

SOTHEBY'S TO AUCTION THE LIBRARY OF JOHN R.B. BRETT-SMITH



John R.B. Brett-Smith

ONE OF the most extensive and important collections of 17th and early 18th century English Literature books to have appeared at auction since the 1930s will go under the hammer at Sotheby's on Thursday, May 27, 2004. John R.B. Brett-Smith's library of some 1,300 books will be sold in 640 lots and is estimated to fetch as much as £1,000,000. The works in the library provide a fascinating insight into the dramatic events and scurrilous affairs of life in Britain in the late 17th century.

JOHN R.B. BRETT-SMITH

John R.B. Brett-Smith (1917-2003) was formerly the President of the American branch of Oxford University Press, and in 1972 left to join his old friend Michael Papantonio at Seven Gables Bookshop, New York. After Papantonio's death and the closure of the bookshop in 1980, Brett-Smith became a private dealer and conducted his business from his home in Princeton.

Greatly respected and a familiar figure among book dealers, librarians and scholars alike, Brett-Smith was also a member of the Grolier club, the American Bibliographical society and Friends of the university libraries of Cambridge and Princeton.

In his passion for books he followed in the footsteps of his father, H.F.B. Brett-Smith, the Oxford don and book-collector, who produced the long-standard edition of the dramatic works of Sir George Etherege (1927). This niche area is reflected in John Brett-Smith's own collecting interests, his greatest interest being English Literature from the period 1660-1730.



THE LIBRARY

Reflecting Brett-Smith's favourite period, the focus of his private library is dominated by Restoration and early 18th-century literature. He took immense pleasure in the book, not only in terms of its literary content, but also as a physical object, and he loved to collect fine quality copies. Not surprisingly, the library therefore contains important and beautiful bindings as well as first editions, presentation copies and other rarities.

The literary range of the library represented includes plays, burlesques, poems, satires in both verse and prose, political polemics, 'familiar letters' and histories, as well as literary and theatrical criticism. Mainstream authors of the period such as Dryden, Milton, Rochester, Marvell, Donne and Jonson are all represented, whilst all the major restoration playwrights are also featured, including Etherege (Brett-Smith's particular favourite), Congreve, Wycherley and Farquhar. The collection also includes a number of works by 'hack' writers of the age (Tom Brown, Ned Ward and their ilk) who wrote lively pamphlets and dialogues about the passions, squabbles and public controversies that stirred contemporary society, as well as offering vivid accounts of its low life. Women writers

constitute a sizeable portion of the library, with first or rare editions of works by figures such as Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips, as well as books owned by women of that period. In addition, a number of the books in the library deal with women or women's issues, some satirical and even misogynistic, as well as texts written in their defence.

Brett-Smith was attracted to books with distinguished provenances, and a vast range of notable collectors are represented in the collection. The library is virtually a guide to the history of English book-collecting over the past three-and-a-half centuries.

Previous owners include such figures as John Evelyn (the prolific 17th-century diarist and author), William Morris, the eccentric Richard Heber, Henry and Alfred Huth (whose sales at Sotheby's in the 1920s have been described as "one of the most striking events in the history of the English saleroom"), as well as women collectors such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Frances Richardson Currer.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SALE INCLUDE:

Sir George Etherege, *The Man of Mode* (1676) illustrated right

A first edition of Etherege's masterpiece, particularly significant because it is encased in a splendid morocco binding by Queens' Binder B. The play's printed dedication to the Duchess of York (Mary of Modena) and Etherege's known devotion to the Duke of York (James II) both suggest, at least the possibility, that this copy is the author's dedication copy. It is estimated to fetch £15,000-£20,000.



John Dryden, *MacFlecknoe, or a Satyr upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet...* (1682)

Estimated at £6,000-£8,000 this is a very rare first edition of one of the greatest verse satires. It is a satire on Thomas Shadwell, who succeeded him as Poet Laureate.

Elkanah Settle, *Thalia Triumphans* (1717)

This unique congratulatory poem presented to Henry, Earl of Lincoln himself, is elaborately bound in a tooled morocco Settle binding and is estimated to fetch £4,000-6,000. Settle - a well known 'hack' writer of the period - attempted to market his books by putting them in ostentatious bindings and sending the unsolicited celebratory poems to public figures in hopes of reward. Settle was also renowned for altering the dedication and sending the same bound poem on to a different celebrity, if it had been returned to him without reward.

Sarah Fyge, *The Female Advocate* (1686)

This poem written in defence of women, which Fyge apparently wrote at the age of fourteen in less than a fortnight, was a response to Robert Gould's scurrilous 'satyr against Woman' *Love Given 'Ore*. It is estimated to fetch £1,500-£2,500.

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