Novelists and Newspapers, 1900-1939

This exhibition features little-known and scarce original examples of richly illustrated serialized fiction, short-stories, and poems that appeared in daily and weekly newspapers during a period of extraordinary creativity, from the early twentieth century until the beginning of World War Two. The remarkable success of newspaper fiction resulted from the convergence of improvements in print technology, increasing and widespread literacy, and intense competition between newspaper owners for readers.

As the exhibition reveals, fierce commercial rivalry between newspaper barons, especially in the field-leading American 'Big-city' papers, spawned the development of 'author cults', and the promotion of novelists as celebrities, and in some cases, public intellectuals. In the first decades of the twentieth century, before other media such as radio and later television, were in direct competition with newspapers as the entertainment package par excellence, newspaper fiction had an unparalleled cultural penetration and perversiveness within mainly middle-class readerships, profoundly affecting literary 'taste'. In part due to the ephemeralness of the newspaper medium, but also the 'high-brow' approach to literature that dominated post-war literary criticism, newspaper fiction, as distinct from periodical literature, has until very recently been neglected and its richness and diversity lamentably ignored. This exhibition therefore uses pertinent original examples of newspaper fiction, illustrations, and related items to chronicle how newspapers became purveyors of (albeit not always fine) fiction, reinforcing class values, and fostering national pride and solidarity, in what amounted to a highly choreographed collective reading experience in this little-understood literary flourishing.

Among the works on display by famous authors, are Charles Dickens' 'The Life of Our Lord' (variously serialized posthumously in 1934), Erich Maria Remarque's 'Im Westen nichts Neues [All Quiet on the Western Front]' (serialized in the 'Vossische Zeitung' in 1928), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Valley of Fear' (serialized in the New York Tribune Sunday Magazine in 1914), and Hugh Lofting's 'Adventures of Dr. Dolittle' (serialized in the New York Tribune in the early 1920s), as well as poems by Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson. However, as well as showcasing examples of work by famous literary figures, the exhibition also aims to introduce patrons to some of the hundreds of writers who were widely read one hundred years ago, but who now languish in the cemetery of forgotten writers. Writers, who coalesced on the fiction pages of newspapers, with amongst the most celebrated writers of all time, but whose works, for various reasons did not continue to resonate with changing readerships.

Over the course of the two-month exhibition there will be a programme of public lectures/talks by invited speakers on aspects related to the exhibition's central theme.