

So, what's next?

Please accept the fact that this is not my usual “tight” essay. I bounce about a bit, go in retrograde or fast forward here and there. Shift gears. Restate and resume. This essay is more about being my concluding remarks than about any one topic area. So I beg, borrow, recapitulate, take a strident step, retreat, and bounce back again. It's about casual reflections, important redirections and new foci. Reinvention. Even blows off some steam at places. Nevertheless, it's meant to inform those who have read my scribbles over the years and who may have even enjoyed them. And for those who didn't, it will at least bring some sigh of relief. Time to rejoice. No matter what your disposition, it's been my pleasure to put a few essays before the Delaware Bibliophiles since September 2000, and my sincere *thanks* go to Gordon Pfeiffer, editor of *Endpapers*.

A fellow collector recently posited that he could see me taking out a third or fourth mortgage should an important treasure trove of Mosher material come my way. That remark concentrated my thinking about where I presently stand vis-à-vis the Mosher collection and whether I really wanted to continue to beat all the bushes I possibly could to add yet more to the collection, to which I responded “No... really... truly. No.” OK, I'll qualify that by saying that IF something should come along that requires my serious consideration, so be it, but I'm not about to go out there and ardently seek new material as in times past. Played that game and shelled out those bucks over the years. Should some deal be worked out, fine, and of course I'd never reject a donation to the collection; but, do I want to continue ardently searching upcoming auctions, putting out notices of my WANTS, etc.? I think that steadfast and passionate pursuance of “the next find” is now entering a dormant phase. It's been getting to the point that what I've been finding and adding to the collection increasingly lies outside of my wants—a state of diminishing returns, if you will. Of course, if a BIG deal comes my way, well... that's what happened with the Wiksell archive, the Toof bindings, the Yeats inscribed *A Land of Heart's Desire*, the pure vellum *In Praise of Omar*, and the *Memories of President Lincoln*. With the latter two I wasn't even looking for them.

I had put out a WANTS notice last year and did get a response from a California dealer who had a vellum printed Mosher in a signed binding, but I already have three vellum printings of the same title he was offering me, and the binding was rather ho hum—certainly nothing to get excited about. He asked me to make him a reasonable offer, and I did send him a figure based upon what I'd expect the book to go for at auction given the records I compared with the book. It

wasn't enough in his estimation, i.e., I assume it wasn't because he never responded to my email. I guess at this point I'm just as willing to walk away from a potential purchase if I perceive any kind of gamesmanship playing out. I simply set my limit with the proviso that if not accepted I'll walk away from the item. Add to this the fact that there are a number of Mosher related items on the Internet which in times past I would have jumped at, but now —perhaps because of a plethora of already amassed treasures—I simply let them alone because they don't measure up to my self-imposed standards. If I have some hesitancy about my decision to pass, or even a regret, I just walk into my library and look around in astonishment, and the mental recording plays out “oh... my... god...” I truly been fortunate over the years. So many wonderful objects and their concomitant stories rest upon those shelves.

I now only sporadically check out the "for sale" listings and the eBay offerings, and matters seem to be heading toward my neglecting them for longer periods or altogether, although now... see what I've done... I'll probably check out eBay and ABE Books when I'm through with this essay. It's been over a week since I last checked either of them, but those buttons, when pushed, apparently still work; however, tapping them doesn't spark as ardent and passionate a response as before.

My focus and interests have been heading more toward research and writing, although that seems interminable too. Perhaps it's just the way I'm mentally contending with the fact that I have a diminished disposable income at present since I'm still paying off past collecting debts. What has happened is that I've begun to look at the *Collected Letters of Thomas Bird Mosher* project as a way of collecting, only this time it's collecting images or texts of letters from Mosher to whomever. It's gotten to be something of a game where I'm challenged to find a new letter or stash of letters that I didn't know existed before. I'm also fascinated by finding the important material, like Mosher's letters to Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, William Michael Rossetti, John Loder (friend of E. FitzGerald), Gustav Percival Wiksell (friend of Horace Traubel), and other authors, contacts or important folks who roughly co-terminally flashed upon the same scene as Mosher and then were no more. I'm also interested in getting more and more images of the bindings done by Otto Zahn helping me to appreciate the Mosher books I already have bound by him and which add to a research project on Zahn's life and accomplishments. With Mosher I'm looking for things that substantiate, that settle certain questions, and that help in presenting the man Mosher as well as Mosher the publisher.

I also know I have a number of other projects in front of me, like cataloguing and annotating entries in the Mosher collection, getting my roughly 200 page typescript of Mosher's library revised, polished,

and readied for publication. There's my research and layout of the census of Mosher's books printed on real vellum (including the list of all books printed on real vellum in America), and the transcription and expansion of the biography of Mosher's early years. There's the unpublished Mosher manuscripts which I have yet to organize beyond the present binders in which I presently have all archived. The 650 plus pages of my book collecting memoirs will need to be edited and probably printed as an "on demand" book of several copies—including creating a lengthy index which it needs to open up its contents and thereby the contents of the collection. Really, there is just so much more to which I should be attending than to merely expending my efforts to search for new acquisitions, more buy, buy, buy... I mean, what's the point?

Recently I had the fine opportunity to personally meet with a "retired" British scholar. The good doctor has been working on a biography of a university professor who influenced the Pre-Raphaelite writers, and who most certainly swayed Thomas Bird Mosher's publication choices. The research involves references to Mosher—including numerous citations made in reference to my Mosher bibliography. When called upon, I've offered my assistance to this scholar and to several others over the past few years. There have been papers published on trans-Atlantic influences and talks given which have incorporated a more enlightened view of Mosher's publishing program and his accomplishments. I even amassed a whole sub-collection of actual Mosher books and relevant copies of *The Bibelot* that I gave to a scholar to help in her research. A friend asked me what I meant in my letter to him about "giving" the Mosher books to the London researcher. What did I mean about "giving" the Mosher material? It meant just what I said. I gathered together each and every book --I'm talking about the physical objects themselves-- and each and every issue of *The Bibelot*, meaning each and every physical copy wherein her subject was mentioned, discussed, or on which Mosher had printed something, and literally turned them over to her, gratis. No questions. Didn't want, and haven't asked for, any remuneration. Look, in addition to the thousands of books and manuscripts on the shelves upstairs in the collection, I've had hundreds more stored away in waterproof containers, all duplicates or triplicates. I decided "well Philip, now's the time" and gathered the relevant ones together and gave every blasted one to the British researcher. I wanted to be sure that if she wrote about Mosher and his publishing, that she had a fuller understanding of what Mosher was presenting to his American public and so that she would germinate her remarks from a platform of knowledge, not innuendo and oft repeated, hackneyed characterizations. In my mind, I think it's important for any researcher to see the physical objects and their contents (often with Mosher's bibliographical introductions or notes) in order to more fully

understand the importance of Mosher's reprint and to see the forms his books took along the lines of The Bodley Head, the Chiswick Press, the Daniel Press, and so on.

Actually I've been doing this is the kind of thing for many years now, i.e. supplying free copies, usually with other Mosher collectors, and the support I've given and the things I've written and compiled are beginning to come home to roost. British opinions surrounding Mosher are beginning to change or at least are being clarified beyond the simple thoughtless branding of Mosher as a literary pirate. My sharing of information also recently took place with an article I wrote for *Yeats Annual* which is still with the editor who seems to like it and said that he only wants to trim out a little bit to make it an even more convincing argument. I'm looking forward to seeing the results which are taking a long time in coming.

Speaking of sharing, this reminds me that I will be working with the Mosher Press website which was moved from Millersville University to another host site now accessible at

www.ThomasBirdMosher.net

This was a big change and took some coordination with the Millersville folks to be sure that they redirect all users to the new site. Eventually there will be page changes and major additions, so institutions, scholars and collectors will all be able to continue to find relevant information on Mosher and his publishing program. Incidentally, most of the essays submitted to *Endpapers* have their electronic equivalent on this site, thanks to the kind permission of Gordon Pfeiffer on behalf of the Delaware Bibliophiles.

So with all these activities going on, will I collect as heavily as I did before? I really don't think so, and quite frankly the major waves of acquisitions in 2011 have curtailed my freer spending. As such, I could only wish for a windfall in income to allow me to acquire Mosher material unimpeded, but given that that seems a remote possibility, and since outstanding Mosher material seems to have disappeared beyond those long sought acquisitions of 2011, I've taken it upon myself to abruptly change my direction whilst still being able to "collect," only now it's collecting facts and images, and scholars to support in any way I can, while further assembling and working with my own material. It's time to share. The way I figure things, it's best not to leave all this material for some future scholar to figure out, or worse yet, to simply have languish because nobody cares, or to have it disappear and disintegrate in some forgotten hell-hole. To be sure, there's plenty of meat in the collection for future scholars, but it's kind of important that I do what I can to shed light on many of the collection's parts. As I mentioned before, with regard to the 650 pages of memoirs I've thus far written, it will be important to have that material edited and to have a complete and thorough index made so it will complement the collection. Ideally, one should be able to look at a

book in the collection and then turn to the index to see if it was mentioned or discussed at some length. The only way anyone will be able to find any of that is to have a proper index made. And I've given up on the idea of interesting some publisher. There have been too many "we don't care" and "so what" folks out there that I've decided the best tact is to have it self-published. My heavens, what I've seen of what can be accomplished in this regard is simply marvelous in today's world of self publication. I figure I'd have about 6-8 copies made and that's it. A friend of mine had a 300 page genealogical work printed, replete with hundreds of photos. He gave me a copy because it includes information on our Arts & Crafts bungalow and the first two families that lived here. Complete with a really slick cover, it's beautifully printed, and I could have fallen over when he answered my question as to how much each volume cost him. The outfit that did it is located in Rochester, NY and it cost him \$20 per copy to have it printed and bound (he supplied the pdf page layouts). He could pick any number of copies to be printed, but in his case all he needed was 30 copies. Imagine! So that's when it hit me that the memoirs could indeed be self-published to accompany the collection with a complete and thorough index. Bingo! So when the collection passes to its new institutional home, a user may well spot read and appreciate what he holds before him.

Anyway, there are so many projects which need attending, and since passing the ol' 60th birthday, I think it's high time to recreate myself and put the nose to the grindstone. I realize words like herein stated are cheap, but I think I've been doing a good bit to show that I'm putting them into practice and will accelerate such behavior. Besides, it's turning out to be enjoyably entertaining, and this new direction is a palliative substitute for my collecting juices. It's just like diverting a stream of water. Same water flows, only it's channeled in another direction: new flow is used to turn new wheels and new things result--a kind of mental manufacturing.

Another question, or actually a note of caution, was offered to me by a respected independent scholar who thought my giving over information on Mosher was perhaps not wise in that someone else might publish before me. Well I look at things a bit differently. To me, there's plenty to go around and as I've mentioned, I have a number of Mosher project irons in the fire. It's very important, or at least that's how I assess it, that scholars willingly use, develop and run with anything involving Mosher. Slowly but surely Mosher's reputation will be given its just due. Nothing flummoxed and infuriated me more than when Matthew Bruccoli included no entry on Mosher in his multivolume work, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. There are two volumes reserved just for publishers, and although Bruccoli admitted Elbert Hubbard and the Roycroft Press, there was not one entry for Mosher. I viewed this as not only a slight, but a serious

disservice to the history of American publishing. Imagine, the Roycrofters being considered as a serious publishing venture while Mosher commands not even one entry. Anyway, things are indeed happening and a number of scholars have begun to introduce Mosher into their papers, and a few have even focused on Mosher as a serious player. Norman Strouse said it was his responsibility to keep the word alive about Mosher, and before Strouse died he recognized that I was to take over with some diligence. I know I haven't betrayed his trust.

To be quite honest, I really don't care on which side scholars come down or up on Mosher. What I do care about is that he's in the mix, that he's given consideration and acknowledgement for the place he held in American publishing. I have heard a scholar indicate that a reassessment has to be made on what value we assign to a "reprint." I remember a collector of Victorian literature setting aside any consideration of Mosher in that he wasn't a "real" publisher like other publishers. True, Mosher's output was mostly that of reprints, but their value in introducing British authors to the American public, and in further assessing the value and position of these authors and their original publications, is indeed being reinvestigated and assessed in ways perhaps that I never thought about, especially because I am NOT a trained literary historian. So my job is to feed the fire, see to it that scholars have something to work with, make suggestions, and open up my extensive Mosher research collection to scholars. Eventually the entire collection, all my notes, my publications, the indexed memoirs, my project on Mosher's home library, the compilation of Mosher's correspondence, etc., will all be available when I'm no longer around—or at least such is my hope. God bless Brucoli's memory and his wonderful contributions, but I will always resist a Matt Brucoli taking away or deleting Mosher from the literary landscape of publishing historians by refusing to even recognize and acknowledge what he accomplished, and by completely ignoring Mosher's publishing efforts and influences. Period.

From a personal standpoint, even if the yield of my efforts aren't of any far-reaching consequence, they are nevertheless fun for this cataloguer/researcher. For example, my writing that little piece on the *Memories of President Lincoln* lead me, through a chain of circumstances, to the catalogue of the American Art Association May 4-5, 1925 sale of the libraries of Carlotta Russell Lowell, Dr. Dudley Tenney, and most importantly, to the collection of Louise Van Dyke of Grosse Point, Michigan (McKay 8831). Through the intersection of my work on Mosher's letters, my recording of the copies of the vellum *Memories*, and my own considerable stash of Mosher correspondence in the collection here at Acorn Cottage, I found out that Mosher actually sent Louise Van Dyke a copy of that vellum book which was in all likelihood the last copy he had for sale, even after trying to sell that very copy through W. Irving Way in California. Mosher actually

set up Ms. Van Dyke with a nearly complete collection of the Mosher books printed on Japan vellum and a few printed on what he referred to as "pure vellum." This was somewhat reminiscent of what he did years before, only on a much grander scale, with his very good lady customer in NYC, Emilie Grigsby whose likeness appears in the front facade of the New York Public Library. What fun this discovery, worthwhile in and of itself, and knowing that I forget three-quarters of what I research due to this sieve of a brain of mine, I nevertheless get it recorded in hopes that I or someone else can use it later on.

Lest someone reading this thinks that all I do is collect (in addition to selling) books, and write about Mosher or assist others in doing so, I should add that Mosher is only one of my passions. My wife and I have been avid gardeners of native plants and perennials for some time now and we continually seek to integrate our acre of woodland gardens with our Arts & Crafts bungalow, both outside and inside. In this regard, we reference a number of gardening guides, but our "bible" for garden creation and design is Claire E. Sawyers's *The Authentic Garden—Five Principles for Cultivating a Sense of Place* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2007). The fusion of our gardening lives with our home has basically paralleled the sentiments of Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) in his poem, "The Wish" where he says "Ah, yet, ere I descend to the grave, / May I a small house and large garden have; / And a few friends, and many books, both true, / Both wise, and both delightful too!" These sentiments have sometimes been erroneously ascribed to William Morris; however, one can appreciate the general favor of the remarks carried over into the 19th and 20th centuries' Arts & Crafts movement and the personal aims of the homeowner. We've even gone so far as to assemble a collection of book covers depicting acorns and oak leaves to display here at Acorn Cottage (see "A Few Ruminations over a Binding" in *Endpapers* for September 2010). Added to these A&C sentiments is our love for family, particularly our children and grandchildren, and to our care of four resident felines—one of whom is pestering me right now for a head scratch. Among all these collections, principles, and loves, I find myself ever guided by a framed calligraphic quote given me a long time ago by my father, Richard H. Bishop. It's from the English translated work, *The Thoughts of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus*:

...a man's true greatness lies in the consciousness of an honest purpose in life, founded on a just estimate of himself and everything else, on frequent self-examination, and a steady obedience to the rule which he knows to be right, without troubling himself... about what others may think or say, or whether they do or do not that which he thinks and says and does.

This has pretty much been my touchstone throughout my years as a collector and for life in general. I've looked upon collecting and

writing about the Mosher Press as my mission, my “honest purpose in life,” and so too my steadfast adherence to researching and making available Mosher related research. Hopefully this little essay, however disjointed, has manage to somewhat convey this to anyone reading it all the way though. I want to wish all the Delaware Bibliophiles and book collectors everywhere the very best for 2012, and may your book collecting efforts be particularly fruitful and rewarding.

Philip R. Bishop
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