

Léon Maillard's "La Flore Ornamentale" Masterpiece Exhibition Binding on one of four vellum copies of D. G. Rossetti's *Poems* (Mosher, 1902)

(Léon Maillard, binder) Rossetti, Dante Gabriel *POEMS*. Portland, ME: Thomas Bird Mosher, 1902). Copy No. 2 of four copies printed on vellum. Binding signed CLUB BINDERY 1905 and LÉON MAILLARD FINISHER. Exhibited at the Grolier Club's "An Exhibition of the Latest Artistic Bindings Done at the Club Bindery," entry No. 115, from April 26 - May 12, 1906. The entry in the accompanying catalogue:

115 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel.

Poems. Portland, Maine, 1902.
 8vo, light brown levant morocco, doubled with the same in a lighter shade, sides decorated with a wide pointillé border, outlined by blind-tooled fillets, leaving a plain centre panel; the border is inlaid with bands of old blue, branches of conventionalized horse-chestnuts, and insects; so treated as to leave the decoration in relief.

No. 2 of four copies on vellum.



PROVENANCE

Henry William Poor / John Quinn / Walter M. Hill / Helen Davis Stibolt

From the magnificent library of Henry William Poor (see Vol. V, lot 955 of the Poor sale in 1909), this binding stands apart from other Club Bindery examples in his library, in fact from many of the known Club bindings executed by Léon Maillard. Henry William Poor's collection of fine bindings, illuminated manuscripts, first editions and press books was first rate. His family brokerage firm and his own financial career provided the necessary funds, but all came crumbling down in 1908 when the financial structure of his company collapsed and forced the liquidation of his assets. Included in his library, liquidated by the Anderson Auction Company, were 46 Mosher books printed on vellum. Before the collapse, however, a number of Poor's Club bindings were exhibited along with Robert Hoe's extraordinary collection of Club bindings (and a few other owners) at the 1906 Club Bindery exhibition at the Grolier Club.

After this Rossetti binding's appearance in the 1906 Club Bindery exhibition, and that portion of the sale of Poor's library, the next appearance was in the John Quinn sale (#8199) and then then binding is apparently resold in a 1924 bookseller catalogue of Walter M. Hill in Chicago (#299). Strangely, the entry here is most certainly describing this binding, but no note of provenance and nothing indicating the severe limitation, one of four copies printed on vellum. There is also a bookplate present in the Rossetti volume, that of one Helen Davis Stibolt, wife of Victor A. Stibolt (Vice-President of the Rock Island Plow Company) which my research has led to Rock Island, Illinois (she later became wife of Pike Johnson starting 1/26/1943). Mrs. Stibolt most likely purchased the book from the Chicago

299 **ROSSETTI (DANTE GABRIEL).** *POEMS. Portrait.* Thick 4to, full brown levant morocco, mosaic borders composed of fruits and leaves on gold pointillé ground; doublure of crushed brown levant morocco, delicate gilt border, gilt edges, by the Club Bindery, Léon Maillard, finisher. In a slip-case, with half leather protecting cover. Portland: Mosher, 1902. \$150.00



bookseller. Note: The Stibolt bookplate was pasted directly over that of Poor's, but luckily the glue dried and it fell off revealing the red leather bookplate. A separate nameplate remains. Beyond that, we have no idea where the binding was located, and I have no further information from the bookseller as to where he found the binding. So after the Stibolt ownership the trail goes dry. Safe to say, however, the chain of provenance has been recently restored by now having the book as part of the Bishop Collection of the Mosher Press as chronicled below, with short explication of the binder's work.

Comments on the Recent Journey of Léon Maillard's Club Binding on Rossetti's Poems

On Tuesday evening of January 8th I received the following email on my iPad from a dealer which simply said:

You'll have to forgive my obtuseness, but I didn't want to send over what I'm about to send over out of the clear blue sky.

I've got a volume to show you that's well above and beyond anything I've sent your way in the past. And yes, this is something that is potentially for your collection, not something I've added to mine.

Settle in, gird up your loins, and let me know when you're ready to see something really special.

To which I simply responded "Fire away!" In a few minutes I received a return email with attachments saying:

It was a Mosher on vellum that brought us together originally, so it seems somewhat fitting to be sending this over to you to take a look at.

As you'll no doubt see from the images below, I managed to come across a Poor vellum Mosher in a Club binding. I'm sure you're familiar with this particular volume; lot no. 955 in volume V of the Poor sale and item no. 115 in the 1906 Club Bindery exhibition at the Grolier [description inserted]

But no description can really do it justice until you see it...or better yet, have it in hands. Words can't quite describe just how sumptuous and substantial of a volume this is.

The bookplate that's laid in had originally covered the Poor plate, but fortunately has come loose...

I will let the images say the rest!

Indeed, the images were the insanely enormous bulk of the communication, and all I could write back was that it was "a feast for the overheated senses. You know, I could wax elegant, but this is really a bit hard to fully absorb. So... to cut to the chase, what kind of price are we talking about and would you be willing to send on approval if agreed upon?" Thus began a sleepless night and then a set of complex negotiations which surprisingly took only one day to resolve. At one point, having accompanied my wife who wanted to run some errands at a local shopping mall, I sat with my trusty iPad overlooking his counter suggestions and options. We came to an agreement by about 3 PM on Wednesday, and I asked that the binding be sent overnight FedEx, insured, and I'd pick up the tab. Still being unsettled over the binding, I sent through this follow-up which I wanted the owner of the Rossetti to know.

Obviously my mind and attention remains transfixed over the Rossetti *Poems* Mosher, 1902) in Club binding. Your original email takes me back to your initial contact, after which I simply said "Fire away" only to receive an email with pictures that would continue to interrupt my sleep, constantly pull on my heartstrings, and perplex me as to how it was that this binding remained in obscurity until your recent finding. And in sending me the tracking information you reveal the you "can honestly say: of all books I've ever sold... it was the hardest to say goodbye to this one." I believe that, and am thankful that I am not

on the parting, but rather the receiving end. I can only imagine when you first saw and ordered this binding. Some day you will have to tell me the whole story about how you first received word, and how you reacted when you first saw it in your hands.

I do know about the substantiality of the volume. Years ago I was offered copy No. 1 of 4 on vellum which most surely was Emilie Grigsby's copy (Grigsby always got #1, Poor always got #2). Below you can see the binding. Indeed, the book has some heft. The book I received was absolutely terrible. I sent it back the same day after several hours deliberation. Many of the pages were unopened, and there was much browning / foxing inside the volume. I reimbursed his postage and enclosed the note "Not for me." The California dealer contacted me and asked why I didn't keep it after buying around \$3,500 of other Mosher books from him (part of a collection he bought in the East. Much history with this collection and how I got the lion share of it). I told him since he asked, and proceeded to write a whole page of reasons why the volume wasn't even satisfactory. Part of his response was "well, go find another." With your offering I did just that!!!! This copy #1 went to another dealer who seriously miscatalogued it making it sound like a fresh and VG-F copy. Unbelievable. It finally went to an institution, or at least I so presume.

From 2010 onward the hole in the collection wasn't filled. Now it is thanks to you.

So I am indeed waiting with baited breath. Tomorrow is delivery day, and I'll be alerting the post office folks and after FedEx drops it off (which is usually around 1-2 PM) I'll be able to retrieve it. Yes! Meanwhile, I have two of the bindings pictures filling half of my large Mac screen. I keep looking at them, and looking at them. I already have the glass showcase in my library cleared for the new arrival. Can't wait. Believe me, your check in the amount of [withheld] payable to you, but marked on the back "for deposit only" just in case some unauthorized person should open it. What, me paranoid?

So I wait... and wait... and wait... Meanwhile I know you'll be getting your treasurable goodie on the same day. I hated to part with it, but felt you deserved a binding out of the deal. It will be a very nice addition to your collection.

Sorry I have to go now. I need to check on the FedEx delivery status for both your new addition and mine-to-be. I just keep staring at my computer screen looking at the pictures you sent. Guess you can tell I'm excited. What a nice transaction.

And so I followed the tracking of the FedEx package on January 11th. Closer and closer. It was finally listed as being at the Lancaster facility and out for delivery to the post office whose physical street address I gave for reception. I had some other mail to send and so went down to the post office, and recorded in an email to the sender exactly what happened:

First, an amazing coincidence. Was following the shipment notifications. Didn't seem FedEx would get to the post office until the 3 PM mark, but I had to go to the PO anyway so drove down and saw the FedEx truck parked across the street (they don't deliver there, only in back of the post office. Anyway, nobody was around so went into the PO to mail a check and then went up to the counter to inform them that I was waiting for the parcel and I'd be back later on. This was at 12:58. Then a harried FedEx guy walks in and marches up to the counter with an Amazon box. He asked them what their address was because he's been looking for 129 E. Main St. They told him this was 129 E. Main St. and he got out his scanner gizmo for them to sign. I asked out loud, "That wouldn't happen to be a package for Philip Bishop would it?" He looked at the addressee and said, "why yes" and he asked me "Are you Phil Bishop?" I accented while the postal clerk looked on wondering what was transpiring. "Why here, YOU can sign for it." I did, and walked out of the PO at 1 PM with a delivery in an Amazon box. Done!

Put the box in the back of the car and off we went to get some material Sue was looking for. After the drive to the next county to get the fabric, we decided to take a little drive in the countryside, of course, I ever mindful of the box in the back.

We finally got back later in the afternoon and I brought the box in and set it on the table. Told Sue I was going to wait until the box acclimated to the inside environment. Took a little nap and heck, couldn't really lie still and so unpacked the two boxes until I got down to the tissue paper. I then put the book wrapped in tissue on the dining room table and took two folio volumes down and placed them on top since you and I both know how vellum can misbehave. OK waited maybe another half hour but couldn't stand it, so asked Sue if she wanted to be at the unveiling. She gleefully got out her phone camera and snapped away while I opened it.

My first expression was "Ah" (see picture below) and even a bit of a smile, one of my few. We also got a video but she doesn't know how to send it to me, nor do I as a fellow tech-challenged person.

My further reaction was saying something like "this will take some minor touch up here, and there" and so on. I was pleased and then noted other things like the bookplates. Showed Sue the two stamps THE CLUB BINDERY 1905 and the binder's name (very important). The rest of the evening was me working on the binding. It looks marvelous! Does that fit the bill for the initial reactions?

How about you? Your first thoughts [when you first saw it]. *

Yes, likewise appreciate the opportunity to work this out and for the friendship these several years. We're quite the select little group. By the way, I will be posting the binding's details on MOSHER PRESS in BINDINGS, and just a front cover on my Philip Bishop FB page.



* **Footnote:** he would share his first thoughts later that afternoon of the 13th:

- When I mentioned "shock and awe" previously with regards to my reaction on opening this one up...I really, truly meant it. I purchased this volume sight unseen. All I had was its description. As you know now, words cannot do it justice. In hand, it is...*something else*.
- As I was waiting for it to arrive, I discovered the 1906 exhibition description of it, and at that point, I began to realize the somewhat "monumental" nature of what I had purchased.
- Not important to the overall process, but I feel compelled to mention my exact words upon unwrapping it were (pardon my French): "Holy. Sh*t."

And so the binding was safely at the Mosher Press Collection and I could begin my more or less constant vigilance over it. I couldn't stop thinking about it, and the only person to whom I could respond who had the binding expertise was the person from whom I purchased the book. After a day with the binding I mounted pictures of it on my Facebook page, and after the initial reaction I wrote to him:

Yes, I know... our deal is over, but I just have to reiterate just how thankful I am to have worked with you on acquiring the Léon Maillard binding. Should you ever find any more information on it, please do let me know. Quite frankly, it's as though I'm under some sort of a spell with regard to the binding. You probably know I emailed our mutual friend to let him know about what had transpired and to show him some pictures. He mentioned seeing the other book traded and figured it was from my collection (although past tense.... guess it will always have that provenance) after hearing from you that "something interesting was in, and he was right." He had to have seen your post and figured something has gone down.

One person commented that the binding design "has the look of Eugene Samuel Grasset." That's a very fine and astute observation, and being that Maillard was

still in France when Grasset was at the height of his popularity, well... makes it all the more probable. This also may help to explain my fascination and fixation with the binding. I love Grasset's work, in fact much of Art Nouveau (although I somewhat dislike the architectural manifestations). French Art Nouveau graphic work is, to me, particularly captivating, and this binding has that distinct look and appeal. I also resonate with something our friend wrote to me, something which I don't think is saying anything out-of-school: "Homina homina homina! Wow. So much vellum! So. Let me get this straight: Club Bindery onlaid binding. Signed by Maillard. On vellum. On Mosher. Ex-Poor. And an exhibition binding at the Grolier Club. I really don't think there is anything else one could ask for. Really phenomenal... Really just wonderful how many areas of collecting that volume covers." Of course I know all these things. They were all part of my quick weighing of whether to go after it or not (30 seconds max), but it's so nice to read/hear a fellow binding collector say it outside myself. And of course I know you weighed it on your end as well before contacting me. However, there are several other things that weighed heavily in my decision.

One you already know about, that being part of the story I already related to you concerning my previous interaction with a dealer offering another copy of the vellum Rossetti in less-than-satisfactory condition. On yet another front, there is a story about how I was not offered another Club binding on a Mosher vellum book, this after I had recently met with a dealer who acquired it along with a library he bought. He and I were at a book show together and spent some time—we talked as we walked around the building where the show was taking place—with me about my Mosher interests, and he claimed that the next unusual Mosher that comes his way would be offered to me. A short time thereafter he got this wonderful binding on a Swinburne Mosher printed on vellum, and I found out second hand that he turned around and immediately offered it to another collector. Boy, was I pissed. So this binding from you is some kind of cosmic recompense for that slight, or at least that's the way I view it.

Another angle is that if you ever read the *American Bungalow* article on our house, you'd know that one of our living stipulations is that there be an exchange between in the inside and the outside of the bungalow. We love wildflower gardening, trees, and seeing to it that our collecting interests mirror the outside with the inside of your place. That's one of the reasons why we so enjoy decorated book covers, including our "acorns and oak leaves" book cover collection, and the floral and other designs on the Mosher books in special bindings. This copy of Rossetti in binding is perhaps the epitome of that, along with a few others in the collection.

Yet another angle is that my son and daughter are both lovers of design and the outdoors, particularly gardening, and beneficial insects. Well... guess how on the mark Maillard's design is?

There are more connections, like how the binding advances the Mosher Collection, the joy of being able to share this work of art, the importance of that design to the memory of a binder whose life ended so tragically, and so on. I would get into those here, but don't take the time. They are also important reflections. Lastly, however, one has to mention the personal element.

That personal "thing" is just how I began this email. The binding has me under some sort of spell. I get up in the morning and think of it. I go to bed at night and think of it. Throughout the day I walk over and pick it up while marveling over the design, the heft of the tome, and the history behind it. I haven't been able to shake it. Several other books in the collection have had a similar affect on my thoughts and being. To mention just a few, there is that vellum copy of *The Germ* in binding by Leonard Mountenay, and the two bindings by Otto Zahn which were pictured in his *On Art Binding* monograph. There are others, in fact several others, but I don't want to go about compiling an inventory of them. Suffice it to say, they had a similar affect on me, but over time their charm was controlled and the agitation mitigated although the memories are still quite potent. But it is this present Léon Maillard binding which has fully captivated me.

I wish for you and our mutual friend to experience a similar set of controlled passions. I know he's stricken by his field of bindings, and it's become quite obvious that you have found this guiding light in the binder whom you like. We were both pleased when you selected your binder as your theme, your guy so to speak, and it will give me great pleasure to be able to secure you more such bindings.

That's it. Just thought you'd appreciate another wave of insights following the sale of that book. Oh, and what a book it is!

The thought on how Grasset may have been an influence was intriguing, but it would turn out that a far more important consideration would be settled upon. Meanwhile, that binding was still monopolizing my mind. Just couldn't seem to shake it and settle down. It was like an alien invasion maybe just because I'm getting older. Perhaps it's analogous to getting stuck in second gear. It should have been just another conquest, but questions kept popping up, like:

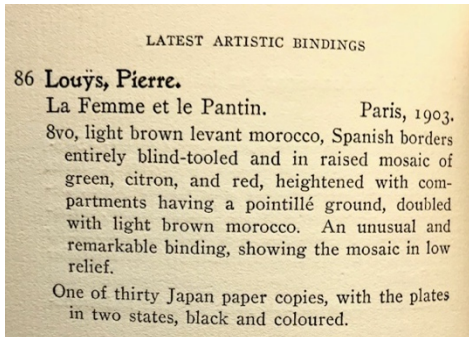
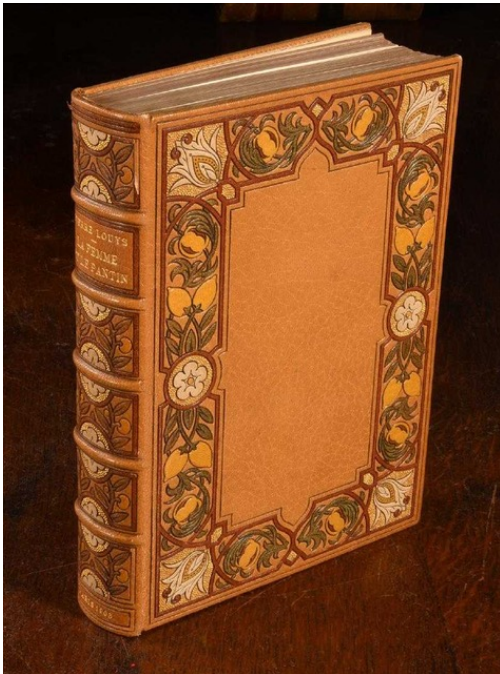
- Why did Maillard decide to so radically veer from his usual binding style?
- What did his fellow binders think of it, both those in the Club Bindery and those who attended the 1906 Grolier exhibition?
- Same question as that above, but for the Grolier Club attendees: What did members of the Grolier Club think of it? And especially what did Thomas Bird Mosher, fellow Grolier Club member, think of the binding on his vellum Rossetti imprint? (This last one is easy—he never saw it! He was on an extended trip to California and back over the months it was held).
- And what of Henry William Poor? Did he commission it without any input? Did he specifically ask for something more along the lines of Marius-Michel? Or did he simply give Maillard free-reign. Poor had many a binding by Maillard of the usual more conservative and repetitive sort (although stunning and admittedly tooled to perfection), so what did Poor think of this design on his vellum Rossetti when he took it home to set on the shelf with the others?
- How much of this binding's design came from influence of Grasset who was quite popular in France when Maillard was there. Or did Grasset's influence have little to do with it? What about influence for other French binders under whom he trained there in France before being recruited to America?
- Why did Maillard settle upon the extraordinary use of Horse Chestnut leaves and seed pods? And why did he decide to inject two ladybugs on the spine? The poems contained therein make no reference to these pieces of flora and fauna. Were these elements simply pulled out of the thin air? And to present these to a very conservative, even stodgy viewing public, wasn't he opening himself up to criticism?
- Where has this binding been hiding all these years? Why did nobody make reference to it so far as I know?

The questions just kept coming and I tossed and turned trying to get a foothold much less to figure it out completely. Obviously the binding has had an affect on people seeing it. It has an enormous affect on me and these were just a little of what was wafting over my overheated brain cells. But some of the answers would be forthcoming; others not so much or missing altogether.

The Binder's Background the Key

Robert Hoe went to France to find the best binder he could hire for his newly created Club Bindery. In 1897 Hoe met Léon Maillard “a Parisian bookbinder considered by many to be the best finisher of his day, and engaged him on the spot. Maillard came from a family of binders and had worked alongside some of France's greatest craftsmen: Gruel, Cuzin, and Marius Michel.” —Boss. *Bound to be the Best*, p. 14. Maillard's work with Henri Marius Michele was an important influence on Maillard with regard to the two bindings being discussed. Henri Marius Michele was famous for “La Flore Ornamentale” binding design. “Mr. Maillard also learned his trade from his father, Charles Maillard, in Paris at Cuzin's bindery. His work with Gruel and his position as master finisher with Marius Michel just before coming to American led to Mr. Hoe's choice of him for master finisher at the Club Bindery” —*The Biblio*. Vol. I, No 1. March 1913, p. 19. And what would Maillard have seen and witnessed being there shoulder to shoulder with Henri Marius Michel?

One of the most important exhibitions of the Club Bindery's work was the 1906 exhibition. There was an earlier exhibition in 1900 which is captured in the "Catalogue of an Exhibition of Book Bindings done at The Club Bindery" held by Dodd, Mead and Company at their new store on Fifth Avenue & Thirty-Fifth Street in April 1900; however, the most significant exhibition was that held at The Grolier Club from April 26-May 12, 1906. This exhibition included a lion's share of bindings the Club Bindery did for Robert Hoe, but it also included those binding done for others, most importantly for Henry William Poor. The 1900 Dodd, Mead exhibition contained none of Mosher's productions, but the 1906 Grolier Club exhibition included eight Mosher books, all from Poor's library (in all, Poor would have at least 246 imprints in his library bound at the Club Bindery!). One of Robert Hoe's Club bindings takes on the same form as the Rossetti *Poems*, No. 86 of the same 1906 exhibition:

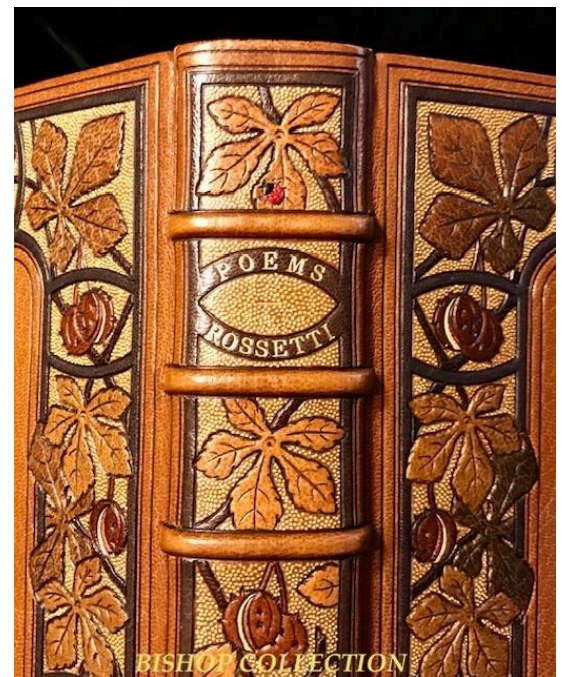
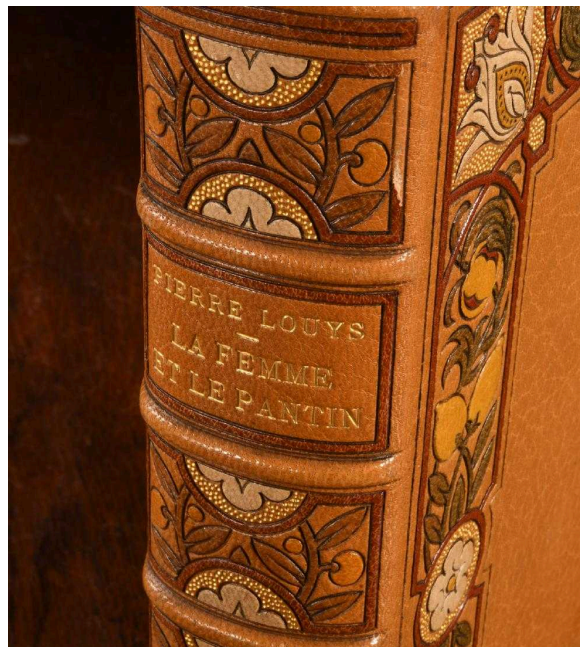


The recently discovered binding on Louÿs's *La Femme et le Pantin* (1903) was owned by Robert Hoe is indeed a lovely production done in similar "La Flore Ornamentale" style as the Rossetti's *Poems* (1902), entry No. 115. Both bindings share in Maillard's influence by Henri Marius Michel whose work in

this vein is well known and appreciated. The Rossetti *Poems*, however, is the more daring of the two with its less restrained plant elements, the use of insects to partly startle and captivate the viewer present a playful disruption of the spine's design, and the non-traditional placement of author title on the spine. While Maillard's titling of *La Femme* is the traditional straight horizontal placement of the wording, the Rossetti title bends in an elliptical manner. Furthermore, the floral designs on the Rossetti cross over the inner trellis at places while the designs of *Le Femme* stay nice and neat within their confines. The choice of flowers

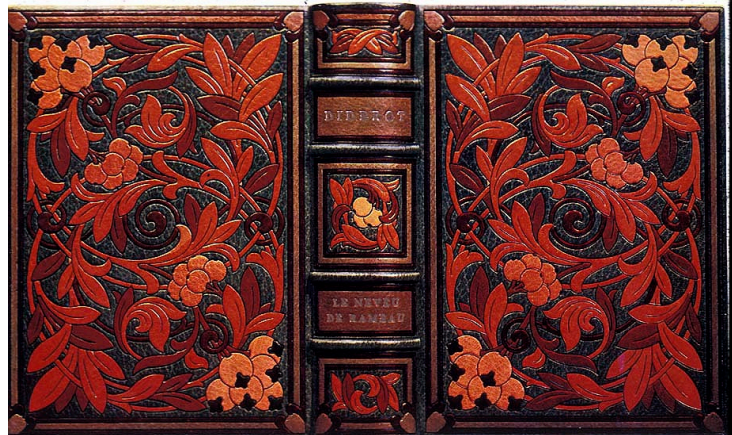
and fruits in *La Femme* are more somber, while on the Rossetti he introduces the unusual use of multi-hued

leaves and the prickly, just opening pods of the Horse Chestnut tree. The dense use of gilt pointillé on the Rossetti also adds a solidity, heft and luxuriousness in its overall effect. The two bindings are indeed of the same type, both being outstanding examples of the "La Flore Ornamentale" style, but their creative treatment is different, and in my



opinion the Rossetti is more daring, the more unusual, and more appealing. It makes a statement. Here was a Léon Maillard bringing together his experience in Paris of just a few years before starting at the Club Bindery. Here's the type of work he day-to-day experienced working with Marius Michel who was considered:

...the best binder of his generation as well as the founder of modern French bookbinding, Henri Marius Michel (1846-1925) began his career in the atelier established by his father Jean in Paris in 1849, where they produced distinguished work in the prevailing historical styles for two decades. After the father's death in 1890, the firm came to even greater prominence when Henri began producing bindings in a completely new and original style that did nothing less than change the course of modern bookbinding in France. According to Duncan & De Bartha, Henri believed passionately "that bookbinding needed a new vocabulary of ornamentation in order to express the mood and spirit of contemporary authors." The "vocabulary of ornamentation" he developed was based on nature, the revolutionary "La Flore Ornamentale" style that he unveiled at the 1878 International Exposition. Marius Michel fils was at first viewed as impudent and



A later example: D. Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* (Paris 1924) from Roger Devauchelle, *La reliure en France...* (Paris, 1959-61, opp. p. 90), bound by Henri Marius-Michel with floral ornamentation.

rebellious, and his work was objected to on theoretical grounds as being too much like "art," and too little like a product of the binder's craft. But, in the words of Duncan & De Bartha, "the young man's fervent convictions, as well as his superb technical skills, as both a binder and a gilder, won him an increasing number of supporters. By 1885 his designs were seen as a viable alternative to traditional bindings for certain books." Other binders began to imitate his approach, but Marius Michel the younger was the "undisputed leader of the new movement, [his] incomparable technique, harmonious selection of color, and infinite variety of plant motifs [placing] his work above those of his contemporaries."

--Phillip Pirages Catalogue 71 (entry 140) description for a Marius Michel binding on *Le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris, 1886), and the citations to Alastair Duncan & Georges de Bartha's *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Bookbinding -French Masterpieces 1880-1940*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1989.

We see the use of seed pods just as Marius Michel and those he influenced had similarly employed in his own indomitable atelier creations meant to compete with a bibliopegic public conditioned to accept more traditional forms to the exclusion of the new ornamental art. To be sure, many of the complicated bindings designed and executed by Maillard often placed their design within the folds of tradition, but here, along with his Parisian compatriot, Maillard stood shoulder to shoulder in presenting the most exquisite of "La Flore Ornamentale" binding decoration. True artist, indeed.

As for the possible influence of Eugène Grasset, it certainly had to have been a major factor. The binding's color is very much in line with Grasset's color aesthetic of the time. This Swiss born artist lived in Paris and he and his pupils created a plethora of innovative designs that inspired the Art Nouveau movement at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Binders like Marius Michel and Maillard were certainly intimately familiar with Grasset's *La Plante et ses Applications Ornementales* [Plants and Their Application to Ornament] published in Paris, 1897, in

which even the Horse Chestnut tree was presented as one of his examples. Furthermore, many of Grasset's designs employed color combinations similar to what Maillard used in the Rossetti binding. One only needs to look at examples in Grasset's calendar published in 1896, some of his posters of the era, or the work of some of his pupils like that of M. P. Verneuil's "gourd design" in *La Plante et ses Applications Ornementales*, to see some of these very color combinations used on the Rossetti. Maillard was plucked from his Art Nouveau milieu in Paris to become lead finisher at the Club Bindery in New York City. You can take the binder out of "Art Nouveau" Paris, but you can't take that Paris out of the binder. The Rossetti binding resoundingly accentuates his origins and recreates them in an America setting, so we have a French binding stamped with the seal of approval by an American employer on an American vellum publication worthy of such fine treatment.

For contrast with this style of binding, there are numerous bindings pictured in the exhibition catalogue *Bound to be the Best—The Club Bindery* (Boston: Thomas G. Boss Fine Books, 2004), and plates 19 and 21 in my *Thomas Bird Mosher—Pirate Prince of Publishers* (New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press & The British Library, 1998), but there are three others in the above sources which, in my opinion, are examples of the "La Flore Ornamentale" classification:

- (1) Plate 18 in my book, with its somewhat chaste but exquisite three poppy-like flowers and a bud along vertical stems, is on J. A. Symonds' *Fragilia Labilia* (Mosher, 1902) finished by Maillard. This too was also in the Library of Henry William Poor. The volume is now located at the Bancroft Library by way of Norman Strouse.
- (2) another is the Harriet Beecher Stowe *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) finished by Maillard (Item 47) in Boss. Although technically finished by Maillard while under the flag of the Rowfant Bindery, we see the clear expression of a floral/pictorial nature that can be ascribed to this style; and likewise...
- (3) Item 27 in Boss -- which was also shown at the 1906 exhibition--, Cyril Davenport's *English Embroidered Bookbindings* (1899), which is a clear expression of "La Flore Ornamentale" with its tutor roses, rose buds, and twining stems with rose leaves swirling about. Although not personally identified with Léon Maillard's stamped signature, mimicking a cloth embroidered binding but now in leather, it nevertheless is a clear example of the style.

Add to these examples the newly discovered Louÿs's *La Femme et le Pantin* (1903), and the present Rossetti's *Poems*, we can easily see a pattern develop. So without much trouble I have identified five bindings, the Rossetti and *La Femme* included, that fit into this category and all which reflect the influence of Henri Marius Michel's "La Flore Ornamentale" expression and, in my opinion, should be identified under that nomenclature. Of these five, a binding expert called the Rossetti "a keystone piece!" and again, in my humble opinion, is probably the most complete and interesting example known. Of course there are different calibres of aesthetic taste. Some admirers of the Club Bindery may lean toward the more classic styles, or enjoy mostly the mosaics, or a more Grolieresque design, etc. Certainly all, especially those directly linked to Léon Maillard, are handled with such exactitude, precision and complexity so as to boggle mind. There is ample room for all.

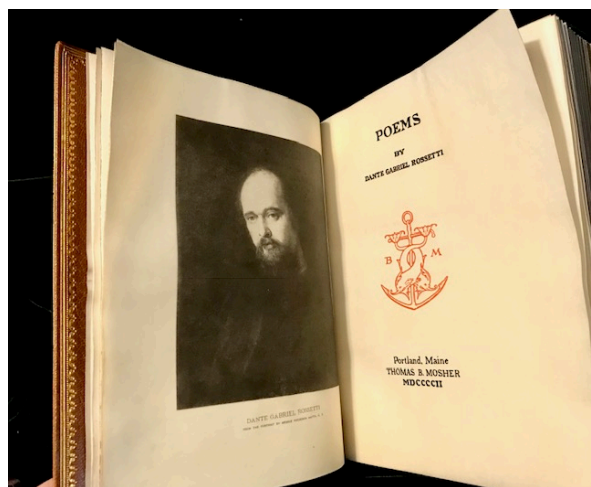
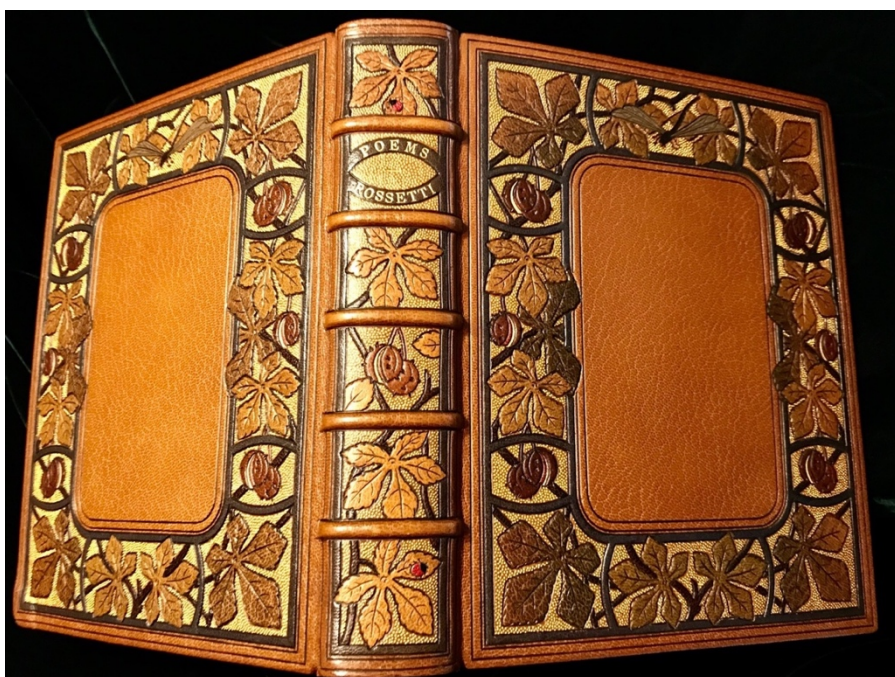
My friend and fellow Mosher Press collector, Norman Strouse, would have greatly enjoyed this binding had he lived to see it. He had five (technically six) Club bindings on vellum printings by Mosher, now all housed at the Bancroft Library: J. A. Symond's *Fragilia Labilia* (No. 2 of 5; the Poor copy), Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (No. 2 of 4; the Poor copy), A. C. Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse* (No 2 of 4; the Poor copy), E. FitzGerald's *Polonius* (No. 3 of 4; the Poor copy), and Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (2 vols., No. 2 of 4; the Poor copy). I can hardly compete with that (although I should note that the Mosher Collection includes over 350 fine bindings), but I have surpassed Strouse in the number of "pure vellum" Mosher printings in the collection, and perhaps may some day exceed this Club Binding goal as well. Presently I have four Club bindings, one being on the 1902 *Rubáiyát* (No. 38 of 40 on Japan vellum), John Hay's *In Praise of Omar* (No. 3 of 4; the Poor copy), *A Little Garland of Celtic Verse* (No. 2 of 10; the Poor copy), and now the Rossetti's *Poems* (No. 2 of 4; the Poor copy). Hopefully I have a few years and dollars left in the ol' acquisitions mill to at least approach Norman Strouse's achievement, but at this point I am very satisfied after having acquired the Rossetti.

A number of people have commented on Maillard's binding of the Rossetti *Poems*. One person observed it must have taken many, many hours to do this binding, to which I responded:

Yes, and just think about the years and years of training and more years of accomplishment leading up to the time one was able to successfully design, plan and execute this breathtaking binding. When asked about such work, "How long did it take to do this binding?" the binder may well have answered, "a lifetime."

Of course there was a good peppering of gorgeous, stunning, beautiful, exquisite, incredible, amazing and other such superlatives. Another person began my thought processes by saying it was "brilliant, has the look of Eugene Samuel Grasset" and another indicated it has the look of Marius Michel which again got me to thinking. An accomplished Canadian art binder remarked that it is "An absolute beauty! A masterpiece! Heaven on earth!!" and later still not being able to contain his joy, "What a beautiful, gorgeous, delightful and amazing designer binding! Such skill, such good taste, such creativity! Truly a masterpiece! Bravo!" and then his cup over flowed with "I just can't believe what I am seeing! What a thrill it must be to hold this treasure in your hands and caress the leather work with them!!!" With regard to the insects portrayed, one person exclaimed, "The dragonflies and the ladybugs!!! Resplendent!" and yet another, a scholar and top-rung book collector indicated, "Quite a buggy binding. I don't think I've ever seen anything like it, quite nice indeed and in the right collection." Perhaps one of the most poignant remarks made about this binding was that of a binding conservator, "Phil.... do you know the book *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Book-binding*? Well really, your vellum copy of Rossetti's *Poems* could easily have taken a place alongside others pictured in that book." That is probably the finest compliment to Léon Maillard one could make. He keeps good company with the finest.

Philip R. Bishop
3 February 2019



The curl of vellum title page with portrait of D. G. Rossetti frontispiece.



Henry William Poor (red) bookplate, and Helen Davis Stibolt nameplate facing the leather doublure with gilt decoration around its edges.