

Bertram  
ROTA

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Celebrating One Hundred Years

1923-2023

January

This is the first in our centenary year of what we intend to be a monthly series throughout of historical reflections, celebrations, themed lists, a fully-fledged catalogue (in the spring) and more.

To begin with, we take a look back at our very first catalogues, issued between 1923 and 1927, when the notion of collecting first editions by modern authors was very much in its infancy.

The first nine catalogues were issued by Julian the present owner's grandfather, "C. Bertram Rota", from 108 Charing Cross Road, in identical format – both wrappers and text on thin paper with the inner upper wrapper doubling up for page 1. The C[yril]. was dropped from catalogue 3 onwards – he was never too fond of his given first name. It was only with catalogue 10 that variation in cover colour, design and typeface was entertained.

Not only paper but ink cost was a serious consideration – catalogue entries were densely printed, and somewhat minimalist, with lots of abbreviations (it took decades to free ourselves of these sometimes obfuscatory restrictions ("bds." for "boards" for example), and perhaps we have not entirely done so even now. I can recall quite a battle with my father to have authors' names at the beginning of every description of their works rather than just the first one, especially confusing and unhelpful when a list of titles ran over the page.

The telephone number was Regent 6258, the option of sending orders by cable ("Rotabook, London") appearing for the first time in catalogue 8. Catalogues 5 to 7 mention "Showrooms: First Floor" on the upper wrapper.

These catalogues were variously titled:

*A Catalogue of Modern Books, mainly First Editions* (number 1), then *A Catalogue of Modern Books, First Editions and Belle Lettres*, for number 5 *Modern Books, First Editions, Fine Printing and General Literature*, number 6 including "Editions-de-luxe" and number 9 more assertively and confidently simply *First Editions of Modern Authors*.

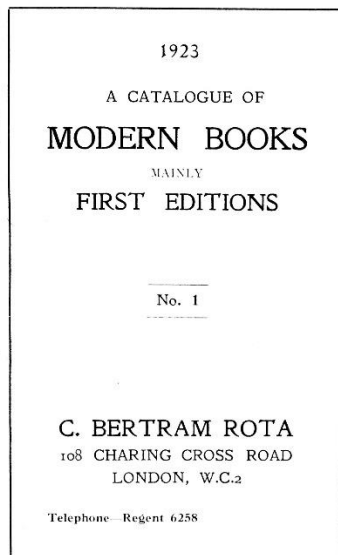
Catalogue number 1 consisted of 546 entries, beginning with that stalwart of the earliest reaches of the alphabet in the context, Lascelles Abercrombie:

ABERCROMBIE (Lascelles). *Speculative Dialogues*, FIRST EDITION, cr. 8vo, wrappers, 1912. 6s. 6d.

Amusingly perhaps in view of the importance of condition in the market now, there is no mention of it at all, although we did elsewhere say "fine copy" or "nice copy", apparently quite randomly. Dust-wrappers are mentioned only occasionally. Ironically given the hand-wringing over them by the firm through three generations, they were seen as a sort of bonus. The idea that they mattered very much would have been thought ludicrous. Publishers were not mentioned either (another little battle for clarity in more recent years).

There follows a list of twenty books which appeared in that first catalogue, copies of which we have in stock and for sale now, with those 1923 prices alongside today's (condition and other variables notwithstanding). We trust that they are not the same copies, slow though turnover can be, unless they have at least been through our hands several times in the interim (a not at all uncommon phenomenon – we acquire books to this day in which I find notes, cost codes and pricing in my father's or my grandfather's hand). We have three Abercrombie titles but not, alas, *Speculative Dialogues*. It is worth mentioning too perhaps that anthologies, which featured prominently in our catalogues then and for many years, were seen as fascinatingly reflective of their time, rather than inferior and of little interest as they seem rather to be now.

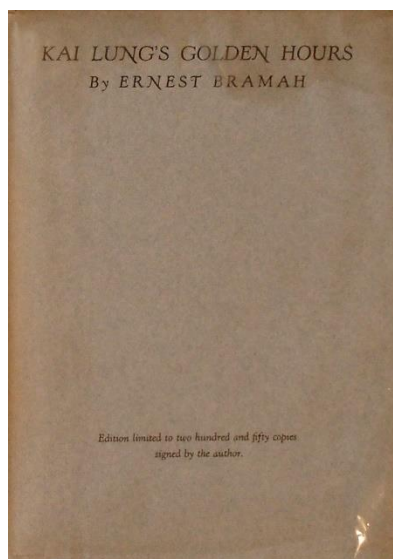
Julian Rota



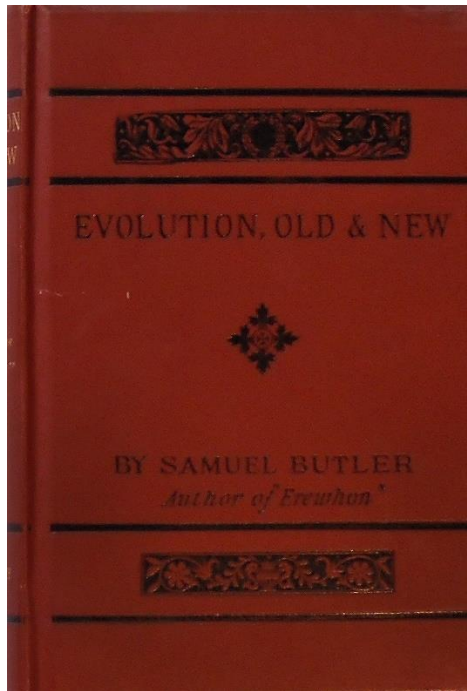
**Beerbohm (Max).** *A Survey; caricatures.* 52 plates. Heinemann, 1921. First Edition. 4to. Upper cover damp-marked and spine darkened and worn, but internally a very good copy; lower hinge weak. {£1 10s} £95

**Belloc (Hilaire).** *Verses.* 1910. First Edition. Spine and covers somewhat marked and worn and some slight foxing throughout, but a very good copy in newly provided protective paper wrapper; inscription on fly-leaf. {7s 6d} £45

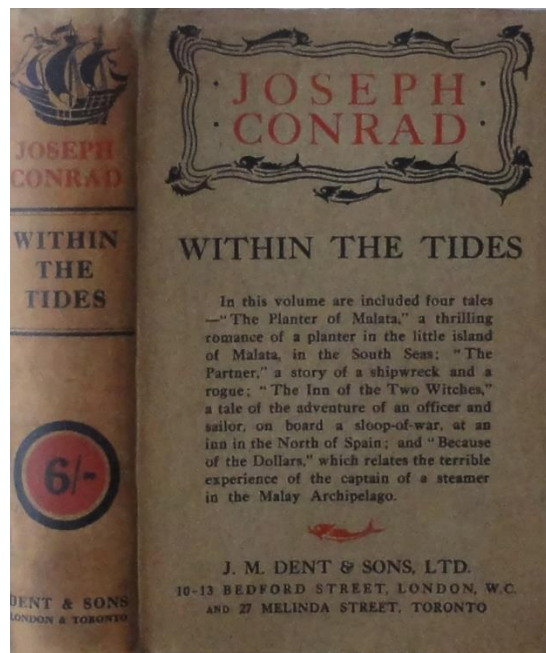
**Blunden (Edmund).** *Pastorals: a Book of Verses.* Erskine Macdonald, 1916. First Edition, First Issue. Small 8vo. Original brown printed wrappers. Very nice, unopened copy. Kirkpatrick A7a. {15s} £200



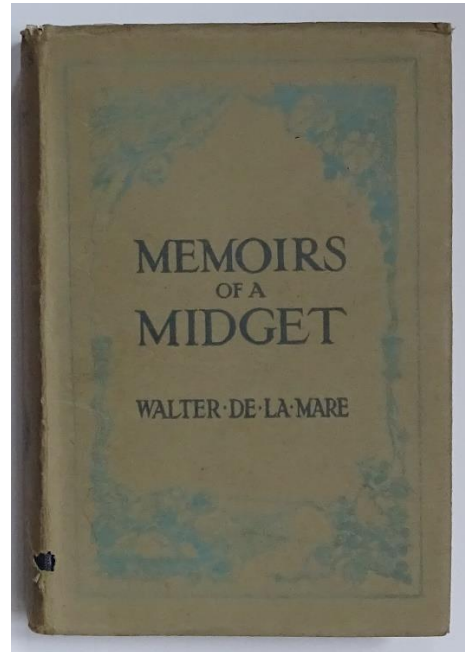
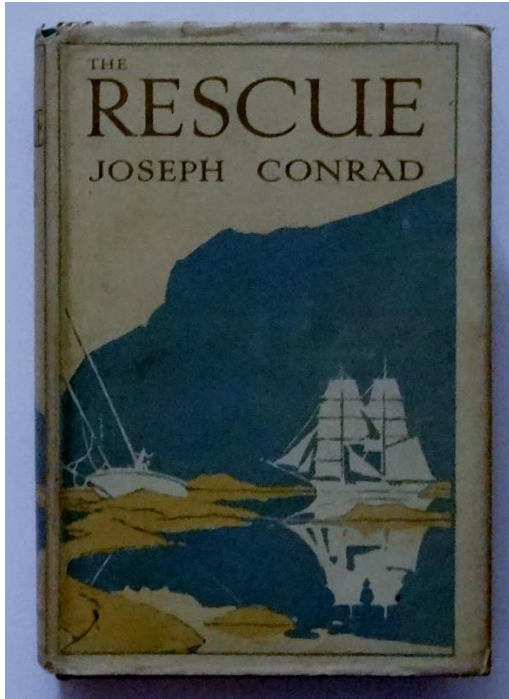
**Bramah (Ernest).** *Kai Lung's Golden Hours.* Preface by Hilaire Belloc. 1924. First Large Paper Edition. One of 250 numbered copies signed by the author. Fore-edge spotted and occasional spotting internally, otherwise a nice, partly unopened copy in slightly frayed dust-wrapper. {10s 6d, first edition} £160



**Butler (Samuel).** *Evolution, Old & New; or, the theories of Buffon, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, as compared with that of Mr. Charles Darwin.* Hardwicke and Bogue, 1879. First Edition. Original red cloth, decorated in black and lettered in gilt and black. End-papers slightly browned and light spotting at edges, but an exceptionally nice, bright copy. {£7 10s, "VERY RARE PERFECT COPY"}  
£375



**Conrad (Joseph).** *Within the Tides.* J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1915. First Edition. Original green cloth, spine gilt. Sides faded as usual, spine bright and fresh, browning to free end-papers and a little foxing, but a very nice copy in dust-wrapper which has been professionally restored at the hinges and is a little browned at the spine panel. {£1 10s}  
£1,750



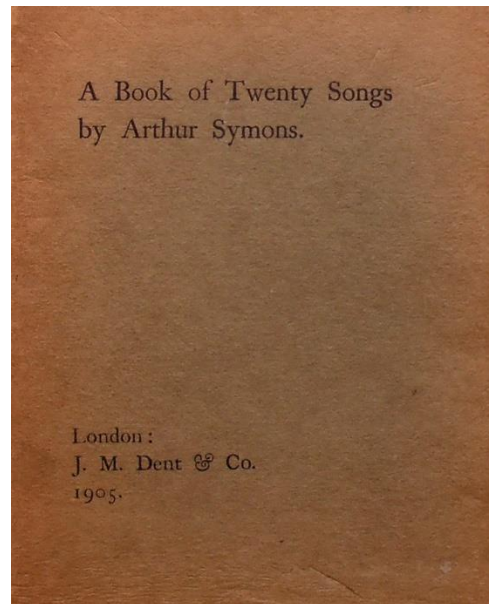
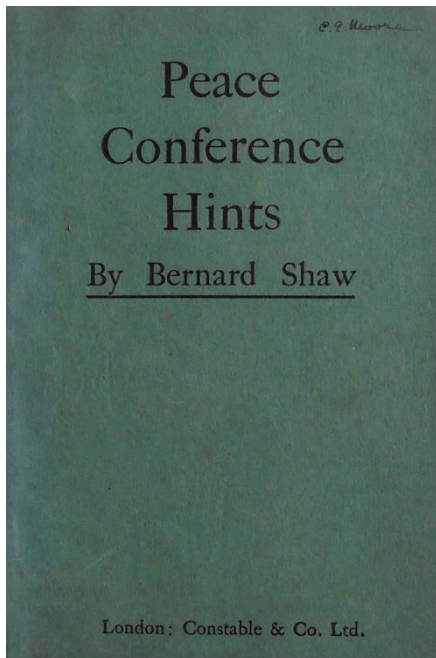
**Conrad (Joseph).** *The Rescue; a romance of the shallows.* J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1920. First English Trade Edition. Just a little foxing, mostly at edges, light crease to spine, slight darkening to free end-papers, two leaves poorly opened at one blank corner, nevertheless a very nice copy in slightly frayed, chipped and darkened dust-wrapper, the title-page with a curious, neat serration along the outer blank margin; ownership signature on front free end-paper. {12s 6d} £150

**De la Mare (Walter).** *Peacock Pie; a book of rhymes.* Colour frontispiece (plate guard torn with slight loss) and black-and-white plates and illustrations by W. Heath Robinson. [1916]. First Illustrated Edition. Pictorial cloth. Cloth a little marked, hinges cracked and end-papers browned, otherwise a nice copy. {£1 10s} £60

**De La Mare (Walter).** *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination; a lecture.* 1919. First Edition, First Issue, lettered in black. Head and foot of spine just a little worn, otherwise a very nice copy; name on front end-paper. {7s 6d} £30

**De la Mare (Walter).** *Memoirs of a Midget.* W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1921. First Edition. Slight wear to head and foot of spine, otherwise a very nice copy in holed, frayed and repaired dust-wrapper. Presentation Copy, with an Autograph Verse signed by the author on the front free end-paper and, loosely inserted, a Typed Letter signed by him, 1 page, small 4to, 11 December 1922, to Violet Hunt (Mrs Ford Maddox Hueffer). {15s} £175

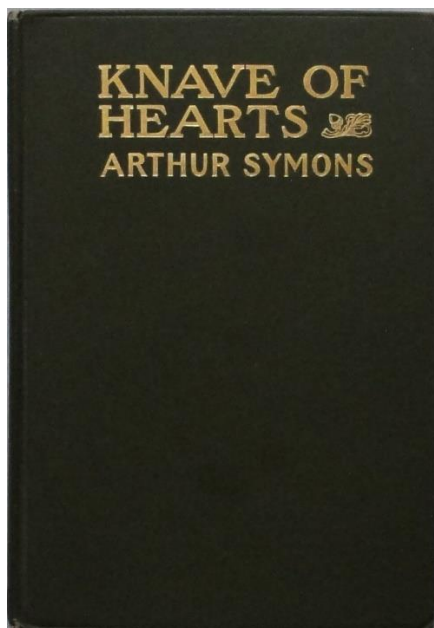
**Huxley (Aldous).** *Mortal Coils.* Chatto & Windus, 1922. First Edition. End-papers slightly browned and spine very slightly faded, otherwise a very nice copy. {15s} £50



**Shaw (George Bernard).** *Peace Conference Hints*. 1919. First Edition. Wrappers. Backstrip slightly faded and pages browned as usual, but a very good copy; name on upper wrapper. {3s 6d} £18

**Stephens (James).** *Hunger: A Dublin Story*. By James Esse. Candle Press, Dublin, 1918. First Edition. Bound in green cloth, original wrappers preserved. Very nice copy. From the library of Oliver Brett, Lord Esher, bearing his bookplate. Scarce. {15s} £60

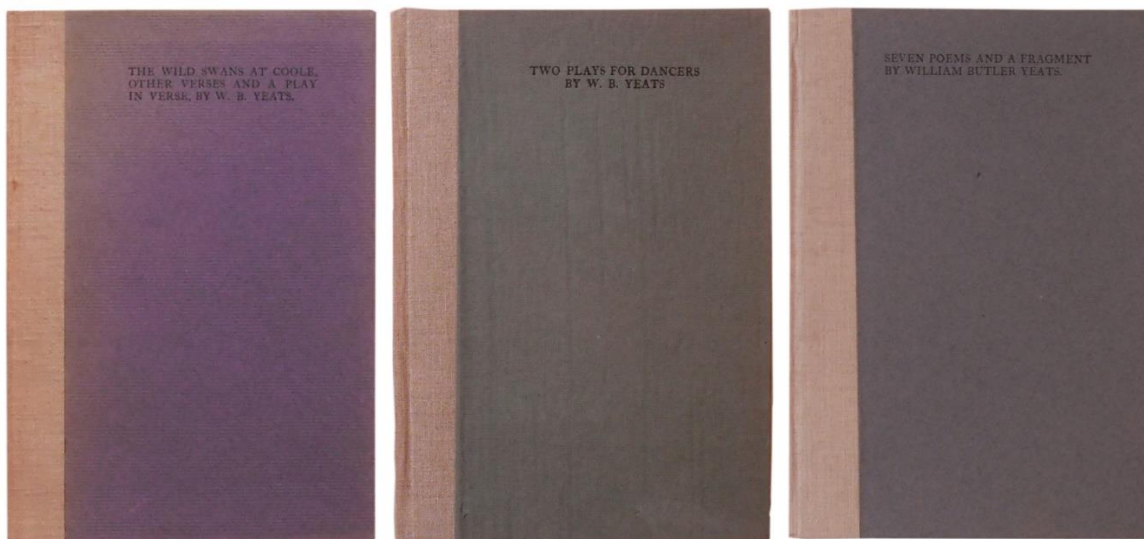
**Symons (Arthur).** *A Book of Twenty Songs*. 1905. First Edition. Wrappers. Wrappers faded, but internally a nice copy. {8s 6d} £45



**Symons (Arthur).** *Knave of Hearts 1894-1908; poems*. New York, 1913. First American Edition, from English sheets. Very nice copy. {15s} £40

**Whitman (Walt).** *Specimen Days in America.* Walter Scott, Camelot Series, 1887. First English Edition, with a specially written new preface and “Additional Note”. Original green cloth, spine with (rubbed) printed label, uncut. Covers with some soiling and slight wear to extremities, tears at foot of spine, end-papers somewhat foxed, but a very good copy; ownership inscriptions, ownership stamp and bookseller’s small labels on front end-papers. {3s 6d} £80

**Woolf (Virginia).** *Monday or Tuesday.* Full-page woodcuts (slightly offset onto text as usual) and cover design by Vanessa Bell. Hogarth Press, Richmond, 1921. First Edition. [One of 1,000 copies]. Covers a little darkened and soiled and corners slightly bruised and worn, otherwise a nice copy; rear end-papers darkened. Loosely inserted is a cutting of a contemporary review. {5s} £2,000



**Yeats (W.B.).** *The Wild Swans at Coole, other verses and a play in verse.* Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, 1917. First Edition. One of 400 copies. Blue paper-covered boards, printed in black, buff linen spine with white paper lettering label printed in black. Boards a little faded at edges and end-papers also slightly faded (all as usual); lettering label on spine slightly rubbed, otherwise an exceptionally nice, unopened copy. {15s} £1,750

**Yeats (W.B.).** *Two Plays for Dancers.* Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, 1919. First Edition. One of 400 copies. Upper and lower covers slightly rubbed, otherwise an exceptionally nice copy. {15s} £300

**Yeats (W.B.).** *Seven Poems and a Fragment.* Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, 1922. First Edition. One of 500 copies. Front and rear free end-papers very slightly browned, otherwise an exceptionally nice copy. {12s 6d} £350  
Issued without lettering label to spine.