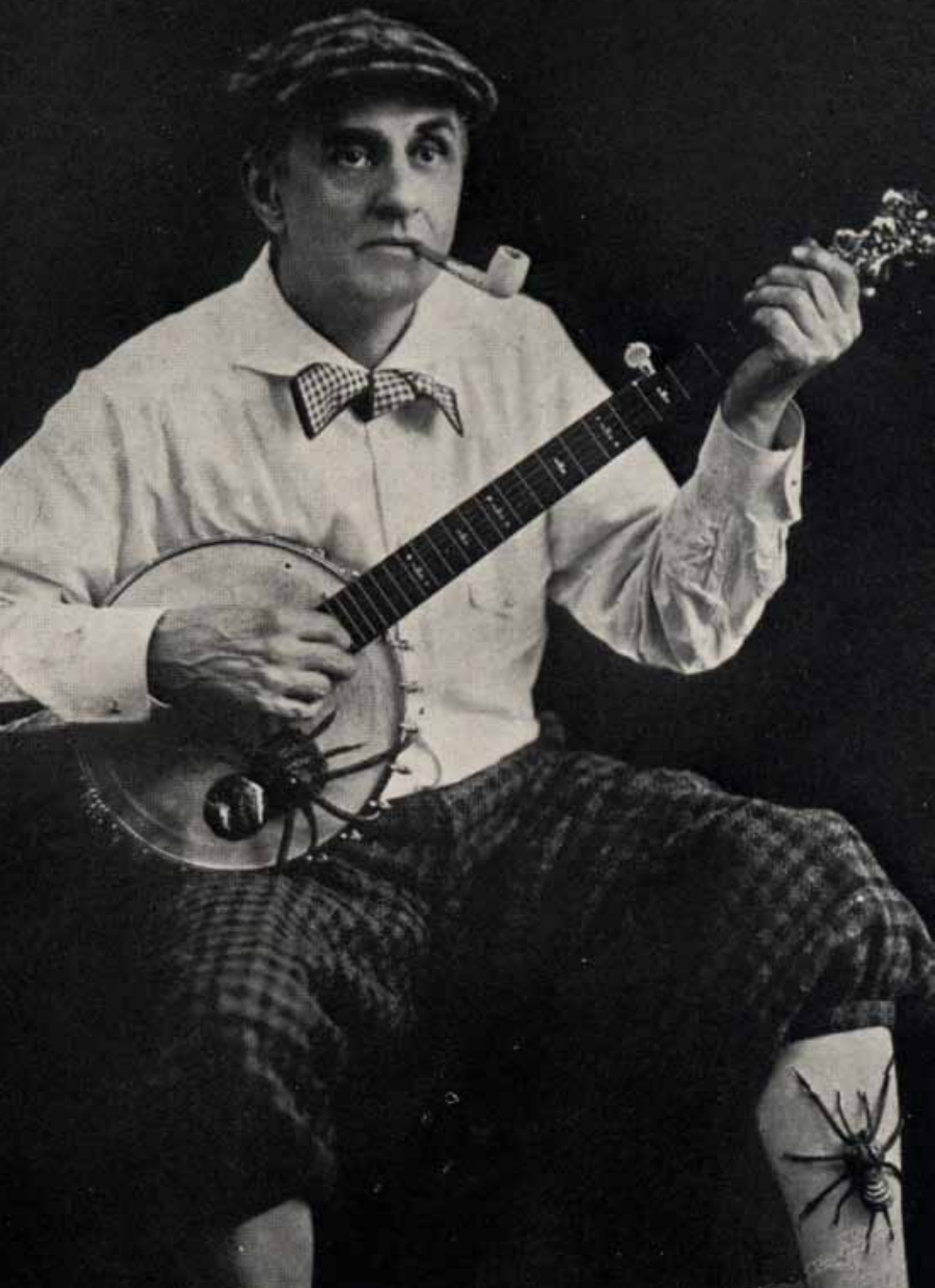


GARRETT SCOTT, BOOKSELLER: OCCASIONAL LIST 3
THE CRUSTACICIDAL LUNATIC PROTO-DADAIST OF NEW YORK



OCCASIONAL LIST 3: RICHARD GRIFFIN CRUSTACICIDAL LUNATIC POET OF NEW YORK

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SOME EXPLANATION: The enigmatic poet Richard Griffin (born 1857, died sometime after 1932, self-publishing at a fairly good clip between 1913 and 1931) has – with his peculiar cracked talent for atrocious but compelling poetry – created a coterie of enthusiasts. I date my latter-day discovery of Griffin from two appreciations (perhaps an inadequate term) written by bookseller Eric Korn for the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1986 and later collected in his *Remainders* (Carcenet, 1989), his essays thence through some good luck ending up in my hands in the mid-1990s. Korn's essays weren't quite Chapman's Homer in shaping my bookselling aesthetic, but from that date I certainly began to keep my eyes open for Griffin while scouting the less traveled stretches of the poetry sections of book shops (and on rare occasions would be rewarded). Generally bound in a pleasing uniform neat green cloth and illustrated with plates showing Griffin arrayed in a variety of outfits and poses (playing the banjo and covered in rubber spiders, attacking a lobster, etc.), the books as objects themselves suggested a dandy eccentric dwelling amid drab neighbors.

Brief extracts do scant justice to the enigmatic Griffin (see the poet and translator Bill Zavatsky's essay on Griffin in the literary journal *Siennese Shredder* #2 for some possible clues on the poet's life), though certainly the man went forth with a facile pen, an unbalanced imagination, and a sadistic bent. His minor epic "The Lobster's Gizzard" recounts the murky quest of one Mike O'Hara to scale the Hill of Tara at the behest of a wizard to consume the gizzard of a magical lobster; other pieces touch in Griffin's own peculiar way on political corruption, Mormons, or fashion. Most, however, defy easy categorization – viz. "The Elm of Nax" ("The famous tree is spelled either Nax or Nacks. I use both ways," notes Griffin) or "Notional Nimrod":

Under the sod
Notional Rod
Nimrod poor clod
In his green pod–
Say–does he fry?
I don't know, why,
Do You?

Evidence would suggest that Griffin spent time in an institution; the lengthy poem "Water on the Brain" makes detailed reference to life in "the captivating nuttery." Eric Korn notes in his original essays that "The more Griffin I read . . . the less can I decide whether we are dealing with self-conscious Manhattan Dada, or barking crustacididal lunacy." Correspondence in 2000 on this point – "whether he [Griffin] is a satirist or loony" – drew from Korn the observation that perhaps the distinction is "a false antithesis."

This collection does not (alas) include the relatively uncommon MELANCHOLY YAK (1917) but otherwise offers a representative view of Griffin's work. The images here are also representative (and recurrent in Griffin's books, though he was prone in some cases to hand coloring); the images have been enlarged to show detail.



1. BUG HOUSE POETRY.

[New York: n. p.], (1917). 8vo, original green cloth and gilt lettering (uniform with his earlier works), 293 pages. Frontis portrait, three plates. First collected edition of Griffin's verses.

Expanded editions of this title appeared in 1919 and 1922 (see below); this edition collects Griffin's work through *The Melancholy Yak* (1917). Griffin includes his own warning to those who would judge his verses harshly:

Many a critic too dareful
Is languishing deep in the cell
Of the buggy jug Dingley Dell.
So close up your trap in a jiffy
Beware how you criticize Griffy.

Some trifling wear; a fine copy.

\$125.00

2. BUG HOUSE POETRY: THE COMPLETE WORKS OF . . .

[New York: n. p.], (1919). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering (uniform with his earlier works), [2], 367 pages. Frontis portrait, five plates. Second edition, expanded, of the collected works of Griffin.

Inscribed in ink on the front free endpaper, "With best wishes of the Author, Richard Griffin. November 1921." The collected verses of the eccentric Bug House poet (expanded over the 293-page edition of 1917). Stamped in gilt at the foot of the spine, "Kenedy" — almost certainly the New York printers and publishers P. J. Kenedy & Sons. A trifle rubbed and worn; some light foxing; a very good copy.

\$150.00

3. BUG HOUSE POETRY: THE COMPLETE WORKS OF . . .

[New York: n. p.], (1919). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering (uniform with his earlier works), [2], 367 pages. Frontis portrait, five plates. Second edition, expanded, of the collected works of Griffin.

With an inscribed autograph slip laid in, "Compliments of the author, Richard Griffin c/o 44 Barclay St., N. Y. C." (This address is that of the printer



RICHARD GRIFFIN

Best wishes to
Miss Olga Nezorova,
from the Author,
Richard Griffin.

et,
927.

and publisher P. J. Kenedy & Sons, whose name is stamped in gilt at the foot of the spine of this title.)

The collected verses of the eccentric Bug House poet (expanded over the 293-page edition of 1917). A trifle rubbed; a fine copy.

\$150.00

4. BUG HOUSE POETRY: THE COMPLETE WORKS OF RICHARD GRIFFIN (ENLARGED AND REVISED).

[New York:] (Richard Griffin, 1922). 8vo, original red cloth, gilt lettering, [vi], 401 pages. Frontis portrait, six plates (the frontispiece and two plates hand tinted in red by the author). Third edition, preceded by editions of 1917 and 1919.

A presentation copy from the mad poet Griffin, whose verses range over such subjects as hallucinatory violence and vengeful phantasmic crustaceans, inscribed at the foot of the frontispiece, "Best wishes to Miss Olga Nevzorova, from the Author, Richard Griffin. Oct. 1927." (To judge from such excerpts of online journals as might be found, Nevzorova appears to have been a Russian-born librarian at the New York Public Library.) To see Griffin's work in such bulk is to realize that, conscious satirist or no, he possesses a fairly disturbing imagination. Cloth somewhat darkened; spine faded; a bit bumped and spotted; a very good copy.

\$150.00

5. BUG HOUSE POETRY: THE COMPLETE WORKS OF RICHARD GRIFFIN (ENLARGED AND REVISED).

[New York:] (Richard Griffin, 1922). 8vo, original red cloth, gilt lettering, 401 pages. Frontis portrait, eight inserted plates (several hand-colored by Griffin). Third edition, preceded by editions of 1917 and 1919.

A presentation copy, inscribed at the foot of the frontispiece, "Best wishes from the Author, Richard Griffin. July 1924." Spine and gilt a bit dulled; some internal staining from the plate coloring; one closed tear to a leaf, with no loss; a very good copy.

\$200.00



Hull
N.Y.

6. THE CAMEL'S LAST GASP.

[New York: The Author], (1931). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, [4], 123 pages. Frontis portrait. First edition.

A presentation copy, inscribed in ink at the foot of the frontispiece, "With best wishes from the Author, Richard Griffin. May 1931." The eccentric poet's own last gasp and his final book, published in a format uniform to his earlier volumes. The title piece is something of a novella, revisiting in prose many familiar themes from Griffy's corpus—vinegerones, Guy Barnabas Bone, the guillotine, the elm of Nax, etc. Cheap paper stock a bit browned; spine a bit darkened; a very good copy.

\$125.00

7. THE DEAD RABBIT RIOT A. D. 1857 AND OTHER POEMS.

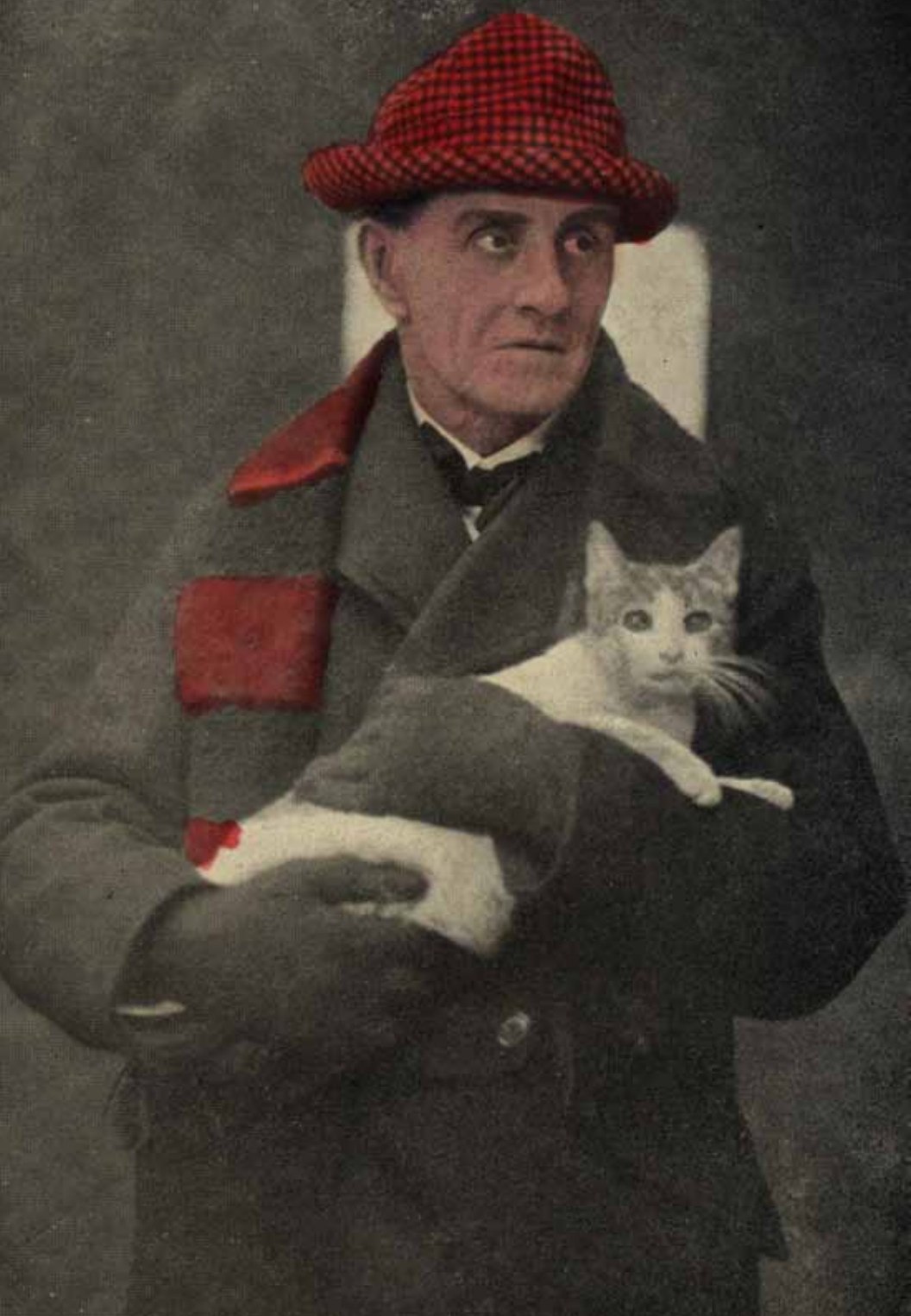
[New York]: Published by the Author, (1915). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 48 pages. Frontis portrait. First edition.

A presentation copy, inscribed on the blank verso of the frontispiece, "To Mary with best wishes of author Richard Griffin." What has proven in this cataloguer's experience to be the *rara avis* of Griffin's collections, a representative collection of the eccentric poet's work, including the title work, a cracked narrative poem of a gang war in New York City:

They rush to the street, they gather in line
(Triumphantly sour like pickles in brine),
The brightest red shirts, the tallest high hats,
Well armed with stout clubs, this gang of wharf rats,
The pride of the Bowery Boys.

But Griffin also turns his imagination to such everyday topics as a reverie on boardinghouse hash:

Hash! hash! hash!
There's a new kind of hash to-day.
Curious kind of a dash
Of spice that cannot allay
The marvelous taste, three cheers for the cook!
The landlady smiles with a faraway look.



(This cataloguer would argue that the final line of that stanza is what propels the verses toward genius.) Griffy being Griffy, there are also a few grisly pieces on butchers and capital punishment, and he also includes the satirical, "Pastoral Adapted for Lyceum Performances, Sunday Schools, etc." (the costumes laid out in great detail, *viz.* "Angel of Light. Red beard. Blue wings. Cavalry boots. Long white robe. Carries bucket in one hand and white-wash brush in the other"). Some light foxing throughout; a trifle rubbed and worn; a very good copy.

\$225.00

8. THE DELAWARE BRIDE AND OTHER POEMS.

[New York:] Published by the Author, (1913). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 45 pages. First edition.

A presentation copy, inscribed on the front free endpaper, "With best wishes, Richard Griffin, August 1913." The collection with which Griffin burst onto the poetical scene, launching a fairly prolific career of self-publication (eight collections as well as at least three editions of his collected works through 1931). The lengthy title poem here describes a public flogging (a recurring fascination with Griffy) with such additional Griffin classics as "Dear Aunt Ann," "Tribulations of Perfularties," and "Oh There!":

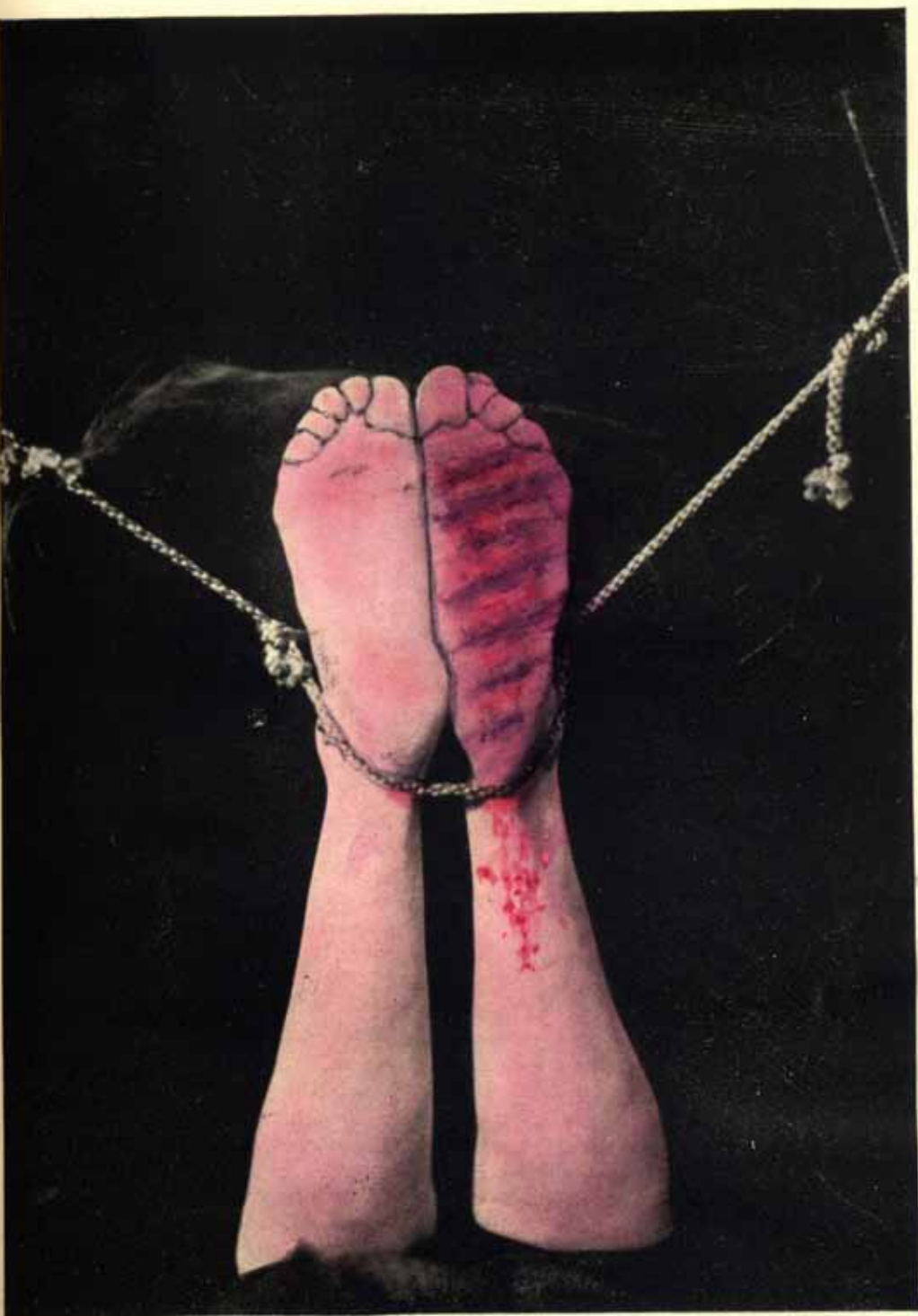
Oh! there once was a man with a celluloid throat
Who once sailed along in a little green boat;
His wife, she was troubled with an ossified liver;
Her thumb, it was pierced with a sharp oaken sliver.
Now this sliver, this liver, this boat, and this throat,
Were at last swallowed up by a petrified goat.

Title-page a mounted singleton. Some light wear and soiling; some light browning; a fine copy.

\$150.00

9. FRESH BUGS. BY RICHARD GRIFFIN, AUTHOR OF BUG HOUSE POETRY.

[Brooklyn: Braunworth & Co.], (1919). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 80 pages. Frontis portrait, two plates. First edition.



Bastinado

Presumably bringing the eccentric poet's body of work up to date (the second edition of his collected verses, *Bug House Poetry*, also appeared in 1919). Includes such classic Griffin scenarios as a caning with the bastinado, the loss of a chin in a swimming accident, and such characters as the hop hewer, the girl with the blister on her heel, and the evil taxidermist:

The kangaroo upon the shelf is very lifelike, yes,
Appearing to all visitors uncanny to excess,
Struggling with a secret mysterious distress.

Publication information taken from a copy at RPB. Irish, *The Modern American Muse*, 4727. Pencil ownership signature of one C. E. Merritt (dated 1943) on the front free endpaper. Some slight wear and occasional light marginal staining; a trifle musty; a very good copy.

\$125.00

10. THE LOBSTER'S GIZZARD AND OTHER POEMS.

[New York]: Published by the Author, (1916). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 53 pages. Frontis portrait, one plate (plate modified, presumably in Griffin's hand, to add a plume to his cap). First edition.

A presentation copy, inscribed in ink on the front free endpaper, "To Joe Beck, With Compliments of the Author, Richard Griffin. August 1916." A work first characterized in our Catalogue Six as "one of the stranger published collections of American verse"—a description by which we stand over a decade since. In any event, an uncommon collection. Not noted in Flake, despite a Mormon-related poem. A trifle musty; a fine copy.

\$150.00

11. A TALE OF FRAUNCES' TAVERN A.D. 1765 AND OTHER POEMS.

New York: Excelsior Publishing House, (1915). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 47 pages. Frontis portrait. First edition thus, with a cancel publisher's slip, and expanded from the separate publication of the title poem in 1914.

With the later issue cancel publisher's slip on the title replacing "Published by the Author." Another example of poetical madness from Richard Griffin. As expected, the poet's Brueghelian imagination teems with such figures as Pendennis McGuire (killed by a centipede in his coffee pot), the hangman Sweney Tod, and assorted victims of mayhem. He also appears to include one poem on drug use ("Hit the Pipe"), a violent reworking of nursery rhymes ("Little Red Riding Hood fell in the gutter. / Grandmother picked her out thumping her"), and much in his usual line of switchings, canings and floggings. Amid Griffin's usual strange and morbid verses he makes mention of "an obelisk of crisket rock." Crisket not traced in the OED; perhaps a place name? Some light rubbing, bumping, soiling and foxing; a very good copy.

\$100.00

12. A TALE OF FRAUNCES' TAVERN A.D. 1765 AND OTHER POEMS.

New York: Excelsior Publishing House, (1915). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 47 pages. First edition thus, expanded from the separate publication of the title poem in 1914.

A presentation copy, inscribed in ink on the blank verso of the frontispiece, "With my best wishes to Miss Clara. Richard Griffin." The Excelsior Publishing House imprint a mounted cancel slip, canceling the original "Published by the Author" imprint. A trifle rubbed; smll discoloration on the rear board where a label (perhaps Excelsior?) removed; a very good copy.

\$150.00

13. A TALE OF FRAUNCES' TAVERN A.D. 1765 AND OTHER POEMS.

[New York?]: Published by the Author, (1915). 8vo, original green cloth, gilt lettering, 47 pages. Frontis portrait. First edition thus, expanded from the separate publication of the title poem in 1914.

Some rubbing to the edges, with a slight half-inch crack to the front joint near the head of the spine; hinge somewhat cracked along the gutter at the title page; a very good copy.

\$125.00

