

Emilie Grigsby's Catalogue: Dominos behind a Stimulant's Outcome

James Lewis of New Hampshire is an ardent collector reflecting his education and work background* in his collections. His interests include bookplates, art on paper, and fine printing; but broaden along the lines of classical music, architecture, painting, silent film history and even include the Queen Elizabeth's choice of dogs: Corgis. He's had two miniature books printed at Scott Vile's Ascensius Press and bound by master binder and paper artist, Gray Parrot, one being on the leather bookplate of the astounding collector, Estelle Doheny (limited to 50 copies). The other miniature, more severely limited this time to just 15 copies, is on the subject of Joseph Kearns, a Hollywood actor who purchased Wurlitzer's theatre organ Opus 2022 in 1955. He also had a monograph booklet letterpress printed by Ascensius about E. D. French's bookplate, *A Bookplate for the New York Yacht Club Library* (privately printed, 2012) in an edition of 40 copies (30 for sale) which includes an original bookplate mounted as a frontispiece and has been sold through Thomas G. Boss Fine Books. Lewis is obviously a sophisticated collector who enjoys a catholicity of interests and who appreciates turning some of his bookish interests into fine press publications. I've never met this collector and only lately came to know he existed. So what's Jim Lewis doing in an essay on the Mosher Collection?

On May 26 of this year I received an email totally out of the blue in which Jim Lewis wrote:

HELLO,

I enjoy looking at your website and seeing all of the wonderful books and binding of the Mosher Press publications.

I have an auction catalog of the belongings of Miss Emilie Grigsby that lists the books in her library among which are many Mosher publications. This is an original copy in nice condition. If you don't have a copy of this and would like one for your collection, please let me know and I will be happy to send it to you.

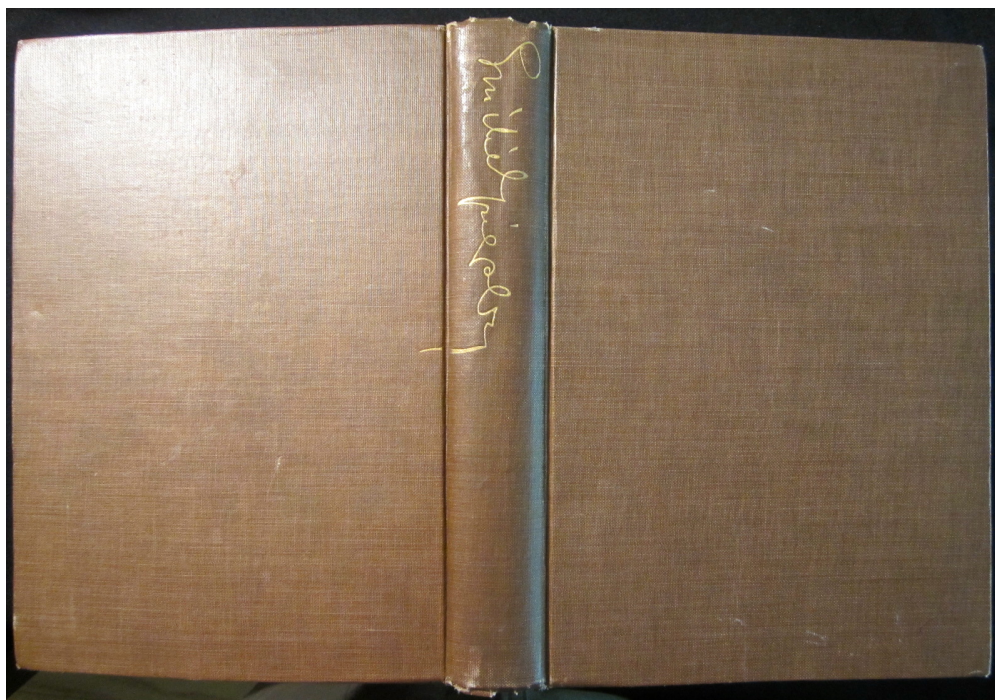
I am in the process of moving and the book is packed, but I should have everything in my possession by the middle of June and will send it then if you are interested.

Regards,

Jim Lewis

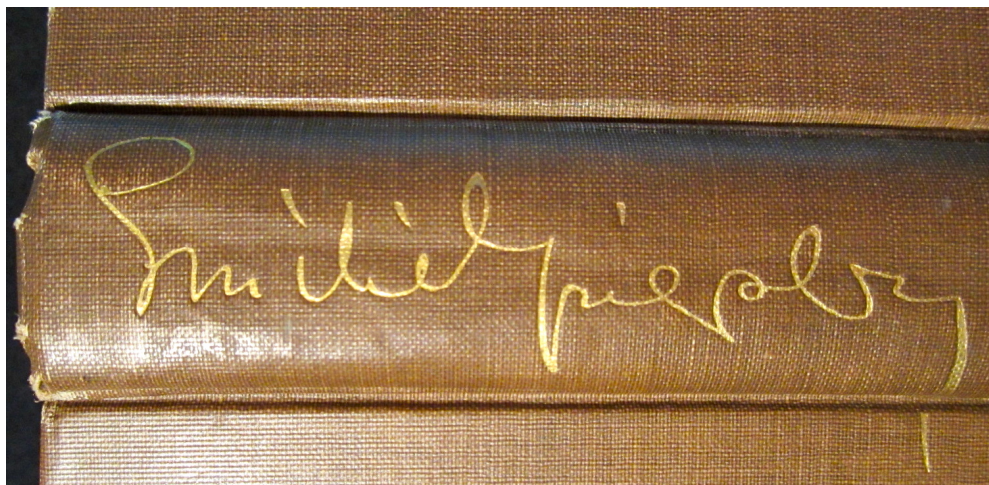
In our subsequent email exchange I essentially indicated I'd have interest in that I was supposing he was only talking about the second part of the Grigsby auction which was devoted exclusively to her books,** and that I have one set of both parts already, but only the first part of what could then become a second complete set if he wanted to send it along. I mentioned that I was assuming he was sending it as a gift, and indeed, that's exactly what he meant. So on June 13th I received his package from California where Jim is now summering, opened it up, and was totally surprised at what appeared. It was not only both parts of the Grigsby sale, but they were bound together as one in brown cloth with —and this is the astounding part— Emilie Grigsby's name boldly gilt-stamped (4 1/8" x 4 1/4") on the spine richly displaying her cursive signature. I had never, ever seen such before, and wondered if she had prepared some copies to be specially bound and selectively distributed to friends and family. Or was it done by the Anderson Auction Company? Was it

a unique copy (perhaps her own?) or one of five? Ten? Twenty-Five? I've always prized the Grigsby two-part auction catalogue because of the insight into her personal milieu and her many books listed that were not only special



association copies, but also because there were a large number of Mosher Press books the publisher sold or had given to her. But what to make of this cloth-bound copy with Emilie's bold, gilt-stamped signature? Furthermore, a small stamp on the inside pastedown of the volume shows this specially bound copy to be of British origin.

Along with some attached pictures, I fired off an email to Tom Boss who knows his auction catalogues, especially those associated with sales of fine press books, books specially bound in high quality levant by noted binders, and all manner of books reflecting the finer qualities of the book arts—including those of the 19th and 20th century book collector titans. Not long



after, in came Tom's usual laconic email response to my "what do you make of it" query: "How interesting and unusual! Must have been done by herself. TGB" Yes! How wonderful. Yet another memento revealing another tiny portion of the Emilie Grigsby story, and so it joins books from her library with

her René Lalique-designed bookplate, the Jan de Beers oil painting I have of her, and Mosher's letter to her wherein he first presented his services in helping her to build a Mosher Press collection printed on Japan vellum and pure vellum, and to assist her in acquiring other fine press books from England including Kelmscott, Eragny and the Vale presses. However, it wasn't that easy to just place the catalogue on the shelf and move on, for as is usual with me, if I come across something of interest like this, I tend to focus and start digging around for more information, which is exactly what Jim Lewis's kind gift did. It spurred me into further inquiry and research.

I have always gathered information on Emilie Grigsby because of her Mosher connection. A Google search led to three blog articles on her. Actually I had known about two of these relatively recent listings, both being write-ups by one Bruce Ware Allen who asked me for permission to include Emilie's Jan de Beer's portrait on his blogsite. The other, however, was totally new to me. A blog article by Tom Miller entitled "The Lost Emilie Grigsby House – Park Avenue and 67th Street" (interior photos of which appear in the Grigsby auction catalogue) presented plenty of new information which I hadn't known. One of the reader comments at the end of the blog again mentions a book which came out in 2012, *'The Blue Beast'—Power & Passion in the Great War* by Jonathan Walker. I've come across mention of this before but never pursued ordering a copy. Don't know why, because ten seconds into reading a review of the book I knew I had to get my own copy! After all, not only is Emilie B. Grigsby mentioned, but she the subject of a third of the book (the other two-thirds shared by the lives of Winifred Bennet and Sylvia Henley) and the brief contents I read from the book preview made it imperative that I promptly get the book. The day I received my copy with a pictures of Miss Emilie prominently displayed on the front of the dust jacket, I immediately sat down and read it through, paying closest attention to "Part II - - Emilie Grigsby", further broken down into Southern Belle, Mascot of High Command, Salons & Cabals, and Reputations. Fascinating. Revealing. Even mesmerizing. My god what different side of Edwardian England was presented, and Miss Em's role in it all, really a must read. But even more thrilling was the description I alighted upon on p. 75 where Walker writes "The 58-year-old Yerkes had met Sue Grigsby [Emilie's mother] several years before and was very taken with her young daughter, Emilie. He commissioned van Beers to produce a portrait of Emilie, barely into her teens, but with a coquettish tilt of the head that promised much. Indeed, Yerkes now decided that Emilie should become a permanent part of both his personal and financial future." Oh be still my heart. The van Beers portrait to which the biographer referred HAD to be the oil painting I acquired from Bonhams back in February 2008, thanks to the assistance of Mark Samuels Lasner and Julian Rota of Bertram Rota, Ltd. In London.

I wrote to *'The Blue Beat'* author, Jonathan Walker, and he confirmed that although the records from his research were now in storage "...from memory I think the reference was indeed [one of] the Bonhams records." And then those lovely words 'you are indeed fortunate to own the original!' Ah, always so gratifying to receive confirmation and recognition, particularly from such a fine source, and even though the portrait "with the coquettish tilt of the head" is not cited as being in the Mosher Collection, I'm nevertheless pleased as punch that mention of the portrait has met the page of a book that includes Emilie Grigsby as one of its subjects.

So those are the falling dominos, the serendipitous chain of events that Jim Lewis's kind gift sparked. Without his act of generosity I might have never come to see *'The Blue Beast'* as soon as I have, nor acquire a presentation copy of the Emilie Grigsby catalogue—Parts I & II in her specially commissioned yet simple cloth binding. It's all been great fun. Another collector whom I greatly admire and with whom I already shared parts of this story kiddingly warned "If I were Sue I'd be worried about 'the other woman' and censor your reading. She's not my type, however, so no competition from this quarter..." God love him, but I can say that my wife has nothing to worry about. Furthermore, Emilie isn't my type either, but because she figures into the Mosher story, she's a subject of keen and ongoing interest and her portrait by van Beers continues to reside on a shelf in one of the glass fronted barrister cases, positioned in front of a backdrop of Mosher books in fine, highly decorated full leather bindings—a friendly, smiling face, albeit now always to be seen with a "coquettish tilt of the head that promised much" in greeting the onlooker. Geez.

*He holds a degree in photography and design from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA and has worked as an architectural and product photographer who, on occasion, teaches on the college level.

**The first part was devoted to "Objects of Art" including paintings, sculptures, jades, snuff bottles, Chinese porcelains, silver, miniatures, fans, jewelry, rugs, tapestries, embroideries, artistic carved furniture, and china. Yes, this was one wealthy woman.

Philip R. Bishop
July 11, 2013

© Philip R. Bishop / MOSHER BOOKS, September 2013.

This essay is Copyright © by Philip R. Bishop. Permission to reproduce the above article must be granted by Gordon Pfeiffer, editor of *Endpapers*, the newsletter of the Delaware Bibliophiles, in which the essay appeared in the September 2013 issue, pp. 5-6. No portion of this essay may be reproduced or redistributed without the expressed written permission from both parties.