

THE HOWARD T. BEHRMAN BEQUEST

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## Library Notes

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### THE HOWARD T. BEHRMAN BEQUEST

In October 1978 we opened a loan exhibition—"The Behrman Collection of American Literature"—in the Gould Gallery of Firestone Library. The collection was assembled by Dr. Howard T. Behrman over a period of about 25 years, and it had never been seen in public. Since it was too large to show in its entirety, the Rare Books staff chose 141 titles by 55 authors and published a modest catalogue as a guide for our visitors and a remembrance of the occasion. Dr. Behrman died in Princeton on 9 October 1985. He bequeathed his books to the University along with a generous endowment for additional purchases in American literature. The books arrived in late spring, 1986, and it is now time to announce to the readers of the *Chronicle* the scope and nature of this collection.

Dr. Behrman, a resident of New York City and Princeton, wrote six books and hundreds of articles on his medical specialty, dermatology, before he turned in the mid-1940s to collecting as an avocation. Beginning with old maps, then Meissen porcelain and Fabergé boxes, he soon discovered that they were becoming too scarce and too precious to hold his interest. In the early 1950s he bought a few books he had enjoyed as a boy: first editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* and a copy of *Pickwick Papers* which Dickens had inscribed for his doctor. Within a year he knew he was committed to a more demanding world, and he began his tours of auction rooms and antiquarian bookshops. But in a short time he also knew he had begun too late—and with too little spare time for searching—to assemble a definitive collection of English literature. It was then he decided to concentrate on American authors from 1800 to 1950.

"Knowing that I couldn't get and didn't desire all of every writer who interested me," he once said, "I tried instead for three things: the first book of an American author, always hard to find because they were printed in small editions; the best-known book; and the scarcest.

Sometimes all three are in one book, more often just two. George Washington Cable's *Old Creole Days* is his first and best book. Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will* are both the first and the scarcest. I am still looking for two other firsts, Pound's *A Lume Spento* and Poe's *Tamerlane*, but they continue to elude me, though I came close to owning the Poe on a recent occasion."

In the last years of his life, Dr. Behrman brought the collection to his house in Princeton simply because he was spending more and more time here, but he made few new purchases. He showed his books to his friends as a gathering of authors who had, at one time or another, captured his interest. "Occasionally," he wrote in 1973 in the preface to his privately-printed catalogue, "I was so enthralled by an American author that I couldn't resist collecting him in some depth, especially if some fine association item came my way." But there are only six in the collection who appear in "some depth," none of them complete: Cooper, Thoreau, Poe, Melville, Twain, and Eliot. The oldest book is Increase Mather's *Mystery of Israel's Salvation* (1669). The most recent is a memorial edition of John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* (1964) bound in full blue morocco and inscribed "For Howard Behrman with my deep appreciation and esteem. Jacqueline Kennedy." But neither is typical of what forms the core of the Behrman collection: fiction, poetry, essays, and juveniles by 90 authors, highly concentrated in the 19th century.

How shall we begin to describe so diverse and so personal a collection? Using his own criteria for the assembling of the 1978 exhibition might be a starting point. Rather than of genres, Dr. Behrman spoke of his favorite authors, the scarce "first books," the presentation copies, the pseudonymous publications, and the delightful juveniles in pristine condition, attesting once again to his search for rarities.

James Fenimore Cooper is represented by a fine group of seven novels in 15 volumes, all of them in their original bindings including *Precaution* (1820), a first edition of his first book, and the even rarer second novel, *The Spy* (1821), in an American first edition. Herman Melville's first book appeared in England in February 1846 under the title *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands; or, a Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846). The Behrman copy of the first edition is in red cloth with the incorrect numeral XV for XX on the backstrip. One month later the American edition appeared in New York with a new title, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*,

and five “indelicate passages” deleted. Melville published four more novels in quick succession—*Omoo*, *Mardi*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket*—before the great *Moby-Dick* appeared in New York (1851). All except *Redburn* are in the Behrman collection in fine copies, especially the *Moby-Dick*.

Mark Twain was Dr. Behrman’s special passion, and the 11 titles begin with the Jerome Kern copy of *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches* (1867), Twain’s first book, signed by the author. They end with *Extracts from Adam’s Diary* (1904) in a unique presentation copy inscribed to Irving S. Underhill by F. A. Nast for the publishers, Harper & Brothers. It is the only copy of the first edition printed on calendered paper. The other titles include *Mark Twain’s (Burlesque) Autobiography* (1871), inscribed by the author; *Mark Twain’s Sketches* (1874) in the original pictorial pale blue wrappers; the first printing of the first American edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876); two copies of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), one in the less common blue cloth and the other in pristine green; *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894) with a letter from Clemens laid in; and *Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar for 1894*, a scarce and fragile pamphlet less than two inches square published in Dawson’s Landing, Missouri.

The 11 titles by T. S. Eliot concentrate on the early work, especially the poetry. The first appearance in book form of any of Eliot’s poetry was in a volume edited by Ezra Pound, *Catholic Anthology, 1914–1915* (London, 1915). The Behrman copy is almost pristine. *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), in buff wrappers, is the first edition of the author’s first book, signed by him on the title page. *Poems* (1919) was hand-printed and hand-bound by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at The Hogarth Press in an edition of about 200 copies. The Behrman copy is one of the few first copies with misprints on page 13 (later corrected) and a binding of fragile grasscloth textured paper (later replaced by marbled paper wrappers). Of *The Waste Land* (1922) there are four copies, all numbered, one being a presentation copy: “for Virginia Woolf from T. S. Eliot Jan 1923,” and two bound in the flexible black cloth of the earlier first impression.

By far the most fascinating of the Eliot volumes is *Ash-Wednesday* (London, Faber and Faber; New York, The Fountain Press, 1930) in unbound proof sheets. Dr. Behrman described its history succinctly:

The original plans for publication of *Ash-Wednesday* called

for its issue in a large quarto format, but the plan was abandoned and the poem reset and issued in octavo in a limited edition of 600 copies. The unbound proof sheets are one of the two forms in which the earlier printing has survived: proofs of Section I, lines 1-23 are known, and proofs of the entire poem, as we have it here.

Surprisingly, he did not seek a first edition of the octavo volume of *Ash-Wednesday* nor a first edition of Eliot's major work, *Four Quartets* (New York, 1943; London, 1944). Instead, he acquired presentation copies (all inscribed to an American friend, the Reverend William Turner Levy) of the four separate poems which make up *Four Quartets*, published by Faber and Faber in London in printed paper wrappers: *East Coker* (1940), *Burnt Norton* (1941), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942). They are all in remarkably fine condition.

The scarce "first books" range over two centuries. Five are by major authors. Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in the 1900 edition was printed but never distributed because Mrs. Frank Doubleday, the publisher's wife, was so shocked by what she read. Dreiser, some 30 years later, recalled that "no copies were ever sold but Frank Norris . . . told me [he] did manage to send out some copies to book reviewers, probably a hundred." Whoever owned the Behrman copy must have kept it hidden in a drawer. It is so immaculate in its red buckram covers it could not have been read, at least not as avidly as the 1907 reissue which finally introduced Carrie Meeber to the American public.

Ernest Hemingway's *Three Stories & Ten Poems* was printed by Robert McAlmon in 1923, *in our time* by William Bird in 1924, both in small limited editions in Paris. They are his first two books and difficult to find in good condition. Edgar Rice Burroughs began his Tarzan series in 1914 with *Tarzan of the Apes*. First editions are scarce because they were read to pieces, but the Behrman copy may be a unique survivor. It is bound in brilliant pictorial wrappers with a silhouetted Tarzan sitting in a tree, perhaps an advance copy designed for publicity purposes or private distribution.

The Walt Whitman and Thomas Wolfe first books are just the opposite. Drab is an understatement. Whitman's first separate publication was *Franklin Evans; or, The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times*. When it was advertised in the *New World* on November 5, 1842, Whitman's name did not appear, but when it was published on November 23 in an oc-

tavo edition the title page read "By Walter Whitman." Only three other copies in the original printed wrappers are known. In his old age Whitman wanted to forget that he had spent "three days of constant work" to finish this morality tale. He recalled it as "damned rot—rot of the worst sort—not insincere, perhaps, but rot nevertheless." Thomas Wolfe's first effort is a 14-page pamphlet—*The Crisis in Industry* (1919)—which won "the Worth Prize for philosophy at the University of North Carolina given annually for the best thesis by an undergraduate." Wolfe had enrolled at Chapel Hill in 1916 at the age of 15, and his thesis treated labor problems following the First World War.

Another group of "first books" preceded by many years the authors' great successes and thus were particularly difficult to track down, not to mention unknown even to specialists in American literature. Edward Everett Hale, a Boston Unitarian clergyman, wrote prolifically on many subjects. He is known internationally for *The Man Without a Country* (1865). Fifteen years earlier he published his first brief tale, *Margaret Percival in America*. The Behrman copy has a tipped-in autograph inscription: "The Three Eternities are Faith: Hope: Love—Edward E. Hale." Mention Kate Douglas Wiggin and one thinks of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) or *Mother Carey's Chickens* (1911). To raise money for her Silver Street Kindergarten in San Francisco, she published her first book, *The Birds' Christmas Carol* (1887), in a small edition in pictorial paper wrappers. It is conjectured that fewer than ten have survived, and less than that with the original wrappers. Houghton, Mifflin published a successful trade edition in 1888.

Horatio Alger, Jr. made a fortune from his 115 sentimental boys' novels on the "rags to riches" theme, beginning with *Ragged Dick* in 1867; but he was still teaching school in Rhode Island when he published *Bertha's Christmas Vision* (1856), a collection of 11 short stories and 10 poems for adults, not children. The book left scarcely a ripple, but before Alger died he was known as "the most popular author who ever lived," with 20 million copies of his books in circulation. Richard Hovey never achieved that kind of recognition, but with Bliss Carman he was known across America for his "songs of the open road." They published their first collection, *Songs from Vagabondia*, in 1894, followed by two more in 1896 and 1901. When Hovey was only 16, he and his friend N. B. Smith printed 17 of his poems on a press in the law offices of Smith's father. *Poems* (1880) was issued in blue printed wrappers but also in the much rarer green cloth binding which Dr. Behr-

man notes as “tantamount to a large paper issue.” Hovey’s father warned him that some day he “might regret this permanent relic of his poetic apprenticeship.” He ignored the warning and gave copies to his Dartmouth classmates. Years later he inscribed one with the disarming question: “Who can be ashamed of having been a boy?”

Other young writers chose pseudonymous publication for their early work, and Dr. Behrman sought some of these rarities for years. Sinclair Lewis’s first book is *Hike and the Aeroplane* (1912), an adventure story for boys published under the name Tom Graham. Twenty years later he admitted it was written for the “sole and not very commendable purpose of getting . . . a long vacation to do a few words on my first novel, *Our Mr. Wrenn*. The transaction was deplorable on all sides, and I believe the book is worth a lot of money.” How right he was, especially a copy in fine condition in the original dust wrapper. In even finer condition is Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) in the original mustard-yellow wrappers, uncut and unopened. Too sordid for every publisher, it had to be brought out under a pseudonym, Johnston Smith, at the author’s own expense, on borrowed money.

Much earlier in the 19th century two young New Yorkers—Joseph Rodman Drake, a doctor, and Fitz-Greene Halleck, a bank clerk—collaborated on a series of satirical poems lampooning political figures and current events in the city. Between March and July 1819 they sent the poems with the utmost secrecy to the New York *Evening Post*. Their publication there became known as the Croaker Papers, and speculation was rife as to authorship. Later that year an unauthorized collection appeared, *Poems*, by Croaker, Croaker & Co., and Croaker, Jun., 36 pages in three gatherings, bound in tan printed wrappers with the top edges of all leaves untrimmed. This “privately printed ephemeron” has appeared at auction only five times in the 20th century, according to the late Carroll Wilson. When the authorship was later revealed, Halleck was catapulted to fame, but Drake, alas, had died of tuberculosis in 1820 at the age of 25.

Another 19th-century doctor of medicine, S. Weir Mitchell, attracted Dr. Behrman’s attention when he discovered that this Philadelphia surgeon had published, in addition to a dozen novels and over a hundred scientific tracts, an early collection of five stories and ten poems for young readers, *The Children’s Hour*, by E.W.S. and S.W.M. (1864). His collaborator turned out to be Elizabeth Wister Stevenson.

All presentation copies are not great rarities, not even Robert Frost's first volumes, *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914), both with whole poems inscribed on the free front end papers, because Frost was so generous with such inscriptions. But several other presentation copies in the Behrman collection have a special flavor. Bret Harte's second book, *The Lost Galleon and Other Tales*, was published in December 1867. The Behrman copy is inscribed "My first book—Bret Harte." Perhaps Harte had forgotten—or wished to forget—that his *Condensed Novels*, satirical parodies of famous authors, was advertised for sale in October 1867. Louisa May Alcott's first book, *Flower Fables* (1855), is here in a copy inscribed to her mother: "Mrs. A. Bronson Alcott, 1855, from the authoress." This must be Mrs. Alcott's second copy since the one Louisa gave her mother the preceding Christmas is at Harvard. Lydia Huntley Sigourney was known as "the Sweet Singer of Hartford," a woman obsessed with death who poured her heart into 67 volumes of prose and verse, dreadfully saccharine verse but nevertheless popular and profitable in mid-19th-century America. She wrote her first book at the age of 24 when she was running a small school for girls in Hartford. The Behrman copy of *Moral Pieces in Prose and Verse* (1815) is inscribed on the title page "To Mrs. Dumont from LHS." Tipped in is a 19-line signed autograph poem entitled "To Mrs. Dumont, on being treated with great kindness during a sudden sickness, when calling at her house." Alice Caldwell Hegan was a minor author of stories for children, and her reputation rests chiefly on *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (1901). Her inscription in the Behrman copy (the first issue of the first edition) attests to her popularity at the turn of the century and after: "Dear Mr. Groves: This was my first book and you ask me to tell you something of its history. It has been translated into French, German, Swedish, Danish, and Chinese, and printed in Braille [sic] for the blind. It was played on the stage for seven consecutive years, and in stock for twenty. Four versions of it appeared on the screen. Alice Hegan Rice (Alice Caldwell Hegan)."

Double presentation copies are rarities. *As We Remember Joe* (Cambridge, Privately Printed, 1945) is a group of eulogistic essays by friends of Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. who died when his aircraft exploded over England in August 1944. His brother inscribed a copy: "For Mr. and Mrs. Coblentz who were friends of Joe in happier times. Jack Kennedy. May 1945." On an unknown date the book was reinscribed: "To

Howard Behrman—this little book meant a great deal to Jack—it is really a keystone to him—I am delighted that it will be in your collection—Jackie.”

Collecting children’s books can easily become an obsession for some bibliophiles. According to Carroll Wilson, “Part I of *Little Women* with the 1868 date is the foundation of a collection of American juveniles.” Whether Dr. Behrman bought his *Little Women* (in two volumes: 1868, 1869) early in his searches is not known, but he clearly found fine copies. His Part One conforms to Jacob Blanck’s description that “the first printing does not have a note at p. 341 regarding *Little Women, Part Two*; and the fact that the earliest form of the binding does not have the statement *Part One* on the spine.” With Miss Alcott Dr. Behrman was definitely not obsessed. Her next three juveniles—*An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Little Men* (1871), and *Work* (1873)—are not in the collection. L. Frank Baum was another matter. After finding *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), a fine copy of the first state of Baum’s best-known book, he had to have the author’s first book. *Mother Goose in Prose* (1897) was preceded only by a small pamphlet on raising chickens, so it can at least be called his first juvenile if not his first publication. It is also the first book illustrated by Maxfield Parrish, and the Behrman copy is in superb condition. Matching that quality in Baum’s rarest book—*Father Goose* (1898)—was a lengthy search. In 1973, Dr. Behrman described his acquisition as “a book in many ways more important than *The Wizard*. Baum and W. W. Denslow (his illustrator) financed its printing. . . . With the great success of the volume, going into six printings the first year, the publisher went ahead with *The Wizard of Oz*. Most of the copies of *Father Goose* were literally ‘read to death’ by its youthful readers, and only six other copies have been located.” In 1978, *Father Goose* was part of the Firestone Library exhibition, but sometime between that happy event and 1985 Dr. Behrman gave his copy to another collector of juveniles.

Jacob Abbott wrote more than 200 juveniles, the first of which was *The Young Christian* (1832), but Dr. Behrman wanted for his collection the first of the 28 volumes in the “Rollo” series, among the earliest American children’s books. *The Little Scholar Learning to Talk: A Picture Book for Rollo* (1835) is in the original marbled boards with half leather, one of three known copies.

But the greatest rarity among all his juveniles—perhaps in the whole collection—is John Townsend Trowbridge’s first book. “I was fortu-

nate," he recalled, "that George Goodspeed permitted me first choice in his sale of Paul Seybolt's fine collection of first books. How I enjoyed opening the package and finding that lovely *Kate the Accomplice*. . . ." Trowbridge was well known during the Civil War for *Cudjo's Cave* (1864), an antislavery novel written expressly for children, but the collector's choice is *Kate the Accomplice, or The Preacher and Burglar; Story of Real Life in the Metropolis*, published in Boston in 1849 under the pseudonym of Paul Creyton. The Behrman copy is in the original pink illustrated wrappers, uncut. It is a novel known only by this superb copy and by one other, without wrappers, in the Library of Congress.

— RICHARD M. LUDWIG