signing of treaties (Campo Formio, Tolentino); the deaths of generals (Duhpohot, Joubert); and the royalist attempt to assassinate Napoleon with a “macchina infernale.” Later scenes include the battles of Wagram, Ligny, and Waterloo, and Napoleon’s exile to St. Helena. The drawings vary in their level of finish: some precise and detailed, others with a more fluid line, but all united by a shared style and graphic weight.

An optimistic early bookseller’s note identifies the drawings as the work of Jacques-Louis David, which is certainly not true, but the unknown Italian artist was clearly inspired by the neoclassical French history painters. The drawings were mounted in an album by Andersen, a Roman bindery active in the 1870s and 1880s, known for producing luxury gift books for the tourist trade. Interestingly, the album’s original owner (presumably the “W.F.H.” of the binding’s monogram) did not arrange the scenes chronologically. Rather than follow a historical narrative, the reader leaps from battlefield to town square, dockside to council chamber, flashing back and forward in time, with the iconic figure of Napoleon at the center. A compelling example of historical world-building, in both the early and late nineteenth century.

First and only edition of the very scarce first book by African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, presented by his mother to the principal of The Preparatory High School for Colored Youth in Washington, D.C., upon its re-dedication as Dunbar High School in 1917.

The ambitious son of former slaves, Dunbar published Oak and Ivy at his own expense at the age of 21, selling copies of the volume to passengers in the elevator he operated in downtown Dayton, Ohio. His efforts eventually attracted the attention of Frederick Douglass, who hired him to work the Haitian Pavilion at the Chicago World’s Fair, and William Dean Howells, who reviewed Dunbar’s second collection in Harper’s Weekly, gaining him a national readership.

Dunbar became the first African-American poet to make a living as a writer, notable for working in two different registers. The poems he called his “majors” employ conventional English diction and meter, as in “Ode to Ethiopia”: “Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul; / Thy name is writ on Glory’s scroll / In characters of fire.” Those poems he termed “minors” are written in a lyrical African-American dialect: “It’s hot today. The bees is buzzin’ / Kinder don’t-keer-like aroun.” Although Dunbar died young of tuberculosis in 1906, his work paved the way for the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, inspiring Langston Hughes, among others.

The 1917 renaming of Washington, D.C.’s Preparatory High School for Colored Youth in Dunbar’s honor testifies to his lasting influence. The dedication ceremonies took place over the course of a week, and Matilda Jane Dunbar, his mother, was honored by the students and faculty on the first day. Born into slavery in Kentucky, she moved to Dayton after the Civil War and worked as a laundress while raising her children. Although she was not formally educated, Matilda taught her son to read when he was very young, shared the memories of plantation life that inspired many of the poems, and supported him emotionally and financially throughout his life. He dedicated Oak and Ivy to “My Mother, who has ever been my guide, teacher, and inspiration.” BAL 4916; Blockson 6021. A moving association copy of Dunbar’s scarce and fragile first book.

Scarce example of one of the most influential artists' books of the twenty-first century, a collaboration between artist Jen Bervin and scholar Marta Werner. Through a series of vividly printed fragments, the authors explore Emily Dickinson's late turn to composing on scrap paper and envelopes, showing how these “sudden collages” launch Dickinson's formal experimentation into a third dimension. Reproducing almost fifty surviving “envelope poems” in facsimile, Bervin and Werner illuminate aspects of Dickinson's real-time writing practice previously lost to view, new taxonomies of the ephemeral and the material. The Gorgeous Nothings was issued in a numbered run of fifty copies, with ten copies hors commerce: this is copy 50/50. In 2013, New Directions issued a smaller-scale version in book form, with an introduction by poet Susan Howe. That trade edition remains in print, but copies of Bervin and Werner's original production are elusive. A fine example.


Signed limited edition of Eudora Welty's profile of Mississippi midwife and second-hand clothes dealer Ida M'Toy, who spent her life “delivering the child and clothing the man,” first published in Accent magazine in 1942. “She sees them all, her children and her customers, in the double way, naked and clothed, young and then old, with love and with contempt, with open arms or with a push to bar the door.”


First edition of this oral history of “the granny-midwives” of rural Georgia, based on interviews with folklorist Marie Campbell. Well into the twentieth century, most Georgia births were attended at home by Black midwives who learned to “catch babies” on the job. In 1925, the Board of Health moved to professionalize the practice, requiring licenses and training for all midwives working in the state. This book captures the transition from the Old Law to the New, in “story-sketches from the sociable conversation of the granny-midwives,” reminiscences which often extend well beyond scenes of childbirth.

Complete run of this innovative American literary magazine, distinguished by art director F. Quarré’s ambitious experiments in color printing: “The Engravings, Drawings and Paintings, with which ‘THE ARTIST’ will be adorned are executed by a process hitherto unknown, and by it we shall be enabled to represent Flowers, with their own brilliant tints; Landscapes with the joyous verdure of Spring, and Portraits of young and lovely women, in whose complexions will be blended the rose and lily.” While the genres of the color plates are conventional, the methods used to produce them are not. Some appear to be aquatints, with parts of the plate isolated and printed in variously colored inks; some feature three-dimensional details as a foil to hand-colored and color-printed elements, a technique that anticipates the heyday of the Victorian valentine. One floral plate is entirely embossed in blind, presumably for subscribers to paint.

William Reese observes that The Artist” exemplifies the experimentation with color printing techniques in book illustration which paralleled the beginnings of chromolithography in the 1840s.”

The June 1843 number closes with the announcement that The Ladies National Magazine has acquired The Artist. The merger was intended to support a new periodical, apparently never produced, with “original embellishments . . . in exact imitation of Nature, an Art as yet secret to the world and known only by F. Quarré.” A scarce complete run of a magazine designed to be cut to pieces.
[Charles Dickens]. Engraved ticket to Charles Dickens’s farewell dinner. [London]: November 2, 1867. Pale green coated card, measuring 3 × 4.5 inches, printed recto only: “Dinner given to Mr. Charles Dickens / on the occasion of / His Departure for the United States / Freemason’s Hall, Great Queen St. / Saturday, November 2nd 1867, Seven o’clock.” Ticket #70. Admission ticket for the public banquet given in honor of Charles Dickens as he embarked on his final American reading tour. In 1867, Dickens was at the height of his literary fame, and the grand farewell dinner at London’s Freemason’s Hall was attended by almost five hundred guests, including Matthew Arnold, Wilkie Collins, Alfred Tennyson, and Anthony Trollope. In his response to the toasts, Dickens outlined his reasons for returning to America: “I am inspired . . . by a natural desire to see for myself the astonishing change and progress of a quarter of a century over there, to grasp the hands of many faithful friends whom I left upon those shores, to see the faces of a multitude of new friends upon whom I have never looked, and last, not least, to use my best endeavor to lay down a third cable of intercommunication and alliance between the old world and the new.” Dickens was overwhelmed by the occasion, writing to his friend Harry Wills the following day: “When I got up to speak, but for taking a desperate hold of myself, I should have lost my sight and voice and sat down again.” A near-fine souvenir of the Victorian literary scene.

Courtney Melmoth (Samuel Jackson Pratt); [Lord Chesterfield]. The Pupil of Pleasure: or, the New System Illustrated. London: G. Robinson, and J. Bew, 1776. Two twelvemo volumes, measuring 6.5 × 4 inches. Contemporary half-calf, marbled boards. First edition of this scarce epistolary novel, published two years after the posthumous appearance of Lord Chesterfield’s Letters to His Son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman. In that controversial bestseller, Chesterfield advises his son to cultivate an open, inviting manner while steadily advancing his own interests: “take great care that the first impressions you give of yourself may be not only favorable, but pleasing, engaging, nay, seducing.” Samuel Johnson remarked that Chesterfield’s letters “teach the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master.” Philip Sedley, the young hero of Pupil of Pleasure, takes “the divine Letters” as his gospel, moving to the spa town of Buxton to practice his pleasing, engaging, and seducing: “what our Garrick is to Shakespeare, I am resolved to be to Chesterfield — the living comment upon the dead text.” But what begins as a comic novel, featuring a naïve clergyman and his easily dazzled young wife, turns into a much darker cautionary tale, as Sedley sinks into real brutality and destroys multiple lives in his pursuit of pleasure. In justice to Chesterfield, one witness to Sedley’s fall observes that he “pillaged the volume for the pernicious, and rejected the instructive.” OCLC locates ten holdings worldwide. A fascinating fictional critique.
“Author of the Female Quixote” [Charlotte Lennox]. Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear Are Founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors. With Critical Remarks. London: A. Millar, 1753. Two twelvemo volumes, modern calf gilt. $6000.

First edition of novelist Charlotte Lennox’s study of Shakespeare’s literary sources, the first scholarly analysis of his plays written by a woman. Pulling together original source material for ten of the plays, Lennox considers each pairing, noting that Shakespeare often flattens the female characters he adapts, losing their individual motives in the shift to the stage. The success of Shakespear Illustrated prompted Lennox to publish a hastily assembled third volume in 1754, but this 1753 first edition is complete “in two volumes,” as issued. A landmark in Shakespearean and feminist literary criticism.


First editions, presentation copies, of these historical Shakespeare studies, in which Plumptre argues that Gertrude in Hamlet is intended as a critique of Mary Queen of Scots, who like that Danish queen remarried hastily under a cloud. He characterizes Hamlet as Shakespeare’s effort to secure the approval of Elizabeth I, “to flatter his mistress by adding his drop to the flood of calumny poured out against her rival.” Inscribed to literary scholar William Richardson, who dealt with Hamlet in his 1774 Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare’s Remarkable Characters.


First edition of L. Frank Baum’s obsessively detailed guide to retail show windows, published the same year as The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. In the decades before his success as an author, Baum styled himself as an expert in sales, merchandising, and publicity. He marketed fancy poultry and axle oil, ran his own traveling theater company, founded a South Dakota dry goods emporium called Baum’s Bazaar, and worked as a department store buyer and salesman in Chicago. Drawing on his theatrical background, he established himself as an authority on retail window displays, founding the trade journal The Show Window.

In The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors, Baum offers a practical guide to retail spectacles of all kinds. He discusses materials, color theory, set construction, and signage, revealing the mechanical and electrical workings behind the curtain. The text is illustrated with hundreds of photographs, each display of merchandise more dazzling and disorienting than the next. Baum’s manual of “illusion” echoes the big reveal in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: “He pointed to one corner, in which lay the great Head, made out of many thicknesses of paper, and with a carefully painted face. ‘This I hung from the ceiling by a wire,’ said Oz. ‘I stood behind the screen and pulled a thread.’”

OCLC locates two holdings, at Columbia and Yale. A sound copy of a true rarity in American material history.

First edition of John Izard Middleton’s stunning survey of Greek ruins in Italy, “the first contribution made by an American to the knowledge of classical antiquity” (C.E. Norton). The son of South Carolina planter Arthur Middleton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Middleton was raised on his family’s Charleston plantation and educated at Cambridge. Traveling through Italy in 1808 and 1809, he studied the polygonal Greek walls and ruins that predated Roman civilization, capturing them on paper with the aid of a camera obscura: “In a tour of this kind, the artist is perhaps of more real use than the scholar; and after toiling through the obscure pages of an historian, I found that my sketch told me more than my notes. . . . The views therefore which are now offered to the public are not meant merely to accompany the text; they are the principal object of this publication. I write, because I have drawn.” The work is not merely documentary: Middleton annotates his plates with quotations from Greek and Latin texts, creating a kind of classical sourcebook, and includes a tiny modern spectator in almost every landscape, uniting the iconography of “Cyclopian” prehistory and the Grand Tour.

While the title page of Grecian Ruins in Italy is dated 1812, the book was issued in parts over the course of a decade. The plates in this copy are watermarked from 1805 to 1823. Abbey Travel 165; see also Charles Eliot Norton, “The First American Classical Archaeologist.” A fine copy in a splendid contemporary binding.
Carolyn Wells (editor); Lewis Carroll; Algernon Charles Swinburne; Rudyard Kipling; et al. A Parody Anthology. New York, 1904. First edition of this collection of parodies of English poets. $50.

Students of the Kettle Point Indian Reserve; Allan Fleming (designer). Alphabet Book. Toronto, 1969. First trade edition of this ABC illustrated by Ojibwe schoolchildren. $100.

Joseph Longman. Sentences, Divine, Moral, and Historical. Salisbury, 1786. First edition of this list of exemplary sentences by famous authors, compiled by a provincial writing-master. $1250.


Jane Austen; Lawrence Flammenberg; Carl Grosse; Francis Lathom; Eliza Parsons; Regina Maria Roche; Eleanor Sleath; Devendra Varma (editor). The Northanger Set of Jane Austen Horrid Novels. London, 1967–68. Fine press reissue, in seven volumes, of the “horrid” Gothic novels recommended in Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey. With publisher’s prospectus, in custom slipcase. $850.

Anne Foote; Elaine Smedal. Decorative Art in Wisconsin. Madison, 1948. First edition of these fifteen color serigraphs, in original portfolio. $75.


Dafydd ap Gwilym; Rachel Bromwich (translator); John Elwyn (illustrator). Houses of Leaves. Llandogo, 1993. Signed limited edition of this illustrated tribute to fourteenth-century Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, one of 250 copies, in original slipcase. $150.
[GAMES]. The Laughable Game of What D’Ye Buy, by Professor Punch. London, J. Passmore, circa 1855. Twelve hand-colored engraved cards depicting shopkeepers; seventy-two letterpress cards (six per shop); instruction booklet, measuring 5 x 4 inches, entitled “Explanation to The Laughable Game of What D’Ye Buy?” Housed in publisher’s wooden box with sliding lid and pictorial label. Ownership signature of “Mrs. Marquis, Birchfield House, Edge Lane.” $4800.

Complete set of this comic card game, a Victorian tradesmen’s version of Mad Libs. One player takes the role of the “Conductor,” while the others each assume the identity of a shopkeeper, holding the cards describing that shop’s wares. The twelve trades represented are: Greengrocer, Milliner, Ironmonger, Doctor, Butcher, Music Seller, Fishmonger, Poulterer, Tailor, Publican, Toyman, and Pastry Cook. The Conductor reads the rambling story printed in the booklet, pausing after each sentence to challenge one shopkeeper at random to supply a missing item, no matter how ludicrous in context. Our hero might go for his morning shave to discover “a mealy Potato” from the Greengrocer in lieu of his soap. His wife might dress herself in “a lump of Dough” recommended by the Pastry Cook, or turn down her bedclothes to find the Fishmonger’s “Cod’s Head and Shoulders.” As the instructions note: “the sport is kept alive by the readiness each must exercise to avoid a forfeit,” as the players strive to “sell” their wares in unexpected and ingenious ways.

This particular game was owned by Robina Marquis (1814–1873), mother of a large family of tradesmen in Liverpool. Her husband John owned a general provisions brokerage business, and her two eldest sons became mercantile clerks and brokers. OCLC locates six holdings worldwide. A diverting game, located at the intersection of commerce and the absurd.

Abbé Berthaud; Comtesse de Beaufort d’Hautpoul; Madame Dufresnoy; Comtesse de Genlis; Isabelle de Montolieu; Hannah More. Le Quadrille des Enfants, ou Système Nouveau de Lecture. Paris: Arthus Bertrand, [1854]. Octavo, measuring 9.5 x 6 inches. Contemporary blue cloth, two steel-engraved plates, four hand-colored pictorial charts. With publisher’s decorative engraved box, containing 79 (of 84) pictorial bone tiles. $4200.

Nineteenth-century edition of the Abbé Berthaud’s innovative literacy game, first published in 1743, which prepared very young children to read by connecting familiar images to words, and those words to the most frequently used sounds and syllables in French. The book is accompanied by the publisher’s original box of hand-colored pictorial tiles corresponding to the images in the text. By matching the pictures on the tiles to the pictures in the book, and assigning a related sound and syllable to each — “une” to “la lune,” “ad” to “la salade,” “ga” to “un gateau” — children quickly memorized the most common clusters of letters in French, enabling them to read more fluently than by spelling out each individual letter. The second half of the book features fables and stories by the likes of Madame de Genlis and Hannah More, encouraging young readers to practice their new skills.

Le Quadrille des Enfants remained in print for well over a century, but the tiles themselves — small, fragile, and easily lost — rarely survived. The Musée National du Château de Fontainebleau holds a copy of the 1783 edition, accompanied by its box of 84 tiles, used to teach Napoleon’s son to read. Gumuchian 95 (twelfth edition); the Catalogue Général de la Librairie Française dates this fifteenth edition to 1854. OCLC locates one holding of this edition in Australia, speculatively dated 1860, with no mention of the tiles. A remarkable survival.

A true rarity: a complete set of the privately printed dual-language edition of Robinson Crusoe translated and printed by pioneering woman of letters, Guyonne de Montmorency-Laval, Duchesse de Luynes (1755–1830), during the French Revolution. The wife of the 6th Duc de Luynes, the Duchesse served as Dame du Palais to Marie Antoinette from 1774 to 1789. She was known for her “masculine” manners, unconventional dress, intellectual curiosity, and command of English literature; in Paris, she and her husband hosted a literary salon in the rue du Bac. During the Revolution, the couple retired to their chateau at Dampierre, where the Duchesse set up a printing press. From 1795 to 1803, she published seventeen titles, overseeing all aspects of the printing herself. Madame de Récamier writes about a visit to the Ballanche printing house, where her older friend impressed the workmen by nimbly composing a page of text on the spot (Souvenirs et correspondence).

Among the titles published at Dampierre was this abridged (but still massive) edition of Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, printed with the Duchesse’s own interlinear translation in French, an educational experiment designed to help her young son Charles learn English independently. The Duchesse’s translation of Robinson Crusoe was intended to be informative, rather than elegant; she used numbers to flag words where the original English order could not be maintained in French. In her opening “avertissement,” she writes: “Les peines, que je me suis donnes seront amplement payées, si elles servent à applanir les difficultes que les élèves éprouvent dans l’etude de toutes les langues; je dis toutes, parce que cette méthode peut s’appliquer à toutes.” (“The pains that I have given myself will be amply repaid if they serve to alleviate the difficulties that the pupils experience in the study of all languages; I say all, because this method can be applied to all.”) The Duchesse would return to this pedagogical technique in 1800, producing a dual-language edition of the life of Jonathan Swift; she would later devote decades of editorial and financial support, behind the scenes, to a French edition of The Spectator after Napoleon’s crackdown on private printing put an end to her press at Dampierre.

W.T. Lowndes, in The Bibliographer’s Manual of English Literature, reports (“it is said”) a total edition of 25 copies of the Dampierre Robinson Crusoe. We locate seven institutional holdings worldwide: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, British Library, McGill, McMaster, Chicago, Dartmouth, and Indiana. A near-fine copy of an ambitious pedagogical and literary experiment, the work of an unconventional printer, translator, and educator whose work deserves further study.

John Ruskin's annotated catalogue of his collection of drawings by J.M.W. Turner, published to commemorate the 1878 London exhibition of the pictures. Ruskin's lifelong advocacy of Turner is one of the most powerful examples of critical tastemaking in English art history. As a teenager, Ruskin wrote an impetuous defense of Turner in response to a harsh review; although unpublished, that essay was the origin of Ruskin's five-volume *Modern Painters*, which placed Turner's atmospheric, almost abstract style at the forefront of modern art. The 1878 exhibition of Ruskin's Turner collection at the Fine Art Society was a major event, reviewed on both sides of the Atlantic. Revisiting these drawings in preparation for the exhibition, and shaken by the personal memories they evoked, Ruskin suffered a breakdown while writing the catalogue; the early editions were issued incomplete. This illustrated edition, “the most complete of any,” published late in 1878, contains Ruskin's finished epilogue. The book is accompanied by an original ticket to the exhibition, featuring a mounted photograph of Turner's “The Fighting Téméraire.” Wsce 231. A compelling artifact.


First edition in English of the psalm book of the Reformed Dutch Church of New York City, the first book of music printed from moveable type in America. The psalms were translated from the Dutch by the American composer Francis Hopkinson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; the musical type for the melody line was imported from Amsterdam; and the book was printed in lower Manhattan by preeminent colonial printer James Parker, longtime collaborator of Benjamin Franklin. The psalms are followed by musical settings of the Ten Commandments and various prayers, then by the text of the Heidelberg Catechism and the sacraments of the Church.

This copy bears the early ownership signatures of Jeromus and Nelly Vanderbilt. Before the meteoric rise of shipping and railroad tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt in the nineteenth century, the Vanderbilt family settled throughout New York and New Jersey, many worshiping in the Reformed Dutch Church; a Jeromus Vanderbilt married Nelly Ten Eyck in Somerset County in 1781, though we cannot positively identify that couple as the owners of this psalm book. ESTC W6234, Sabin 66448, Evans 10561, Church 1067. A handsome example of a landmark in American printing.

Two complete sets of carved bone alphabets, a popular educational toy of the Victorian era, housed in a portable hardwood box. Each tile features an uppercase letter on one side and the corresponding lowercase letter on the other. Very young children could identify individual letters and match uppercase letters to their lowercase counterparts; as the children grew into readers, they could arrange the tiles to spell simple words. Rarely found complete and in such fine condition.

Set of wooden blocks representing the sections of a sphere. United States, nineteenth century. Five dissected wooden spheres, each measuring 2.5 inches in diameter. Housed in original wooden box with five interior compartments and sliding lid. $500.

Nineteenth-century set of mathematical models, featuring five solid wooden spheres. Each sphere is segmented into equal slices representing a series of fractions: halves, thirds, quarters, fifths, and sixths. Models like these, simple and sturdy, reflect a pedagogical shift in the United States, as private mathematical tutors gave way to free public schooling over the course of the nineteenth century. These durable spheres could withstand continual handling by young children in the classroom, and be packed neatly for storage afterwards. A handsome set.

Pulp reprint of Lewis’s sensational Gothic novel, first published in 1796. The front wrapper introduces The Monk as “the original horror novel — spinechilling and suspenseful,” with an image of our wild-eyed, big-haired heroine clutching a dagger in the crypt. The rear wrapper promises “a mass of murder, outrage, diablerie, and indecency,” evidence of the enduring popular appeal of Lewis’s brand of supernatural horror and sexually charged violence.

[Matthew Gregory Lewis]; James Gillray. TALES of WONDER! London: Hannah Humphrey, 1802 (but circa 1807). Hand-colored etching and aquatint, on a sheet measuring 12.75 × 17.5 inches. $1250.

Caricature print by London satirist James Gillray, making fun of the Gothic horror craze. A group of wide-eyed women readers sit awake past midnight, huddled around a copy of The Monk. The sitting room is furnished with suitably Gothic props: a single smoldering candle, two scenes of protesting young women being abducted, and grotesque ornaments on the mantel (a winged dragon, a skeleton crawling with snakes, a Gorgon’s head). The headline reads: “This attempt to describe the effects of the Sublime & Wonderful is dedicated to M.G. Lewis Esqr. M.P.” Lewis became a Member of Parliament in 1796, the same year that The Monk became a sensation; he took up the seat vacated by William Beckford, whose 1786 novel Vathek had been an earlier Gothic bestseller. A near-fine print, testament to the fascination that “horrid novels” exerted on the English reading public.


First edition of Massachusetts sea captain Amasa Delano’s account of his voyages between 1790 and 1810, covering the Hawaiian, “Pelew,” and Galapagos islands; Manila, Canton and Macao; New Guinea, Australia, and the East Indies; and Chile and Peru. Delano’s narrative is best remembered for his account of the capture of the Spanish ship Tryal off the coast of Chile, the inspiration for Herman Melville’s 1855 novella Benito Cereno, in which an unsuspecting American captain boards a moored ship in the middle of a slave revolt, misinterpreting every action he witnesses. In Delano’s original account: “the negro, who kept constantly at the elbows of Don Benito and myself, I should, at any other time, have immediately resented. . . .” This copy bears the ownership signature of fellow sea captain Edmund Fanning, “the Pathfinder of the Pacific,” a native of Connecticut who set sail in 1792 for the South Seas. During the following decades, Fanning sailed around the world, visiting Australia, South Georgia, Fiji, Tonga, and the Marquesas. For some time, he and Delano sailed the same seal trade route from the Falklands up the coast of Chile, both profiting handsomely. Howes D233, Sabin 19349, Shaw & Shoemaker 40635. A very good copy, with excellent seafaring provenance.

First edition of this spectacular artist’s book inspired by the trickster figure of Anansi the Spider, the storyteller of West African legend. Artist Ronald King and poet Roy Fisher take the Caribbean versions of the Anansi tales collected in Walter Jekyll’s 1907 Jamaican Song and Story as their point of departure, observing: “In Africa, Anansi the Spider was a god, of the sort easily demoted by missionary theology to the rank of demon or imp: a spirit of ruses, deceits and evasions, of compulsive activity unimpeded by ethics. Abducted by slave traders and shipped to the Caribbean, he there developed as a folklore character, the not-always successful mover of hard-nosed comic and satirical tales.”

In Anansi Company, King and Fisher reimage thirteen traditional Anansi tales. The gatherings include, on the outer wrappers, scraps of words and music drawn from Jekyll’s collection, while the interior wrappers feature modern riffs on the material. The Parrot, who repeats Anansi’s stories, talks in tabloid headlines: “IS PARROT PRETTY-BOY? NEW PROBE,” “I WAS DUPED’ CLAIMS BEDROOM RABBIT,” “MEDIA BIRD SIGNS TOP BOOK DEAL: SPIDER TELLS ALL.” The chilling figure of the Chicken-hawk offers his services for a fee: “It’s the length of the drop / and the weight / and build of the client. . . . Distance times weight / times fright. Let me quote you.”

The tales are accompanied by hand-made puppets constructed of wire and card, each incorporating a startling photocollage element. The inclined heads of storyteller and listener are represented by a bright yellow set of headphones, Anansi’s eyes are binoculars, the Dog’s muzzle is a gun, the Dry Skull is a vintage electric razor: “Just to be with you, I’ve been / getting myself ready / Shaved my cheeks and chin / closer than close. / No trouble.” The final effect is gorgeous and unsettling, a tribute to the West Indian community of Notting Hill, where Circle Press was based. A fine copy, accompanied by an invitation to the private publication view of Anansi Company at the Victoria & Albert Museum.
Horace McCoy; [Tod Browning].
They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?
Single volume, measuring 8 × 5 inches.
Original cloth, original dust jacket.

First edition of this hard-boiled classic, inscribed in the year of publication to director Tod Browning. Set during the Depression, McCoy’s novel follows the last days of Robert and Gloria, two Hollywood drifters who enter a month-long dance marathon. Driven to exhaustion, surrounded by desperate contestants and a gawking crowd, their pursuit of celebrity and a cash prize becomes a waking nightmare. Before he became a screenwriter, McCoy had worked as a bouncer for a dance marathon on the Santa Monica Pier, and that firsthand experience gives the novel a sharp documentary quality: “beneath our feet, beneath the floor, the ocean pounded night and day.”

Horror director Tod Browning, best known for Dracula (1931) and Freaks (1932), was a fixture at the dance marathon where McCoy worked. Screenwriter Budd Schulberg recalls: “Even more appalling than the victims on the dance floor were the regulars, affluent resident sadists in the same front-row seats every night, cheering on their favorites. . . . One of the most dedicated of the regulars was Tod Browning, who never missed a night and got that same manic gleam in his eyes as when he was directing Freaks.” Browning was riveted by McCoy’s novel and tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade MGM to buy him the film rights; it would be decades before Sydney Pollack’s Oscar-winning film adaptation appeared. A spectacular association copy of a cornerstone of Hollywood noir.

[DESIGN]. Hand-painted embroidery design depicting a parrot, a snail, and a lizard. France, nineteenth century. Original watercolor, executed on two sheets joined together, entire piece measuring 15 × 32 inches. $750.

Large fragment of an original embroidery design, likely for a shawl or tablecloth, executed in red watercolor. The stylized parrot, snail, and lizard are meticulously plotted out by hand, stitch by stitch, against a background of oak leaves and acorns. This design is plotted on “papier quadrillé” manufactured by the Paris publisher Chavant & Dessaigne. Fleury Chavant was an industrial designer who issued a number of influential pattern books in the 1830s and 1840s; his company offered a range of these printed grid papers, with gauges corresponding to every kind of needlework, enabling those at home to produce their own whimsical designs.
Detailed descriptions and additional images of the books featured here can be found online at honeyandwaxbooks.com. All books are offered subject to prior sale.

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For direct answers to bookish questions, write info@honeyandwaxbooks.com.


Honey & Wax Catalog 10 is dedicated to Brigid Cabry Nelson and Matt Carr, with thanks for a decade of collaboration, and to all those who cheerfully offered their homes and workplaces to make these catalogs what they are.