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News Release

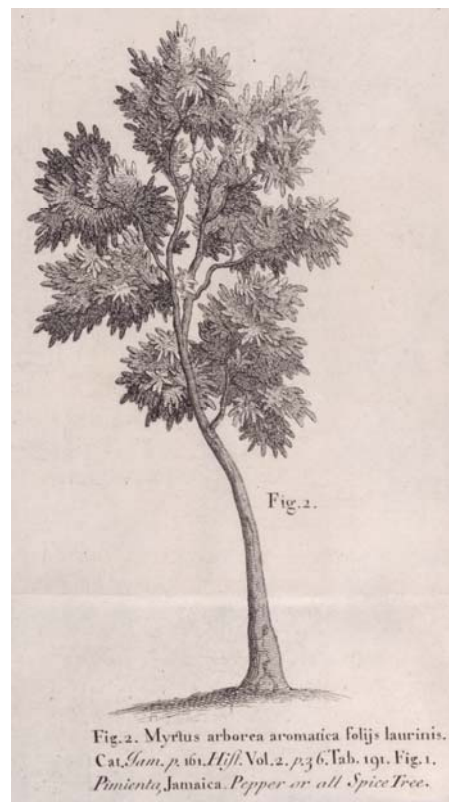
∞Trees in Fact and Fable An Exhibition of Illustrated Books at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library

“A book is the death of a tree,” wrote the French diplomat and poet Saint-John Perse in 1965. With nearly a million volumes on its shelves and many more (paper) manuscripts in its vaults, the Beinecke Library does well to honor the trees that died in this cause. The exhibition *Trees in Fact and Fable*, opening on April 12 and continuing through May 25, does just that. An opening reception preceded by introductory remarks and readings will take place on Thursday, April 12 at 5:15.

Drawn from all of the Beinecke’s major collections, the exhibition features illustrated books, pamphlets, and broadsides of six centuries, from an incunable edition of the *Divine Comedy*, published in 1491, to a broadside quoting Thoreau that came off the press in early 2007. All of the items picture trees or parts of trees—wood, fruit, leaves, branches, roots.

“Several different exhibitions of tree books could have been put together from the library’s resources,” says Christa Sammons, who organized the show. “With this particular selection, I tried to show a wide variety of book design and illustration through the years, while including some of the best-known trees of history and literature: Longfellow’s spreading chestnut and forest primeval, Joyce Kilmer’s poem “Trees,” trees mentioned in the Bible, Connecticut’s Charter Oak, the California redwoods.”

The exhibition begins with a colorful series of botanical books—“Trees in Fact”—starting with what is thought to be the first treatise on the oak tree, Jean Du Choul’s *De varia quercus historia* (Lyon, 1555). This section of the show culminates in Romeyn Beck Hough’s *American Woods* (Lowville, New York, 1888-1910). In twelve geographically arranged volumes, Hough gathered samples of 350 types of wood. Each of the sample cards includes three translucent specimens of the same wood, cut crosswise, longitudinally, and at an angle between. Because of their age, the specimens in *American Woods* are ecologically valuable. Because of their beauty, the book is a highly sought title. (The entire suite of wood samples has been scanned for the Beinecke’s digital library, accessible to the public from the library’s website.)



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From start to finish, the Bible speaks of trees, beginning with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2:9 to the tree of life for the healing of nations in the Revelation of St. John 22:1-2. Biblical trees featured in the exhibition include, as well as the two just mentioned, the great oak that caused Absalom's death (II Sam. 18:9), Elijah's juniper tree (I Kings 19:4-5), and the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9. The exhibition attempts to show a wide range of Biblical illustration, from 17th- and 18th-century interpretations through Czeslaw Milosz's Polish translation of the Revelation St. John, strikingly illustrated by Jan Lebenstein (1986), and the Pennyroyal Caxton Bible, printed and illustrated by Barry Moser (1999). A similar iconic use of tree imagery in parable and epigram is illustrated by a selection of emblem books of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Trees abound in literature, and the last section of the exhibition, on literary trees, barely begins to exploit the sources.

Eighteenth- and 20th-century editions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are on display, with contrasting illustrations of the same scenes in each epic. The French sculptor and painter Aristide Maillol illustrated Virgil's *Eclogues* in a German edition of 1926. Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, a rich source of tree transformations, is represented by 16th- and 17th-century illustrated editions, showing Daphne, pursued by Apollo, turning into a laurel tree; Phaeton's mourning sisters the Heliads changing into poplar trees; Myrrha, in her despair, being transformed into a myrtle tree; and the old couple Philemon and Baucis becoming intertwined trees so that even in death they are not parted. William Blake's "Poison Tree," Goethe's gingko, Walt Whitman's "Song of the Redwood," and Major André's foreboding tulip tree from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (as interpreted by illustrator Arthur Rackham) are a few of the classic trees on display. The list continues with Betty Smith's bestseller *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), John Ashbery's *Some Trees* (the poet's first collection, published in Yale Series of Young Poets in 1956), and Gary Snyder's *Fates of Rocks and Trees* (1986), illustrated with photographs by Michael Mundy.

Finally, *Trees in Fact and Fable* includes several books from the Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of American Children's Literature: an array of mid-nineteenth-century alphabet books and primers ("A is for Apple Tree.") and a case entitled "Sendak does trees." Of Maurice Sendak's many memorable books, four are on display. *Lullabies and Night Songs* (1965) includes the familiar verse "I had a little nut tree," and in another 1965 publication, a notably obstreperous Hector Protector starts out through the woods to visit the queen. *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (1967) recounts the adventures of Jennie the Sealyham terrier and her conversations with a depressed ash tree. Finally, Sendak's edition of Grimms' Fairy Tales (1973) includes one of the Brothers' grimmer narratives. *The Juniper Tree* involves an evil stepmother, two murders, a severed head, cannibalism, and reincarnation.

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