

The Todd Pattison Binding on Yeats' *The Land of Heart's Desire* -- a binding finally secured

Decades ago I came across a picture on the Internet of a green binding on a Mosher imprint of Yeats's play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. I was doing research for my Mosher bibliography (published in 1998) which has an extensive section on bindings, but try as I might, the image's background was illusive and little information or connection on who posted it. I wanted to include it in the bibliography, but just about all traces of its posting ran dry. I never did find that binding again, until that is, I saw a December 4, 2023 post by pattispaperworks (Todd Pattison) on his Instagram page. My gawd, there it was! I immediately wrote to Todd Pattison in what resulted in a flurry of Instagram messages:

Phil Bishop = PB Todd Pattison = TP

[PB to TP; Dec. 4, 2023]

Todd, if you still have this and if it's on a Mosher book, then I'd like to buy it from you!
Phil / MOSHER BOOKS

[TP to PB; Dec. 5, 2023]:

Hi Phil, As much as I'm trying to weed some books to keep from being a hoarder, I'm holding on to this one for now. It has a lot of memories for me but if I ever decide to sell you will be the first one I contact. THANKS,

[PB to TP; Dec. 5, 2023]:

Thanks for your consideration, Todd. I have been seeing this binding for years now. It would come up in some of my searches. Now I finally know who the binder was/is. It would have been included in my 1998 bibliography of Mosher had I been able to locate more information on it. For the record, which Mosher edition is it? I have several bindings in the Mosher Collection by students of Hugo Peller, and two bindings on Mosher books done by the great binder himself, so if you ever decide to part with it, it would be in a good home with its compatriots. Thanks for getting back in touch with me about your binding which I admire.

[PB to TP; Dec. 16, 2023]:

Todd, don't forget to look up that Mosher book's date... you know, the Yeats. And just in case a thought of its possible sale is lurking about the recesses of the back of your mind, I can supply a lovely contribution in your name to your favorite book organization or library, like the Bennett School. I'm not pushing, but just suggesting. Phil/MOSHER BOOKS

[PB to TP; Jan. 17, 2024]:

I'm still keenly aware of, and interested in, purchasing your binding for the Mosher Collection (has around 550 special bindings on Mosher imprints) which contains several fine bindings by Hugo Peller's students as well as two by H.P. himself. Please, no need to respond. I just didn't want you to think I wasn't all that interested. Quite the contrary. When and if you decide this would be an appropriate home for your lovely work, I'll gladly entertain. Phil

[TP to PB; Jan. 18, 2024]:

I thought about this a lot over the holidays. Your collection is quite amazing, so I know it would be in good company and there is no reason to keep this one any longer. So, I'm willing to sell it to you if we can agree on price. Todd.

[TP to PB; Jan. 18, 2024]:

Todd, this is marvelous news. Why don't you name a price and we'll go from there. I won't be a haggler. I would like any added story behind its creation, that is beyond what you posted. The more the better. This info is to be kept with the binding. So then... your price?

[TP to PB; Jan. 18, 2024]:

\$XXXXXXXXXX

[TP to PB; Jan. 18, 2024]:

SOLD. Do you want me to send you a check? Send me a PayPal invoice. Whatever. Let me know your preferred action.

[TP to PB and PB to TP; Jan. 18, 2024]:

A quick flurry of notes established how and when funds would be sent, questions about more of "the story" behind the book, how it was signed, etc.

[TP to PB; Jan. 22, 2024]:

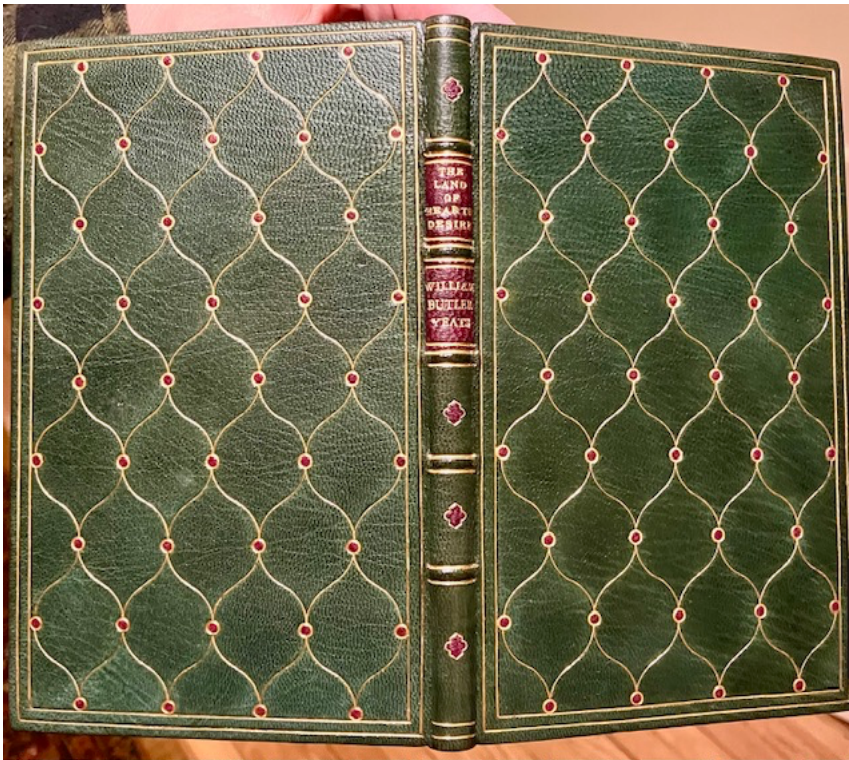
Check received on Monday.

[BP to TP; Jan. 26, 2024]:

Binding received on Friday.

Todd Pattison Binding

During his high school years, when Todd Pattison¹ was 16, Bernard Middleton said he should study with Hugo Peller, and then and there he planned it so that when he graduated from high school, he'd leave a week later for Switzerland. And so it was in 1983 that an 18-year-old Todd Pattison went to Switzerland to learn bookbinding under



the Swiss master binder, Hugo Peller (1917-2003)² who conducted master classes for students the likes of Silvia Rennie, Tini Miura, and many others.

When I asked Pattison about his choice to bind a Yeats book or a Mosher imprint he told me "I saw my first Mosher books when I was about 15 or 16 and really liked the look of them (paper, format, even the bindings were appealing). This was a book my 18 year old self could afford, it really had nothing to do with Yeats that I can remember."

Yeats, William Butler. *The Land of Heart's Desire*. Portland, ME: Mosher, 1905 (4th ed.)

Todd Pattison 1983 binding in full green morocco with white watered silk endpapers.

(further pictures after footnotes at the end of this article)

I purchased this binding directly from Todd Pattison of Somerville, MA. On his Instagram page he pictured it and wrote about it and his experience in making it: "Forty years ago I was studying bookbinding with the great Hugo Peller and made this binding. The design was inspired by some wallpaper in a café where I was having hot chocolate. There are small purple leather onlays in the circles.... I learned so much while at the school, both from Hugo Peller and Edwin Heim, but it is hard to believe it was so long ago. [Peller] was not only a great teacher and binder but also funny and kind. He was so amazingly nice to me!" When posted, there were a number of comments including one bookbinder calling it "a delicious design" adding you were "very lucky to have gotten to do that at a young age." Another echoing the former remarks: "Beautiful binding! How wonderful that you were able to immerse yourself so fully in the craft—and with such talented teachers! (especially at such a young age.)" Lastly, a hand-marbler wrote, "that is so gorgeous Todd! The patience to do all those little onlays, how lovely it must have been to be able to be fully absorbed in a subject!" to which Pattison answered "I had time on my hands back then to focus on bookbinding."

But I've only given you, the reader, snippets from where I could find them on social media. Then to my great pleasure Todd Pattison sent me the following account which came to me on January 28 and which I provide here in its entirety along with the picture of the 18-year-old Todd in Peller's atelier. What an amazing opportunity to get this right from the binder, and how much more precious—in my mind at least—this personal account makes the binding, even though it repeats at places what I had hitherto gleaned. It's the kind of information that belongs with the binding itself, and so it will be catalogued in detail with this short, but meaningful, article.

Hi Phil,

As promised, here is some more information about the binding.

As I mentioned, as a teenager I liked the Mosher press books because of the quality of the paper, the fact that they were limited, and the overall layout and typography. For someone just finishing high school that needed to take some books with him to bind in Switzerland this was a good choice.

I left a week after graduating high school in Western New York state for Centro Del Bel Libro. First time on a plane and flew from Rochester to New York City and then overnight to Milan and from there on a train to Locarno, Switzerland (also the first time I had been on a train). I was not prepared for all this as I had a modest upbringing with a father who was a union worker who liked sports and did a lot of vegetable gardening. He was encouraging though because knowing my interest in pursuing this he said that it was better than digging ditches for a living.

It was in the boy scouts that I found bookbinding and was lucky enough to have the merit badge course taught by Fred Jordan who did it for a living instead of out of a Boy Scout manual. He could tell I was very interested and took me on as an apprentice at age 13. He knew Bernard Middleton and when Middleton came to the U.S. in 1981, I met him and we asked his advice on where to study and he encouraged us to look at Ascona and Peller, which I did by writing at age 16 to inquire about going there after high school. He said they would save a spot for me and that was it. Really quite easy.

Hugo was amazing, funny, encouraging and patient. I'm including an image you might have seen before of him demonstrating something to me at my bench. The Yeats binding was finished about a month before he had his heart

attack and stopped teaching at the school. Edwin Heim took over after that so I was lucky to get to study with them both, about 5 months with each. The design idea for the binding came to me while I was having a hot chocolate in a cafe one weekend. I was sitting there thinking about something else and staring at the opposite wall when it occurred to me that there was a really interesting pattern to the wallpaper that would make a nice binding design. My bookbinding instructor in the U.S., Fred Jordan, was definitely fond of traditional British bookbinding and that rubbed off on me, especially the late 19th and early 20th century designs. I thought this design would be good for the date of the Mosher Press book I had. I wanted to do something with a lot of repetitive tooling and this design certainly gave me that. Given the nature of tooling curved lines and moving from a curve in one direction to the opposite direction, you really need to use a very short, straight line in between the two so each compound curve is actually three tools, which gives you an idea of the number of impressions. I hate to think how long I worked on this but it was great practice.



Peller seemed to be pleased with this binding but obviously the traditional design was not so much to his tastes, as you probably know. He always enjoyed a good laugh so maybe he did find something funny in an American working in this style, as most of my fellow students at the time were European and they had very different stylistic interests. They were Swiss, French, Dutch and German mostly, although one woman from America came for several weeks while I was there. At that time Peller would take students for any length of time as long as he had space for them - from as little as a week to as long as two years. He had an amazing ability to jump back and forth between students working on all different techniques and spoke

German, French and English throughout the day. Heim found that too difficult to do (understandably) so when he took over, he gradually changed it to the present set up of the school where people came for set classes and everyone works on the same thing.

I realize this doesn't really discuss the binding that much. Green was an obvious leather choice for me at the time because of the way the gold looked against it, and because of how many of the bindings that I liked from the late 19th/early 20th centuries used green leather. The purple was chosen because it was a nice pop of color against the green and they seemed to go well together. The endpapers were something that Peller demonstrated to us around that time. You could take silk, wet it, then fold it in half and dry it under pressure and you would have watered silk. It was so easy and somewhat magical so I used it on several bindings around that time but can't really recall using it since then.

I hope this helps. if you have any questions just let me know and I'll try to do best to answer them.

Todd

How wonderful a set of memories accompanying a beautiful binding. I am certainly honored to have this lovely example in the collection!

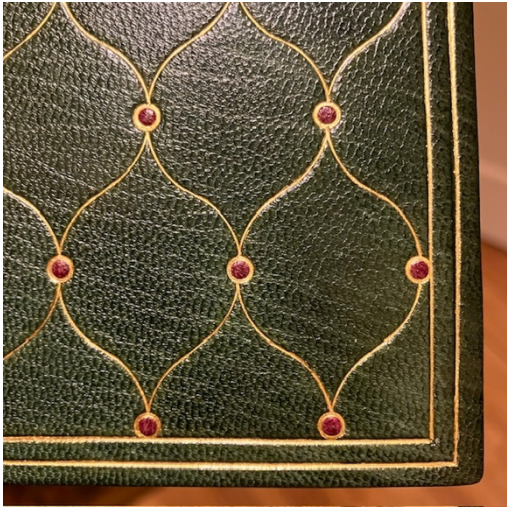
Footnotes:

¹Todd Pattison is the Conservator for the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Previously, he worked as a book conservator at the Northeast Document Conservation Center for more than 25 years and was the Collections Conservator at Harvard College Library, supervising a lab treating Harvard's general collections. He is an active member of the New England chapter of the guild of Book Workers and a Fellow in the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC). He first became fascinated with the binding of books in the Boy Scouts while completing his Bookbinding Merit Badge. He has an undergraduate degree in Art History from Nazareth College and an M.L.S. from the University of Alabama. —Rare Books School (Univ. Virginia) write-up.

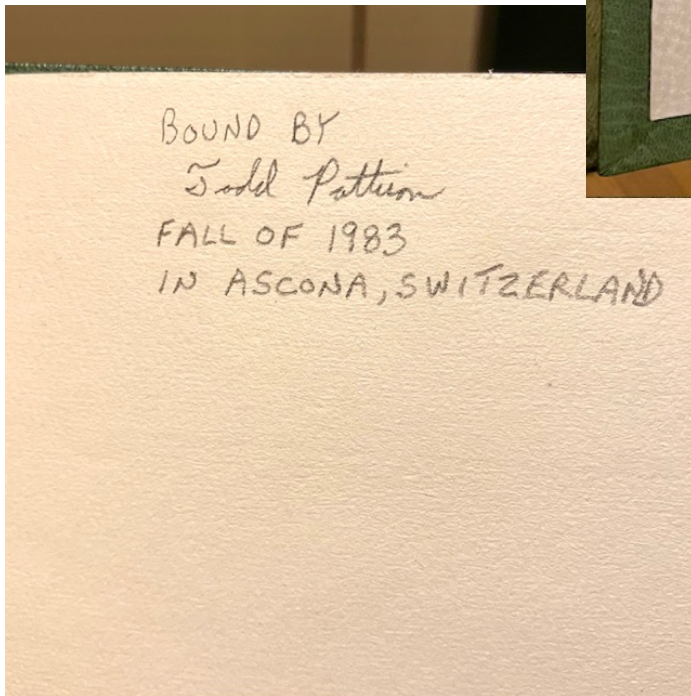
²As conservator, Todd Pattison works to preserve and care for the collection of books, manuscripts, and fine art. Todd comes to American Ancestors/NEHGS with more than 25 years of experience from the Northeast Document Conservation Center, and has also worked as Collections Conservator at the Harvard College Library. He has an undergraduate degree in Art History from Nazareth College, an M.L.S. from the University of Alabama, is a Fellow in the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), and has taught the course "American Publishers' Bookbindings, 1800-1900" for Rare Book School at the University of Virginia. Areas of expertise: Conservation of books, manuscripts, art on paper and photographs, the production of the American book in the industrial era, and the general history of European and American bookbinding. —American Ancestors website.

"Hugo Peller was born in 1917 in Solothurn, Switzerland, the son of a master binder. Most of his life, except for the war years, was devoted to learning, practicing and teaching bookbinding. He served his apprenticeship as a bookbinder 1934 to 1938 followed by a year of studies in Strasbourg, France. During 1945 and 1946 he studied at the École Estienne in Paris. He was a teacher at the Gewerbeschule (trade school) in Solothurn from 1946 to 1967. He was a founder member and principal of the artistic bookbinding school, Centro del Bel Libro, in Ascona, Switzerland from 1978 to 1983. In 1955 he was elected to membership of the "Masters of the Art of Bookbinding" (MDE) and served as its vice-president from 1961 to 1966. Peller has won many awards, his books have been exhibited internationally and are in many private collections. For the several years the Pellers spent two weeks, in February, with friends in Wehmais, Finland and he conducted Symposiums there in 1987 and 1989... In 1990, *Der Buchbinder Hugo Peller* was published in Bern, Switzerland. He

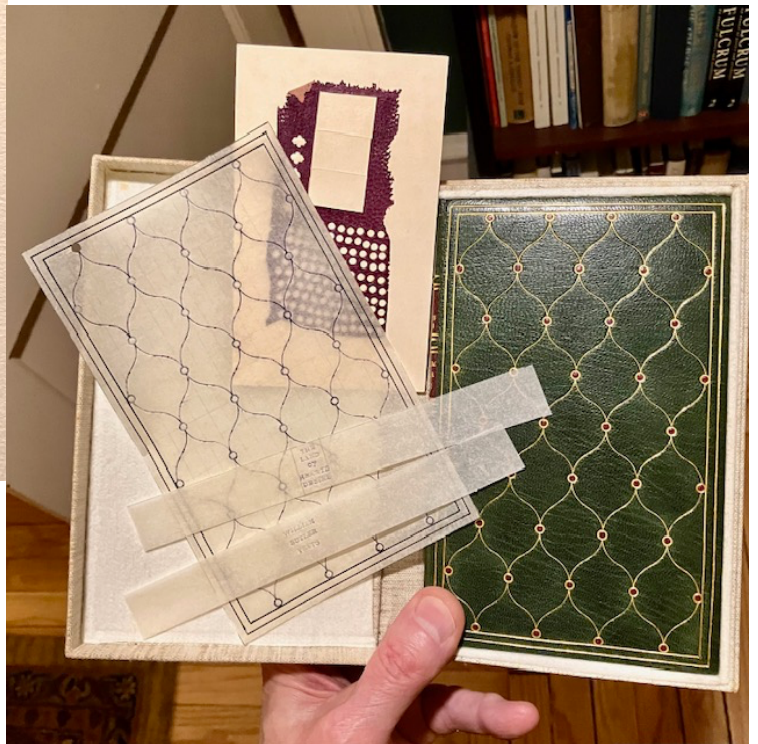
passed away in 2003." – Presented on the Internet as "You can Judge a Book by Its Cover—
33 Miniature Designer Bindings" Special Collections, Washington University.



Close-up of tooling and onlays. White watered silk endpapers. Signed and dated by binder. Original tissue paper patterns, punched out leather for onlays, and cloth clamshell case.



BOUND BY
Todd Patton
FALL OF 1983
IN ASCONA, SWITZERLAND



Philip R. Bishop
February 1, 2024