

## Judging a book by its cover:

### Dust jackets in the Monash University Library Rare Books Collection

#### Introduction

The most immediately striking feature of a modern book is the dust jacket, or dust wrapper as it is also known. This is essentially an advertisement, meant to catch the eye at point of sale. When such features were first introduced in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century they were meant primarily as protection for the often gorgeously decorated cloth covers underneath.

The earliest example in our collection is from 1860. Although decorated, it is on flimsy paper and was meant to be discarded after purchase. This habit of discarding the jackets persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even after the covers of books had become quite plain and all the design effort had been lavished on the dust wrapper itself.

Most early jackets are typographical, simply telling you the title, the author and the publisher, but increasingly, from the Edwardian period on, we see jacket design reflecting current trends in commercial art. Many serious artists worked in the field. Included in this display are examples by Salvador Dali, Wyndham Lewis, Vanessa Bell, Graham Sutherland, Edward Bawden, and Sidney Nolan, as well as accomplished and characteristic work by professional engravers and designers such as John Farleigh, E. McKnight Kauffer, Eric Gill, Robert Gibbings, Richard Chopping, Lynton Lamb, and Australian book designer, Alison Forbes.

The most recent books on display are from 2006, the Penguin Designer Classics. These are limited edition artists books by such celebrities as Manolo Blahnik, and couturier Paul Smith whose book jacket for *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is in embroidered silk.

Although built initially around a base of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century books, the Monash University Library Rare Books Collection is also strong in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century material, and can offer those interested in the history of the book a broad range of possibilities. In 2004 we mounted an exhibition of 19<sup>th</sup> century coloured cloth bindings; we now present a display of book jackets showing a rich cross-section of our holdings in this attractive field.

#### Collecting Dust jackets

Buying a book because you like its cover is a natural response and building your library based on attractive dust jackets is one of the most enjoyable ways of collecting books.

All collectors need a holy grail, a goal to aspire to. In this field of collecting two jackets stand out. The Chatto & Windus first edition of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), is a classic art deco period piece designed by Leslie Holland.

The other iconic early jacket is the 1925 Scribner's edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, with the jacket in the surrealist style by Francis Cugat (the band-leader Xavier Cugat's brother).

Richard Overell

Rare Books Librarian