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THE PIERRE BERGÉ LIBRARY

Pages from a singular life

“Were I to live my life over again, I should live it just as I have lived it; I neither complain of the past, nor fear the future.” Montaigne

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SALE Friday 11 December 2015
AUCTION AND EXHIBITION Drouot Richelieu, 9 rue Drouot 75009 Paris

PRESS CONTACTS Sophie Dufresne sophie.dufresne@sothebys.com T. +33 (0)1 53 05 53 66
Chloé Brézet chloe.brezet@sothebys.com T. +33 (0)1 53 05 52 32
BEGINNING IN DECEMBER 2015, PIERRE BERGÉ & ASSOCIÉS, IN COLLABORATION WITH SOTHEBY'S, WILL BE AUCTIONING THE PERSONAL LIBRARY OF PIERRE BERGÉ.

This collection includes 1,600 precious books, manuscripts and musical scores, dating from the 15th to the 20th century. A selection of a hundred of these works will be part of a travelling preview exhibition in Monaco, New York, Hong Kong and London during the summer and autumn of 2015. The first part of the library will be auctioned in Paris on 11 December at the Hôtel Drouot, by Antoine Godeau.

This first sale will offer a stunning selection of one hundred and fifty works of literary interest spanning six centuries, from the first edition of St Augustine’s Confessions, printed in Strasbourg circa 1470, to William Burroughs’ Scrap Book 3, published in 1979.

The thematic sales which are to follow in 2016 and 2017 will feature not only literary works, the core of the collection, but also books on botany, gardening, music and the exploration of major philosophical and political ideas.

The experts are Stéphane Clavreuil, Benoît Forgeot and Michel Scognamillo.
Portrait of a life

Pierre Bergé’s library reflects the course of his singular life. As a young man captivated by literature, he left La Rochelle just before passing his Baccalaureate, impatient to write his own great opus. Initially guided by writers who were both mentors and friends, including Pierre Mac Orlan, Jean Cocteau and Jean Giono, he worked as an antiquarian book dealer, and gradually developed a passion for collecting. The avid reader became a bibliophile, developing a keen interest in both texts and the quality of the books – fine- and large-paper copies, contemporary bindings, inscribed or annotated copies...

The 1,600-odd works making up his collection function as rootstock, where the items echo and cross-reference each other with their successive dedications and provenances, sometimes revealing unsuspected links between people and ideas.

Yves Saint Laurent once stated: “The world will talk about a Goût Bergé, just as it speaks of a Goût Noailles.”

While the dispersion of the artwork and furniture collections in 2009 bore out the couturier’s prediction, the library provides further, and perhaps more significant evidence, because it unveils the privacy of a public figure and his very own personal journey.

This “Bergé taste” is embodied above all in a selectivity which runs counter to mere accumulation – a selectivity dictated by a keen eye, passions, and a penchant for living objects with their lineage revealing the various links between intellectual and artistic figures. Faithful to Stirner’s maxim, whereby “there is no such thing as freedom; there are only free men”, the collector avoided any obligatory route, any kind of “best of”, following only his passions, his likes as well as his dislikes. And if the “Bergé taste” has any meaning, it is because this rigorous, stern selectiveness serves his passion for the written and printed word.

Thus, we discover a copy of Chamfort’s Maxims feverishly annotated by Stendhal; a libertine novel from the Marquis de Sade’s library; the Notice littéraire sur Théophile Gautier presented by its author Charles Baudelaire to Gustave Flaubert, and a first edition of Treasure Island, 1883, which belonged to William Ernest Henley, a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the model for Long John Silver.

It is also a “world library” with no borders between cultures, as Pierre Bergé sought out the works of his favourite authors in their original language. Hence the presence of numerous Russians (including Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Mayakovsky); Americans such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Gertrude Stein; British authors from Shakespeare to Joyce; Italian writers (Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Casanova, Svevo...); Cervantes; the Portuguese writers Camões and Pessoa; and numerous German-speaking writers, poets and philosophers such as Grimm, Kleist, Schopenhauer, Hölderlin, Goethe, Schiller, Georg Trakl, Walter Benjamin and Paul Celan.

According to his biographer Béatrice Peyrani, in Le Faiseur d’Etoiles, the adventurer, the businessman and the man of convictions, Pierre Bergé always worshiped “l’objet rare”: a “religion” he celebrated throughout his life; a pagan worship combining high standards with pleasure. To quote the bibliophile himself: “Collecting books, as is the case with objets d’art, has always been an immense joy: it is very demanding and it keeps us alert and open to learning.”

Long kept secret, his library will reveal a little-known facet of the man who dedicated his life to all forms of creation – a genuine laying-bare of an eminently literary journey in which the book, in all its forms, played a leading role.
An invitation to travel: six centuries of literature

On 11 December 2015, the first sale will be proposing over a hundred and fifty manuscripts and printed books of literary interest. In this selection, organised chronologically, Pierre Bergé invites readers on a journey through six centuries of literature – a voyage invigorated by the winds of the high seas, with a wealth of nationalities and genres.

The Bergé library contains a number of venerable examples from the pioneer days of printing in the 15th century. The first of these to be auctioned is one of the most precious: the first edition, published in Strasbourg around 1470, of St Augustine’s Confessions, one of the pillars of European culture. The book was printed on the presses of the German-born Johannes Mentelin, a former colleague of Gutenberg. Mentelin’s tome will be followed by a number of equally remarkable incunabula, including the Deifira, a dialogue on the art of love by the Genoese architect and humanist Leon Battista Alberti (Padua, 1471), Dante’s Divina commedia, printed in Brescia in 1487, embellished with woodcuts, and also a first edition of Homer’s works in Greek, published in Florence in 1488.

In the Humanist era, poetry occupied a prominent place, exemplified by several volumes in the Bergé library: a first edition of Alain Chartier’s Fais (Paris, 1489) containing no less than two poems by François Villon; Petrarch’s seminal anthology of poems, the Sonetti, Cancioni & Triarfi, published in Milan in 1507; an ornamented manuscript of circa 1535 containing letters and poems by King François I; an early edition of François Villon’s works (1532, in Roman type); L’Adolescence Clémentine by Clément Marot, printed by the typographer and humanist Geoffroy Tory (1532); a copy of the extremely rare Délie by Maurice Scève (1544), one of the landmarks of Renaissance poetry; the 1553 Ronsard’s Amours – the first to comprise “Mignonne, allons voir si la rose”, without a doubt the most famous poem of French literature; an impeccable copy in its original vellum binding of the Oeuvres of 1555 by Louise Labé (the rarest of literary gems in any collection); the Recueil de poésie by Joachim du Bellay, published in 1562; and a 1597 edition of the monument of Portuguese literature: Os Lusíadas, written over a 25 year period by the poet Luís de Camões.

From the 16th century, the Bergé library also features a first edition of Montaigne’s Essais, France’s greatest literary achievement, self-published in Bordeaux in 1580: this copy is one of a handful known preserved in their first binding.

During the 17th century, the theatrical stage was pivotal in revealing literary glories. Pierre Bergé collected some choice pieces from this golden age of theatre: a series of six first editions of Corneille published between 1644 and 1650; a 1664 folio copy of Shakespeare’s works; first editions of Racine’s Esther and Athalie, each in their original morocco binding, complete with the musical scores specifically composed for the first performances; and a copy of the works of Molière published in 1697, bound in morocco at the time for the Marquis de La Vieuville, one of a small group of celebrated collectors at the turn of the century known as “les Curieux”.

The 17th century was also the age of the moralists. Pierre Bergé’s library contains a complete collection in an original binding of six Oraisons funeral by Bossuet, the only published in the author’s lifetime exemplifying the epitome of Classic eloquence; Blaise Pascal’s Pensées in a binding bearing the coat of arms of Colbert’s brother-in-law; La Bruyère’s Caractères (1689), in a red morocco binding of the time with the coat of arms of Jean-Baptiste Henrion; and a fine copy of the first edition of La Fontaine’s Fables.

These landmarks of French classical literature echo outstanding works printed in other European cities, such as the Don Quixote published in Lisbon in 1605 in Spanish: this third edition appeared in the same year as the first published in Madrid, and bears witness to the immediate success of the novel by Cervantes. In 1623, in Florence, Michelangelo’s grand-nephew published the poems of his great-uncle for the first time, revealing an intimate facet of the Renaissance painter and sculptor (a superb copy preserved in its original vellum binding), while it was in Leiden, Netherlands, that Descartes first published his Discours de la méthode: this copy, in contemporary vellum, is impeccable.

Among the 17th century’s outcasts, we find an early edition of the works of the “King of Libertines”, Théophile de Viau, the first of the “Poètes maudits” after Villon. Also here is one of the few known copies of the first exotic novel in French, published in 1697, Le Zombi du Grand Perou, by the adventurer, writer, pamphleteer, murderer, womanizer, soldier then deserter Pierre Corneille Blessebois: he was discovered and rehabilitated in the 19th century by Charles Nordier, who owned this very copy. Finally, also to be noted from the 17th century, L’Astrée, Honoré d’Urfé’s monumental pastoral novel, a masterpiece of the literature of the “Précieuses”: Pierre Bergé’s copy is preserved in its contemporary morocco binding, richly gilt.

In the 18th century, the Philosophers took center stage. In the battle of ideas stoked by the Enlightenment, a number of books revolutionized the intellectual landscape, and Pierre Bergé sought out prime examples, such as a first edition, in an armorial binding of the time, of Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes; a very fine copy of the first edition of Rousseau’s Emile (1762), in a beautiful contemporary morocco binding; and an exceptional armorial copy of the true first edition of Voltaire’s Candide, published in Geneva in 1759. We also find Swift’s philosophical novel: Travels into several remote nations of the world by Lemuel Gulliver, and, like a hand reaching to the past, a first edition of Montaigne’s Journal du voyage
en Italie, specially bound for the philosophers’ friend, the Marquise du Deffand, with her distinctive cat gilt on the spines.

The library also includes several renowned libertine books, including the masterpiece of the genre, Choderlos de Laclos’ Les Liaisons dangereuses, 1782. Also here, an impeccable copy in a contemporary binding of Casanova’s Fuite des plombs (1787), the only fragment of his Memoirs to have been published in his lifetime; the copy of Monsieur Nicolas by Restif de la Bretonne which belonged to Edmond de Goncourt; and a famous licentious novel, Félicia ou Mes fredaines by the Chevalier de Nerciat. While the latter is relatively common, this particular copy is unique because of its provenance as it bears the autograph signature of the infamous Marquis de Sade. And, by the author of The 120 days of Sodom, Pierre Bergé had the good fortune to acquire the last autograph erotic manuscript: Les Journées de Florbelle. This is the only notebook to have survived from his multi-volume manuscript, seized and destroyed by the author’s son and a police commissioner: they deemed it to be far too scandalous. The rediscovery of this manuscript, which had been lost for decades, was celebrated in 2014 by Annie Le Brun, who included it in her exhibition at the Musée d’Orsay: “Sade: attaquer le soleil”.

Also from the Enlightenment, we find Goethe’s Das römische Karneval, illustrated with finely-colored engravings of costumes (Berlin, 1789: the copy as issued, softbound), and a first edition of the only novel written by the poet Hölderlin, Hyperion, a key work of German literature and the scarcest.

The library of Pierre Bergé is as prodigiously abundant and wide-ranging in literature as was the 19th century itself. Among its treasures, we could highlight:

- a copy of the Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française by Madame de Staël, lengthily and feverishly annotated by Stendhal;
- also by Madame de Staël, the edition she compiled and prefaced of the Lettres et Pensées du Prince de Ligne (1809); bound for Emperor Napoleon I, it is probably the only copy of a work by Madame de Staël bearing the coat of arms of the man she regarded as a modern day Attila, the man who had sent her into exile;
- Le Monde comme il est, Astolphe de Custine’s roman noir (1835), bound for the Empress Marie-Louise;
- Victor Hugo’s play Hernani; a manifesto of Romanticism (1830), inscribed to Prosper Mérimée;
- also by Victor Hugo, a copy of the first edition of Le Roi s’amuse (1832), inscribed to the poet Gérard de Nerval, one of the very few books from his library to have survived;
- and, still by Hugo, his famous declaration of love to France written in 1867 while in exile in Guernsey, Paris, inscribed by the poet to Paul Verlaine.

From this century teeming with European literature, we find a very scarce complete set of Grimm’s “Fairy Tales” (Kinder und Haus Märchen, 1812-1822); Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice; one of the gems of German Romanticism, Hoffmann’s Prinzessin Brambilla (1821), an extremely rare inscribed copy; a miraculously preserved copy of Shelley’s Adonais, as issued, etc. And a spectacular display of Russian first editions: Pushkin’s Potìava (1829) softbound; the incredibly rare Boris Godunov, in a decorated contemporary binding; Gogol’s Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka – his first book in prose (1831-1832); The Possessed, titled at the time The Demons (Bésy), by Dostoevsky, 1873; Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina as well as In the Twilight, 1887; and, finally, a collection of short stories by Chekov inscribed to his friend, the actor Pavel Svobodin. This collection is all the more remarkable given the scarcity of Russian first editions.

Together with eminent works by Balzac (Le Lys dans la vallée, 1836, inscribed to the Duchesse de Castries, and Physiologie du mariage, 1834, with an extraordinary erotic inscription), Pierre Bergé sought out other major texts of the 19th century: for example, Mademoiselle de Maupin by Théophile Gautier (1835-1836) with its manifesto-like preface (Balzac’s personal copy!); the copy of De l’amour Stendhal gave to his friend Luigi Buzzi; Leopardi’s Canti and Operette morali, two masterpieces of Italian literature, in contemporary binding; Charles Dickens’ personal copy of David Copperfield (1850), and Les Filles du feu by Gérard de Nerval (1854), one of nine known inscribed copies, this one addressed to Mr. Bertrand, the uncle of Dr. Blanche in whose clinic the author was treated. The Bergé library also houses an extraordinary literary relic: on his copy of the journal Le Carrousel (1836-1837), Gérard Labrunie signed his nom de plume, Gérard de Nerval, for the first time.
The great Flaubert

Gustave Flaubert is undoubtedly Pierre Bergé’s favorite author. Therefore, the library includes many remarkable works by the novelist, most notably the large paper copy of Madame Bovary (first edition, 1857), which Flaubert offered to Victor Hugo with the following graceful inscription: “Au Maître, souvenir et hommage.” Nevertheless, the copies of other works by Flaubert are also enhanced with impressive inscriptions: Salammbo (1863) was inscribed to Alexandre Dumas fils; L’Education sentimentale (1870) was gifted to George Sand from “son vieux troubadour”; La Tentation de Saint Antoine (1874), offered to “Guy de Maupassant, que j’aime comme un fils”, and the Trois contes (1877) inscribed to Jérôme Bonaparte’s daughter, Princess Mathilde, whose salon the writer frequently attended. As for manuscripts, Pierre Bergé was fortunate to acquire a collection of autograph notes, sketches, plans and scenarios for L’Education sentimentale: a genuine laboratory in which the novel was conceived, bearing witness to the author’s successive versions and his legendary, relentless labor.

Poetry and the poetic

As for the poets, Pierre Bergé acquired a copy of the first edition of Les Fleurs du Mal, which Baudelaire inscribed to Sainte-Beuve, assuring him of his “fiiel friendship”. By Verlaine, he owns the copy the poet offered to Auguste Poulet-Malassias (the publisher of Les Fleurs du Mal) of his first anthology, Poèmes saturniens (1866). These two volumes echo each other, as do many other works in the collection. For instance, the copy of the first edition of Là-bas, inscribed by Huysmans to Paul Verlaine, seems to be a pendant to the copy of Les Diaboliques (1874), Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly inscribed to Huysmans. (Barbey’s inscription was calligraphed in red and black ink highlighted in gold, in the best of the author’s manner: “A M. Joris Karl Huysmans, la griffe de l’auteur qui, malgré son titre, n’est pas celle du Diable. J.”)

Thus, these intersecting inscriptions which weave this singular library, provide further testimony to the “Goût Bergé”.

The set of corrected proofs of Les Poètes maudits put forth Verlaine’s quest to finally gain recognition for three major late 19th century poets: Tristan Corbière, Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud. Not only is the lithographed original edition of Stéphane Mallarmé’s first collection of poems rare and sought after (9 booklets published in a run of only 47 in 1887), but Pierre Bergé’s copy was inscribed by the poet to Edouard Manet’s mistress and model, Mery Laurent. The autograph dedications, each different, reflect the poet’s gradually evolving feelings, and form a love poem of sorts. The only surviving proofs for the planned edition of Valentines by Germain Nouveau (1887) bear witness to the last years of one of the century’s great poets: following a mystical crisis, he destroyed his manuscript and abandoned its publication.

A copy of William Morris’s long epic poem, The Earthly Paradise, was offered by the author to John Ruskin as a tribute from a disciple to his master. The reprobate of Victorian England, Oscar Wilde, inscribed his Dorian Gray to Henri de Régnier, “from his friend and admirer.” At the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, in 1886-1887, a group of adolescents led by Marcel Proust (then aged sixteen) published a literary review called Le Lundi, of which only five issues were published. This legendary rarity, one of the gems of the Bergé library, is testimony to the literary birth of the future writer of A la recherche du temps perdu. Ten years later, in 1896, the “Merdre!” bellowed by Ubu Roi caused a scandal, and its author, Alfred Jarry, embodying his royal hero, inscribed a copy to his close friend Rachilde presenting her the “Homage from Mr. Ubu”. (Rachilde was the wife of the editor of Le Mercure de France, Alfred Valette.)

André Gide was the “contemporain capital” for several generations. For Pierre Bergé, he was a literary passion as well as a mentor. His library houses the autograph manuscript of Les Cahiers d’André Walter, André Gide’s first book, as well as a fine-paper copy of Paludes (1895), enhanced with a moving inscription: “A Monsieur Stéphane Mallarmé, notre maître très vénéré.” Likewise, Pierre Bergé owns the copy of the first edition of L’Immoraliste (1902) inscribed by André Gide to his school friend Léon Blum. The writer and the future socialist leader met in the Lycée Henri IV in 1888: they shared a passion for literature and remained friends throughout their lives.

Two major figures usher in the 20th century, two politically engaged men to whom Pierre Bergé was loyal: Octave Mirbeau (whose harsh Journal d’une femme de chambre, published in 1900, is inscribed here to Anatole France), and the torch-bearer Emile Zola, whose thundering J’accuse! changed the course of events. Precisely, of the latter, Pierre Bergé possesses his anthology on the Dreyfus Affair inscribed: “To my dear wife, in gratitude for her loyalty and courage during the three terrible years that caused her so much torment and suffering, with all my grateful and heartfelt affection.” Alexandrine Zola embroidered the cover in which the volume was bound.

Centuries do not begin and end with zeros, and while the 20th century officially began in 1900, its true character emerged only thirteen years later. 1913, the year of audacity and innovation, announced the birth of modernity: year I of the new world to which Pierre Bergé wished to pay tribute.
On the eve of the catastrophe that plunged the world into chaos, Alcools was published by Guillaume Apollinaire with a frontispiece portrait by Pablo Picasso (Bergé’s copy is inscribed to the Belgian poet André Fontainas); Stravinsky performed Le Sacre du Printemps (Bergé’s copy was given by the conductor to the router of the first performance, Pierre Monteux); Blaise Cendrars published La Prose du Transsibérien embellished with abstract, “surréaliste” compositions by Sonia Delaunay; Franz Kafka published his first book Betrachtung, Eve (inscription to Thomas Hardy) and victims of the war, published as yet unknown: its discovery is a major event. Meanwhile, a copy of André Breton’s iconic novel, containing numerous variants, remains notably, the extraordinary autograph manuscript of Nadja, Surrealism occupies a meaningful place in the Bergé library with, by Maurice Barrès and Paul Lafond (1911). The edition was dedicated to Marcel Proust. This volume matches another paper of his, on 25 April 1914, Raymond Roussel inscribed a copy on Japan years after the book’s publication, as a passing of the torch. For his part, on 25 April 1914, Raymond Roussel inscribed a copy on Japan paper of his Locus Solus to Marcel Proust. This volume matches another in the library: Le Greco, the monograph devoted to the Spanish painter by Maurice Barrès and Paul Lafond (1911). The edition was dedicated to the flamboyant Robert de Montesquiou, who passed on this copy to his friend Marcel Proust “in memory of the dedicatee”.

Surrealism occupies a meaningful place in the Bergé library with, notably, the extraordinary autograph manuscript of Nadja. This first draft of André Breton’s iconic novel, containing numerous variants, remains unpublished to date: its discovery is a major event. Meanwhile, a copy of Alain-Fournier’s Le Siège de Jérusalem, published in private hands. In 1931, the enraged Surrealist René Crevel inscribed his Dali ou L’Anti-Monde to Paul Valéry: the dedication, as a simple “homage” to the author, to which Gertrude Stein alludes, took three months to complete. It now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Finally, what happened when in 1949, the existentialist icon Simone de Beauvoir received a Précis de décomposition by a Romanian writer as yet unknown, accompanied by a respectful tribute? Nothing – the volume remained uncut, and the very virginity of the copy said much more than Cioran’s reception in France.

The section devoted to the 20th century also opens wide the door to world literature. Constantin Cavafy’s Poèmes, a collection of 38 poems printed in Alexandria in a limited private run by Kasimate and Iona between 1924 and 1926, is in itself a precious volume. Pierre Bergé’s copy is still more precious: not only is it inscribed, but it includes the autograph manuscript of an early poem: To pro skali (The First Step), a manifesto on the values which dominate the writer’s labor. The copy of Kafka’s Der Prozess (The Trial) is immaculate, with the box and publisher’s jacket in mint condition. Federico García Lorca’s Poema del cante jondo (1931) was offered as a gift with a warm inscription: “A mi querido amigo el poeta.” Michelena was a Basque writer and journalist, a member of the Phalanje and a declared reactionary... The first edition of Mensagem, 1934, is inscribed by Fernando Pessoa to Pierre Hourcade, his French translator, “com un grande abraço”.

It is true that the latter played a key role in the discovery outside Portugal of the greatest Lusitanian poet since Camões. We must also mention Primo Levi’s masterpiece: Se questo è un uomo, published two years after the end of WWII: one of the most powerful testimonies to have emerged from the horrors of the concentration camps.

Among others, the more recent years are illustrated by two volumes at the crossroads of art and literature: the first by Mishima, Barakei (Killed by Roses), illustrated with 45 magnificent photographic portraits of the Japanese writer by Eikoh Hosoe; the second by William S. Burroughs, Scrap Book 3, printed in a run of 30, which prolonged the experience of the Beat Generation in an insolent, sophisticated manner.

Jean Giono was far more than a mere literary passion for Pierre Bergé: in the garden of the writer’s property in Manosque, also stood a little house, now gone, where Pierre Bergé and the painter Bernard Buffet...

If there was one literary friendship which marked Pierre Bergé’s life, it is with Jean Cocteau. As one would expect, the library abounds with numerous treasures by the poet. On 11 December 2015, a selection of these will be auctioned, including the autograph manuscript of Le Grand Écart, preserved in an inlaid binding designed by Francis Picabia. Also to be auctioned, a copy of Le Cap de Bonne Espérance (1919), Cocteau’s first modernist poem, in an original exquisite binding by Louise Denise Germain: a decorator, she was one of the first women to distinguish herself in the art of creative bookbinding. The copy of La Noce massacrée (1921) is none other than the one offered by Cocteau to Raymond Radiguet.


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