

# DICKENS TO BENTON RARE BOOKS & WORKS ON PAPER

FROM THE MORSE COLLECTION

## BOOK NOTES

*Cases along the walls:*

### **Kate Greenaway (1846-1901)**

Kate Greenaway, the daughter of a master engraver and a talented seamstress, is one of the most well-known and beloved author/illustrators of modern times. Greenaway was influenced by her parents but also by William Morris and his return to medieval sources of inspiration. She rose to great success by bringing something of the style of the mid-nineteenth century Pre-Raphaelite painters to her captivating stories of childhood.

During her career in England from the 1870s to the 1890s, Greenaway produced more than 150 books. John Ruskin, the giant of nineteenth-century art criticism, advised her to devote herself to painting. But perhaps because of her own memory of a happy childhood, the need to support herself, and her astonishing popularity, she chose to build her career on children's books.

Her first book, *Under the Window*, was published in 1879 and sold 20,000 copies almost immediately. It was quickly reprinted in an edition of 70,000. Her first almanack in 1883 sold more than 90,000 copies. As a result, Greenaway's designs began appearing on wallpaper, scarves, fashions, dolls, and plates such as the one included in this exhibition from the Museum's collection.

The *Language of Flowers*, which may be Greenaway's finest book, was published in 1884, and half of its first edition of 19,500 went to America. All her books were reissued in 1900, and subsequent editions continue to be published today as classic literature that is at home in every child's library.

### **Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) Grimm**

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm studied law, but in 1806, at the ages of twenty-one and twenty-two respectively, they started collecting folktales. Both brothers became librarians and began publishing their collection of folktales in 1812. Over the course of their lives, they added tales and published six additional editions of their first collection. The Grimm brothers' published works are considered by many to be the best known and most influential German-language books ever written.

Though editions that came later softened the somewhat frightening and cruel stories, the Grimms' tales were and remain a reflection of pre-modern central European life and society.

### **William Morris (1834-1896) and Kelmscott Press**

If the Arts and Crafts movement could be attributed to a single founder, that individual would be William Morris. His rejection of Victorian design and his rebellion against industrial culture could not have been more complete or more inspiring to kindred spirits all over Europe and America.

As part of his return to the beauty of the handcrafted, Morris founded Kelmscott Press in 1891. By its end in 1898, Kelmscott had produced fifty-three titles and more than 18,000 books. Setting out to surpass the highest standards of past bookmaking, Morris based his work on medieval sources and paid exquisite attention to the paper, typefaces, colors, visual harmonies, and textures.

The Morse's six leaves from Kelmscott's *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* are testament to his success and prove the justice of his Olympian reputation and that of his chief

illustrator, Edward Burne-Jones. Burne-Jones provided eighty-seven illustrations for the Kelmscott Chaucer though Morris himself designed twenty-six large initial words, the border foliage, and the type ornaments. The edition consisted of 425 copies, thirteen on vellum and the rest on handmade heavy linen paper. This book was the masterpiece of Morris' Kelmscott Press. A paper copy originally sold for £20, a very high cost at the time.

### **Charles Dickens (1812-1870)**

Dickens was a prolific nineteenth-century author whose serialized books made him famous internationally. He is most noted for his realistic portraits of industrialized society and for the unforgettable characters he created.

His stories, as in both the Museum's first editions of *Bleak House* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, often were accompanied by illustrations by "Phiz" Browne.

The vase on exhibit is one of a whole line of Weller pottery called "Dickensware" and depicts Mr. Pecksniff, a hypocritical architect to whom Martin Chuzzlewit is apprenticed. It was made about a half-century after Dickens' book was published and attests to the author's enduring popularity – which continues even today.

### **Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932)**

Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, with its endearing adventures of Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad, appeared in 1908 and is the book for which the Scottish author is most beloved and remembered. But *Wind and the Willows* is only part of his legacy in children's literature. Earlier, Grahame had produced *The Golden Age*, a collection of short stories about a group of children. These were

previously published sketches that he had written as a diversion while pursuing a successful career at the Bank of England. Illustrated by Maxfield Parrish, *The Golden Age* was published by John Lane, the publisher of *The Yellow Book*, after it was rejected by an American publisher.

### ***The Yellow Book* (1894-1897)**

*The Yellow Book* was conceived as a new type of journal that would bring the new art of the late-nineteenth century to the public. The color yellow represented a rebellion against Victorian colors by its nature and because of its reputation as the color of “naughty” French novels. One of the most important periodicals of the 1890s, *The Yellow Book* marked the first serious attempt to market high culture to mass audiences in England and America. This avant-garde quarterly journal was published only from 1894 to 1897. The Morse collection includes the full run of thirteen volumes.

*The Yellow Book* featured work by Aubrey Beardsley, who was its first art editor, but it also included the work of more conservative artists such as Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Golden Age*, the latter of which is represented in this exhibition. *The Yellow Book* also published a wide variety of writers including William Butler Yeats and H.G. Wells. Noteworthy was the inclusion of poetry and fiction by women.

But *The Yellow Book's* emphasis was always on the modern and the aesthetic. During its short life, it was regarded as the epitome of style in English art and literature.

### **Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956)**

Frank Brangwyn, artist, painter, engraver, and designer, illustrated *The Girl and the Faun*. The son of a Welsh architect working in Belgium, where he was born, Brangwyn was apprenticed to William Morris in England for four years. Like Morris, he designed for a wide variety of applications, from carpets and textiles to metalwork and jewelry.

Brangwyn was one of a small number of artists whose designs were chosen by Siegfried Bing, founder of the Paris gallery L'Art Nouveau, to be executed in a leaded-glass window by Louis C. Tiffany. That window, *Child with Gourd*, c. 1898, is in the Museum's collection and on exhibi-

tion at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York until May.

*Cases in the center:*

### ***The Sunbonnet Babies' Primer* Eulalie Osgood Grover (1873-1958)**

“The cover of this first edition is filled with the optimism of the story and its time. The gentle curves are typical of those found in French Art Nouveau; the shapes have the innocence of the babies themselves. The author lived in Winter Park. The book deals with the world a child sees, and it sold over one million copies.

Today's world smiles at the naiveté of these quaint characters who helped its grandparents learn to read. We read the *Sunbonnet Babies* in Miss Anderson's class in College Hill, Pennsylvania, before the First World War. We probably were isolated from the grimy side of things. But, then, no one ever waited in the alley to sell us “crack,” and the only alcohol we ever got was in a syrup guaranteed to cure catarrh.

The *Sunbonnet Babies* are no longer in schools. They are where they belong—in a museum where they will be cared for. They are out of print and out of date. Alcohol is recognized as a serious problem in some grade schools, and today's children see a different reality from that of a century ago.

We have cleared away the stuffiness of the world that produced books like *The Sunbonnet Babies' Primer*. But we are not at all certain the world doesn't need a little stuffiness.”

— Hugh F. McKean (1908-1995)

*Director of the Morse Museum*

*From its founding in 1942 until his death*

### **Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), Laurence Housman (1865-1959), and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)**

Aubrey Beardsley, Laurence Housman (brother of the poet A. E. Housman), and Oscar Wilde were central figures in the so-called “Decadence” at end of the nineteenth century. The Decadence was a term often applied to artists associated with Symbolism and the Aesthetic movement. In general, these artists, poets, writers, and designers rejected Victorian ideas about nature, morality, design, and usually, politics. The Decadents believed in art for art's sake and the primacy of beauty even over traditional morality. Though seldom without their critics, they produced beautiful work that is of great historical importance.

### **Mary Dow Brine (1816-1913)**

Mary Dow Brine, a native of New York, is most famous for her inspirational poem, “Somebody's Mother.” But for the Morse, she is most noteworthy for *My Boy and I* or *On the Road to Slumberland*, a collection of twelve poems and lullabies. The book was illustrated by Dora Wheeler, the daughter of Candace Wheeler, a partner in Louis C. Tiffany's Associated Artists group, and even more importantly, the book was one of the very few that Tiffany published.

The Morse acquired this rare book in 2006, and its acquisition brought to an end the long search initiated years ago by Hugh McKean.

### **Walter Crane (1845-1915)**

Although Walter Crane was a successful painter represented in the Royal Academy, he is most remembered as an illustrator. This reputation as one of the leading illustrators of his day rests on his contributions to books on the one hand and to posters, pamphlets, and other propaganda for the advancement of socialism — a non-violent variety, it should be noted — on the other.

Crane, like his close friend William Morris, the leader of the Arts and Crafts movement in England, sought to reform design and to promote social justice in his own time.

The Museum's Crane books are especially beautiful and fine examples of his floral work, his interpretations of nature, and his interest in English medieval sources of inspiration.



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