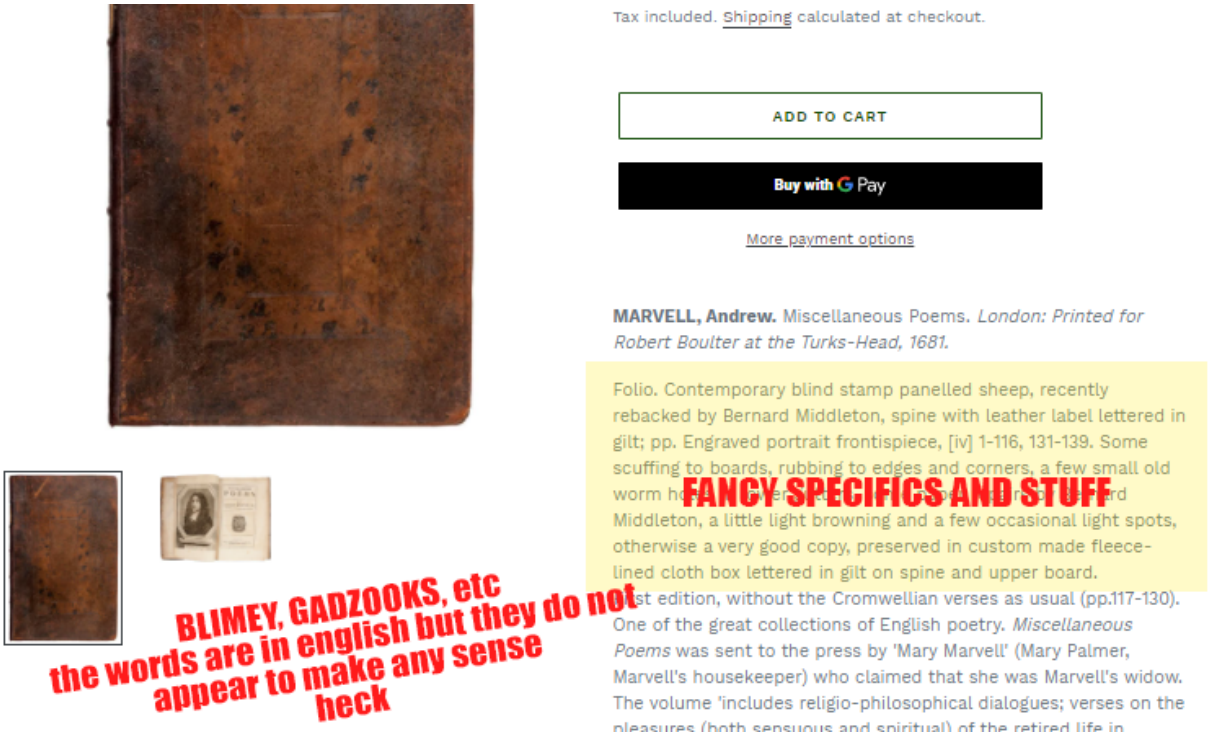
Twitter Thread by Henry Sotheran Ltd



Henry Sotheran Ltd
@Sotherans

it has come our attention that some of our newer followers are struggling to understand the words we use to describe our rare books, and you are in for a treat with this simple guide to "Words That Don't Mean Anything What It Seems Like They Mean"

[thread 1/?]



when we get books in, collectors want to know what the damage is, so we have to find a way to tell them, and over a few centuries bookstores have developed a form of shorthand for this, because business has always been done by catalogue from hundreds of miles away

[btw no rare bookstore uses the same keywords/phrases in -exactly- the same way, dont ask me why, I have no idea why. your mileage may vary. there is no real authority on it, I have checked, it's a bloodbath out there]

if we're in a hurry, we use broad strokes and consult the following table

FINE: the book was crapped out by an angel
VERY GOOD: no-one can prove anything
GOOD: lets just be grateful it has covers, shall we
FAIR: the book is on fire, guarded by a hydra
POOR: no book, only despair

most books we sell actually fit into the common understanding of 'Very Good', but as you can see that could mean anything from "it maybe has all the pages" to "it's almost perfect"

so its not really very helpful. 5 tweets in and we have learned nothing. you are welcome.

this means we have to get more specific, and you'll see most listings for our books have an entire paragraph dedicated to trying to be clear and failing horribly

I am going to cover some of the things you'll see most often, and you are going to hate me for it







"It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

DICKENS, Charles. A Tale of Two Cities...With Illustrations By H. K. Browne. *London: Chapman & Hall, 1859.*

good grief

8vo., [ix], [1]-254, 16 etched plates including frontis and title vignette. Half dark-brown calf and forest-green cloth. The boards edges, corners and joints are rubbed, minor scattered foxing, some of the plates are loose from the stitching, small tear on the list of plates page; otherwise a very good complete copy.
First edition bound from the original parts. All eight of Smith's internal flaws necessary for the first issue present, including page 213 mis-numbered 113.
"When Dickens began the publication of *All the Year Round*, the successor of Household Words, he realized the necessity of making a strong start. So he began writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, publishing the first of the serial in the opening number of his new periodical... As a novel of great popularity it probably ranks next to *Pickwick* and *Copperfield*" (Eckel 87). This was the last novel in

you'll frequently find each book given a number

12mo, 8vo, 4to

This used to have a precise meaning to do with page folding, but booksellers got lazy and now it means 'we eyeballed the size of the book'

smaller number usually means a larger book
because of course

books get ugly when they age. but no-one wants to admit that, so we've developed a few centuries of euphemisms to avoid saying it

we'll say faded, or 'lightly browned' or 'a little tired' when what we mean is 'this book has grazed the abyss'

the worse the sin, the more obscure the euphemism

'sophisticated' literally means 'the book is a fake'

'extra-illustrated' means 'someone cut up and pasted a bunch of images inside the book like the love child of picasso and edward scissorhands'

"Foxing" has nothing to do with the predatory, grey looking london urban fox (vulpes criminalis) which resembles a wolf and lurks near trash cans to mug tourists, it means that the pages of a book have developed brown spots over time as the paper ages

instead of saying 'some tosser scribbled with pen in this book' we'll say 'past owner inscription to p.4' or something to that effect

personally i rather like the fun inscriptions, like the 18th century kid who drew rude pictures all over the inside his latin primer, but ■■■■

the Good News is that a lot of rare booksellers keep a glossary on their site to help keep track of what they mean, and there are books out there like Carter's "ABC for Book Collectors" which is an easy read and a genuine treasure

https://t.co/cGcFh4ZRgm

anyway. takeaways:

- always read the glossary
- ask us if you are not sure
- a 'reading copy' means 'a copy which has suffered so much damage that it remains fit only for reading; that the text is still legible is truly the best that can be said of it'