

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH BOOKS: AN EXERCISE IN BIBLIOPHILE ALCHEMY
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Anecdotes, &C., Antient and Modern was printed in 1789 carrying a visual metatext of the author's own conception. This is a portrait of the antiquarian and historian James Pettit Andrews (1737-1797) in his library-laboratory distilling 'critical' books by such authors as Bayle, Ménéage and Brantôme into leaves to be stored in a 'well-wrought urn' in a class of its own. Lining up his walls are books by moderns like Cervantes, Rabelais, Montaigne or Naudé, or ancients like Pliny and Seneca, as well as by contemporaries like Henry James Pye or Mrs. Piozzi, all pointing to the same literary alchemy. The viewer is struck by the *materiality* of the illustration, in which books are being processed into *ανέκδοτα*, material that could, in Ménéage's words featuring as motto, make up a very curious book ('un livre fort curieux') that could contain 'τα απαξ ειρημενα', literally things uttered but once. The scholar's meticulous labour can be read in detail owing to the *textuality* of the image, whose narrative virtues are obvious.

This paper looks at the prolific species of the 'anecdote' transmuted into the novel, the modern book par excellence now circulating in always renewed and ever more accessible book-like surrogates, from movies to telenovelas to youtube clips. In so doing, it suggests a poetics of the 'anecdote', the ephemeral narrative of immediate consumption of our 'long modernity'.