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PUBLIC OPINION ON LOVERS

THE VINE PRESS CLOTH CASE BINDING REPAIR

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PUBLIC OPINION ON LOVERS

Popular Nigerian Literature sold in Onitsha Market

by Ulli Beier

It has been said that the market of Onitsha on the east bank of the river Niger is the largest in the world. I have no means to verify the claim, but walking along the endless rows of stalls that seem to offer more goods than all the department stores put together one is inclined to believe it. Not only the variety of goods is staggering, but more so is the enormous number of stalls which seem to be duplicating the same wares. The large majority are imported manufactured goods. The tourist on the lookout for objects of Nigerian origin will be a little disappointed. But to his surprise his curiosity will be richly rewarded on the bookstalls. Though the booksellers mostly stock school textbooks, they also display fascinating local "novels" and plays, which have been written, printed and published in Onitsha itself and a few other towns of the Eastern region. Mostly they are small pamphlets selling at 1s. 6d. to 3s. They are seldom more than 48 pages thick. Any day in Onitsha market one can buy at least a hundred different titles.

Usually the printers are also the publishers. They buy manuscripts at varying prices according to the popularity of the author. An advert at the back of one pamphlet offers "2/6 to £1.5. 5s. for a good tortoise story". But a popular novel writer can easily fetch £10. 10s. for a manuscript. The usual edition of these pamphlets is one to two thousand copies, but there are best sellers that keep reprinting year after year and they go to five thousand or more. Most publishers are emphatic about copyright: yet there is a fair amount of plagiarism.

The titles of the books are attractive and revealing in themselves:

- Saturday Night Disappointment
- Rosemary and the Taxi Driver
- Romance in a Nutshell
- Disaster in the Realms of Love
- Public Opinion on Lovers

Sometimes the pamphlets have elaborate explanatory subtitles:

- Our Modern Ladies Characters towards Boys
  (The most exciting novel with love letters, drama, telegrams, and campaigns of Miss Beauty to the teacher asking him to marry her.)
- Husband and Wife who Hate Themselves
  (It was a forced marriage made by Chief Moyer, as a result of this everyday so so quarrel, so so talk, so so fight, so no peace.)

There is another type of pamphlet which is neither a novel nor a play but a kind of moralizing book of advice or admonition. The titles of these are no less revealing:

- Money Hard to Get but Easy to Spend.
- Why Harlots hate Married men and Love Bachelors.
- The Half Educated Court Messenger.
- Drunkards Believe Bar as Heaven.
- Money Hard, But some Women don't Know.
- What is Life?
  (A complete, general book of life, dedicated to the high, the average, the low and for all sisters of life, with a speculative guide of living.)

The authors of these pamphlets often give themselves fancy names, like: Money Monger; Strong Man of the Pen; Money Hard and Master of Life, who obtained the title M.L. at the Commonsense College, where he passed very hard lessons in money mastery and Life Problems.

Sometimes the publisher uses one name to cover various authors.

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(Several people have written under the name Highbred Maxwell, for example, which is the publisher's own name.)

The authors are seldom very educated in English. Many have only primary school education. One or two are known to be secondary school boys. Thus the introduction to one "Novel" says:

"Cletus is one of the Nigerian schoolboys who delight in the attempt of things that are bold. When he asked me to write a foreword to his book, I was surprised, because I never expected that he could hold his studies in one hand and use the other in compiling a book so wonderfully exciting."

Many authors are apologetic about their imperfect English, but nevertheless feel the urge to write. The following are two charming sentences from author's prefaces:

"... and readers should mind very little the poor English it contains, which is hoped to be amended when this book will celebrate her publication."

"It has been practically impracticable to avoid some minute typographical errors and may the readers not be embarrassed where they occur."

One author, in his preface, says he welcomes "mild but constructive criticism from the public".

Some of the more accomplished authors are journalists, usually correspondents of small provincial papers. It is also worth noting that one intellectual author, Cyprian Ekwensi, made his debut with an Onitsha pamphlet ("When Love Whispers"). His last two full length novels Jagua Nana and Beautiful Feathers were published by Hutchinson in London.

In the following, however, we shall not be concerned with the exception, who made his way to become an intellectual writer with an international market, but we shall try to examine the works of those popular Nigerian authors who write for and are read by Nigerian schoolboys, junior clerks, taxi drivers and petty traders.

The language of these pamphlets owes its peculiar charm and vitality partly to the fact that most of the authors do not really master the language. Their ideas about syntax and grammar are extremely hazy, though their vocabulary can be surprisingly large. The writers are not too familiar with English idioms and often new and charming expressions are coined, simply because they have misheard and reinterpreted an English phrase. Like:

... head over feels in love.

... means of lovelihood.
... you are the apple of my heart.
... he is the sort of boy who would sell his mother for a dirty mess of pottage.

Often the language is extremely awkward, because the author writes about things he has apparently not been talking about:

she gave him three strokes of kiss.

On the other hand some rather attractive new words are created occasionally by authors, who are wrestling with the language, groping for the right expressions and formulate without having any regard for the conventional parts of speech:

Her father messaged me.
I daggered the idiot to death.
He is a lovely someone.
It was headaching.
There were great bemoanings.
He tried to show his bigmanity.
Money sweets women more than men.
He endeavoured to find the unfindings.

Much of this writing has the freshness of innocence. The writer has no idea what is conventional in English language or thought, and he can be startling without intending to:

"Darling, you don't look normal today," said Obiageli. "You look
as if you have been thinking. You look miserable.”
“...The bridegroom wasn’t so happy with the bride for he had tasted the feminine stock of her love before the wedding.”
A general characteristic of all this writing is the uninhibited vigour of the expressions:
She liquidated her husband and left him.
(in a love scene) She hurled him into her knees.
He could scarcely vomit a word.
Most writers are fond of expressing themselves in superlatives:
It was the highest eccentric subtle experience of becoming.
There are some, particularly Miller O. Albert, who practise a kind of studied toughness in their speech, probably stimulated by American gangster films:
(Girl rejecting a suitor): “You aren’t the only man of instinct.”
(Couple of boys making up to a girl) “What are you sure you can do to have us fully embraced?”
(Blase lover) “Yes, girls are the most comfortable things we can get alright, for a happy cuddle.”
Even though the language is often clumsy, these Onitsha pamphlets are full of the most striking and original images:
(drinking scene) “They swilled all round, extending the waistband of their pants.”
“That Elizabeth, they nodded, is another girl of diversified scarlet colours.”
(a girl has become pregnant) “She walked away with an additional pound of flesh.”
(admission of failure in life:) “My name is written in white ink on white paper.”
Some writers are extremely fond of big words, sometimes to the extent of becoming completely incomprehensible. Here is a passage from “What is Life”:
“Life been mistaken, men away of existence, people dangling in an empty full of creation, immoral depiction now an expansion of monumental reasonings, movements a habituee of an unsoundly survivor, and in sense that very genuineness and rightness of living are left to disgustments, what a contempt!”
There are some 48 pages of this same stuff, and some people apparently attempt to read it all. On the other hand there is an awareness of this among other Onitsha writers, who occasionally make fun of it. Ogali Ogali, “dramatist and novelist” and one of the most gifted and skilful Onitsha writers, introduces funny characters into his plays who speak a stilted type of language, taken right out of the Oxford dictionary. In Mr. Rabbit is Dead one of these characters is paraphrasing the 23rd Psalm thus:
Deity is my pasture, I shall not be indigent.
He maketh me to recompense the verdent lawn
He leadeth me beside the rippled liquidities,
And he conducteth me in the avenues of rectitude
For the celebrity of his appellation.
Undoubtedly, though I shall not be perturbed
By any catastrophe for thou art present.
Thou preparset a refectiion before me in the presence of my enemies
And quench my ungodonomical reverence
My commiseration shall continue all the lutony on my vitality
And I shall eternalise my habitation in the metropoles of nature.
Although many West African idioms have crept into these Onitsha pamphlets, the authors carefully avoid pidgin English and on the whole aspire to write what they think is standard English. Pidgin is used, however, deliberately in plays to characterize and ridicule illiterate characters. Here is a sample, again from Ogali Ogali. The character, Chief Jombo, complains to his wife about his daughter Veronica, who is running after a boy called Mike (pronounced by him Mikcre):
The subject matter of these novels and plays can best be described with the West African term ‘Highlife’. Highlife is a reaction against the austerity of traditional African life. It is a way of life that believes in pleasure, music, drinking, free love, and ostentatious spending of money. The Onitsha writers speak about this new generation: schoolboys, teachers, drivers, clerks—people who have not yet gone very far in being “westernised”, but who already find themselves in sharp opposition to traditional ways of life. It is significant that where traditional people occur in these books they are always the villains and always ridiculed. One of the favourite stock situations is the old illiterate father who wants to marry off his daughter in the traditional

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manner to some wealthy old friend of his. He does not see that the
daughter should have any say in this. But the “enlightened” daughter
revolts. She wants to marry the man she loves, and she usually gets
her way. In one way or another all these books are concerned with the
concept of “romantic love”. This does not mean, however, that these
stories are as stale as “True Stories” or fiction in “Women’s Own”
even though some of the authors have read both). It is not stale, becaus
because many of these authors represent the first generation who have
escaped from the dignity and austerity of traditional African life—a
first generation of bars, highlife music, tarts, cinemas and a considere
able degree of individual freedom. This new freedom to choose
between different ways of life, the freedom to make individual
decisions without consulting one’s family, are things that excite and
stimulate these authors.

The idea of “romantic love” is clearly new, to some of them, and
though they have taken over all the clichés of the cinema they see it
all with fresh and innocent eyes. The influence of the cinema is self-
evident in the stories, and in addition there are also a number of direct
references to it:

Usually while the film was on, and there was a part where there was
kissing, Jerry would kiss Obiageli as well. But today Jerry was so
absent minded that he forgot to kiss Obiageli during a kissing part
of the film. Obiageli turned sharply to Jerry and asked him why he
didn’t kiss her. Jerry was unable to answer.

“Jerry, I think you don’t love me any longer,” said Obiageli.
(From Boys and Girls of Nowadays by C. C. Obiaga.)

“Okoro was a Film goer. He knew himself that to change a car was
an English method of bringing confusion into crime.”
(From Rosemary and the Taxi Driver by Miller O. Albert.)

Most of the authors profess that they are teaching young people what
they have to know about love; that they give them useful advice as to
how to handle these new situations. Here are some passages from
author’s prefaces:

“I have written this booklet named ‘The Work of Love’ in order
to help many youths to know more of the work of love and how it
penetrates. Whether my work is earthly or a morbid interest I
did not pretend to determine. My only concern is to satisfy that
curiosity which like the impulse to write about the work of love is
nothing new, and just to advise hasty youths and to give them
corrections. Marriage is really made in Heaven before on Earth.”

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“Actually it is not possible for a young man whether married or un-
married to live happily without at first knowing how to get round
our modern, mendacious and honey tongued girls who are the
squeezers of the scanty sum usually paid to my dear gentlemen as
their monthly income.”

Some of the writers are real prophets of gloom. Their books are not
really fiction, but books of advice, in which young men are warned
that most women are evil and that drink and women are the ruin of
men. Subtitle on a cover:

“This book is worth owning. It arms the buyer against hardship
and generates in him the courage to face world-difficulties. Advise a friend to buy one.—Publisher.”

“WIFE BROUGHT LEPROSY TO HER HUSBAND AFTER
COMMUNICATING WITH A SECRET FRIEND.—READ
PAGE 4.”

On the other hand there are some writers who try to be simply
realistic, and apologise to the readers for not describing the world
better than it is:

“Books on human life do not give explanations of things as things
should be, but as some people see them. It is how men see women,
and how women see men at this present age.”

The most vigorous of the writers, however, are not didactic. They
write for entertainment. One advertises his book as a “gripping novel”;
another says “it entertains more than two bottles of beer”. The case of
the Onitsha writer who writes for pleasure and entertainment is most
ably put by Thomas Igwe in the preface of his book John in the Romance
of True Love:

“This drama is one of the best love intricacies ever exposed in this
part of Africa. It is a good thriller and it tells us of a boy called John
who only for the sake of love killed his twin brother—Dixon. After
this bloody deed of his, he proceeded to the secondary school with
his girl friend Agnes.

“Who can guess how they met their end? Well, Agnes was pregnant
and not wanting her parents to know, she took some drugs to pro-
cure abortion which later made her to bleed profusely after which
she was rushed to the hospital where she died. But before she died,
she of course confessed to her parents why she was dying pre-
naturally.

“John having been told of his lovers death wasted no time rushing to
hospital where he saw Agnes dead. He then kisses her for the last

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time and daggered himself to death.

"This drama, with all its mistakes, I hope, will be a good thriller and I hope it too will serve as a good lesson to some of our boys and girls who are always mad about love.

"Finally I may say that all the names used in the play are fictitious ones, hence the drama itself is a fiction."

Even here there is lip service being paid to a moralistic attitude—but then these pamphlets are chiefly sold to schoolboys.

Like Thomas Iguh, most of the authors take great care to point out that all their characters are fictitious and that any resemblances to people alive or dead are purely accidental. Often they use delightfully fresh language to say so:

"All characters in this novel are all round imaginary. Note, none is real. It is not a true story, and therefore concerns nobody in any way. Whoever hits his head at the ceiling does it at his own personal risk."

(Miller O. Albert.)

Thomas Iguh's introduction gives a good idea of the type of wild plot these uncollected authors indulge in. Most of them have no difficulty in inventing plots and in holding the attention of their readers.

(To be continued)
CLOTH CASE BINDING REPAIR

Trevor Hickman

From time to time, when specialising in bookbinding and book repair, one is asked to repair nineteenth and twentieth century cloth case bindings. Normally, these have deteriorated during the passage of time, in part eaten away by insects or vermin, and often rotted by the action of acids or alkalis present in the covering material and in the adhesive. On examining the binding, normally the first reaction to this situation is, that the cover is not worth saving; better to rebind the book in a new case using a modern cloth. Today when time is money, material costs are negligible by comparison. Considerable time can be spent on refurbishing cloth covers and the finished result, after working for an hour or more, does not compare with a new cover, which could be constructed, title added and attached to the book in less than three-quarters of an hour. To a professional bookbinder this time matters. The customer is expected to pay a fair price for the time spent and it is often difficult in his inexperienced eyes to appreciate the frustration the binder must face in attempting to restore the cover to something approaching its original state.

In this decade we have experienced the coming of the “do it yourself” cult and this could no doubt have (and in certain cases already has) been applied to the simple restoration of books, particularly cloth case bindings. However, the rebinding of valuable books must always be left to an expert. The value of repairing plain covers is questionable, even though most collectors prefer their books to be housed in the original binding. A cloth constructed cover can easily be reproduced in a corresponding style if no decoration is wanted. There is, however, a case for the restoration of decorated cloth covers, especially where a damaged binding is part of a set.

Repairing cloth bound books should be an easy, though delicate operation for a dedicated person who is careful, precise, has a reasonable knowledge of book construction and who appreciates the value of a well bound book. Very little equipment and materials are needed. A Swan Morton surgical knife with spare blades, bone folder, small strong pair of shears, clean one inch paintbrush, a No. 5 camel hair brush, poly vinyl acetate (p.v.a.) adhesive, a one-foot steel rule, assorted pieces of bookbinding cloth, coloured inks, ribbed kraft paper, thin card and a few sheets of white bank paper. These materials and tools can be obtained from the majority of handicraft suppliers.
This article deals only with the repair and restoration of book covers constructed from binders' cloth and the reinforcement of partially damaged spine linings. Re-sewing and re-binding, which require more skill, should be left to the skilled binder. For the purpose of this article, two books have been chosen to help clarify the descriptive notes. The first is Vol. III of "A Child's History of England" by Charles Dickens. One of a set of three, this book is a first edition bound in smooth maroon cloth, stamped in blind and gold on the front cover and spine, with marbled edges and matching endpapers. It is a typical Victorian binding, although not too ornate and dated 1852-53-54 respectively.

Volumes I and II were sound, needing only a little refurbishing. Volume III was in a bad state, the spine coming away from the cover at the head, the back linings becoming very loose and the endpapers split down the hinge (joint). Fortunately, the sections were sewn on two recessed cords, which in turn were pasted to the cover, so holding the case and sections together. This book needed the spine linings repairing and re-backing with a matching cloth. Because it was one of a set of first editions in its original cover, a re-binding, though simple enough, was out of the question. The second book was a slightly different proposition. This was a hand-written manuscript on Battery tactics during the Franco-Prussian War. It was bound in a maroon "pinhead" cloth, sewn onto two vellum tapes, and with sprinkled edges. It contained a note on the second page, "Written between November 15th, 1887, and April 11th, 1888. Sent to be bound April 12th, 1888." The binding would still have been quite sound, but unfortunately a mouse had gnawed part of the spine and the glued linings. A complete re-covering would have been in order for this book; it was not part of a set and did not have any decorative merit. On consideration it was felt that only a rebinding was necessary, to show that the binding had been repaired, but which was still partially in the original cover. In fact, the two books needed much the same treatment. The Dickens required a little more care; and will be dealt with first. The following notes have been compiled as a guide to any book-lover who wishes to undertake the craft of book repair.

Re-backing a cloth case binding

The first operation entailed removing the damaged cloth spine. This was done by cutting into the cover, through the cloth on the front and back boards, 1½" in from the spine, using a metal rule and the surgical knife, also cutting the cloth on the turn-in towards the spine, so removing the strip of cloth. This was then put away safely until wanted. At this stage, the binding felt very loose through lack of adhesion on the spine of the paper and Mull linings. By lying the book on the bench, open at the centre pages, it was possible with the No. 5 camel hair brush to force small quantities of p.v.a. under the spine linings. Then the book was closed and carefully moulded to its original shape, at the same time rubbing down the spine linings with the bone folder. A piece of thin ribbed kraft paper was now attached to the spine with p.v.a. fitting nearly to the head, tail and sides. This too, was well rubbed down with the bone folder. The ribbed lines of the kraft paper must run down the spine. These lines show the grain direction of the paper, which is very important, as it helps any bound book to open easily. It is of the utmost importance that new and old linings are fixed firmly to the spine. The book was then allowed to dry for twelve hours.

The binding now felt solid and was ready for rebacking with a new cloth spine. When doing repair work of this kind it is advisable to collect assorted coloured cloths, which can then be matched to existing bindings when needed. Unfortunately, no exact matching colour was available in this instance, so a biscuit-coloured cloth was used for the spine, tinted to match the original cover later. With the aid of the surgical knife, the cloth on the front and back covers was lifted away from the boards for about 3" in from the spine. This was done by carefully making a cut 3" long in the cloth on the edge of the squares on the inside of the cover boards, next to the spine. The cloth was then lifted away from the spine with the point of the knife, along the outside of both covers. To enable the new cloth to be turned in at the head and tail of the spine, it was necessary to lift part of the turn-in next to the spine at the head and tail of both boards. This again was done with the point of the knife. A strip of cloth was now cut to overlap both boards and sufficient to turn-in at the head and tail. The measurements were: the curvature of the spine plus 1½", the length of the boards plus 1". The original turn-in on the covers being ½" on all edges. A thin strip of cloth was cut with the straight grain of the cloth running down the strip. If a sample corner of cloth is torn it will split in a straight line down the warp. A piece of thin card, called a loose hollow, was then cut as a stiffener for the spine. The measurements were: the exact curvature of the spine, by the length of the boards. Again, the straight grain must run down the strip. This can be found in thin card by folding, the fold which offers the least resistance indicates the machine or grain direction. Special emphasis is placed on machine direction of materials used in book repair, one of the chief causes of breaking down of the
weave and starch filling along the spine on cloth cased books is because the original material was cut with no regard to the direction of manufacture; the joints of the case very soon begin to collapse if they are opened across the woven fibres instead of with them. The strip of card was now glued with p.v.a. in the centre of the piece of cloth, allowed to dry, then curved with the thumb and forefinger in order to mould to the spine. A thin coating of glue was applied with the 1" brush to the $\frac{3}{4}$ overlap and the new cloth carefully rubbed down with the bone folder under the lifted portions of the old cover. Glue was carefully brushed on the two turn-ins at the head and tail. These were then turned down inside the card hollow and under the old turned-in cloth. Care was taken to see that these were well stuck by rubbing the new material down with the point of the bone folder.

Glue was now worked under the lifted portion of the old cover with the point of the folder and the No. 5 brush, carefully rubbing down. Great care should be taken to ensure that the old cloth moulds down on to the new and the cuts made at the head and tail butt together neatly. The old spine was now trimmed to fit on the new. The turn-in at the head was still intact. This was left. The old loose hollow was peeled away leaving a limp strip of cloth which was carefully brushed with glue and attached to the new spine, turning down the old material inside the loose hollow at the head. Careful rubbing is essential to ensure complete adhesion, and that the old spine moulded perfectly to the new. The binding was now left to dry under a light weight.

On this book, the endpapers had been rather damaged along the hinge and these were repaired by opening each cover, which was then supported on another book, all the torn loose pieces of endpaper were

The books used to illustrate these notes were kindly loaned by Bernard Halliday, Antiquarian Bookseller, of Leicester.
glued with p.v.a. and rubbed down. A strip of thin bank paper was now torn approx. ½” wide and as long as the book. The reason for tearing this strip was to enable the feathered edge of the bank paper to blend into the endpaper when glued. This strip was glued and rubbed down into the hinge of the cover which was then allowed to dry out, open. The bank paper obscured a certain amount of the marbled pattern on the endpaper, this was touched in with coloured inks using a fine brush. Where the corners of the cover had frayed and lifted a little p.v.a. glue was applied with the bone folder and the corners moulded into their original shape. Finally the new cloth where it could be seen, along the hinge and the turn-in, was tinted with ink to match the old cloth.

Re-backing the cloth-bound manuscript was a much easier task. Such a course of action was decided because part of the spine was missing, that the remainder would not be retained. A piece of matching material was chosen for the new spine and the re-backing operation undertaken in much the same manner as previously. The spine linings were not loose, though one new lining was applied to cover up the damage caused by the mouse. Endpapers this time were fairly sound and did not need to be repaired. The smooth new spine of course required a title and so it was decided to print a lettering piece on white hand-made paper and glue it to the spine, about 1” down from the head. This was common practice on cloth bindings when they were first introduced in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Naturally, it would have been more professional to have gold-tooled the spine, or gold blocked a thin leather lettering piece and attached this to the spine, but as the majority of amateur binders are very limited in their range of gold-finishing equipment and an increasing number of book lovers have printing facilities, it was felt that a printed label was quite in order and at the same time, in keeping with the contents of the book.

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THE VINE PRESS  
by John Dreyfus

Work at this private press began in October 1936. Almost a year later, forty copies of its first book were distributed. The Vine Press was off to a leisurely start—and rightly so. For it is the hobby of two men whose working lives, and other pursuits, leave little time to operate a hand press. Why indeed did they ever decide to tackle such a back-breaking task?

Both John Peters and Peter Foster were concerned to raise standards of craftsmanship, materials and design. Peters had worked for many years since the war as a typographer and type designer, and had previously studied architecture. Foster was a practising architect, with a great interest in fine printing. Both in this country which had been unchalleged until 1936. They knew of no press in this country which had even attempted to approach the pre-war standard. And so they decided to make the attempt themselves. At the same time, they looked forward to opportunities for close collaboration with authors and artists of their own choice. They felt competent to choose their own plant and equipment, and were quite determined to devote equal care to the planning and execution of their work.

In nine years, they had produced six books and two pamphlets. Each production has been treated as a separate typographical problem. There has been no uniformity of typeface, format or binding; each work received the form and treatment which was thought to be appropriate to its content. The one consistent feature of all the productions of the Vine Press has been that they were printed by hand, and not on a power-driven press. Mechanical methods were not despised for text composition, but every sheet was pulled by hand on a Cope and Sherwin imperial press (loaned by Cambridge University Press where Peters worked for fourteen years as a book-designer).

With one exception, all the Vine Press books were printed on handmade paper. Great pains were taken to obtain the finest and most suitable inks, and for their first book inks were imported from the firm of Janecke Schneemann in Germany, formerly suppliers to the Kelmscott Press. The hand has also been dominant in making and decorating the bindings. Special designs were hand-marbled by Douglas Cockerell & Son, and special paste-papers were designed and manufactured by Margaret Foster, wife of the joint proprietor. (Also on the distaff side, Margaret Peters tackled singlehanded all the undecorated paperwork.)

But the greatest degree of manual skill was devoted to the actual printing of the sheets.

It must be remembered that most of the great English private presses from Kelmscott to the Golden Cockerell had employed professionals to print their books. The proprietors of the Vine Press were determined to print every sheet with their own hands. The greater part of their skill was acquired by trial and error, with little help from printers' grammars or from friends in the trade. Fortunately both proprietors were mechanically minded, for they would not otherwise have been able to achieve such clean impression or such accurate register. Perhaps their greatest technical achievement was to devise their own system for damping their handmade paper in order to make it perfectly receptive to their specially-made inks.

Illustrations have been a feature of all but the first of their books. Their most ambitious production was *The Parliament of Women* (1966) for which Reg Boulton made three-colour illustrations on a large scale by a combination of wood engraving on the end-grain, by lino-cuts, and by etching. All the printing surfaces were prepared by the artist himself (at that time teaching art at Huntingdon Grammar School, and without previous experience as a book illustrator). The colour plates were printed under Boulton’s supervision, and were run through the press five times, and were twice damped, without losing register.

Wood engravings for their other books were commissioned from Frank Martin, Peter Reddick and Diana Bloomfield. The work of these artists has never been printed with greater skill, nor has it ever been positioned in a text with greater sensitivity.

The achievement of the Vine Press has been recognized on both sides of the Atlantic within less than a decade. An activity which might have been no more than a satisfying hobby for two enthusiasts (or a gratifying experience for their authors and artists) has turned out to be a valuable example for others to study and enjoy. In exhibitions of British book design, works from the Vine Press have been consistently selected in recent years. Technical advice to other private presses—notably to the Stanbrook Abbey Press—has been readily given by John Peters; and a wider appreciation of the work of the Vine Press has been stimulated by discerning articles in the trade press.

The success of the Vine Press incidentally proved that the operation of a private press does not require private means. After payment in full to suppliers, artists and authors, there have still been sufficient funds left over to provide claret for the proprietor-pressmen at the rate of one bottle per shift. Seldom have “perks” been so well deserved.
Notes on the Production of Vine Press Books by John Peters

1. *Vitis Vera*. An anthology of verses on the vine from the Vulgate and Authorized Version of the Bible, edited, and with an introduction by Peter Foster and John Peters. The text was set by hand in 18 point Monotype Perpetua and 12 point Perpetua Titling. The lettering of the title page and other embellishments were drawn by John Peters. 40 copies printed on handmade paper and bound by Gray of Cambridge were issued in August 1957.

This was an experimental exercise into which we built as many of the problems of composition and presswork as we thought might have to be faced. In the course of printing we discovered the unforeseen eccentricities of our press, some of which were resolved, others we came to accept as a natural hazard. Problems of register were particularly acute and wastage ran high, but we did succeed in printing black and red at one impression and were able to salvage 40 copies out of the hundred intended. We learnt that if we were to produce even one book a year hand composition would have to yield to type setting.


Set in 13 point Monotype Perpetua with the first use of Castellar on the title page. Full morocco bindings were made by Gray of Cambridge and those in cloth by Mansell (Bookbinders) Ltd. The edition was limited to 200 copies on handmade paper. November, 1957.

In securing this short story from Marjorie Sisson we felt we had a manuscript that would respond to lively illustration and this enthusiasm was shared by Frank Martin. The type was set by Shenval Press and Martin spent a weekend with us during proofing, re-entering lines and deepening white areas in his blocks to clear the sagging of the dampened paper.

We had still not perfected our make-ready as far as the type was concerned and it became evident that we should have printed blocks and type separately in order to get an even distribution of pressure. The result was in this way rather disappointing, the blocks printed very well but the type was patchy.

The first sheet had to be reprinted on account of a spelling mistake—an error which we vowed never to repeat, but did.


The text is set in 13 point Monotype Blado italic. The title page has a wood engraving by Reg Boulton and decorative border by John Peters. Full green morocco bindings were made by Gray of Cambridge and those in quarter leather and marbled boards by Mansell (Bookbinders) Ltd. The edition was limited to 150 copies on handmade paper. April, 1959. PPB59-76.

This little book went through with the least trouble of all. Again it was set at Shenval and went to press with only minor problems. We had by this time made a point of using new wooden furniture cut to size for each book. This assisted the process of forme preparation and helped to ease register problems. We had also by this time our 20-inch by 4-inch diameter two-handled inking roller and had developed a system of bearers across the forme. This gave us our most noticeable improvement in presswork and it also speeded up production from 2 impressions to 3 impressions per minute.


The text is set in 16 point Monotype Centaur making use of unjustified lines to link the prose and verse passages. The three-colour illustrations made for this book are a combination of end-grain engraving, lino-cut and etched plate, all of which were prepared by the artist and printed under his supervision. The title is reproduced from a drawing by John Peters. The bindings were made by Gray of Cambridge and a specially marbled paper was made by Douglas Cockrell & Son. The edition was limited to 100 copies on handmade paper. December, 1960. PPB60.103.

Preparation for this book had taken the best part of a year and every contingency as we thought had been carefully considered. The type was set at Cambridge University Press and make-up began. A visit was made to Tuckenhay Mill to select and buy the paper. We had long and searching discussions with Reg Boulton about the illustrations, our aim being to exploit the process to the full. This led to his idea of etching the plate for the first colour, cutting lino for the second and superimposing a wood engraving for the third.

The four sheets containing an illustration each also carried at least two pages of backed text and a heading in red. This meant at least five printings if we could put the red and black in together. It also meant two dampings and three sets of press point holes exactly placed on each side of the sheet. The great test of the system came at the second damping (the sheets having been hung and dried after the first three impressions) since it was essential that the sheet should stretch only as far as it stretched at the first damping. More by luck than judgement this was achieved and the process of five printings was repeated four times without serious wastage. Our only difficulty came with the black printing of the last illustration. For some reason the black would not take on the second colour and much time and paper was wasted until having tried all the usual remedies we sponged the image with a weak solution of household detergent. This was immediately successful and the run was completed.

Altogether the presswork occupied us almost continuously for nine months, working each Saturday and most of Sunday, and two evenings during the week preparing and damping paper. We were reasonably satisfied with the presswork, though the text lacked something in tonal quality.

5. *Membership Appeal* for St James' Church, Henningford Grey.

Designed by Peter Foster with wood engravings by Reg Boulton. June, 1961.


Set in 14 point Monotype Octavian the book is the first commercial use of this typeface designed by Will Carter and David Kindersley. The binding by Gray of Cambridge has paste-paper boards designed and made by Margaret Foster. The edition was limited to 240 copies on mould-made paper. September, 1962. PPB62.141.

This important paper by Sir Herbert Read gave us the opportunity to use Summer 1966
Octavian, then going through a series of experimental settings at Cambridge University Press. Our use of it was in a way part of the experiment in that we decided to use more generous leading and to print on a coarse grain mould-made paper. The coarseness of this paper presented some difficulty in reproducing Peter Reddick’s fine lined engraving of the author. This was overcome by first plate-sinking the paper to receive the engraving. The pressure required to achieve this was as much as our press or ourselves could deliver, and it proved to be a very exhausting run.

7  *Arms* of the Royal Institute of British Architects engraved by Eric Gill.

A pamphlet bound in paste-paper designed and made by Margaret Foster. 40 copies issued, March, 1962.

8  *Twenty-five Poems.* A collection of poems by Evelyn Ansell with wood engravings by Diana Bloomfield. The book is set in 16 point Monotype Centaur and is printed on what is perhaps the last of the paper made by J. Batchelor for William Morris. The bindings, by Grey of Cambridge, in green-morocco and in green silk have specially marbled end papers by Douglas Cockerell & Son. The edition was limited to 100 copies. September, 1963. Pp165. 14s.

Although the preparation and printing of this book went smoothly enough it was nearly brought to complete ruin in binding. The paper was bought from Cambridge University Press several years before where it was part of a stock of Batchelor Kelmscott paper deposited there by Sir Sidney Cockerell and labelled on the wrappers ‘Sir William Morris Paper’ (sic). This when dumped printed extremely well, but possibly due to a fault in the ink, required interleaving before binding. Despite instruction on this vital point our trade binder put the folded sheets into a hydraulic press without interleaving and with the obvious result. At this point all appeared to be lost until H. C. Band of Gray & Sons took the matter in hand and decided that he could restore the sheets to pristine condition. This he did and the edition was retrieved though some copies still show signs of set-off. The only copies in perfect condition are the ten in full leather bound from the start by Grays. This small residue represents the limit in presswork of what we felt we could achieve with our archaic equipment.

**REVIEWS**


Dr Plant’s authoritative and splendidly readable account of the economic history of printing, publishing and bookselling in Britain was originally published in 1939, and has long been out of print and difficult to obtain. The present issue, called by the publishers ‘a second revised edition’, ‘with revised statistical and other data’ appears to be nothing of the sort; but rather a photolithographic reprint of the original edition, incorporating no more than a page or so in all of revised matter. This is a very great pity, as in the past quarter-century there have been more than a few important works—such as Ruari MacLean’s *Victorian book design* and Middleton’s *History of English craft book-binding technique*—which contain modifications or expansions of detail which one would wish to have incorporated into the text. And it is frustrating to find that the references to e.g. Moxon’s *Mechanic Exercises* are still to the original edition instead of to Davis and Carter’s scholarly text. Nevertheless, one has to be grateful to the publishers for again making Dr Plant’s admirable book available, and one’s regrets for what might have been are tempered by the thought that had the revision been fuller the price would have been far less reasonable:

and at two guineas the book is a real bargain.

R. C.


It is always extremely difficult to review an encyclopaedia or similar reference book. The aims of the compiler will often not coincide with the ways in which you would like to use the book yourself; there is the temptation to list some of its inevitable failings to produce a biased notice which will damn the book without due cause, or (fearing to do this) you mention its good points and skate over its deficiencies. And no one person can review such a book as Mr Landau’s encyclopaedia thoroughly. It is obviously a book which supplies a considerable need, since it is going into its third edition only eight years since it first appeared; it is excellently produced in a manner which I know from personal experience stands up to heavy use very well; it contains many long, excellent and up-to-date articles written by authorities on their subjects. And yet, and yet... some articles are badly out-of-date, having in some cases not been revised since the first edition, as far as one can tell. To give one example, the article on the Colon classification fails to mention that the sixth edition appeared in 1961. Many of the shorter articles, on printing techniques and kindred topics are of little relevance in this work, being done better as well as more appropriately in Glaister’s *Glossary of the book*, and the space they occupy would have been much better employed if used on some topics which are not treated as fully as is desirable. Although PLA has a well-written article occupying nearly a full column, the entry for the Bibliographical Society consists of but five short lines, which even the most devoted PLA member must find odd. There are no entries for any of the provincial bibliographical societies, nor strangely enough for any of the copyright libraries nor for the great foreign libraries; topics which one would wish and expect to find treated.

Summer 1966
Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Would not Mr West's informative article on The Toilet in the Spring 1966 issue have been improved by the inclusion of some illustrations? Perhaps these could be included in a future issue of The Private Library.*

W. Sams who is recorded as having marketed the second edition dealt in fashionable ephemera from 1 St James's Street and described himself as 'Bookseller to H.R.H. The Duke of York.'

Yours &c.
G. Wakeman

* We agree. A page of the manuscript is reproduced (facing p. 35) by kind permission of Percy Mair.

Dear Sir,

With reference to Rigby Graham's letter in the July 1965 issue of The Private Library in which he still throws doubt on the quality of alum-tawed skins, if he enquires of the Public Record Office he will find all the evidence needed to establish its undoubted lasting characteristics.

Yours &c.
Roger Powell

Dear Sir,

Having written hundreds of articles in dozens of periodicals at home and abroad, I should not have thought that my piece, "Book Collecting on a Professor's Salary", in the July 1965 issue of The Private Library would attract much attention. Though "much" may not be an accurate term, I nevertheless did receive three letters from widely separated areas: Stockholm, London, and Lansing, Michigan.

Shortly after returning to Detroit after a Scandinavian trip last summer, I found in my mail an attractively printed anthology, Mord 1 folio: fyra biblio mysterier (Stockholm: Sillkapet Bokväxmera, 1965), containing a Swedish translation of a short story by Ernest Bramah. I wrote the publisher to thank him for sending the book and wondered how he knew of my Bramah interest or had my address. In reply I got a letter from Mr Thure Nyman, editor of the volume, saying: "I read your article in The Private Library and asked the editor for your address, as I thought you might be interested to know about the story in Mord 1 folio—so far as I know the only existing translation into Swedish of any work of Bramah."

An equally pleasant result of my article was a letter from Professor H. P. R. Fitberg, an eminent British typographer who has just retired as Head of the Department of English Local History in the University of Leicester. His letter begins: "Recently, while I was recovering in hospital from a major operation, a bibliographical friend brought me a copy of The Private Library, in which I read, with natural interest and pleasure, your kind remarks about the edition of A. E. Houseman which I printed so many years ago." And he continued in a very pleasant vein on printing, typography, the Alcuin Press, and Houseman; which led to further correspondence, and my wish to do a detailed account of his typographical work—if I only had time.

The third letter was from Mr John Neufeld of the Michigan State Library, Lansing, closer to home. He kidded me about the book I said I had bought in Hollywood, the date appearing—through a typographical error in The Private Library—as "MGMXXIX". "Subliminal plug for a studio?" Mr. Neufeld asked. His letter was mainly concerned with a special edition of John P. Marquand's first novel, The Unspakable Gentleman, 1922. Our subsequent correspondence led to my doing an autobiographical piece, "Dialogue with a Bibliographer," for the State Library periodical, Michigan in Books.

I trust my three Swedish, British and American correspondents and constant readers of The Private Library will not object to my liberty in quoting them without permission. But it is all in the interest of good bookmanship, and it just shows what an innocent confessional article on book collecting will lead to.

Yours &c.
William White
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