The Power of Books

University Archives and Special Collections Department

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Robert R. Muntz Library
Presents

‘The Power of Books’

Selections from the UT Tyler Special Collections

The University of Texas at Tyler
"The Power of Books" gives patrons and visitors to the University Archives and Department of Special Collections (UASC) a rather full accounting of some of the most notable bibliographic items contained in our holdings. While the curator has united these objects under a Miltonian theme, these disparate pieces have more traditionally seemed to form a somewhat inchoate whole. In fact, most of the collection arrived at the University during the 1980s, partly due to local generosity (as was the case with the Spanish colonial manuscript) and partly as a result of some intrepid finds from local estate sales (particularly in the case of the German bible). Indeed, collections such as these rely largely on efforts from our friends, in collaboration with a special collections librarian. We are proud to display the materials in this modest exhibit as both a pedagogical exercise (demonstrating "the power of books") as well as a potential starting point for community involvement in potential special collections building.

Michael Cerliano (UT-Tyler, class of 2008) curated this exhibit under the guidance of the University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian. Michael recently graduated cum laude with an English major and a minor field in philosophy. He was also a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Phi Sigma Tau, honor societies for both his fields of study. While he has toiled in the UASC since January 2007, we unleashed his full talents this summer, bringing them to bear on the creation of this exhibit. The end result has reflected a level of excellence that I have come to expect from Michael, giving us a display that has been both exhaustively researched and thoughtfully assembled. He leaves us this August to pursue graduate degrees in comparative literature at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, where he has received a full fellowship. We wish him the best of luck.

Deirdre Joyce
University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian
The University of Texas at Tyler
July 2008

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.
—John Milton, Areopagitica

In many ways, Milton dominates this exhibit. Although his life and work are not central to it—our presentation of a nineteenth-century edition of Paradise Lost has perhaps more to do with the fine bookbinding and Doré's masterful illustrations than it does the literary value of the work—one might say that Milton's ghost haunts the exhibit. After all, his brilliant defense of free speech, Areopagitica, shares a concern with this exhibit: the power of books. Indeed, this exhibit concerns itself with not only the power of literary works to transform human society, but with the real power of printed, published works. The Luther Bible on display in this collection is not simply a record of the end of the medieval era and the beginning of the modern; its status as an immigrant's Bible, a family heirloom recording the progress of one family in America, speaks to the power of books to reach across history and connect us to our roots. Likewise, the Spanish manuscript—a genealogy of Philip Habsburg III of Spain, but published in Colonial Mexico—is a testament to the use of books as political and cultural weapons whose full effects cannot be immediately felt. The power of books also finds its expression in the creation of books that are themselves works of art, as in our velvet-bound edition of the "Doré Milton", or in our numerous nineteenth-century gift books. These were not merely meant to be read, but to be kept as reminders of human affection and the importance of art in life. This importance finds its expression in our nineteenth-century edition of Shakespeare's works, which includes engravings of actors so popular that their fans were often willing to kill and be killed in the name of these cultural artifacts. Printed literature changed the world by reshaping human consciousness, and by examining the impact of the printed word, we are, in a way, reaching into the depths of history and memory to discover who we truly are.

Michael Cerliano
July of 2008, The University of Texas at Tyler
The 19th Century is considered by many scholars to be the golden age of Shakespearean performance. Entertainment was dominated by the Bard during the Victorian era; in the United States, performances and public readings of Shakespeare’s plays were popular with everyone from upper-class elites in Boston and New York to working-class laborers in Philadelphia and Chicago to outlaws and pioneers on the Western frontier. The popularity stemmed not only from the works themselves, but of the unique contributions of the popular actors and actresses of the era. Live drama was as important to 19th-Century popular culture as Hollywood was to the 20th-Century. Consequently, editions of Shakespeare’s works, such as this one published by Johnson, Fry and Company in 1861, bound in half-calf leather with marbled boards and endpapers, printed alongside the plays elaborate portraits of popular Shakespearean performers. Each actor had legions of loyal fans, many of whom were willing to do anything to stand up for the reputation of their favorite stage presence, even if it meant violence.

The most famous case of fans running amok during this era was the Astor Place Riot. The riot was the culmination of a feud between two rival Shakespearean actors: the Englishman William Charles Macready, a foppish, aristocratic man who was the toast of the Anglophilic New York upper classes; and Edwin Forrest, an American actor with a working-class background, whose admirers came from among the working poor of Manhattan’s notorious Five Points slums. The rivalry came to a head in May 1849, when Macready was engaged to perform in Macbeth at the Astor Place Opera House, a theater frequented by wealthy New Yorkers. In response, the nearby, working-class Bowery Theater also began a run of Macbeth, featuring Forrest in the lead role. On May 10, a crowd of 20,000 gathered outside the Astor Place Opera House and began pelting the place with bricks and stones. A riot broke out, and New York police and National Guard were called in to restore order. In all, over 30 civilians were killed and 40 wounded and over 100 national guardsmen and police officers were wounded in what was the worst riot in American history until the New York City draft riots of 1863. Following the riot, Macready left the United States and never returned, dying in England in 1873. Despite being associated with the riot, Forrest continued in a successful career until his death in 1872.
Gustave Doré (1832-1883) was a critically and popularly-acclaimed French illustrator and engraver, whose artwork was responsible for some of the highest-selling editions of literary works of the nineteenth century. Doré’s work is representative of the Romantic movement in illustration, with a deep interest in the gothic and bizarre. Doré’s illustrations have, in many ways, become iconic: the woodcuts he produced for works such as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Dante’s *Inferno* and Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* thrilled 19th-century audiences and have had a lasting influence on the way future illustrators depicted (and the way readers envisioned) the characters and events of each text. Likewise, his moody, melancholic illustrations for an 1866 edition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* proved to be extraordinarily popular with readers and turned the edition into a best-seller. This edition of the “Doré Milton” is unique for several reasons, most notably the fact that it is bound in velvet cloth bindings. In the 1820s, William Pickering introduced cloth bindings made of a durable “book cloth” which was stronger and less expensive than the dress fabrics (such as silk and velvet) that had occasionally been used as an alternative to animal skins. This particular book (possibly a late nineteenth-century reprint of the 1866 edition) is an example of the “Arts and Crafts” movement in design, which flourished during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Inspired the writings of John Ruskin and Pre-Raphaelite artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who romanticized pre-industrial art and design as being purer due to its hand-crafted nature and the ability of its creator to take pride in his own work, the Arts and Crafts movement emphasized simple, flat designs often featuring abstract plant motifs (as in the design on the cover of this edition). The use of velvet binding and unevenly-cut pages gives the book a handmade feel that many printers believed was lacking in contemporaneous book publishing. Although the library’s copy is damaged (particularly on the spine) the cover has remained well-preserved, as have the gilt edges on the pages and the remarkable illustrations by Doré, including these images depicting Satan’s arrival on Earth and the temptation of Eve.

*Paradise Lost*

By John Milton


This edition of *Paradise Lost* features elaborately-patterned engravings on the cover depicting vegetation and other natural motifs, a hallmark of the late 19th Century Arts and Crafts movement in design.
Germany was not united as a nation-state until 1871, following the victory of Prussia over France in the Franco-Prussian War. Before then, the nation was divided into hundreds of kingdoms, duchies, principalities and bishoprics which composed a political entity known as the Holy Roman Empire. Originally a unified state, the Empire eventually morphed into a loose confederation. The head of the Holy Roman Empire was not officially hereditary; instead, the Emperor was chosen by a group of electors selected, by Imperial decree, from among the states. The Holy Roman Empire was dissolved after the abdication of Emperor Francis II (Franz I of Austria) in 1806.

This 18th-Century Bible (translated by Martin Luther, German theologian and father of the Reformation) is an example of what is termed an "elector Bible", referring to J. C. Claussner's elaborate illustrations of the various Imperial Electors contained within the text. During the early modern period, it was not uncommon for owners of elector bibles to remove the illustration of their elector (along with the frontispiece of Martin Luther) and place it on their wall as a form of decoration. This bible was printed on typical German paper of the eighteenth century which—due to the short wool fibers used to make it—has become soft, limp and darkened over the centuries. Each sheet is a folio, which means that each page is produced by folding a printed sheet in half once. The bookbinding is pigskin, and is stamped with eight decorative brass corners and two brass clasps. Although the details of the Bible's provenance are unknown at this time, it is likely that it was brought to America by German immigrants, who often carried their Elector Bibles with them as family heirlooms and used the endpapers to keep family records of everything from the successive owners of the Bible to events such as births, weddings and funerals. In the case of this Bible, the family records are located after the preface. The list of births begins in German in the late 18th century, listing the various members of the Bucher family who owned the book, and concludes with the birth of Hannah Adeline Baker in 1823, whose birth is recorded in English in a distinctly American hand. Because of this, the Bible allows researchers the opportunity to chart the "Americanization" of an immigrant family and their assimilation into early 19th-Century society.
fringes of the empire, printing presses were scarce, and many of the books published outside of Mexico City were produced by hand in the form of illuminated manuscripts.

This manuscript, a genealogy of King Philip III of Spain from 1618, is an example of these techniques. Like many books published in colonial Mexico, the purpose of this text was twofold: to instruct readers and to honor and uphold the power of the Spanish government. Unlike many books from this era, it was written and bound by hand, each page and illustration painstakingly crafted by an expert in manuscript creation and reproduction (in all likelihood, a monk). The pages are not paper; rather, they are made of vellum, which is a tanned animal hide, usually calfskin or sheepskin. Vellum was most often used for important documents such as this due to the fact that, unlike paper, vellum is highly durable and does not deteriorate as quickly. Vellum is still used today, mainly for things like luxury book-binding, although it does maintain official usage in Britain and the Republic of Ireland, where acts of Parliament are printed on vellum for the purpose of archiving them.
The nineteenth century saw a rapidly increasing rate of literacy in the industrialized world. As a result, the Victorian era saw an explosion of printed materials such as magazines, newspapers and, of course, books. One of the most popular forms of book publishing in the nineteenth century was that of the gift book. Popular from the 1830s to the early 1900s, gift books were lavishly illustrated anthologies of poetry and prose, with elaborate bindings often covered with gilt embossing. As evidenced by their name, gift books were intended to be given as presents and were often inscribed by those who presented them. Although gift books often featured collections of works by authors now considered canonical, the overwhelming majority of them were collections of middle-brow popular entertainment: sentimental poetry, children’s literature and some popular scientific and religious texts.

However, the appeal of gift books was not limited to the books’ contents; their fine craftsmanship meant that the books themselves were intended to be looked at as works of art. In this way, gift books can be seen as prefiguring contemporary mixed media works in attempting to create an all-encompassing “total art” that combined text, image and design into a seamless whole.

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“Publisher’s Bindings from the Max Kade Institute for German American Studies.” http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/gallery/kade.html. An online collection of 19th Century German-American publisher’s bindings, showcasing the wide range of design and publishing techniques popular in the 19th Century, maintained by the University of Alabama.

