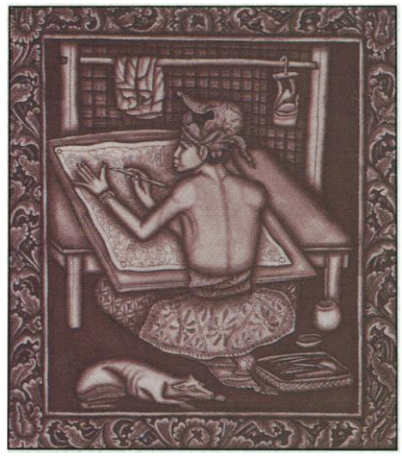
BOOK REVIEWS



Upcoming Book Issue

The glimpses of the book trade in various times and places presented below are a harbinger of next week's annual Book Issue of *Science*. In that issue will be reviewed a selection of present-day works on subjects ranging scientifically from astronomy through zoology and temporally from the Precambrian through pre-Columbian America to World War II and beyond. To facilitate readers' participation in the current book trade, detailed information about how to order books that have had notice in *Science* will be included. Works of art by many hands will also be represented in the issue; the Balinese painting at the right, by I Madé Djata, is an example from Hildred Geertz's *Images of Power* (University of Hawaii Press).

Vignettes: The Demand for Books

Printing had long been known in Japan, but until the late sixteenth century was confined to religious uses and the reproduction of Chinese classics. The new wealth of the merchant classes, however, created a flourishing market for secular texts of all sorts: from romantic novels to satire, and from poetry to encyclopedias. Although movable type was sometimes used, woodblock printing was generally preferred (in part because it was covered by a form of copyright protection). Specialist secondhand bookstores and shops selling imported Chinese works (*karahonya*) appeared in the big cities, but the greatest commercial success of all was the development of commercial libraries (*kashihonya*), which lent out their works to those whose enthusiasm for reading outstripped their incomes. By the first decade of the nineteenth century Osaka had about three hundred commercial libraries and Edo more than six hundred. As well as catering to urban demand, a growing number of booksellers were also setting up mobile libraries which travelled through the countryside, selling or lending books to the growing numbers of literate farmers (a few of whom were beginning themselves to write texts on agricultural techniques). Printed texts provided an important new vehicle for the spread of technological ideas, and one which gradually but surely eroded the power of the urban guilds to maintain their monopolies on knowledge.

—*Tessa Morris-Suzuki*, in *The Technological Transformation of Japan: From the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press)

Most booksellers [in pre-Revolutionary France] had only an approximate idea of what books were actually in circulation, especially those that traveled through the underground. Literary journals were censored and were not supposed to review such works, though they sometimes did so. One could not even judge a book by its title. Of course, title pages gave off many clues. Anything with the standard formula—"with approbation and privilege from the king"—printed at the bottom was likely to be legal, though it might be pirated. Anything with a flagrantly false address—"printed at the expense of the Vatican," "at the printing shop of Priapus," "chez William Tell"—made no pretense of respect for the law. But there was plenty of room for confusion between those extremes. Booksellers often ordered from catalogues or even from rumors passed through the trade grapevine, and they often got the titles wrong. Some of them could hardly spell. When Poinçot of Versailles asked for twenty-five "nouvellles des couvertes des ruse," his Swiss supplier realized that he wanted a travel book, *Nouvelles découvertes des russes*. The Swiss also correctly read his remark on "la bes Raynalle" as a reference to the abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des européens dans les deux Indes*. But they badly bungled an order from Veuve Baritel of Lyon, which seemed to concern some innocent-sounding "Portraits des Chartreux" and in fact referred to the pornographic and anti-clerical *Histoire de dom B . . . , portier des Chartreux*.

—*Robert Darnton*, in *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (Norton)

Twenty or thirty years ago, both in [Britain] and on the Continent, . . . splendid flower books illustrated with sumptuous colour plates could be had for a song; for more strictly scientific and botanical books there was virtually no market at all. Only the incunabula herbals, valued as examples of early printing, aroused the cupidity of collectors. All this is now changed. With the vogue for colour-plate books in general came the craze for illustrated flower books in particular. Early volumes of the *Botanical Magazine* and the like were eagerly competed for in the saleroom, and then as eagerly torn in pieces to make table-mats and lamp shades. Finer works fared little better: their dismembered pages, flashily framed in looking-glass and chromium plate, passed swiftly and profitably from the windows of expensive shops to the walls of smart dining rooms.

—*Wilfrid Blunt*, in *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (with William T. Stearn, 1950; new edition published by Antique Collectors' Club in association with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)