

Thomas Bird Mosher, Pirate Prince of Publishers: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Source Guide to The Mosher Books Reflecting England's National Literature and Design by Philip R. Bishop. New Castle, Del. and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 1998. 536 pp. ISBN 1-884718-49-2. \$125 (U.S.). ISBN 0-7123-4602-3. £60 (U.K.).

There is an inescapable aura of romance associated with a literary pirate whose life has long been constructed around a rich range of sea imagery. The son of a sea captain, Thomas B. Mosher discovered his passion for books during his seafaring youth spent on a clipper ship, "when all the world was young, when the days were of tropic splendour, and the long evenings were passed with my books in a lonely cabin, dimly lighted by a primitive oil-lamp, while the ship was ploughing through the boundless ocean on its weary course around Cape Horn."

After several years of work as a publisher of law catalogues and legal books at a stationery shop, Mosher resolved in 1891 to pursue his passion for exquisite literature and fine printing by becoming a publisher of "Books in Belles Lettres Issued in Choice and Limited Editions." Steeped in the Aesthetic, Decadent, and Celtic fashions of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, Mosher introduced Americans to the "literature of rapture": to Morris and Dante Rossetti, Swinburne and Walter Pater, Dowson and Arthur Symons.

As a printer, his choice of the anchor and dolphin for his publisher's device signals the noble tradition he aimed to join. William Pickering had adapted the anchor and dolphin from the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius. As Pickering had inscribed his design with "Aldi Discipulus Anglus," Mosher's use of the same device identified his vocation as the American disciple of Aldus and Pickering. Christopher Morley sought to link the publisher's device with the salty-dog heritage: "What was there in this hearty sea-bred uncolleged down-easter that made him open so many magic portholes? He had the pure genius of book-fancy; an uneducated man, as uneducated as Chaucer and Lamb and Conrad; and I like to think that when he took Aldus' device for himself there was some memory of the time when an anchor meant more to him than an emblem printed on a title-page."

From his harbourside shop in Portland, Maine, seated within a "sea of books" packed ten shelves high, Mosher attracted the admiration of such friends as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, and Bruce Rogers. Both Frost and Pound hoped Mosher would publish their first books. Frost described Mosher's letterpress as "the most beautiful in the States." Pound developed his taste for the Pre-Raphaelites as an eager reader of Mosher's monthly anthology, *The Bibelot: A Reprint of Poetry and Prose for Book Lovers*, and submitted to Mosher the manuscripts for his first two books. Bruce Rogers began his career with designs commissioned by Mosher in 1895. He would later describe Mosher as "the Aldus of the XIXth century," and, when speaking of Mosher at the Grolier Club, confessed, "I would rather have done his work than mine."