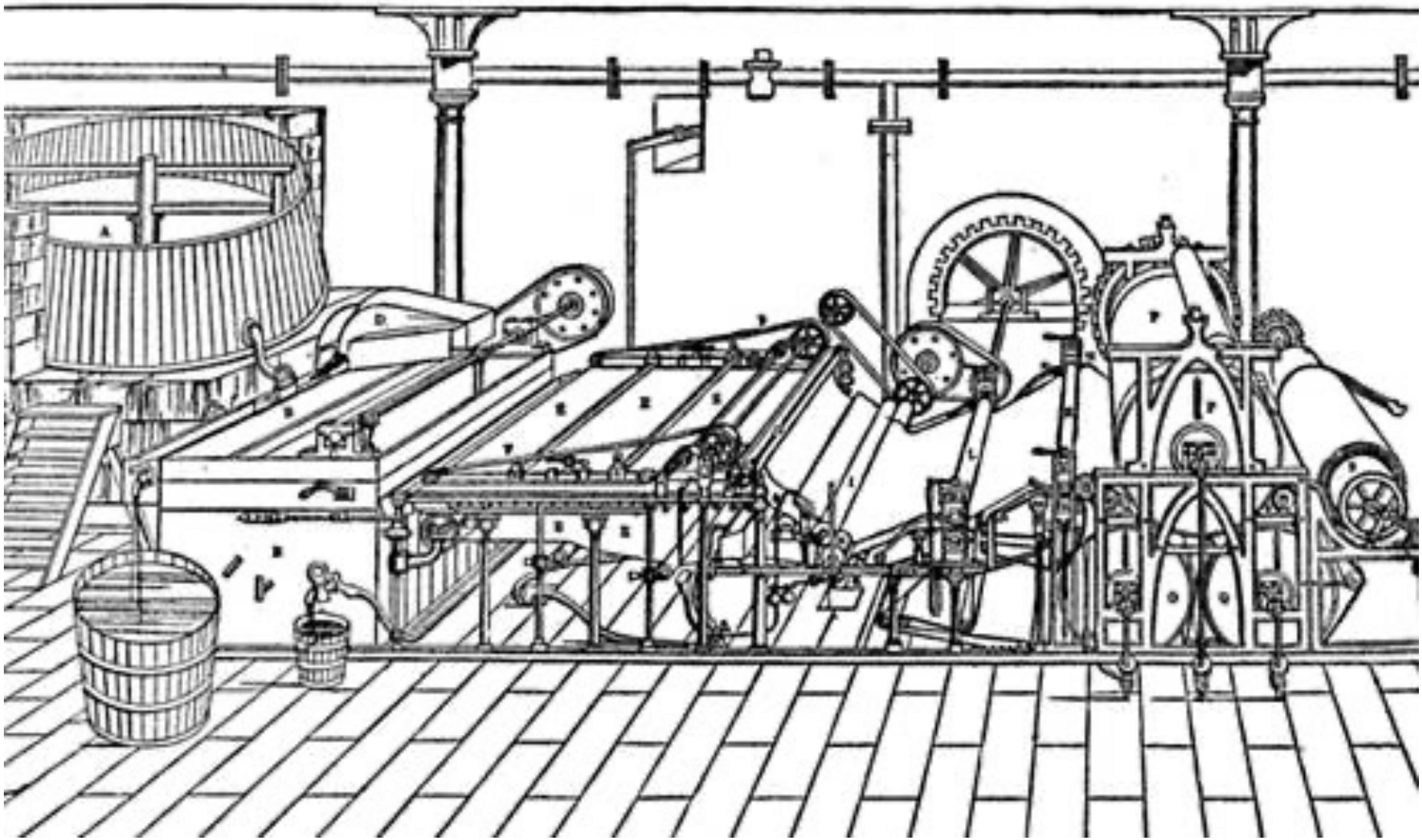
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Literature and Material Culture: Publishing Practices and Distinctions of Taste since the Industrialization of Printing

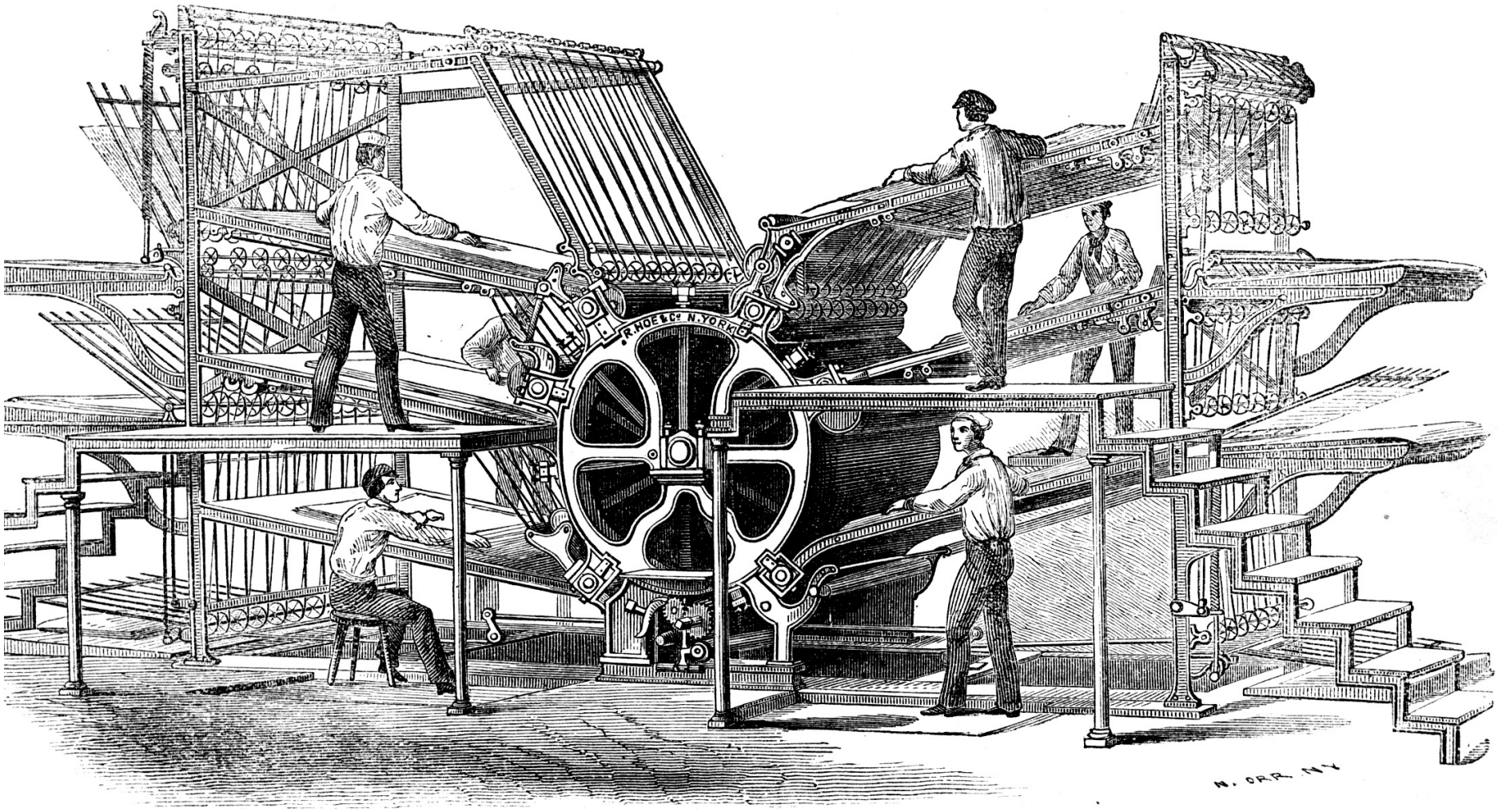
Anthony Enns
Dalhousie University

Bernhard Metz
University of Bern



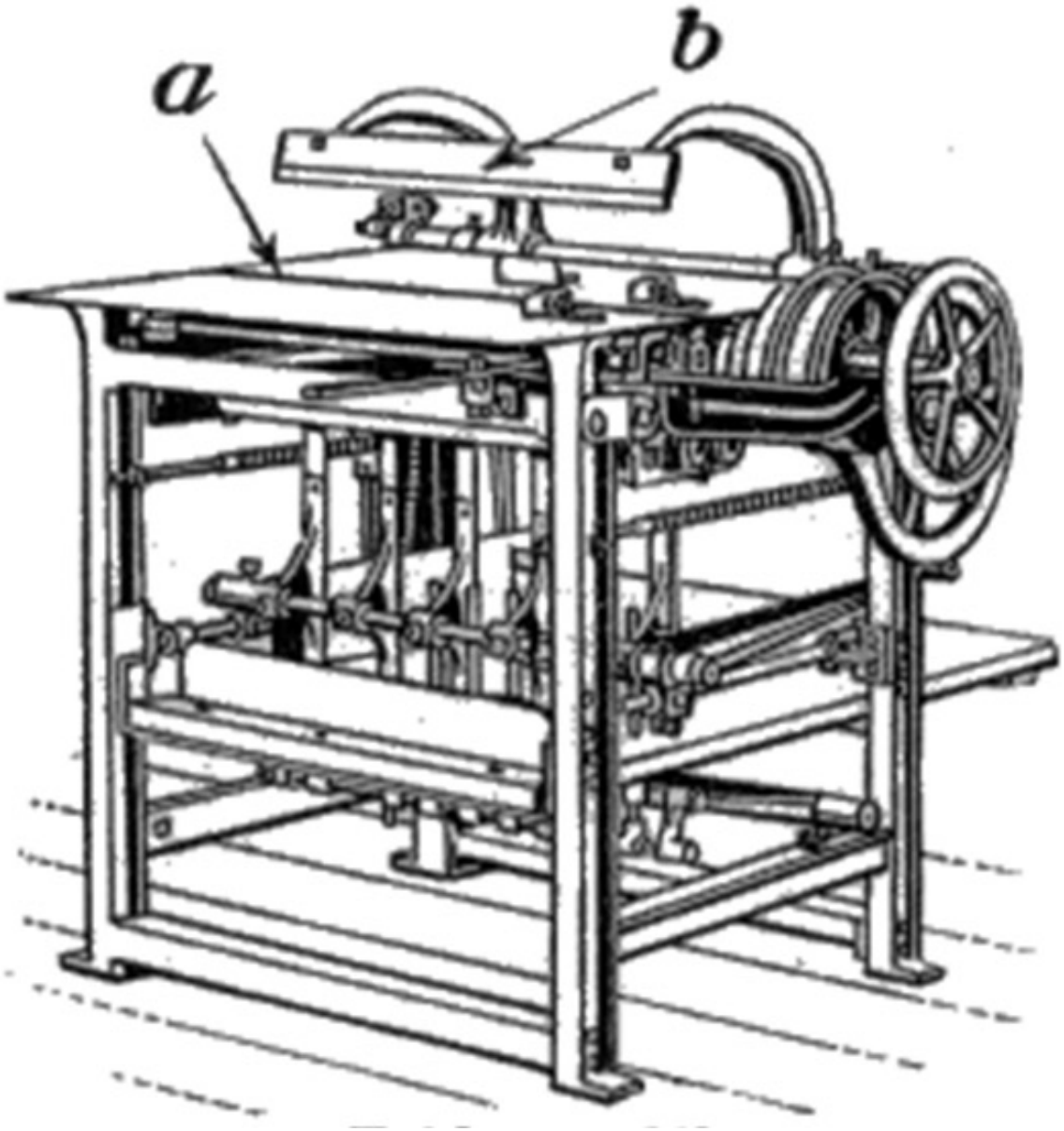
"Fourdrinier Paper-Making Machine"

Paper: Devoted to the Manufacture, Sale and Use of Pulp and Paper (1920)



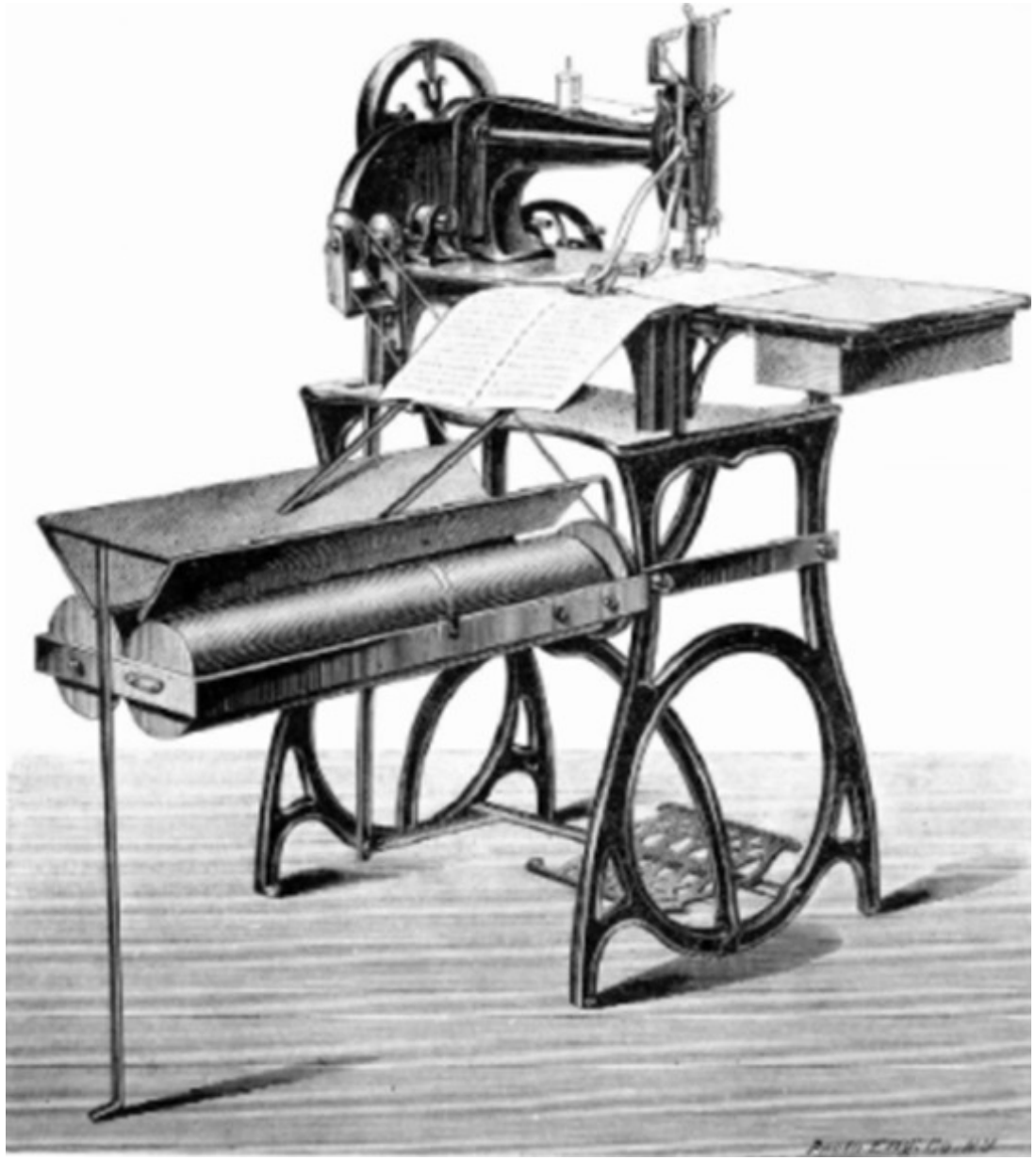
"Richard March Hoe's Printing Press"

History of the Processes of Manufacture and Uses Of Printing, Gaslight, Pottery, Glass, and Iron (1864)

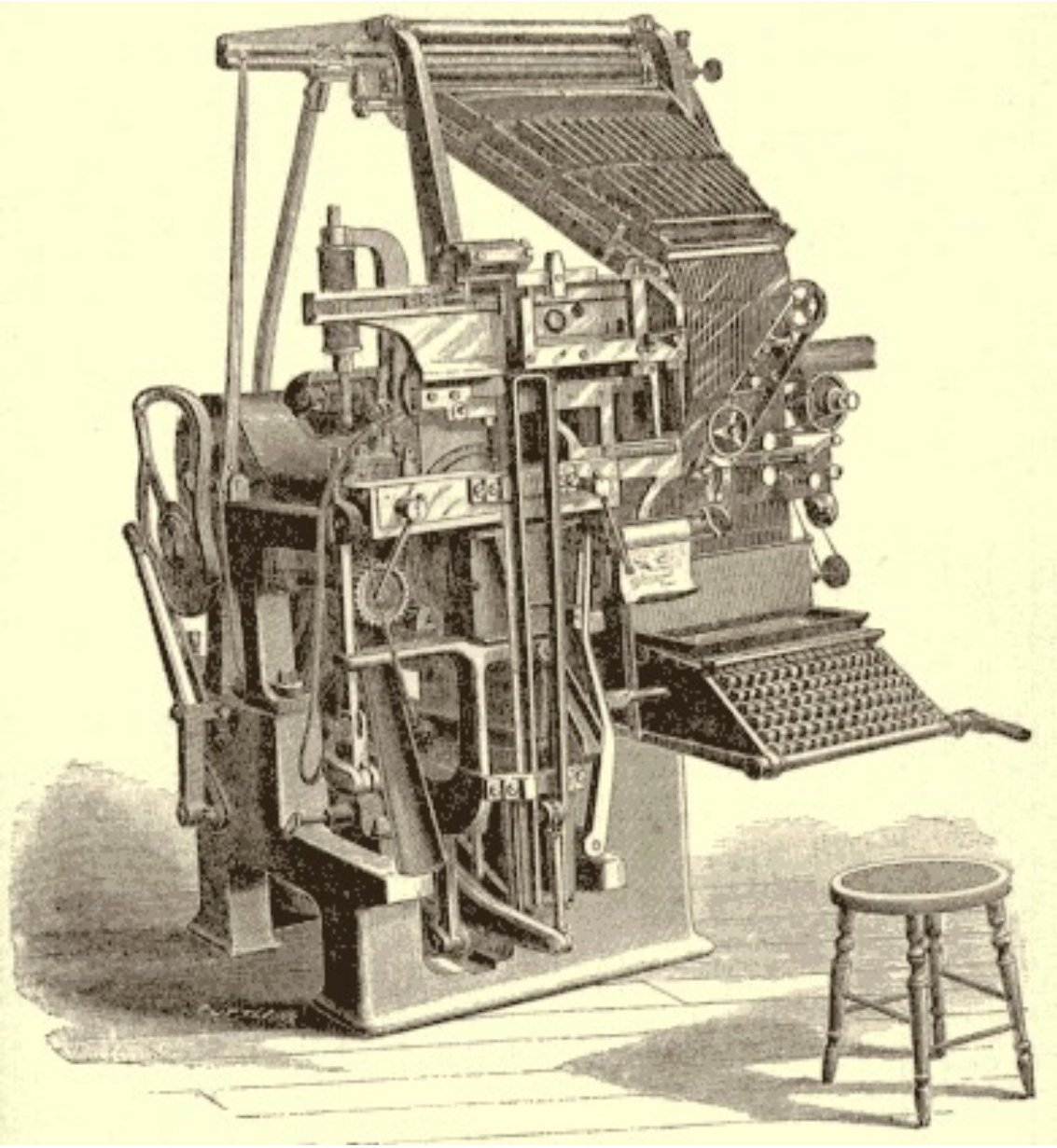


“Folding Machine”

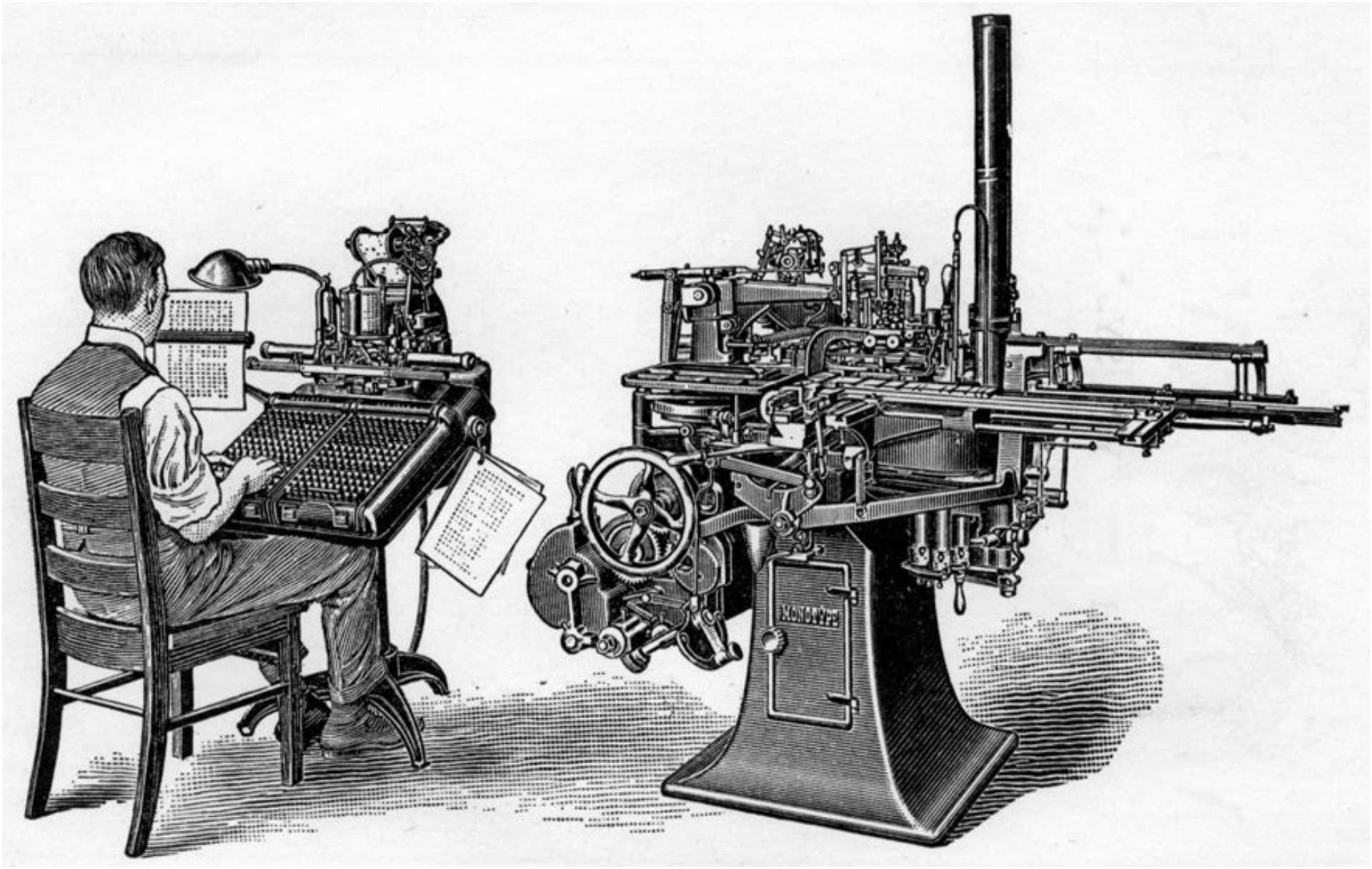
Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (1911)



“Singer Book-Sewing Machine” (1876)



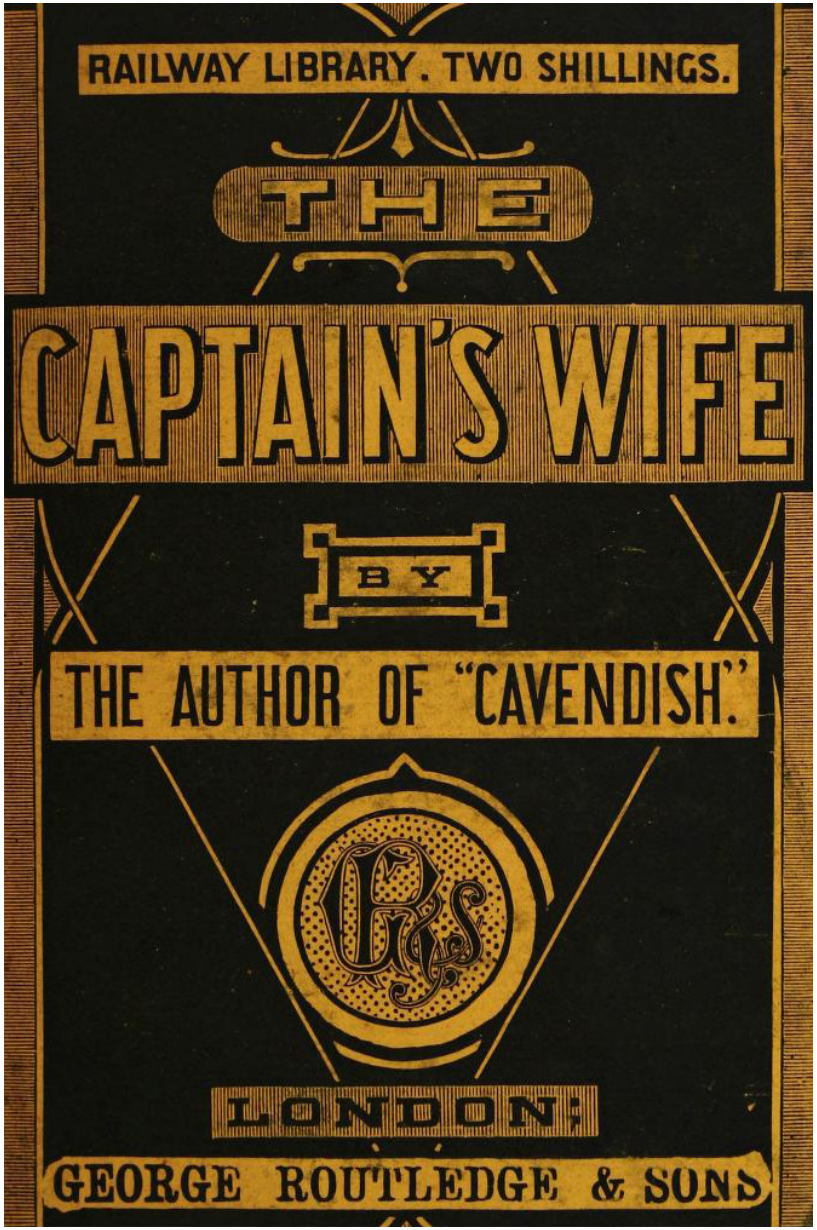
“Linotype Machine”
Appleton's Cyclopaedia of Applied Mechanics (1892)



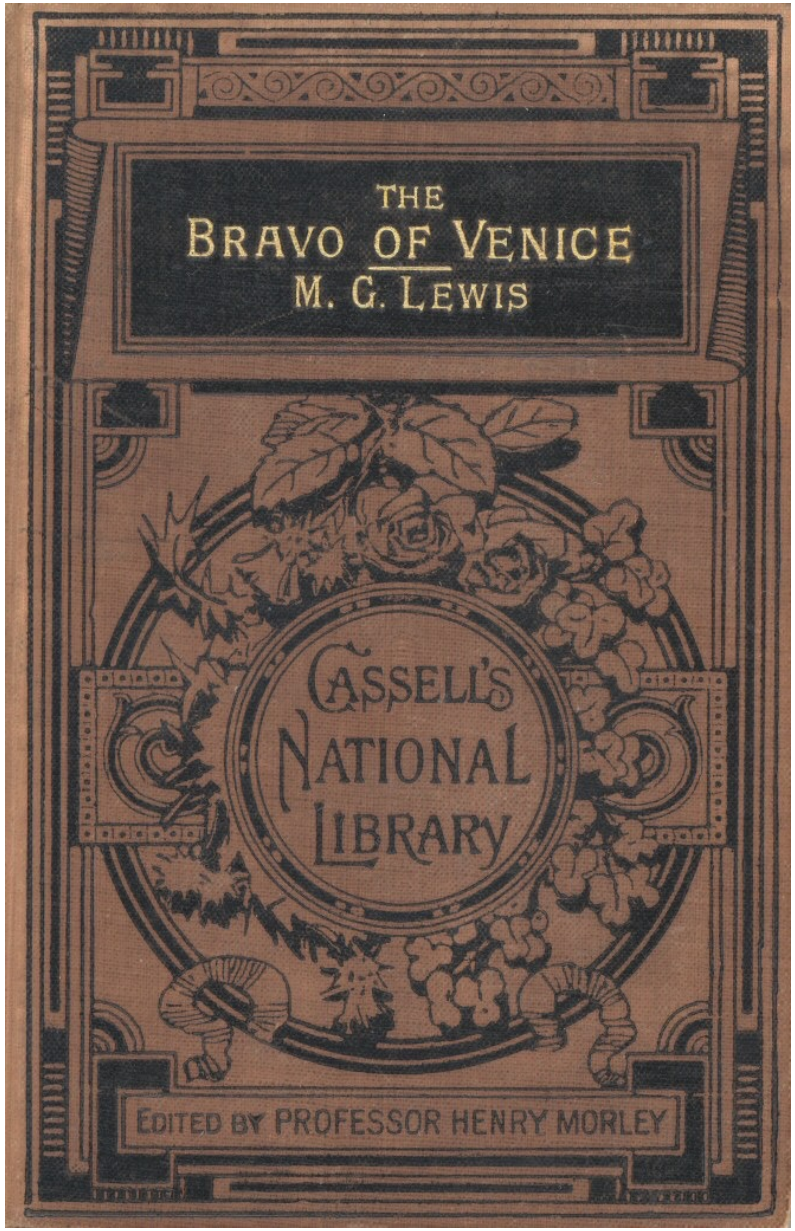
“Monotype Composition Caster and Keyboard”

George Payne Rainsford James, *De L'Orme* (1830)

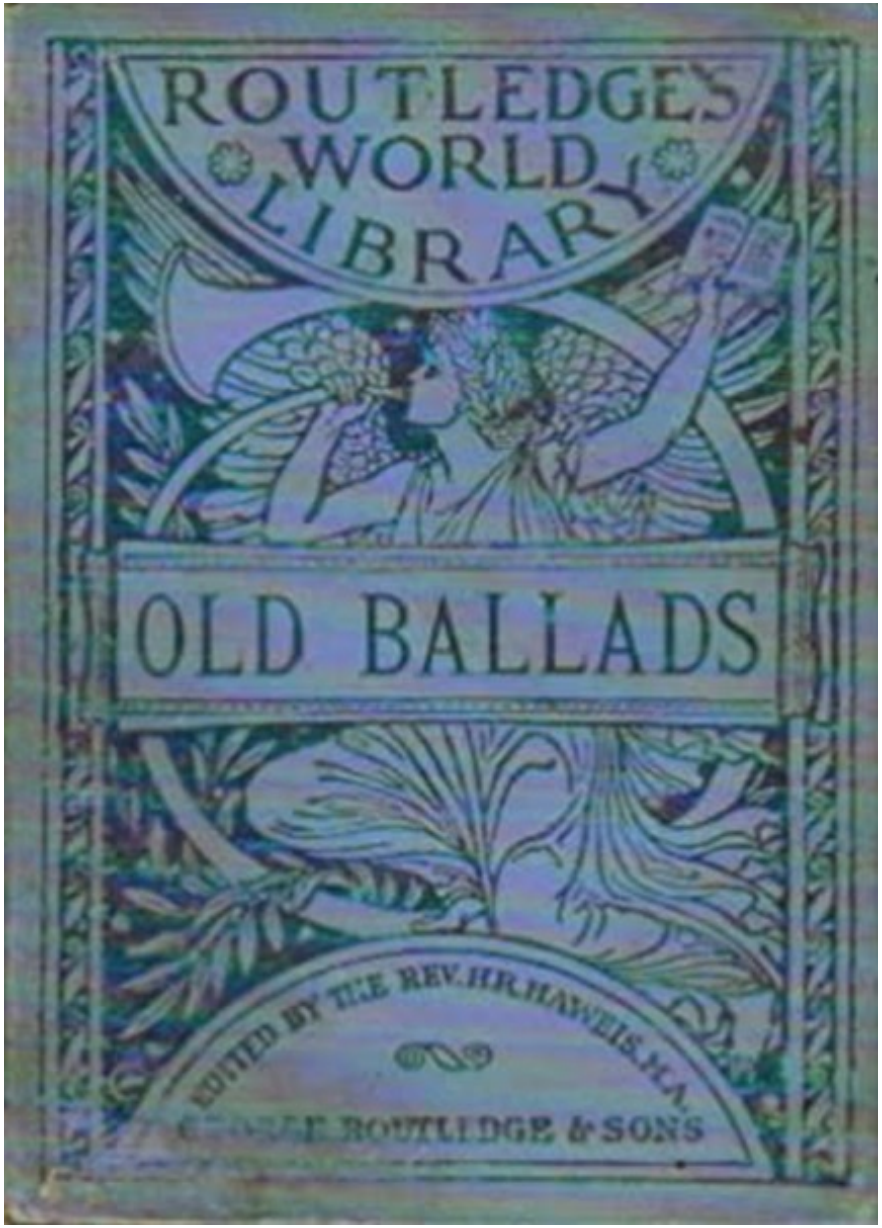
Theodore Edward Hook,
Cousin Geoffrey (1840)



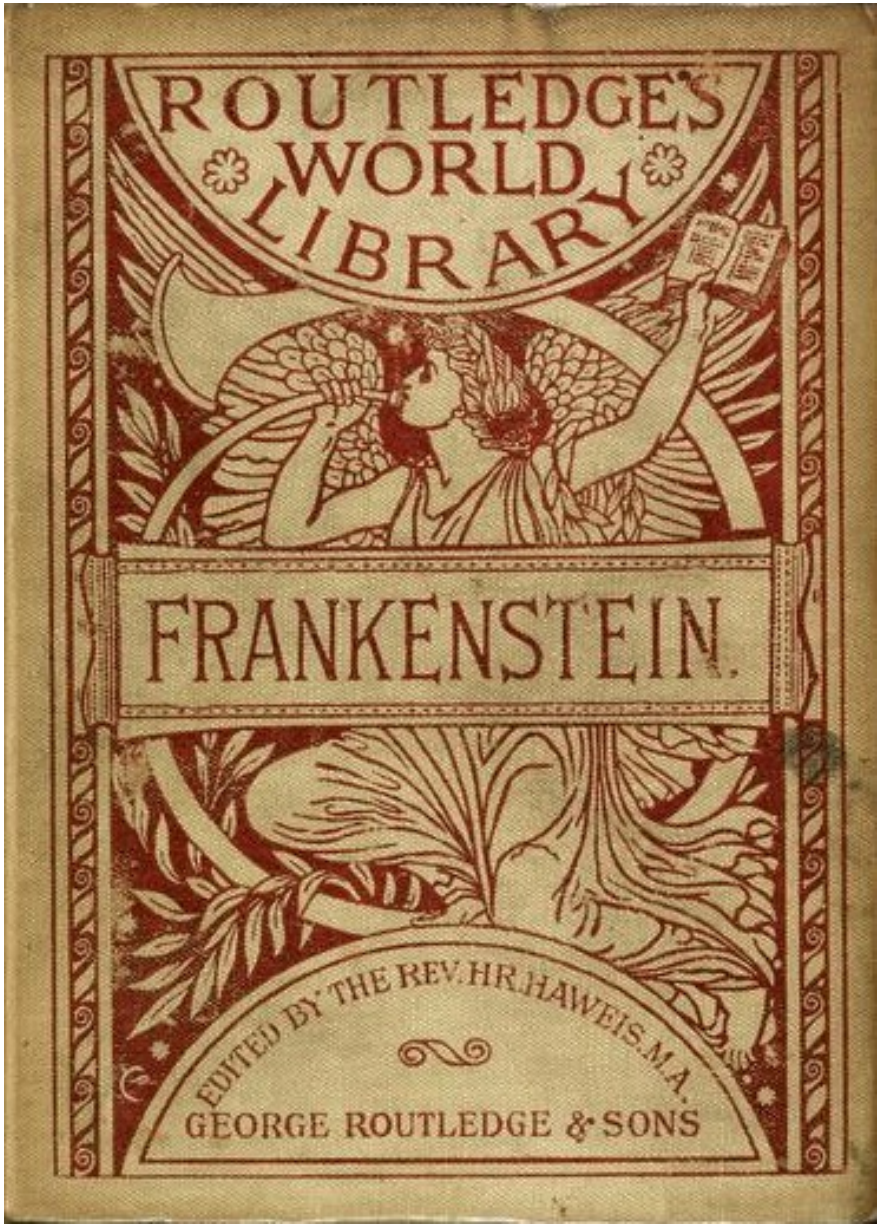
William Johnson Neale,
The Captain's Wife (1862)



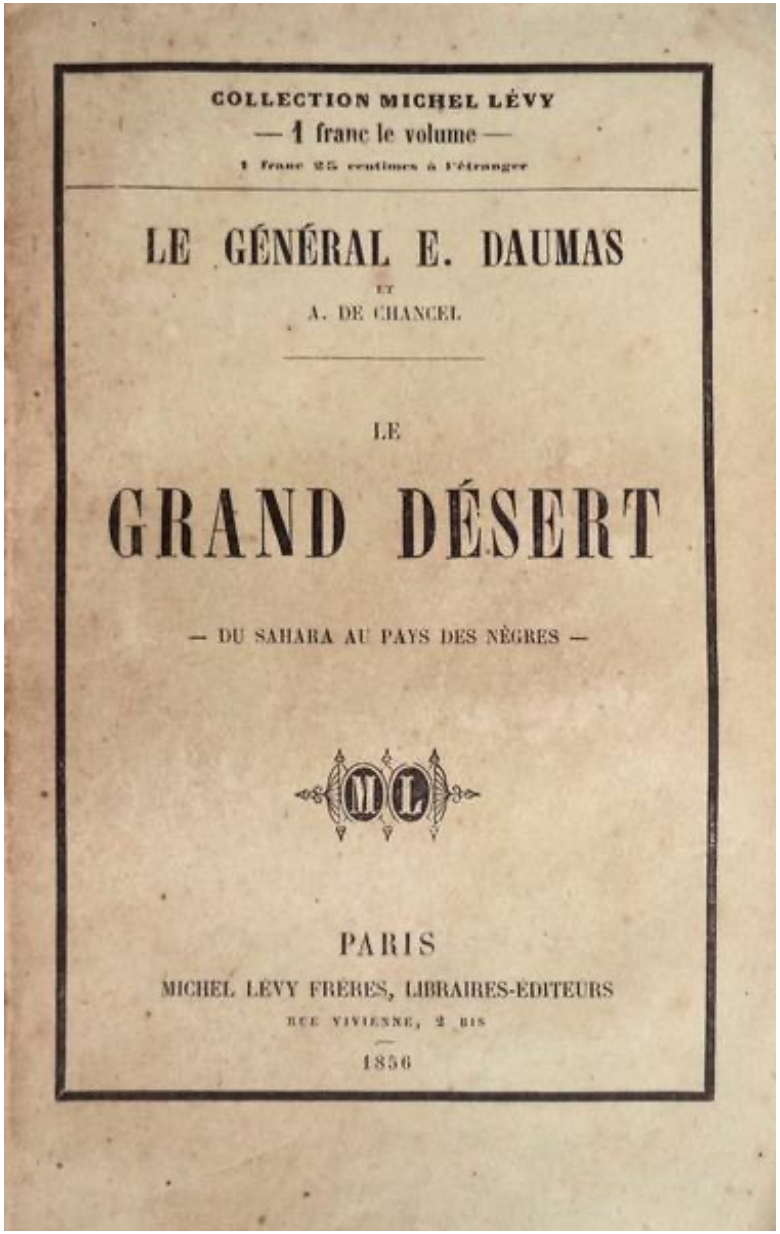
Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Bravo of Venice* (1887)



Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Old Ballads* (1886)



Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1886)



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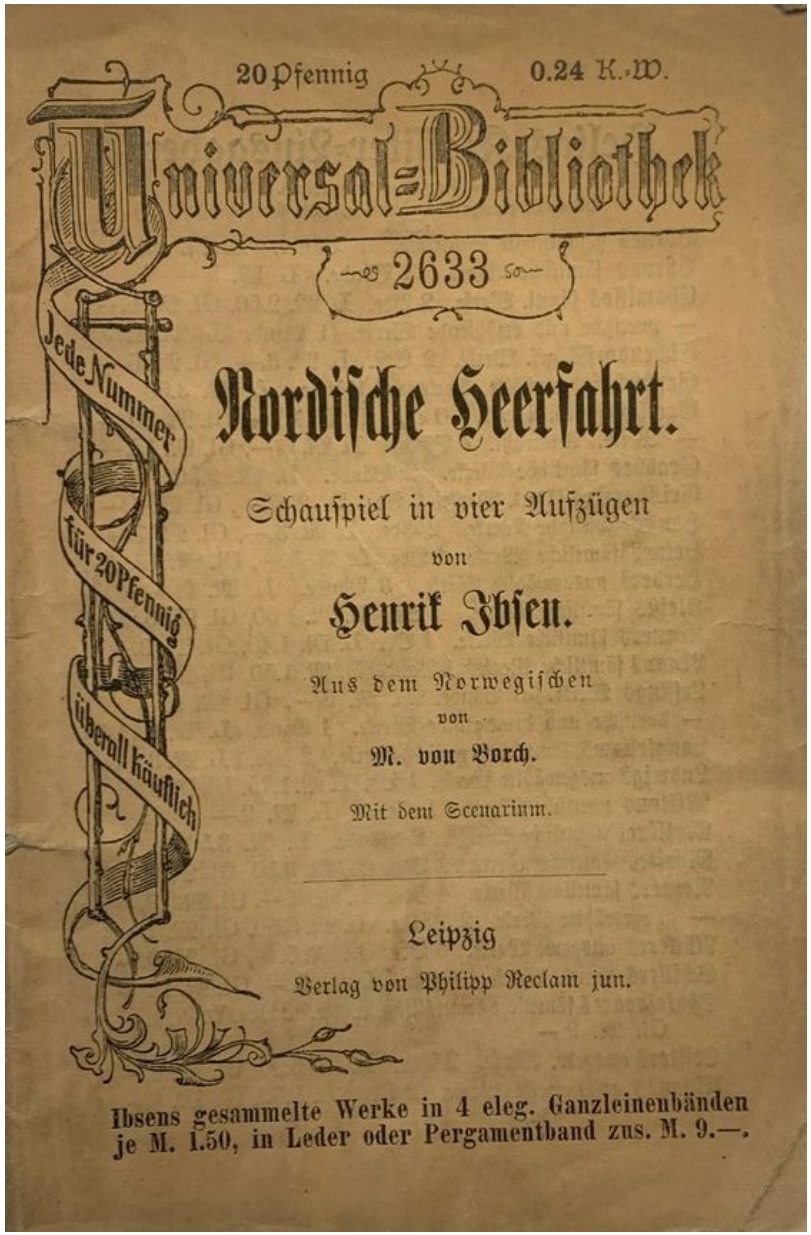
Melchior Joseph Eugene Daumas, *Le grand désert* (1856)



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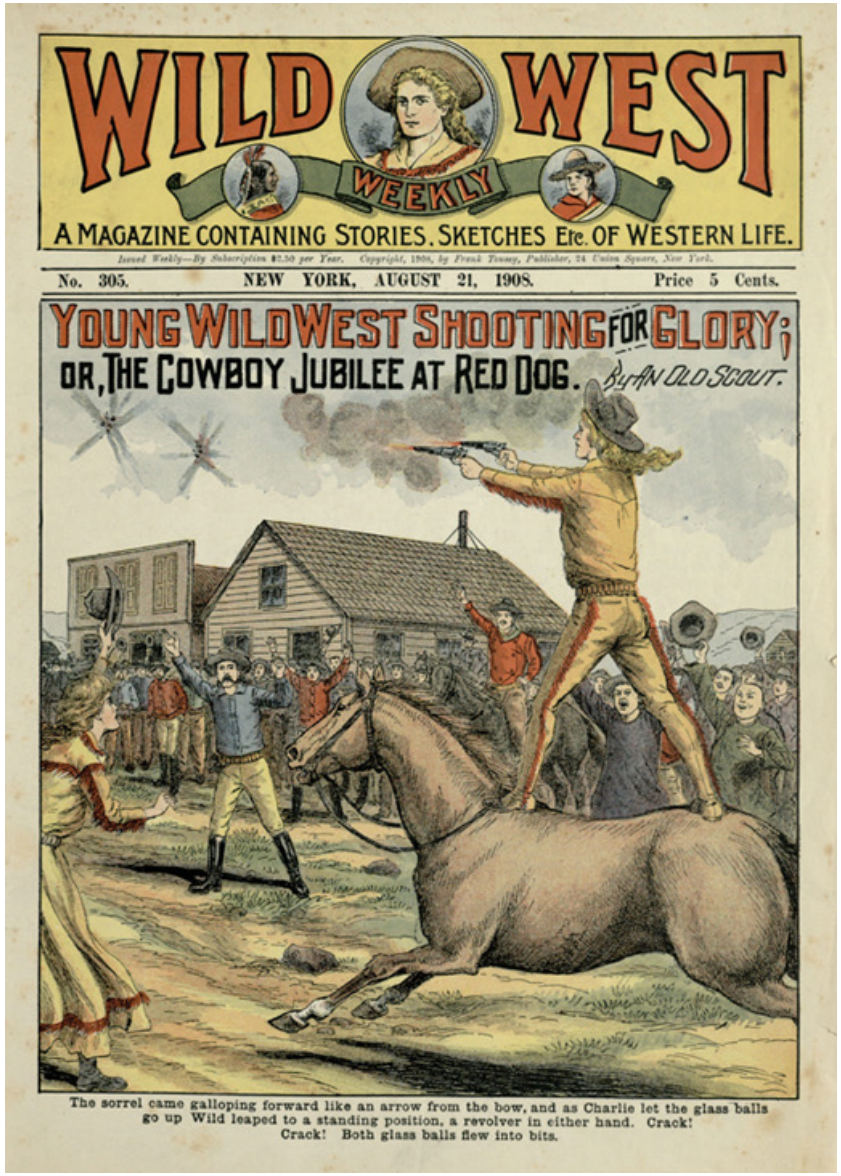
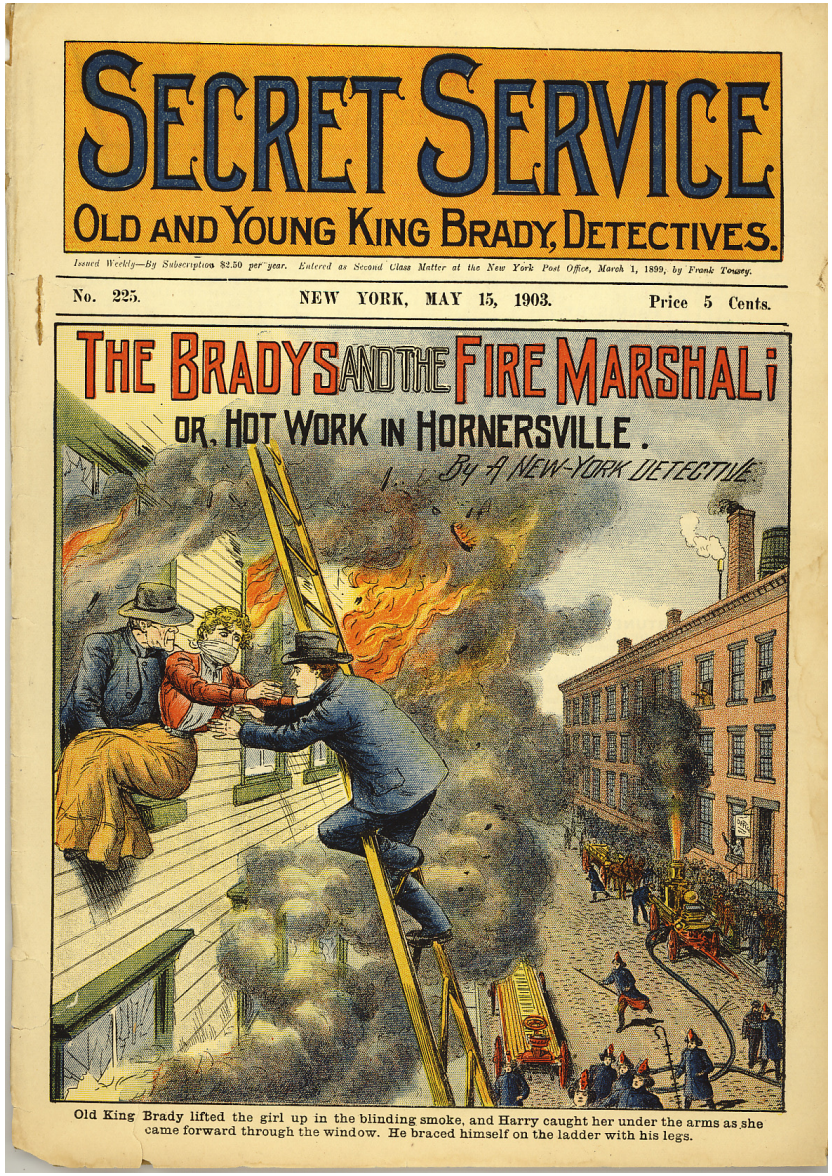
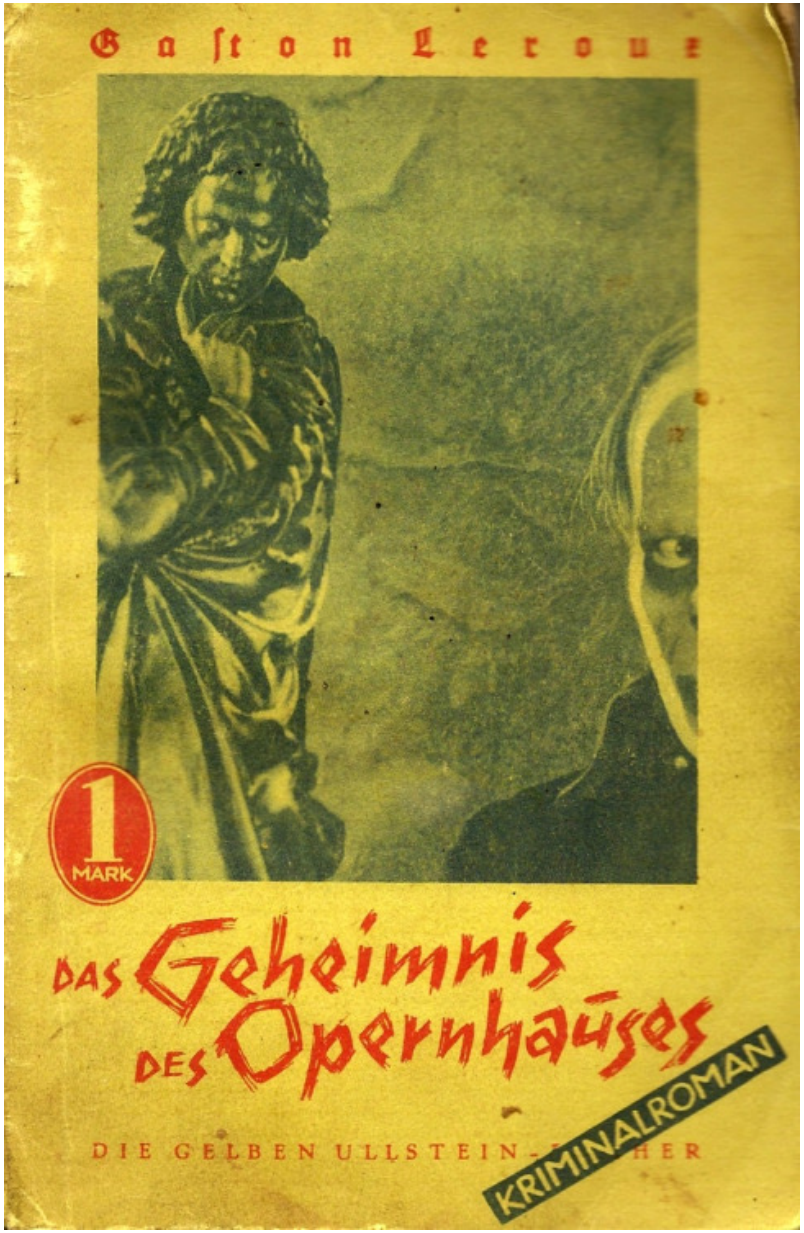


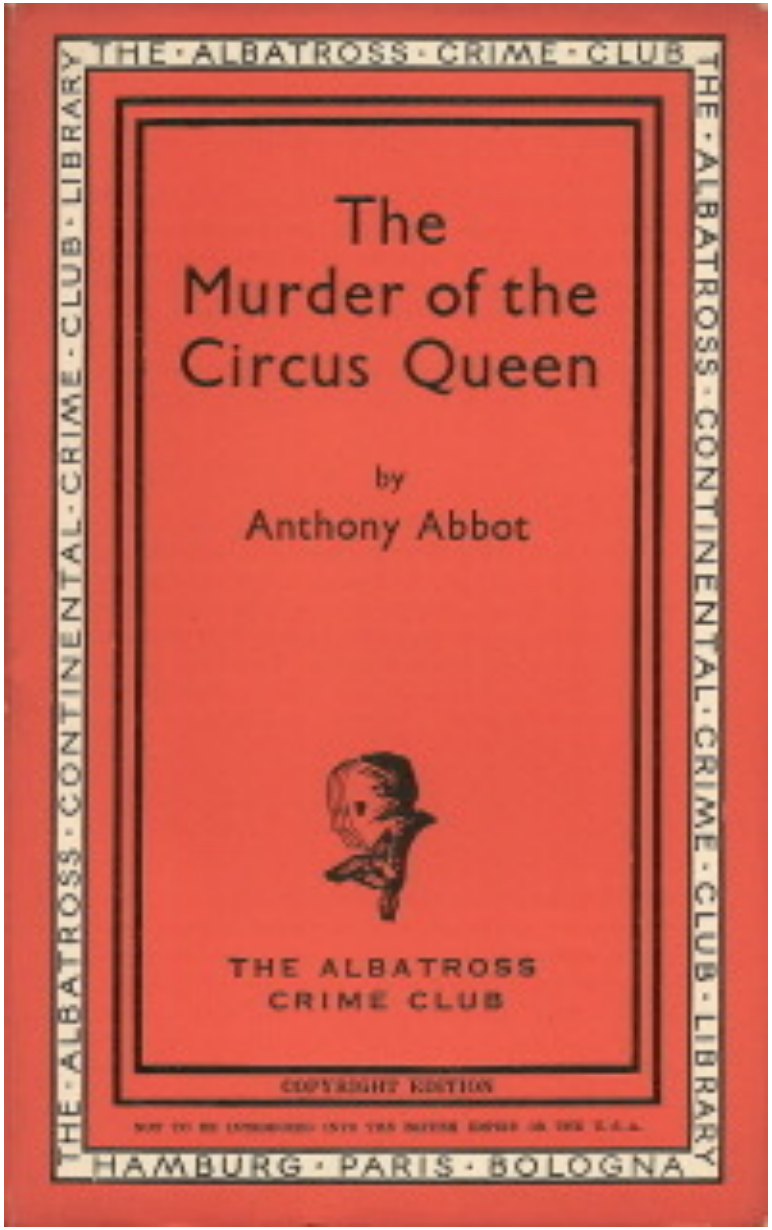
Young Wild West Shooting for Glory; or, The Cowboy Jubilee at Red Dog (1908)



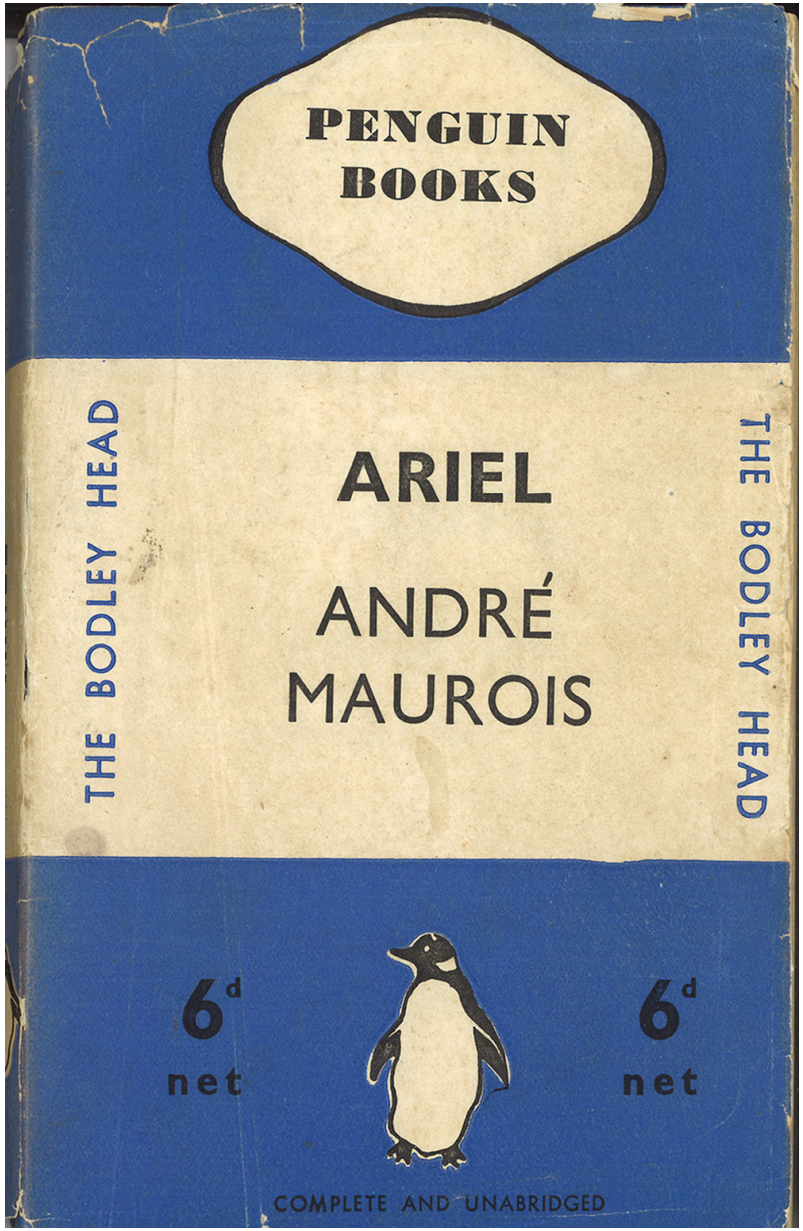
The Bradys and the Fire Marshal; or, Hot Work in Hornersville (1908)



Gaston Leroux, *Das Geheimnis des Opernhauses* (1928)



Anthony Abbott, *The Murder of the Circus Queen* (1933)



André Maurois, *Ariel* (1936)

“Penguincubator” on Charing Cross Road, London (1937)

“VendAvon Book Machine” (1945)

“Book-o-Mat” (1949)

If it be true, as it may be, that single books make an impression less marked and decisive than formerly, so that a bad or inferior book may do less harm than it once did, it is also true that bad books and inferior books are far more common than they once were. Their poison is also more subtle and less easily detected, for as the taste of readers becomes omnivorous, it becomes less discriminating. Besides, the readiness with which good men, and men sturdy in their principles too, read books which they despise and abhor, has introduced a freedom of practice on this subject, at which other generations would have stood aghast. In many cases too, if the principles are not corrupted by reading, the taste is vitiated. Or if nothing worse happens, delicacy of appreciation suffers from the amount of intellectual food which is forced upon us, and the satisfaction is far less keen and exquisite than was enjoyed by readers of a few books of superior merit.

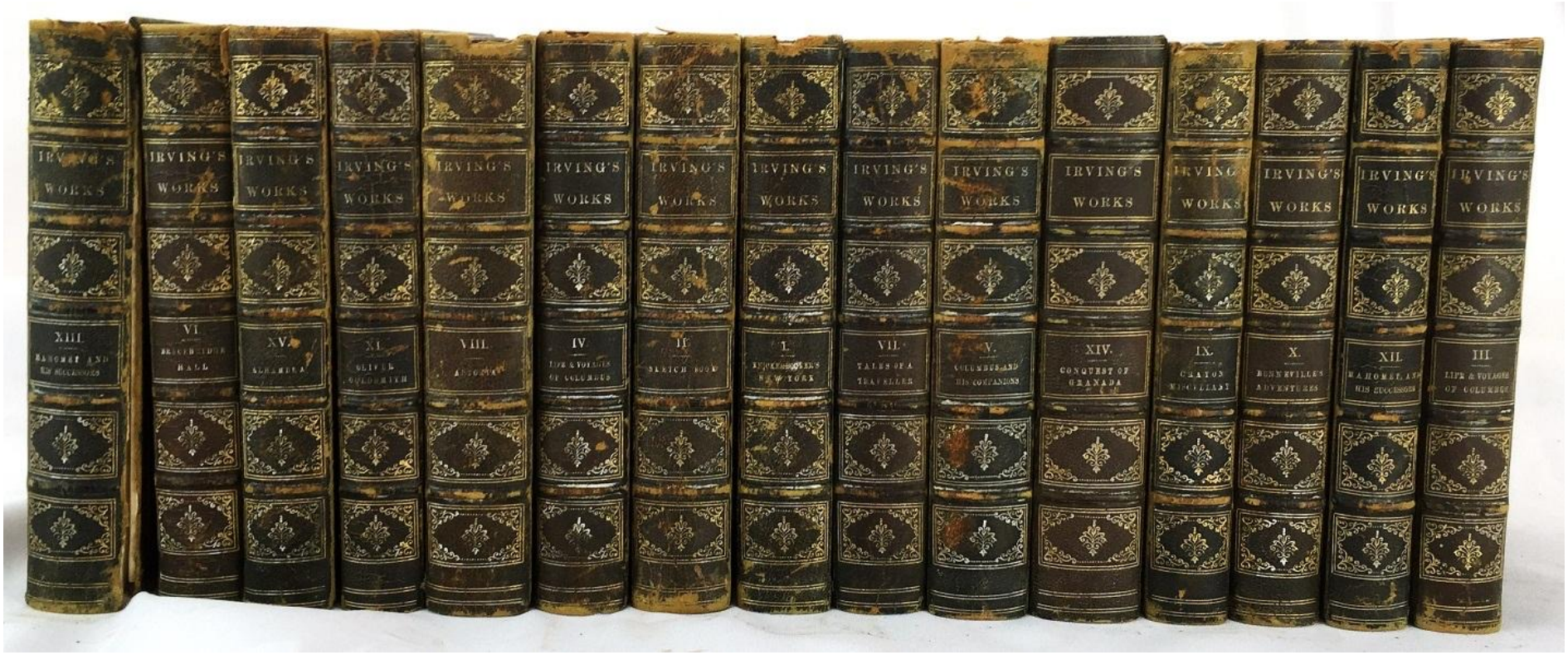
Noah Porter, *Books and Reading* (1871)

When Railway Libraries and 'Yellow Backs' offered a kind of reading that needed little exertion, it was not likely that any other would stand a chance except with the few determined on self-improvement.

Queenie Dorothy Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932)

These fields are the site of the antagonistic coexistence of two modes of production and circulation obeying inverse logics. At one pole, there is the anti-'economic' economy of pure art. Founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness and on the denegation of the 'economy' (of the 'commercial') and of 'economic' profit (in the short term), it privileges production and its specific necessities, the outcome of an autonomous history. This production, which can acknowledge no other demand than one it can generate itself, but only in the long term, is oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital, a kind of 'economic' capital denied but recognized, and hence legitimate – a veritable credit, and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, 'economic' profits.[2] At the other pole, there is the 'economic' logic of the literary and artistic industries which, since they make the trade in cultural goods just another trade, confer priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print run, and which are content to adjust themselves to the pre-existing demand of a clientèle.

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992)



The Works of Washington Irving (1854)

In this more traditional discourse the book was conceived of as the emanation of an author, as serious, as a classic, and as a permanent and precious possession.

Since its intrinsic value was understood to increase with age, such a book, it was thought, would endow its owner with the status and legitimacy associated with learning and the school. In this discourse the proper place for the book was the family library or parlor. As a dignified object, it required a design that would promote longevity; hence the need for high-quality paper, secure bindings, and hard covers.

Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (1997)

On the other hand it could also produce perceived changes in the status of the individual who bought it because the more traditional discourse about the book had managed to associate the social prestige of learning with the particular technology for producing that learning in the first place, that is, with the leather- or cloth-covered book itself.

Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (1997)

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Distinctions That Matter

Distinctions that Matter : Popular Literature and Material Culture

Anthony Enns et Bernhard Metz

https://doi.org/10.4000/belphegor.606

"Distinctions that Matter: Popular Literature and Material Culture," *Belphégor: Littérature populaire et culture médiatique* 13-1 (2015)

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Dossier dirigé par Anthony Enns et Bernhard Metz

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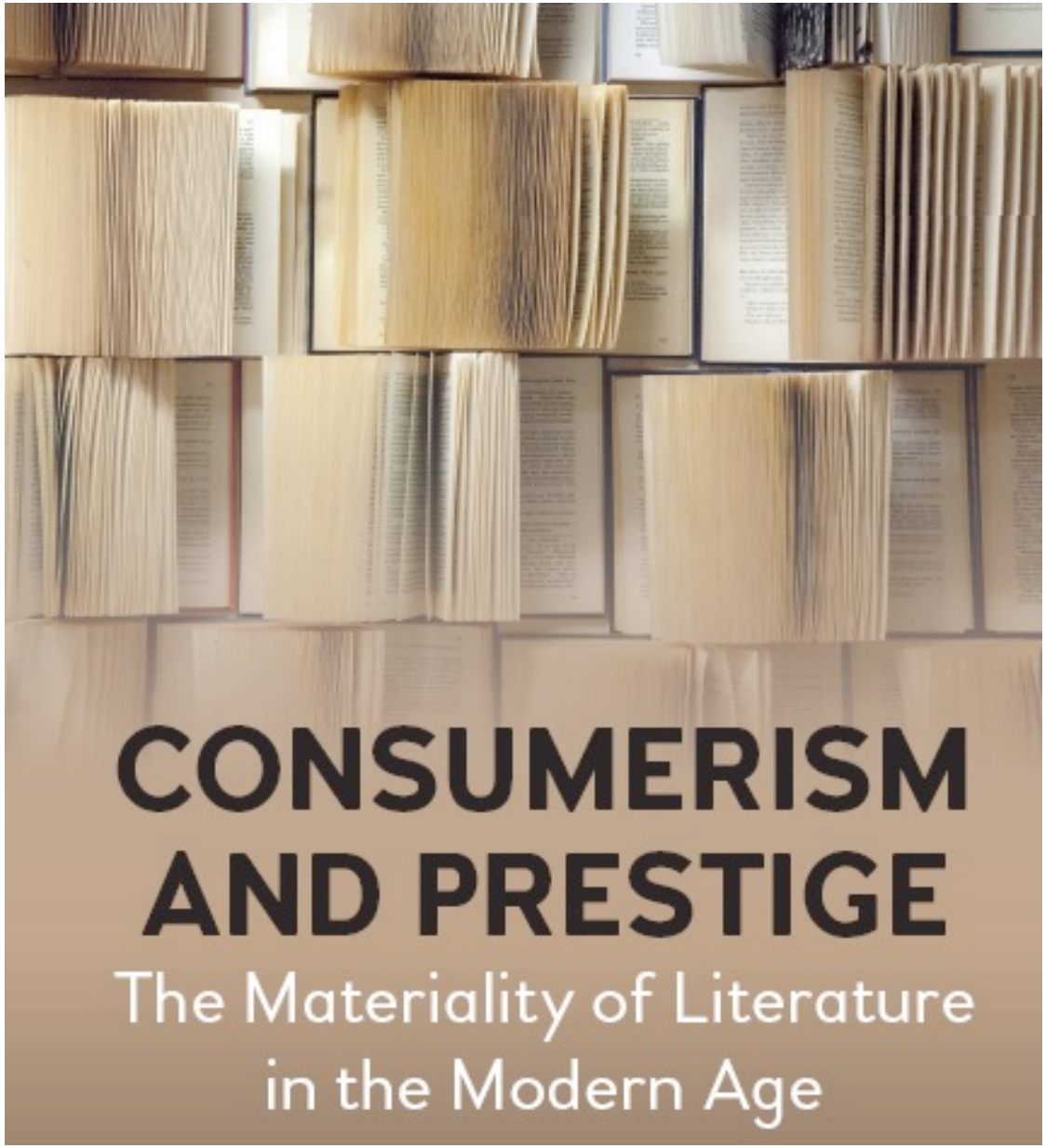
"Distinctions that Matter: Popular Literature and Material Culture," *Belphégor: Littérature populaire et culture médiatique* 13-1 (2015)



Anthony Enns and Bernhard Metz (editors), *Consumerism and Prestige: The Materiality of Literature in the Modern Age* (2022)

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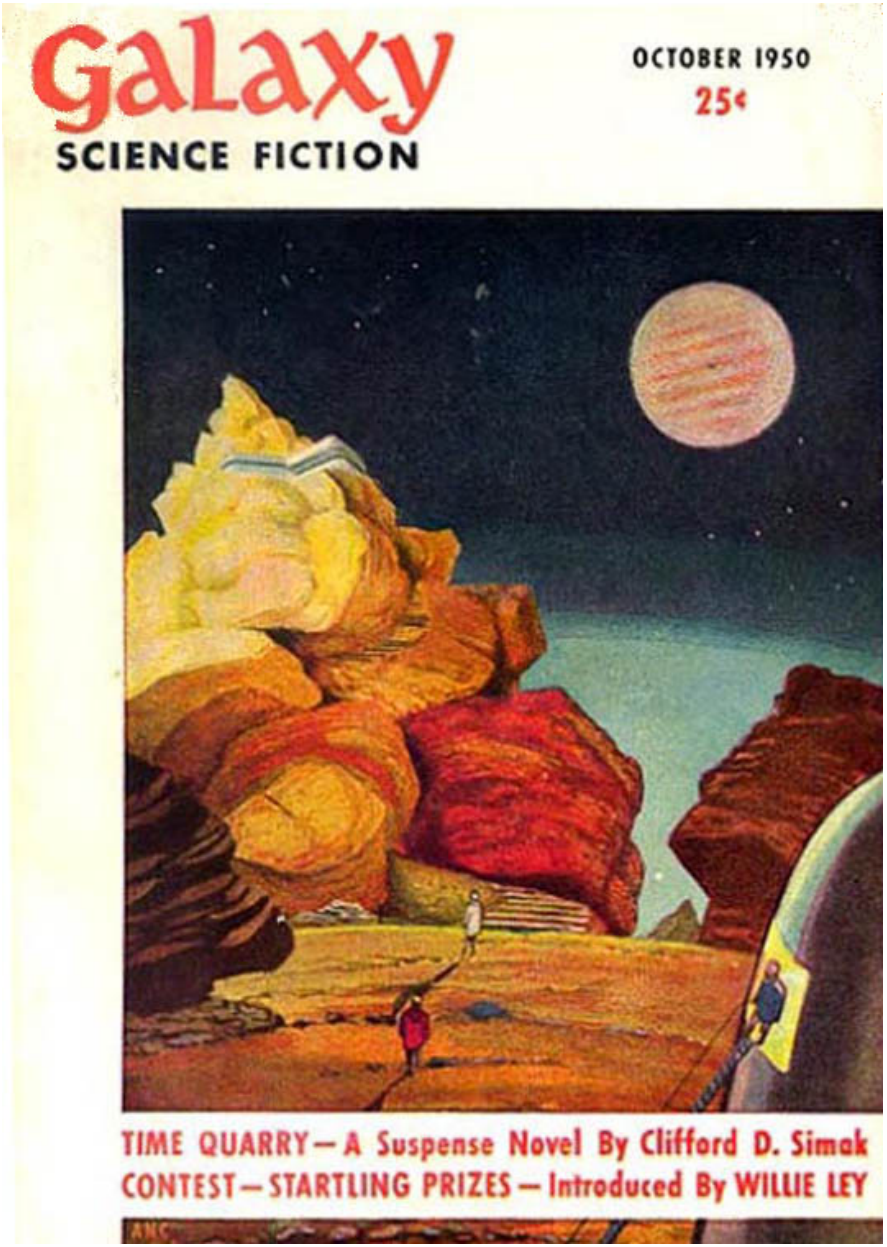
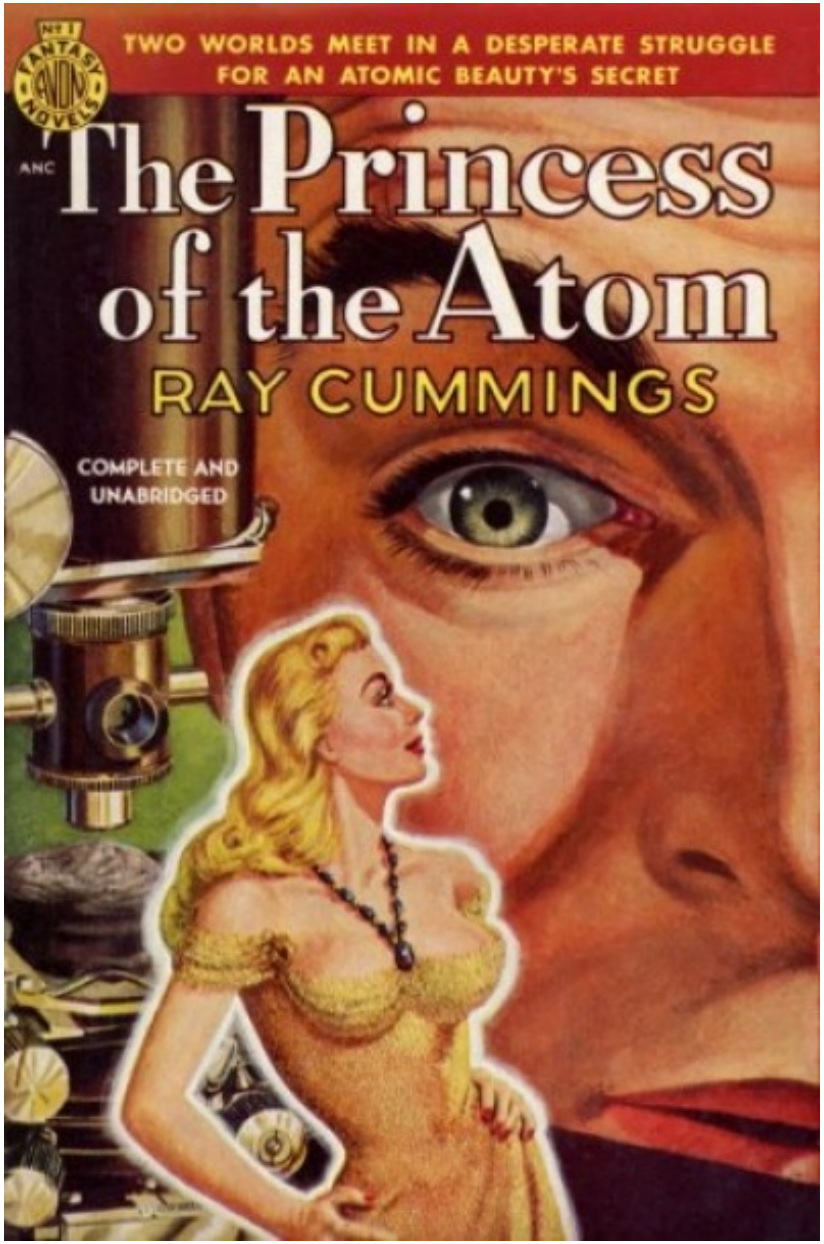
Science Fiction Pulp Magazines (1930s)

Drugstore Magazine Rack (1930s)

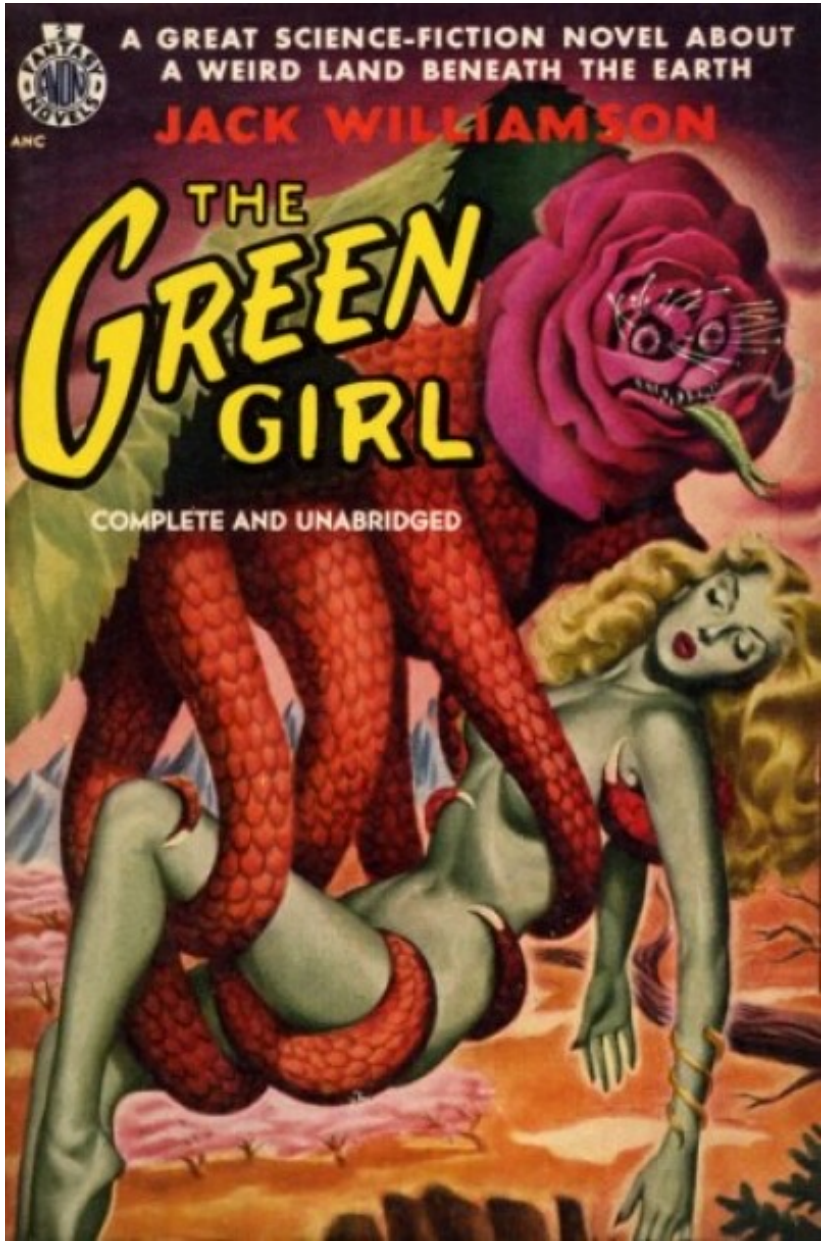
The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (Winter-Spring 1949)



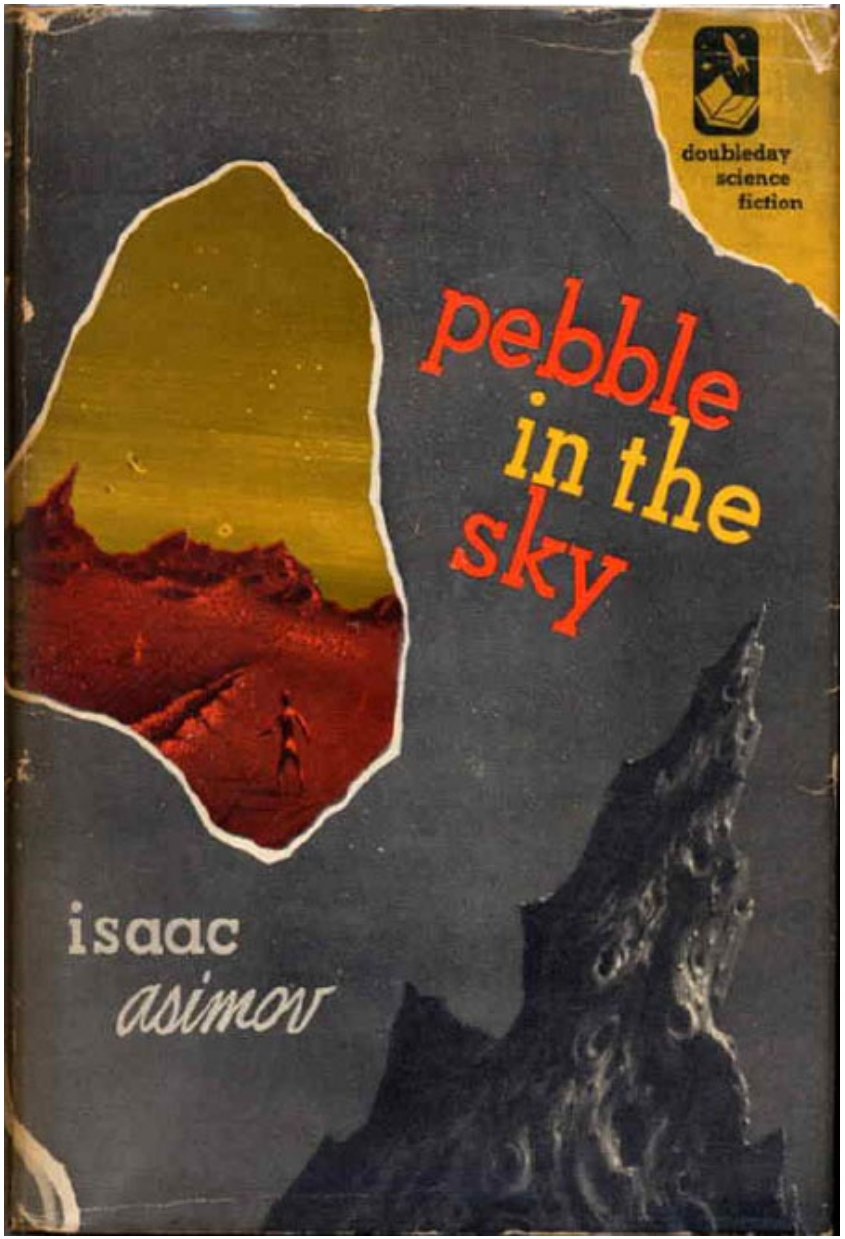
Galaxy (October 1950)



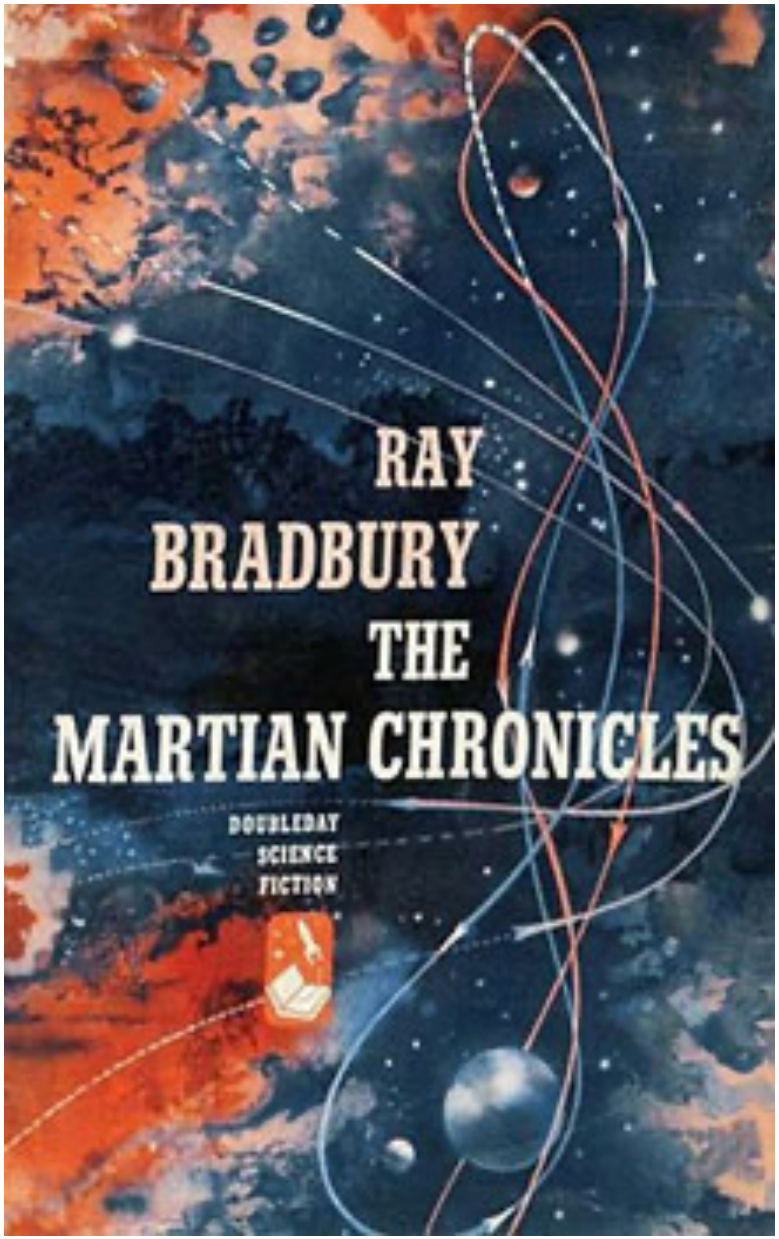
Ray Cummings,
The Princess of the Atom (1950)



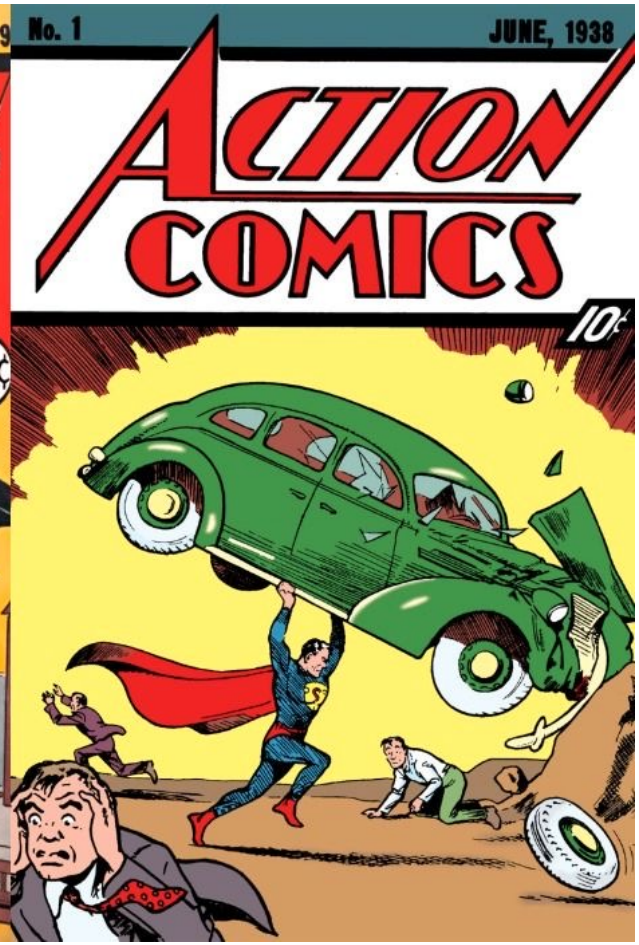
Jack Williamson,
The Green Girl (1950)



Isaac Asimov,
Pebble in the Sky (1950)



Ray Bradbury,
The Martian Chronicles (1950)



Comic Books (1930s)

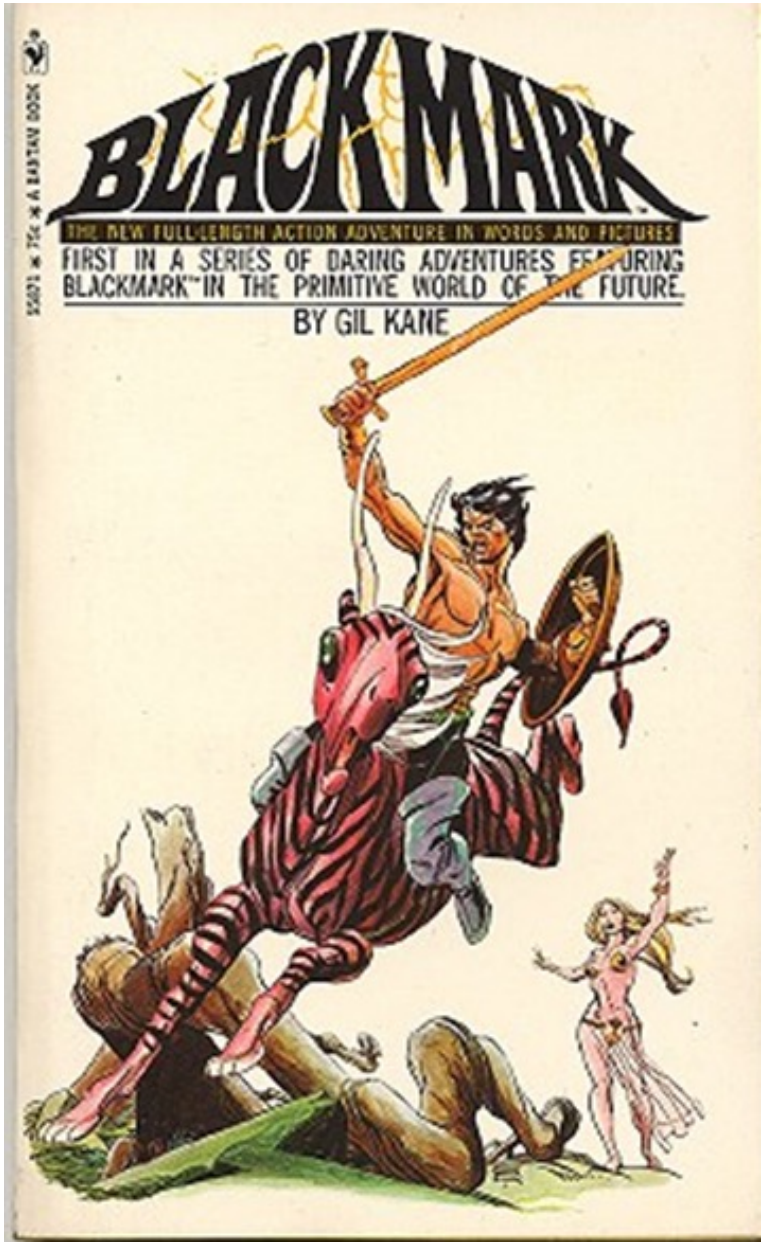
Drugstore Comic Book Rack (1940s)

The old dime novels in which an occasional redskin bit the dust were classic literature compared to the sadistic drivel pouring from the presses today. Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed—a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems—the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant.

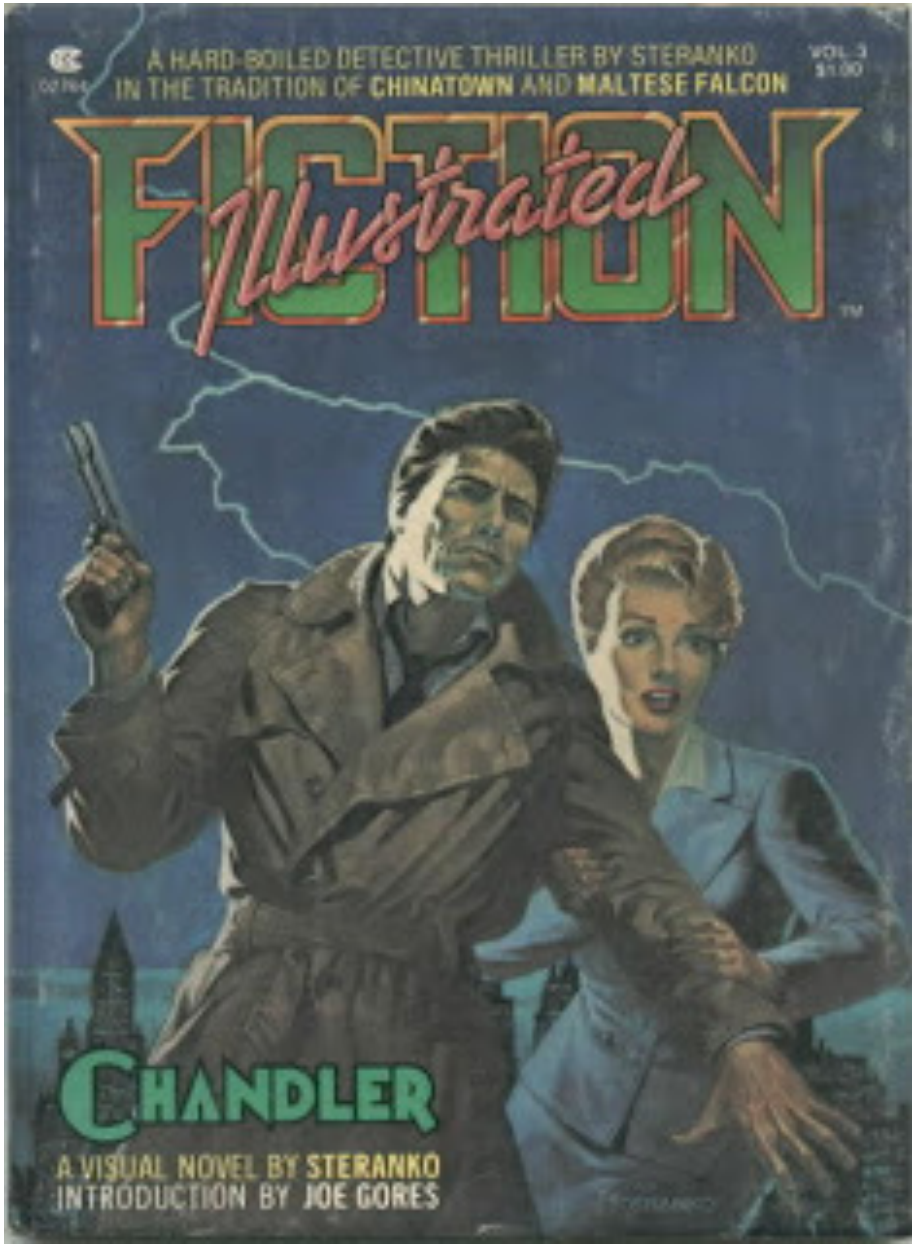
Sterling North, "A National Disgrace and a Challenge to American Patents," *Chicago Daily News* (May 8, 1940)

Print is easy to read when the paper background is light and the printing a good contrasting black. Yet most comics are smudgily printed on pulp paper. The printing is crowded in balloons with irregular lines. Any adult can check on the eyestrain involved by reading a few comic books himself. We *can* produce the most beautifully printed books and pamphlets; every morning my mail has advertising matter expertly designed and handsomely printed on expensive paper. Yet to our children we give the crudest and most ill-designed products.

Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954)



Gil Kane, *Blackmark* (1971)



At first, I thought it was a gag set up by the jokers down at Hurley's, but a second look at the man changed my mind. He wore a dark weave fly-front topcoat with peak lapels and a Homburg hat, all strictly uptown stuff.

What cinched it was the look on his face. He was sweating like a cold pitcher of beer on an August afternoon. His eyes were pinpoints that gave his face a hollow, haunted appearance.

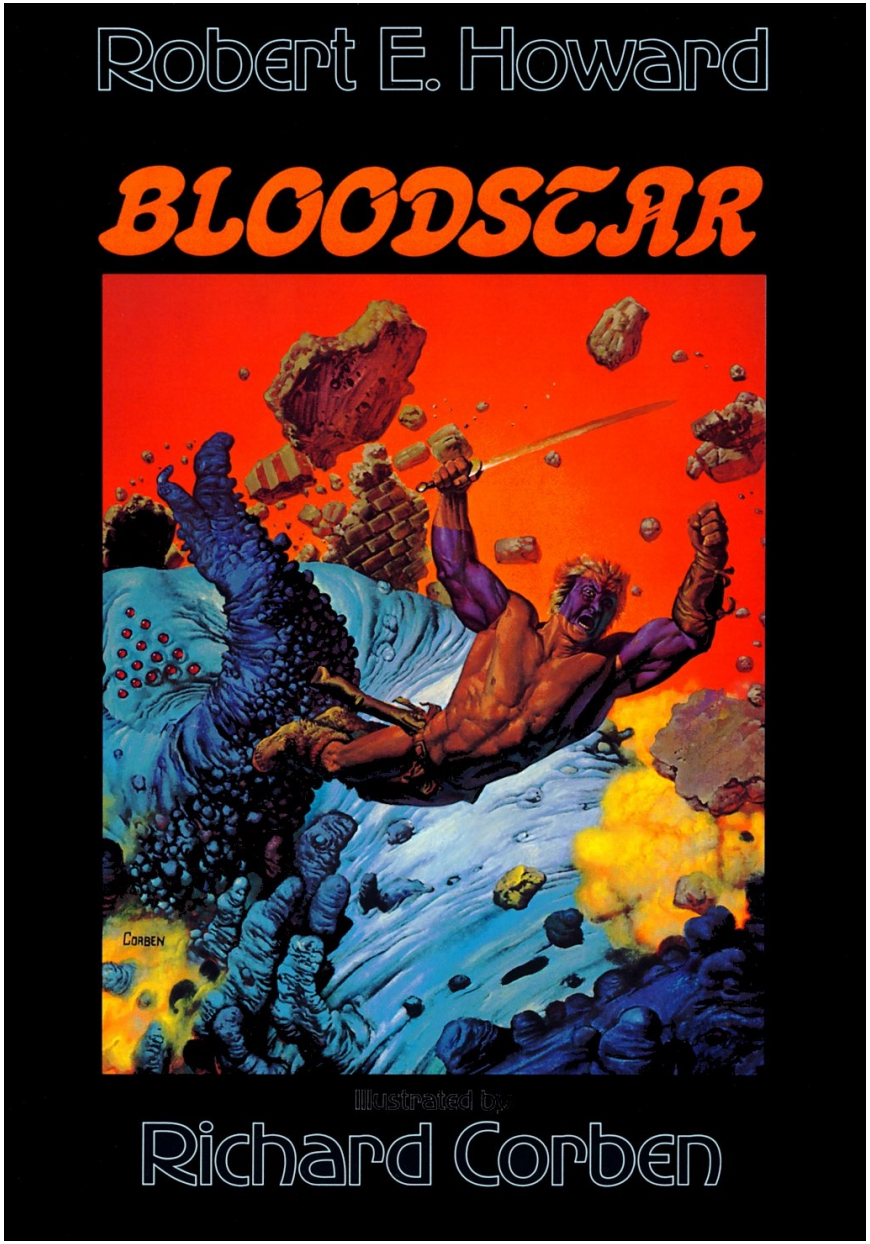
"My name is Bramson Todd and I need your help. I've been poisoned. I'm a dead man."

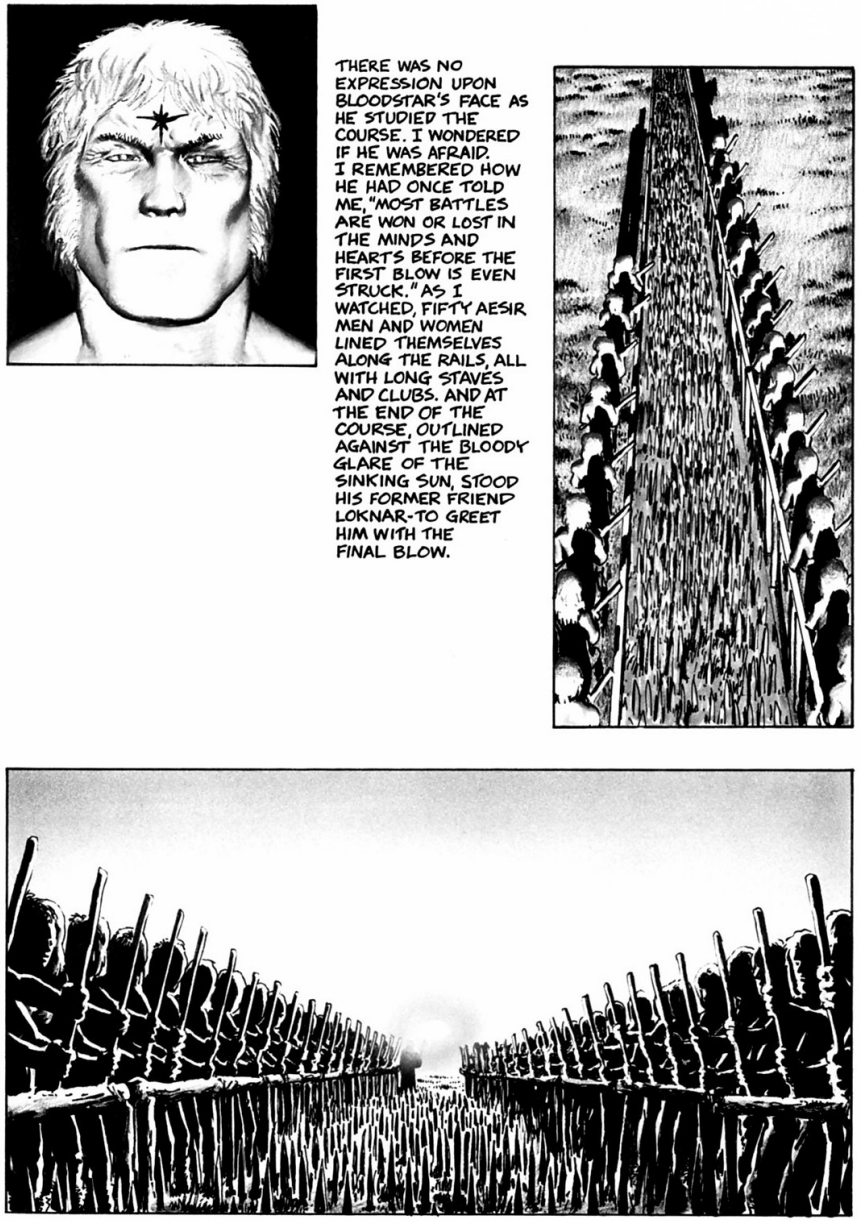
The back of my neck started to tingle. "You need a doctor, not a detective." I reached for the phone. He stopped me.

"No. I've just come from the hospital, Mr. Chandler; I know all there is to know. I've been poisoned and they've given me 72 hours to live. No more. The doctors can't help me now. I've been murdered, and I want to know who did it! Find my killer, Chandler—find him and make him pay for it!"

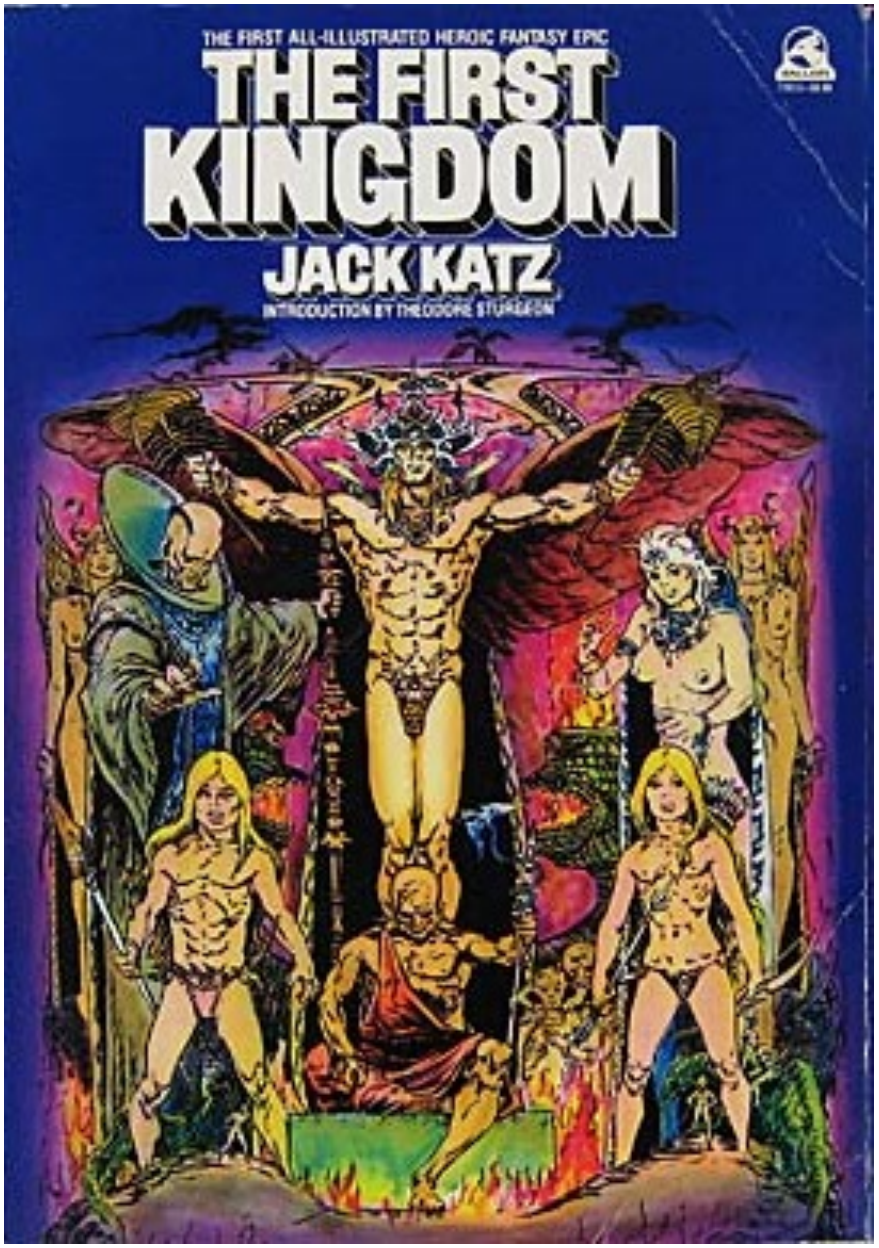
Jim Steranko, *Chandler* (1976)

George Metzger, *Beyond Time and Again* (1976)

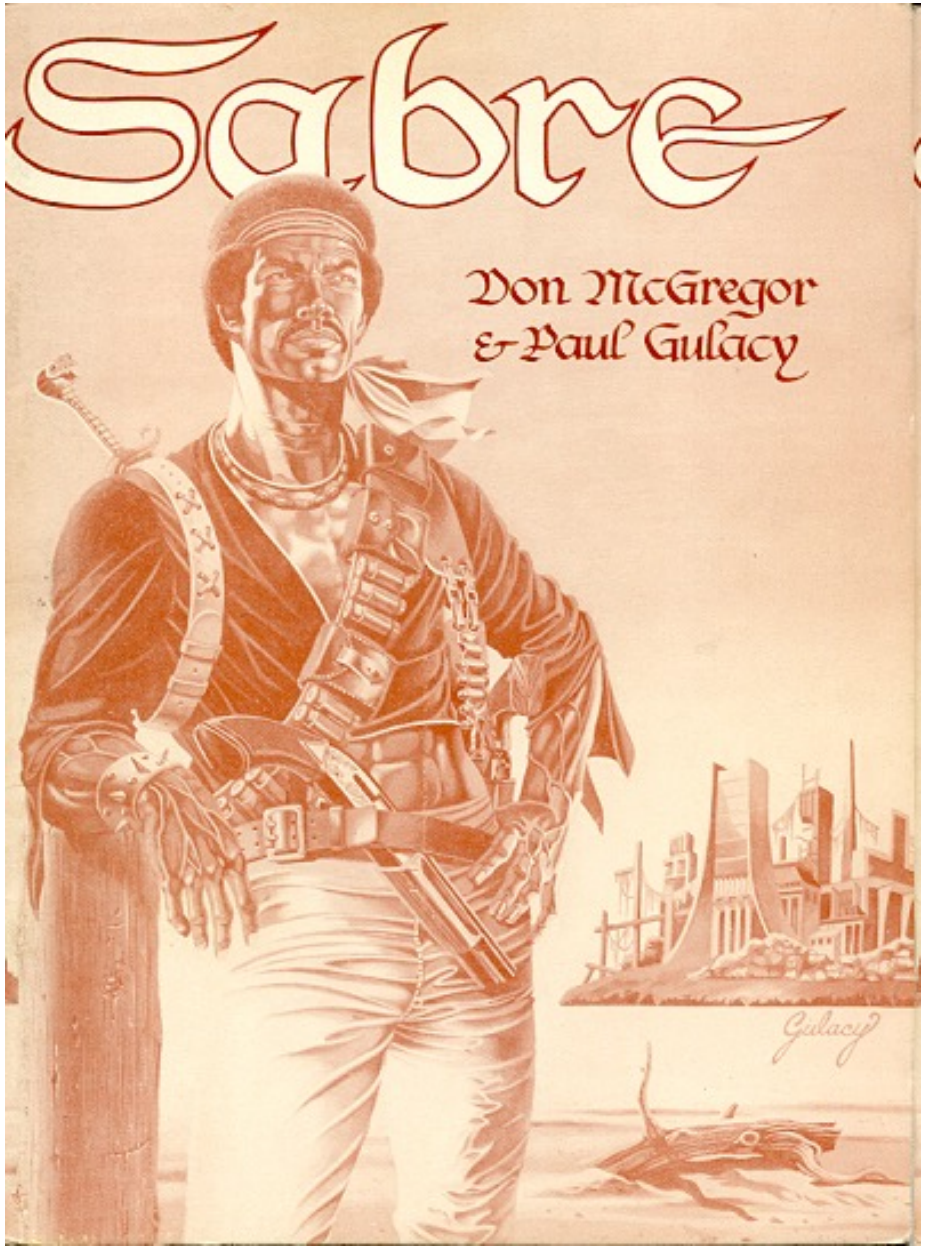




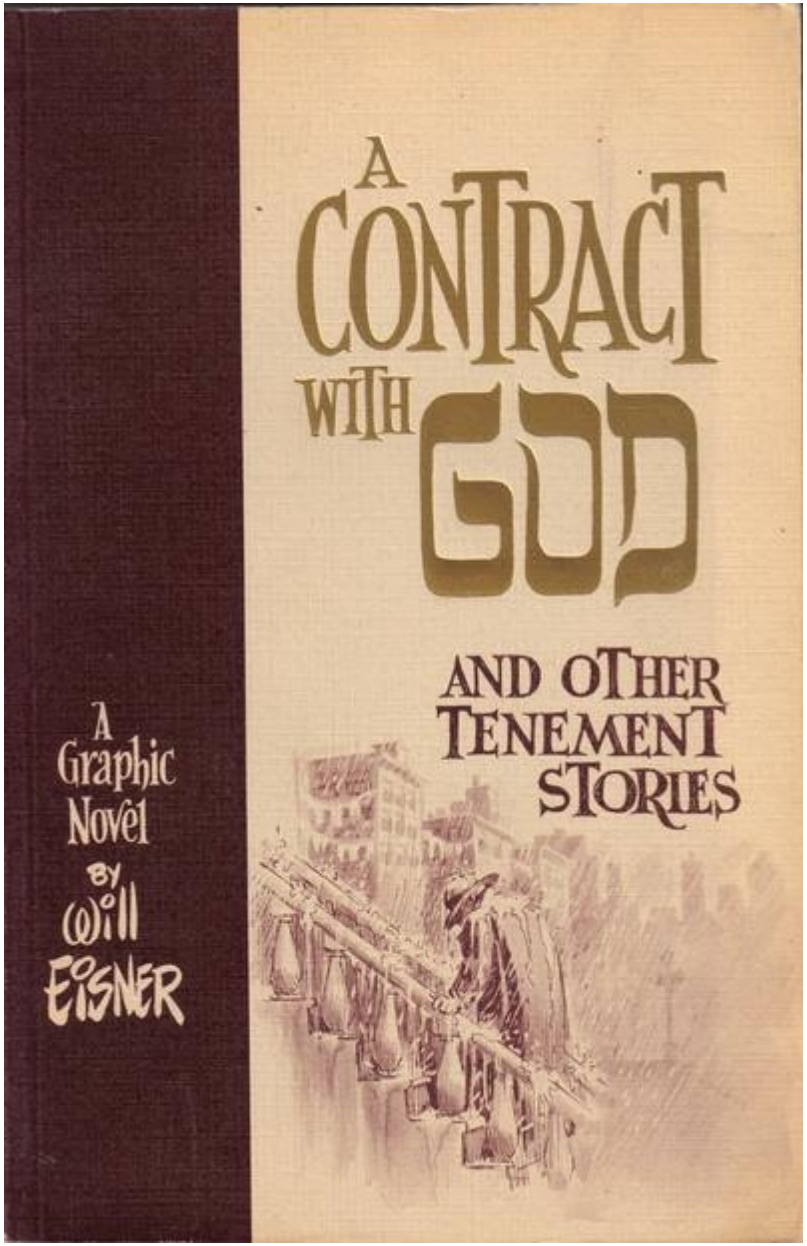
Richard Corben, *Bloodstar* (1976)

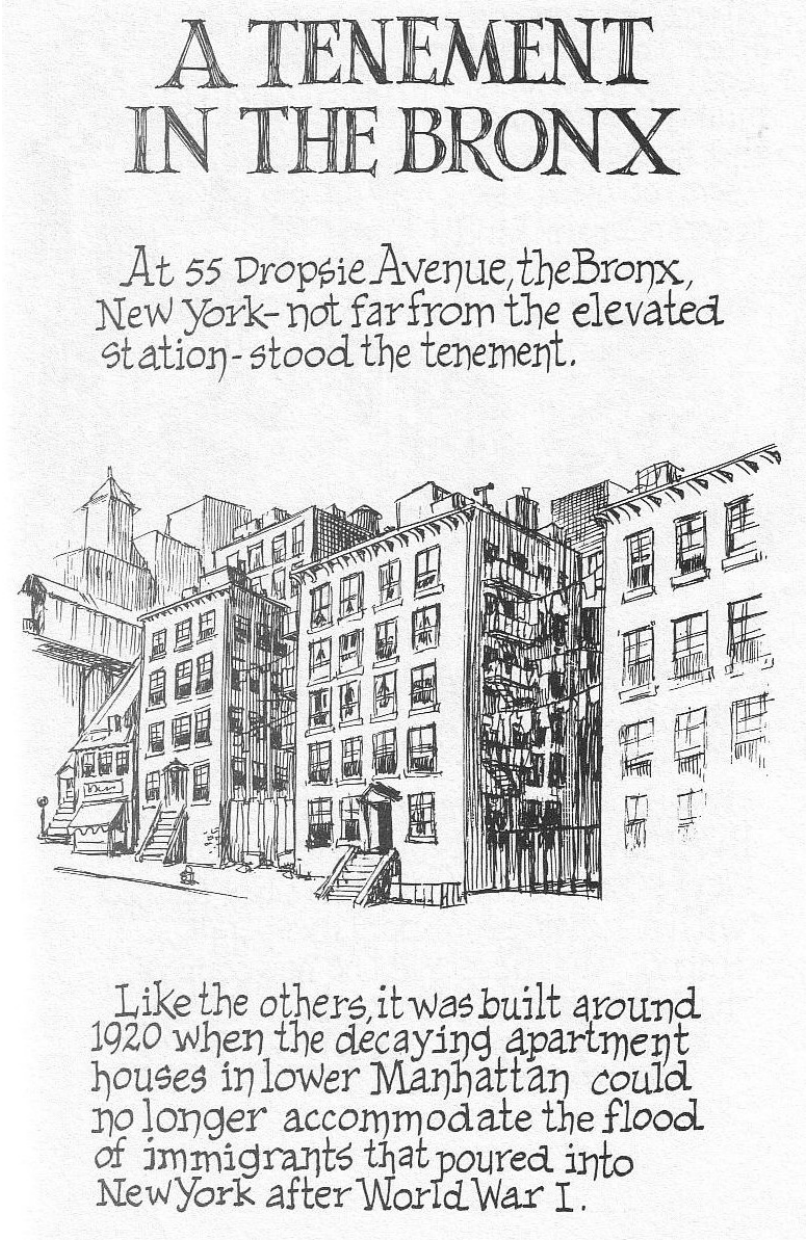


Jack Katz, *The First Kingdom* (1978)

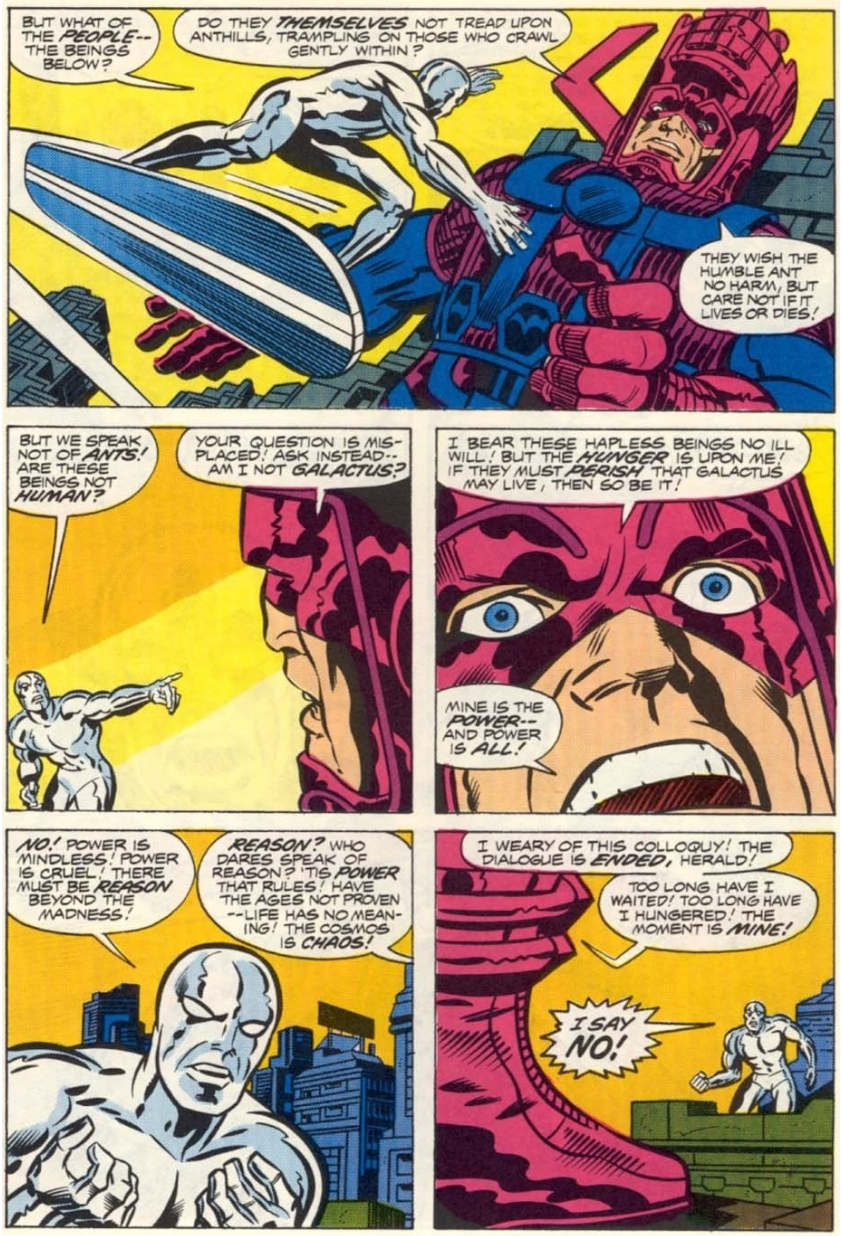


Don McGregor and Paul Gulacy, *Sabre* (1978)

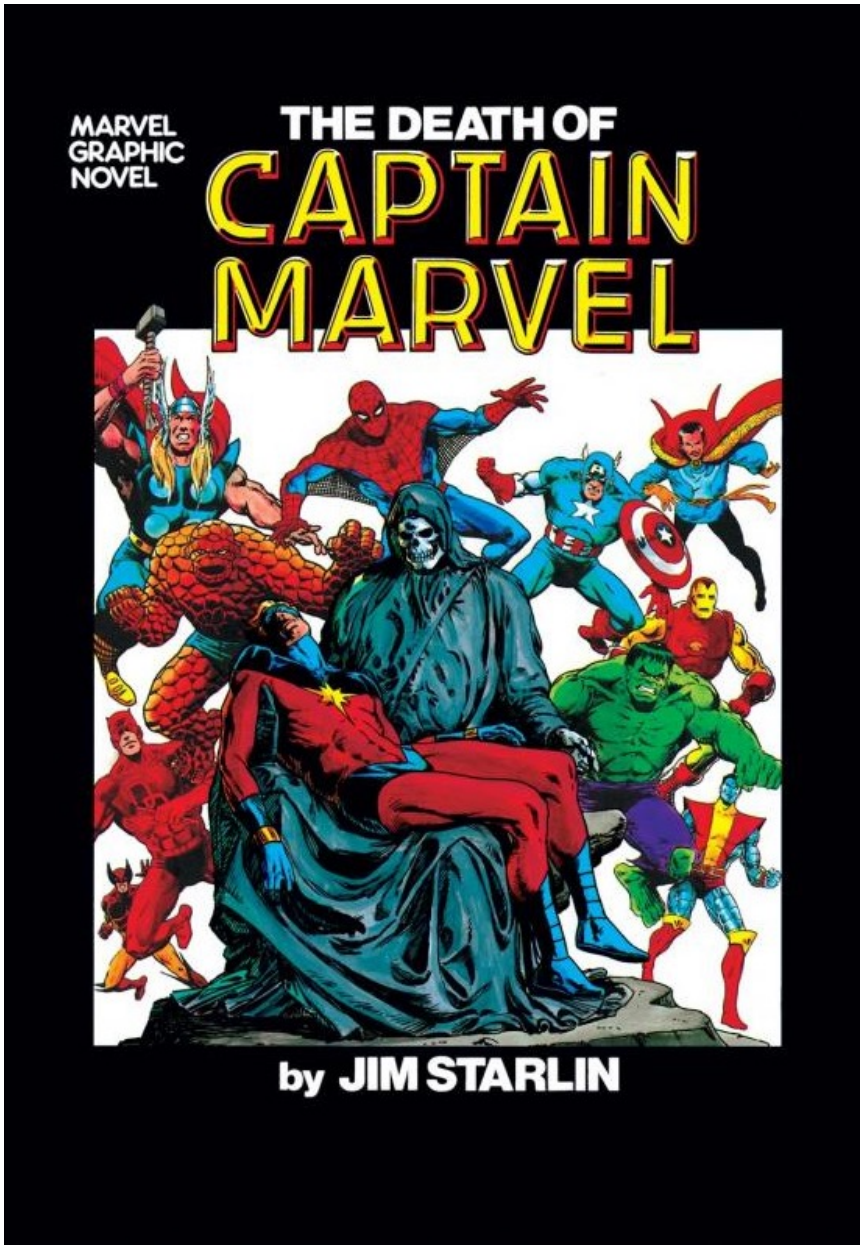




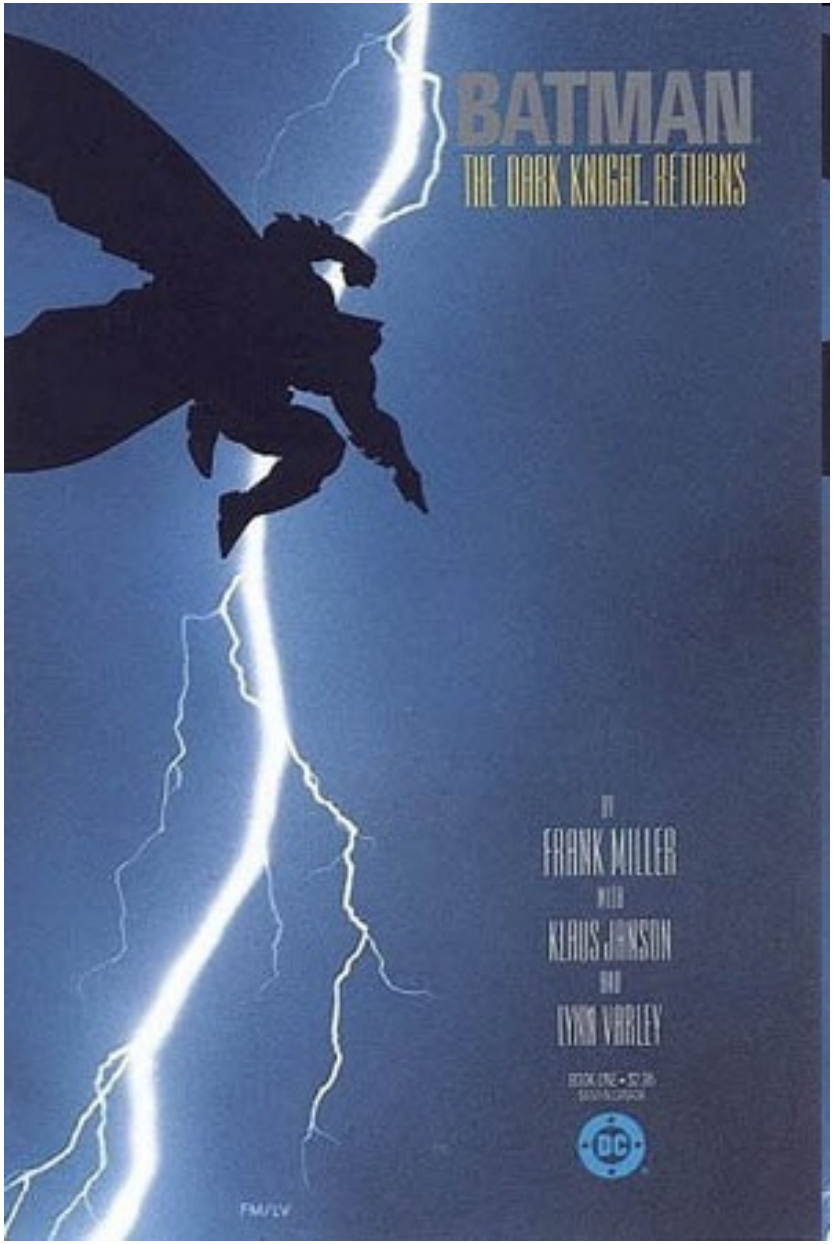
Will Eisner, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978)

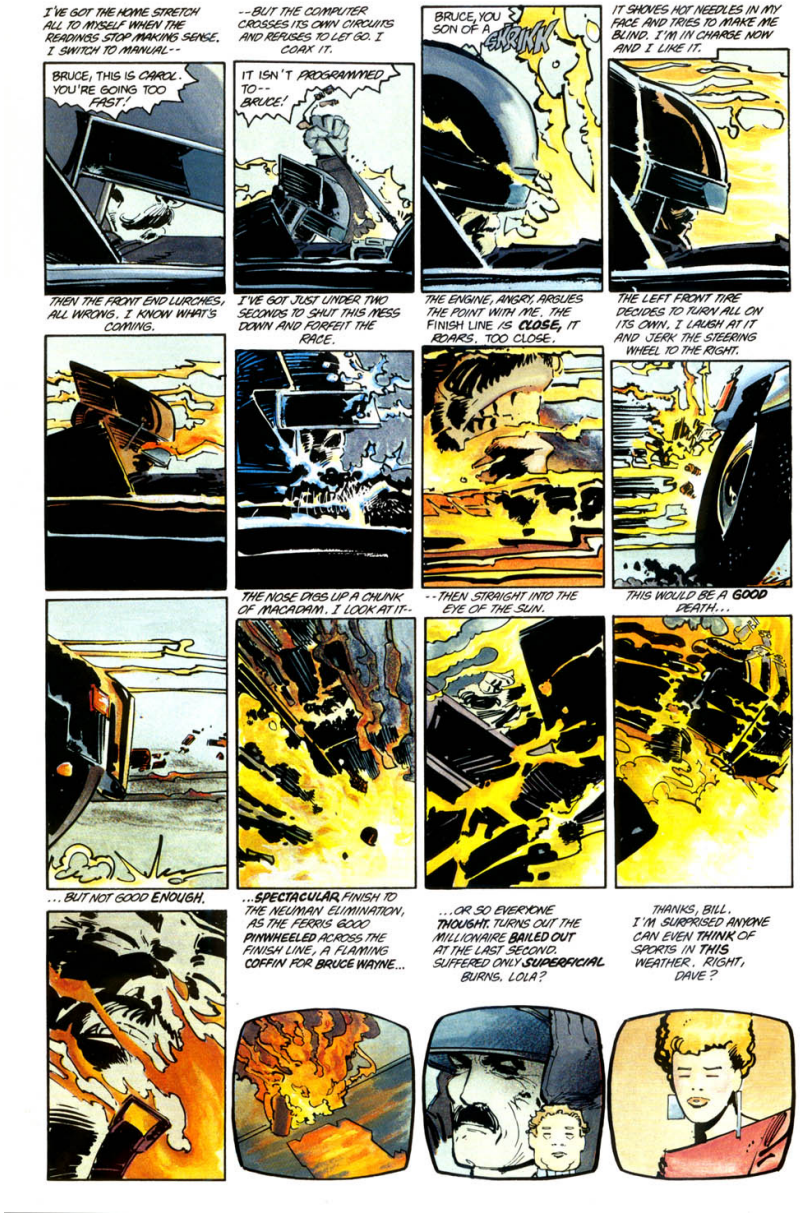


Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, *The Silver Surfer* (1978)

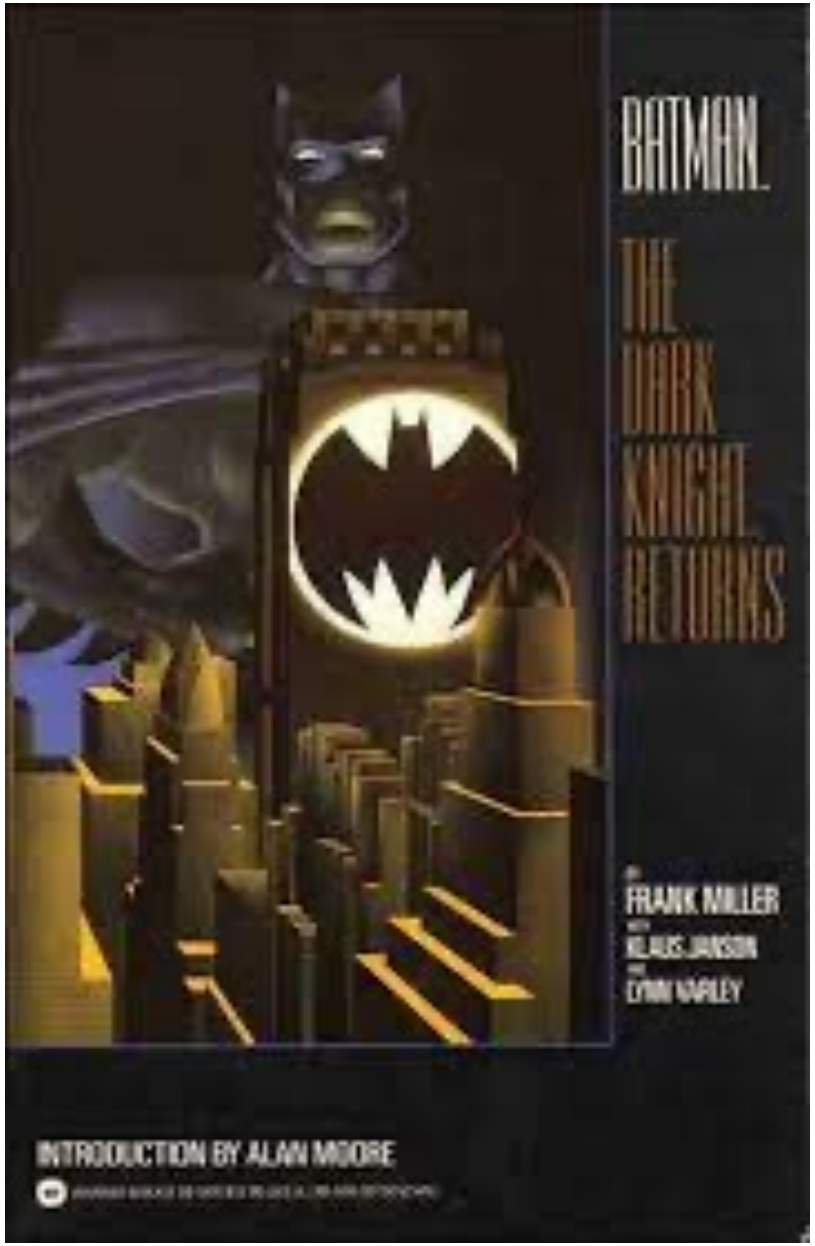


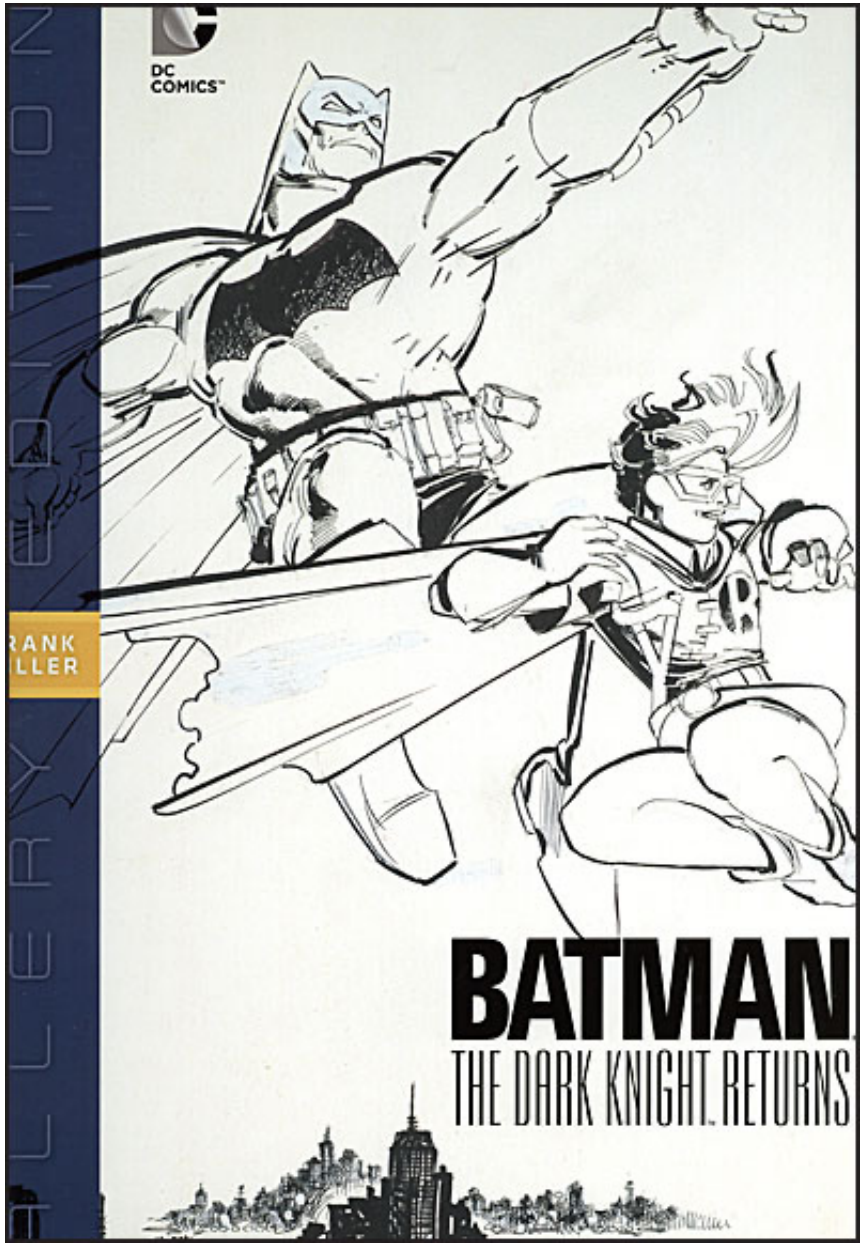
Jim Starlin, *The Death of Captain Marvel* (1982)





Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* #1 (February 1986)

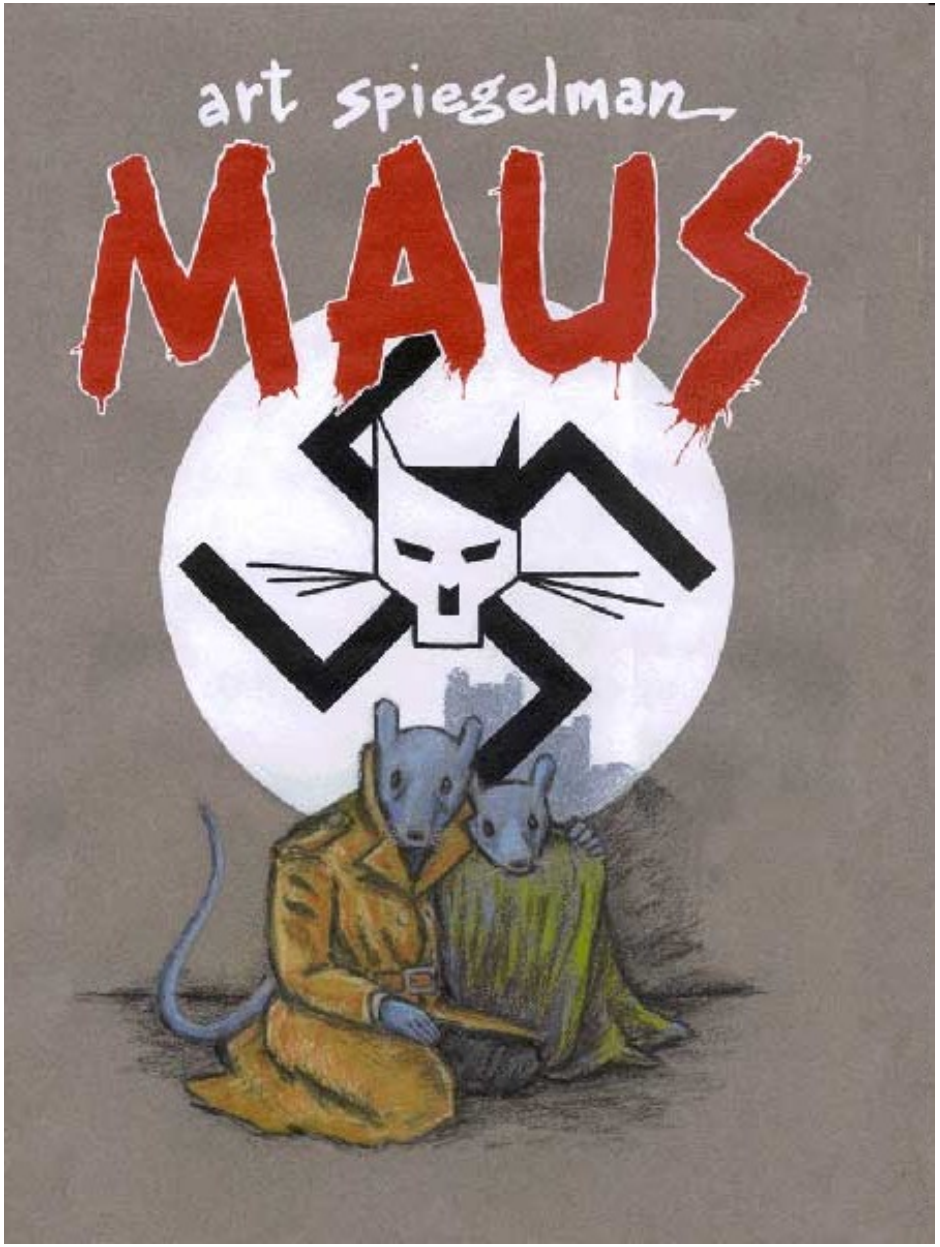




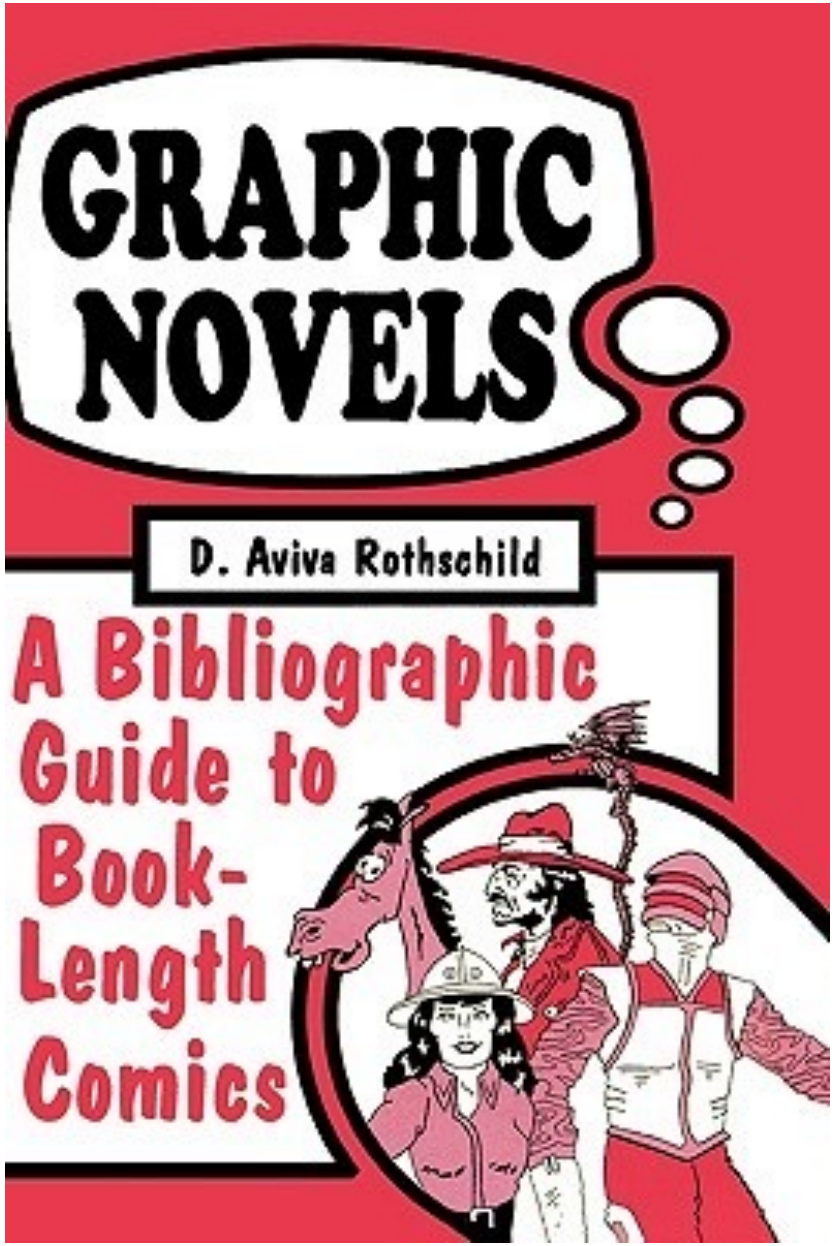
Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986)

You have to understand that comic books began as collections of newspaper strips, and the newspaper mentality toward production has persisted, especially as cheap pulp paper gave way to cheaper, and metal plates gave way to plastic, making the books so fuzzy it takes the dedication of a child to read them. But now, very suddenly, as a direct consequence of the increased power of the talent, the ante has been raised, comics are being published in formats that demand the level of attention from production that slick magazines and fine art books do.

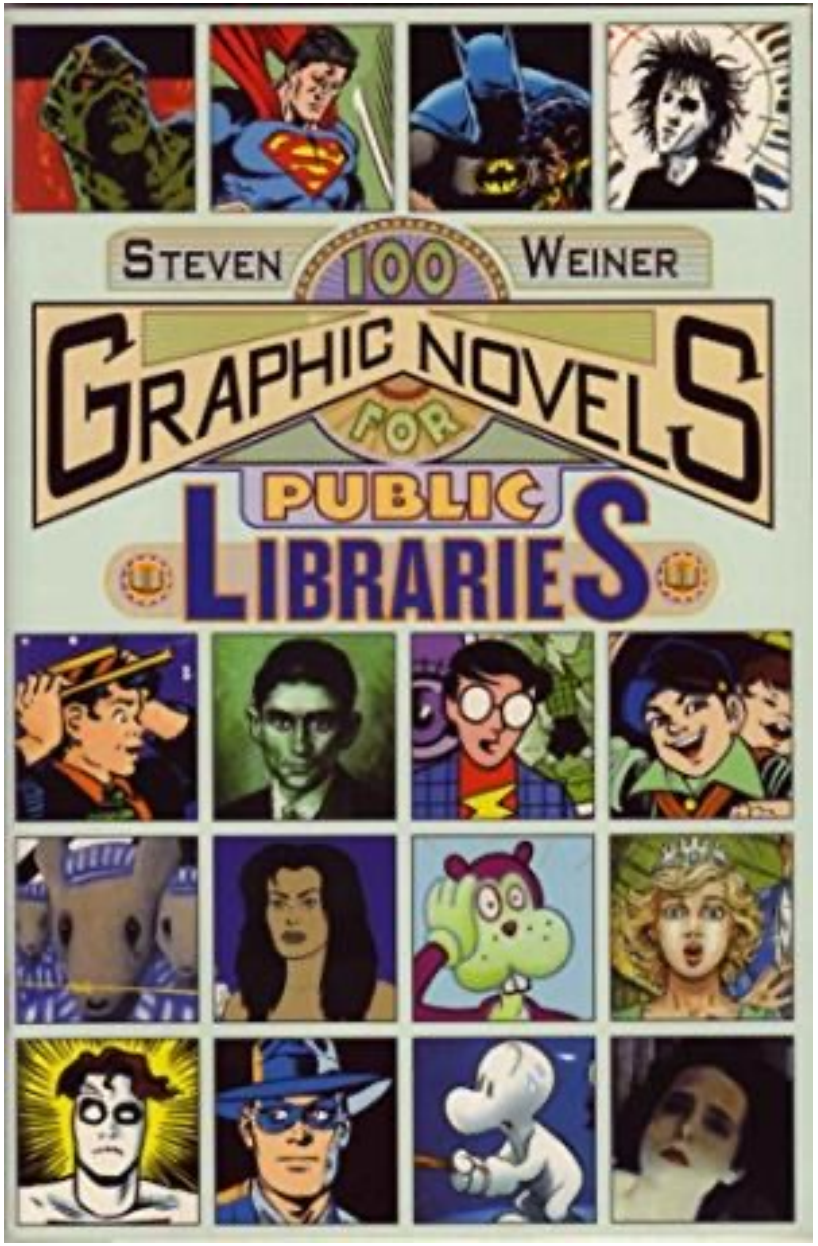
Kim Thompson, "Frank Miller: Return of the Dark Knight," *Comics Journal* (August 1985)



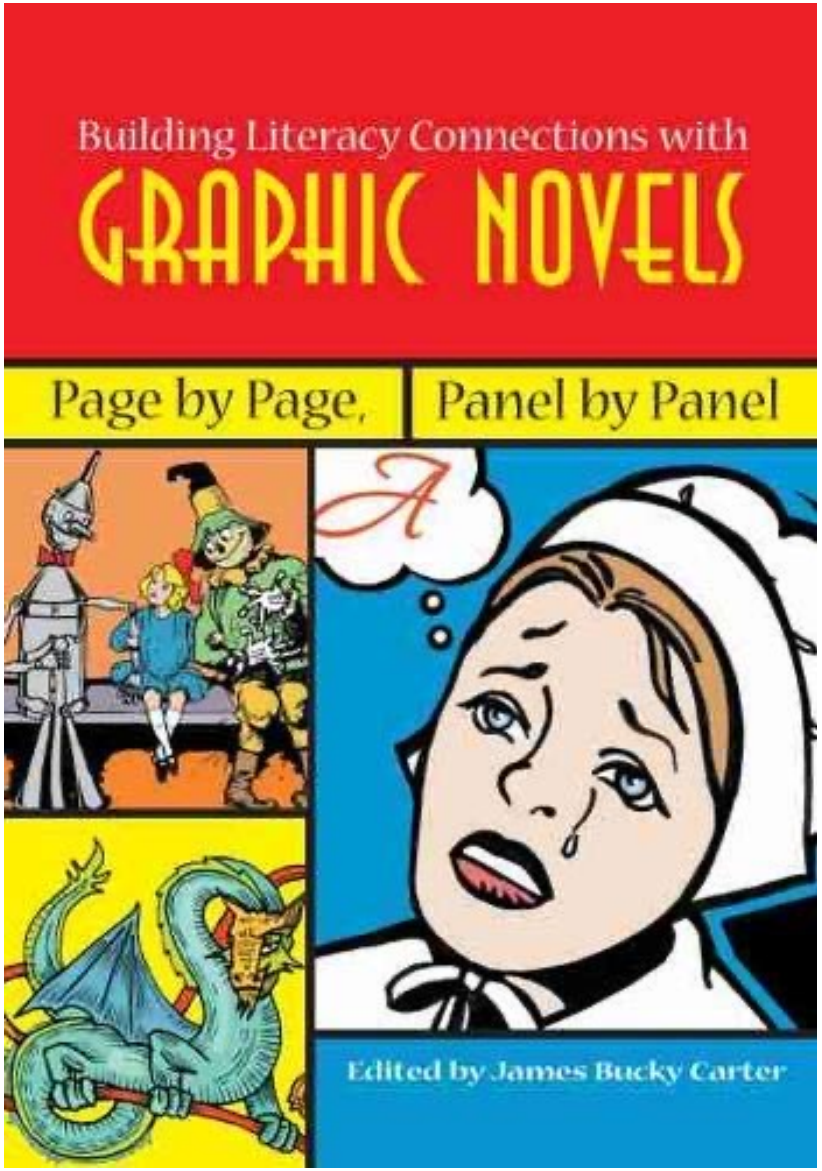
Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (1986)



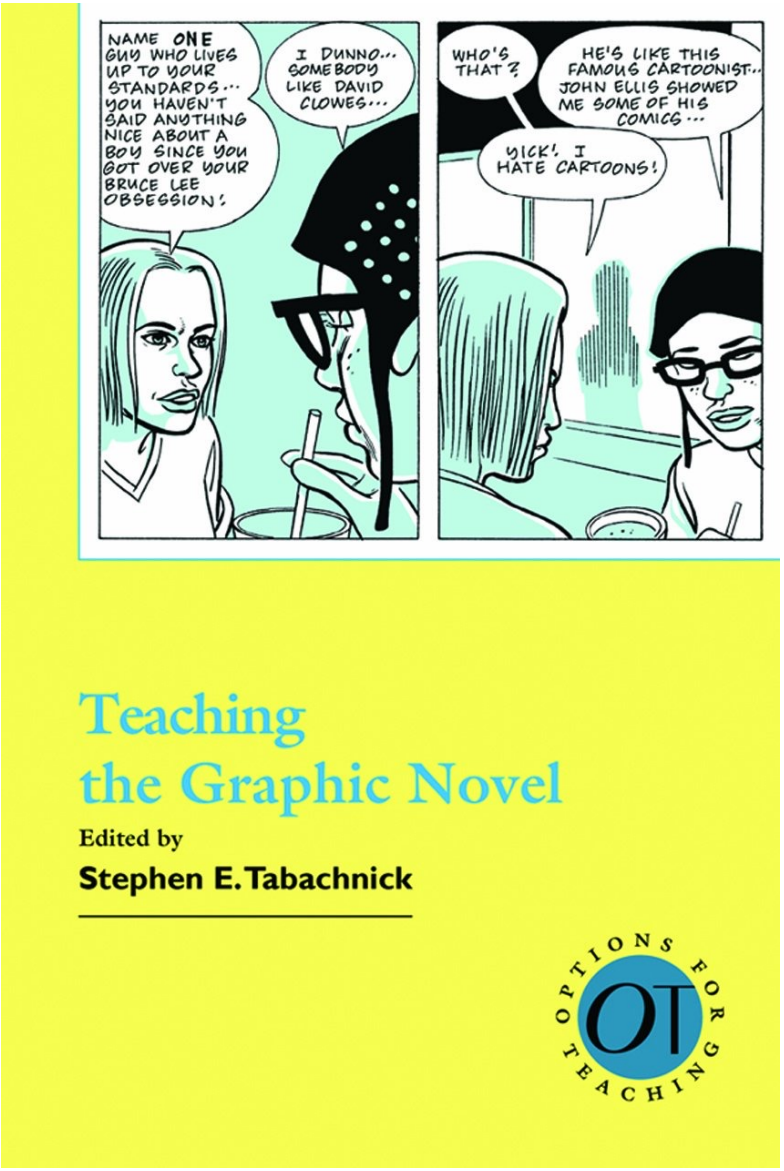
D. Aviva Rothschild, *Graphic Novels* (1995)



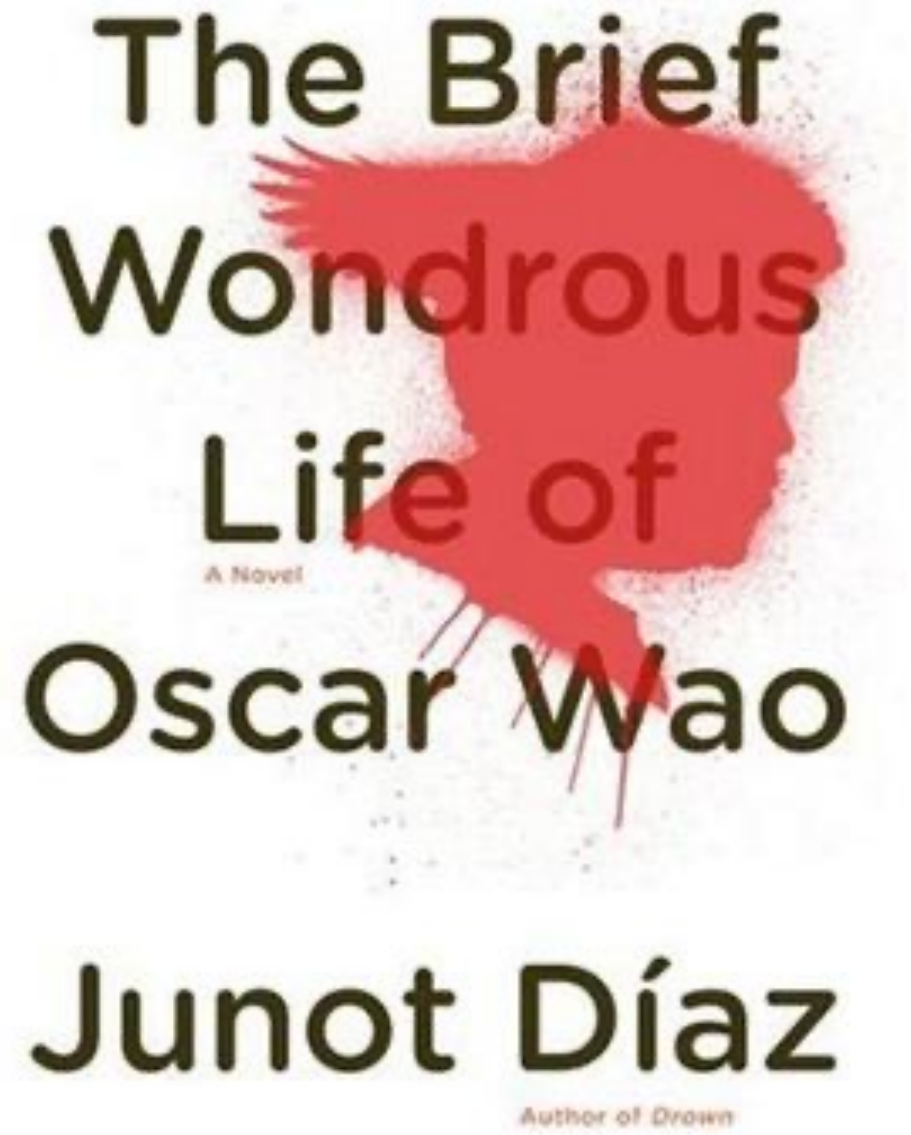
Steven Weiner, *100 Graphic Novels for Public Libraries* (1996)



James B. Carter, *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* (2007)



Stephen E. Tabachnick, *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (2009)

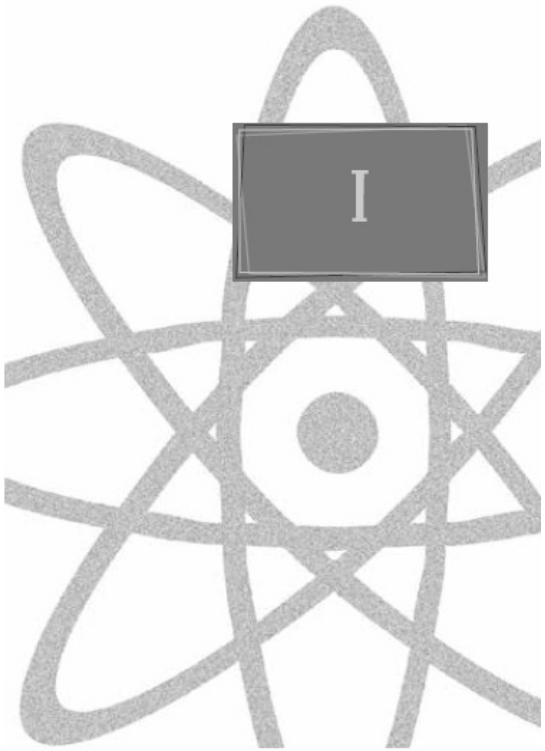


Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

Junot Díaz

Riverhead Books
a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
New York
2007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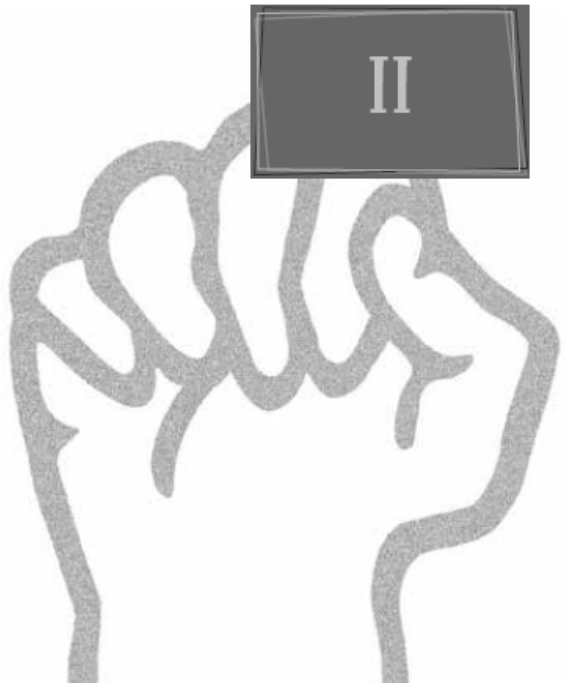
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III

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AND THEN, GALACTUS SPEAKS...

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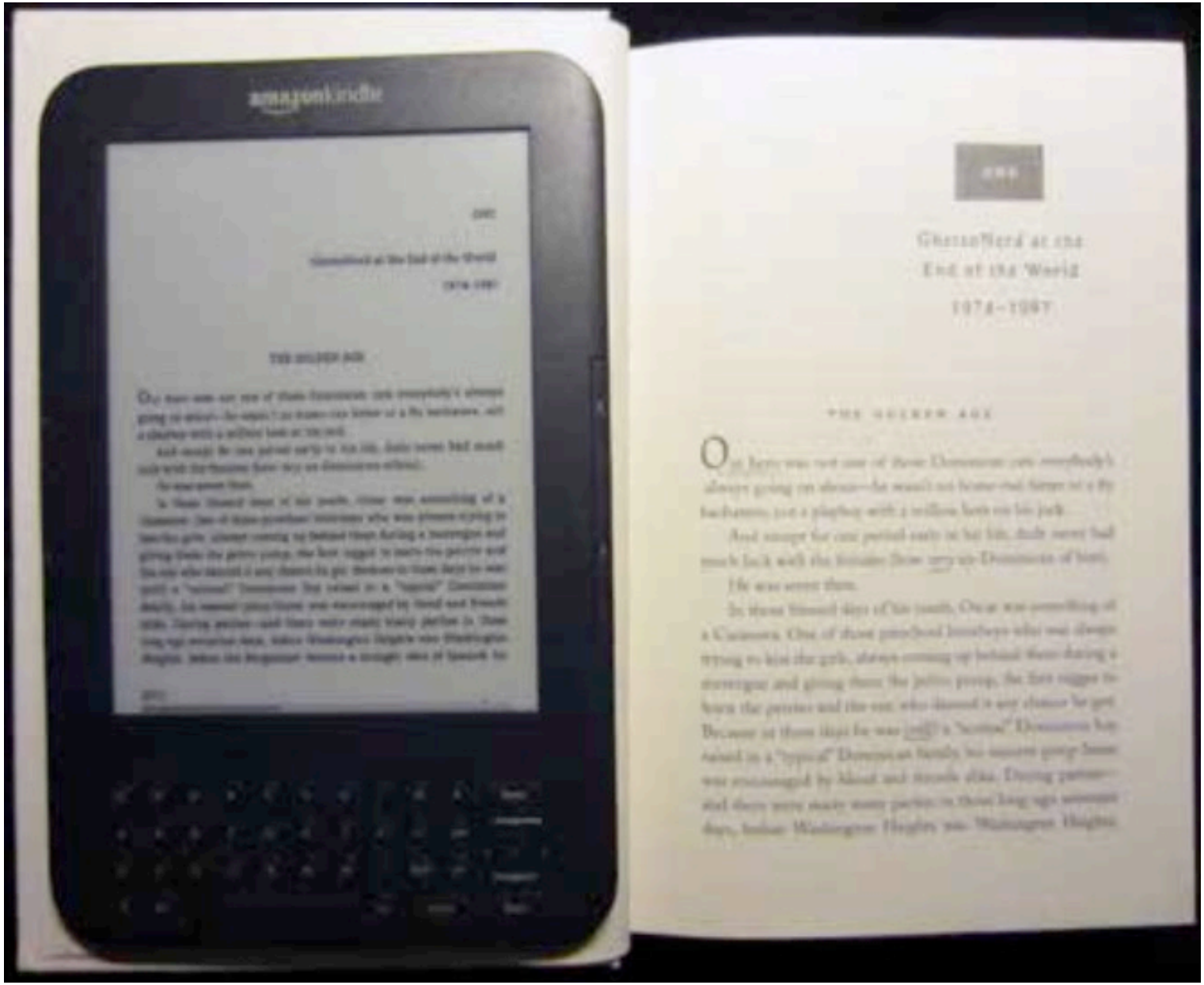
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