

Charles Ricketts & Charles Shannon

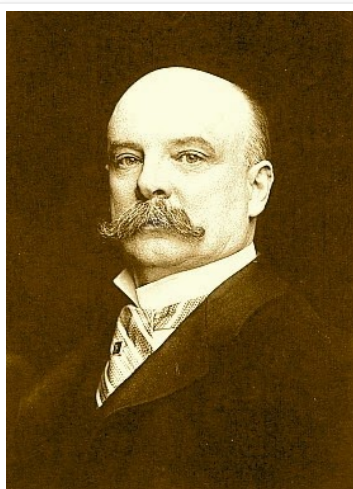
Wednesday, June 11, 2014

150. Who must I copy to be original?

Blog 150 is a contribution by Philip R. Bishop, connoisseur of the work of Thomas Bird Mosher, who has been the subject of some recent blogs.

Who must I copy to be original?

This question from François Coppée's *Le Trésor*, 'Qui pourrais-je imiter pour être original?', has always seemed appropriate when discussing Thomas Bird Mosher and the preparation of his Mosher Press books. The literature and designs of the Kelmscott, Eragny, the Daniel presses and the Bodley Head were all copied and Ricketts and the Vale Press were likewise included in Mosher's arsenal.



Thomas Bird Mosher at age 49 (circa 1901)

To be sure, Mosher admired the Vale Press and its publisher-designer. In the Gordon Bottomley correspondence at the British Library there are two key letters in which Mosher professes his admiration.

In the Mosher-to-Bottomley letter of May 10, 1910 Mosher discusses Ricketts's book on Titian with its excellent half-tone illustrations. He adds to this his appreciation of Ricketts's work with *The Dial* and all his other works in that 'some of them are very glorious indeed.' Between this and a June 10, 1910 Mosher-to-Bottomley letter, Bottomley apparently apprised Mosher of his friendship with Shannon and Ricketts, to which Mosher responded by surmising 'perhaps, however, Mr. Ricketts is not particularly pleased with the way in which I have made use of some of his borders' and then goes on to say how he based an opening letter design on one of Ricketts's, but that the shape has been changed and 'redrawn by my artist here so as to fit *Love in the Valley* and other volumes in that Series' (*Golden Text Series*).

This insight afforded an explanation as to why there might be slight variation between Mosher's presentation and the letters and designs by Ricketts which could be photo-mechanically reproduced, but slightly altered

Search This Blog

 Search


Charles Ricketts (1866-1931), artist, book designer, collector, art critic, set and costume designer & Charles Shannon (1863-1937), lithographer, painter and art collector : a weekly blog written by Paul van Capelleveen

With contributions by Paul Delaney ([no. 11](#), [no. 100](#)), Barbara Pezzini ([no. 39](#), [no. 40](#)), Paul Durham ([no. 136](#)), Philip R. Bishop ([no. 150](#)), and with texts by Charles Ricketts ([no. 16](#), [no. 31](#), [no. 46](#), [no. 61](#), [no. 111](#), [no. 138](#), [no. 149](#))

Thanks are due to Marja Smolenaars.

Contact at: paulton [at] xs4all [dot] nl

Archive

▼ [2014](#) (25)

▼ [June](#) (3)

[151. Ricketts and Shannon on YouTube](#)

[150. Who must I copy to be original?](#)

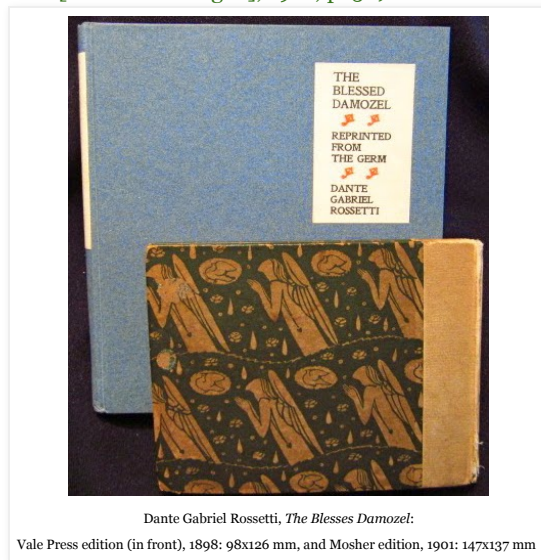
[149. Sham-Gothic](#)

in form by ‘my artist here.’ Mosher concludes the paragraph by admitting ‘this undoubtedly is wicked enough in the view of a foreign artist’ and concludes by saying he’s not the first and surely won’t be the last to avail himself of ‘the moderns... without money and of course without royalty.’

Such an admission certainly didn’t ingratiate Mosher with the British private press crowd, but his choice to copy and adjust for his own purposes certainly was a nod to their achievement. Obviously Mosher identified himself in league with the members of the British private press movement but his actual contacts took place between potential intermediaries (with the exception of C.H. St. John Hornby whom he contacted directly). He always had it in his heart-of-hearts to be allied with their circle and to impress those folks on the other side of the Atlantic, and in turn, to present their designs to an American public.

Along with Mosher’s passion for the literature and design of the era, his aim was also to present the authors in a scholarly way, so he often provided comparative texts, footnotes, references, and comments. In doing so, he saw himself as being part and parcel, even party to, the broader conversation with especially British authors and the attending graphic developments accompanying the printing of their texts. One of the several examples is his treatment of *The Blessed Damozel* published by Hacon & Ricketts in 1898. This book’s diminutive form struck him as falling short of what was needed, saying that:

‘based on the format of the Vale Press, as our reprint professedly is, it shows conclusively how much more beautiful a book can be made by adhering to well recognized standards of page and margin, than by treating the poem as a mere bit of decorative type-work as in the London edition’ (*A List of Books in Belles Lettres* [Mosher catalogue], 1901, p. 58).



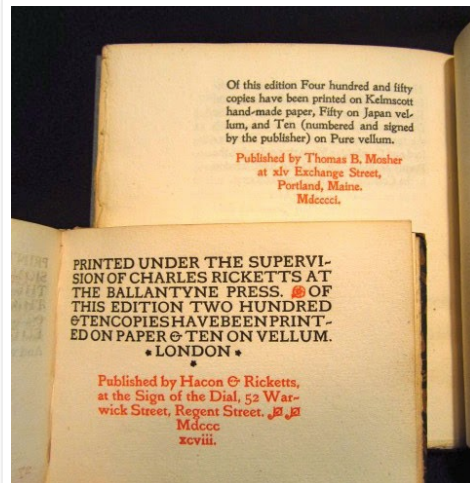
A full comparison of the changes made are found in entry 47 of *Thomas Bird Mosher. Pirate Prince of Publishers* (1998, p. 106) so I won’t bother to reiterate them here.

- May (4)
- April (5)
- March (4)
- February (4)
- January (5)
- 2013 (52)
- 2012 (51)
- 2011 (23)



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blesses Damozel*:
Vale Press edition (below) and Mosher edition: same ruling and overall design

Suffice it to say that Mosher's presentation, based on the former Hacon & Ricketts volume, was to present a variorum edition of the text as what he called his *édition definitive* by presenting changes in D.G. Rossetti's text as published in *The Germ* (1850), variants from *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* (1856), the *Poems* (1870) and the *Collected Works* (1885).



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blesses Damozel*:
Vale Press edition (in front) and Mosher edition: colophons

Mosher would also be critical of another Ricketts/Vale Press edition. The November 1906 issue of *The Biblot* was devoted to 'The Last Days of John Addington Symonds by Margaret Symonds' followed by a 'Bibliographical Note' which briefly presents the 'extent and variety of the work of John Addington Symonds [which] may be gauged by the following short list of his published volumes.' Entry 29 records the first edition *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini* (London, 1887), the second edition of 1888 and third edition of 1889 and then Mosher remarks on p. 381:

'THE SAME. VALE PRESS EDITION. 2 vols. Imperial 8vo. Pp. 187 and 190. London, 1900. Issued in an edition of 300 sets printed on Arnold's unbleached hand-made paper, of which 187 were for sale in England and 90 in the United States, (the latter at the exorbitant price of \$35.00 net,) without the lengthy Introduction, of some 60 pages, also lacking Illustrations, Notes, Appendix and Index which Symonds gave, and which he presumably intended to accompany any and all editions that might in future be called for, this reprint stands as a sumptuous model of everything a book should not be! May it not have been one of the proximate causes of that tremendous debacle which has recently taken place in the public

appreciation of so-called ‘artistic’ book-making?’ (*The Bibelot*, vol. XII, 1906, p. 382).

Although generally speaking the British private presses eschewed what we may call supporting apparatus (prefaces, footnotes, bibliography), Mosher was certainly of the opposite mind adding a number of things by way of bibliography, variant texts and explanations. In this case he additionally saw the Vale Press edition of *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini* as excluding all that J.A. Symonds had intended the book to contain. Incidentally, the ‘tremendous debacle’ which Mosher references is most likely the precipitous decline of interest and market for the wares of ‘artistic printing’ which occurred in England around the end of the second Boer War (1902) and was still going on well into 1906. Kelmscott prices fell significantly and the decline enveloped the other presses. Eragny books were hit the hardest, but so were the Vale Press productions.

Philip R. Bishop

Posted by Paul van Capelleveen at 12:30 AM



[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Paul van Capelleveen

Curator, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National library of the Netherlands - Publications about Ricketts: "A new checklist of books designed by Charles Ricketts & Charles Shannon" (1996); "Butterfly, abstraction or flower? Another look at Charles Ricketts' design for The picture of Dorian Gray" (The private library; Winter 1998); "Charles Ricketts en de nieuwe Nederlandse boekkunst, 1890-1895" (Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis, 2000); "The construction of 'A house of pomegranates', or, Why 'unusually fresh' copies of Oscar Wilde's book are usual" (The private library, Summer 2005); [Review of: The Vale Press. Charles Ricketts, a publisher in earnest] (The library, December 2005); "The revival of a publisher's device. Charles Ricketts and Osgood, McIlvaine & Co." (The book collector, Autumn 2006); "Het private press-manifest als icoon. Over heruitgaven: de route van idealisme naar canoniseren" (De gulden passer, 2012).

Follow by Email

Submit

Subscribe To

 Posts 

 Comments 

Simple template. Powered by [Blogger](#).