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Serendipity in Adelphi University Libraries’ Special Collections: The “Emilie” Bookplate

In 2007 the Grolier Club in New York held an exhibition titled *Illustrating the Good Life: The Pissarros’ Eragny Press, 1894–1914*. Professor Alice Beckwith of Providence College curated this first all-inclusive presentation of the Eragny Press in the United States.¹ A subsequent search for Eragny Press books within the Adelphi University Libraries’ Donald V. L. Kelly Small Press Collection led to the discovery of a unique bookplate connecting Eragny Press to the story of a singular woman.

Lucien Pissarro (1863–1944), son of the French impressionist painter Camille Pissarro, founded Eragny Press. Lucien and his wife, Esther, lived in England but named the press for the Normandy town that was home to the Pissarro family, Eragny-sur-Epte. There was a listing in Adelphi University’s catalog for *La Légende de Saint Julien l’Hospitalier* by Gustave Flaubert, published in 1900 by Hacon & Ricketts and printed at the Eragny Press in London. According to the book’s colophon, “The frontispiece was designed and engraved on wood by Lucien Pissarro. The borders and decorated letters were designed by Lucien Pissarro and

“Emilie” bookplate by René Lalique. Image courtesy of University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries.

engraved on wood by Esther Pissarro, 1900.” The edition was limited to 226 copies, of which 200 were for sale. The Adelphi copy had a bookplate tipped inside the front cover.

The horizontal bookplate measured 2.5 inches high and 5 inches wide and was printed in gray on buff-colored Japan paper with an art nouveau floral design, trailing leaves outside the lower borders of the lithograph. It was signed “R LALIQUE” at the lower right. At the lower left the name “EMILIE” appeared within the image. “R LALIQUE” was the French jeweler and glass artist René Lalique (1860–1945), renowned for his innovations in the decorative arts. “EMILIE” turned out to be an American woman of extraordinary means and circumstances.

Emilie Busbey Grigsby (1876–1964) was born in Kentucky, and her life has been documented in newspaper accounts and historical studies of her famous benefactor, Charles Tyson Yerkes (1837–1905), the Chicago and London public transportation tycoon.² In 1898 Emilie was deeded a Park Avenue mansion by Yerkes, which soon was filled with art and literary collections. Emilie was the inspiration for Theodore Dreiser’s character of Berenice Fleming in his *Trilogy of Desire*.³ After her death, she was described as a charming hostess who entertained sculptor Auguste Rodin and poet William Butler Yeats.⁴

Some years after Yerkes passed away, Emilie decided to move to London, and the Anderson Auction Company of New York sold her collections in January 1912.⁵ A notation appeared in the sales catalog above the listings for books and prints: “Miss Grigsby’s bookplate designed by Lalique of Paris will be found in every volume in her Library.”⁶ The availability of this documentation, both online and in print, facilitated the search for other titles once owned by Emilie. Listed in the books portion of the catalog were 1,352 lots. Closer examination of Adelphi’s Eragny Press title revealed the faint pencil marks of the sale date “Jan 30 1912” in the gutter of page 2.

A second “Emilie” title from England was *Vaughan’s Sacred Poems, Being a Selection* by the seventeenth-century author Henry Vaughan. Hacon & Ricketts published this edition of 210 copies in 1897. Lucien Pissarro’s friend Charles Ricketts designed the decorative borders, initials, and frontispiece. Both Pissarro and Ricketts continued the Arts and Crafts movement approach to fine book design begun by William Morris.

Other titles at Adelphi exemplify Emilie’s interest in American publishing, specifically works produced in Portland, Maine, by Thomas Mosher (1852–1923).⁷ *The History of Over Sea* by William Morris, first published in 1894 by Kelmscott Press, was brought out by Mosher in 1899. John Brown’s *Marjorie Fleming* and Richard Jeffries’s *Hours of Spring and*

Wild Flowers were also published in 1899, printed at George D. Loring's press in Portland and signed by Mosher. *Hours of Spring and Wild Flowers* has the enhancement of a beautifully patterned slipcase as part of Mosher's Brocade series. In a *New York Times* review of holiday books on December 13, 1902, there was mention of "little editions de luxe at 75 cents per volume by Mr. Mosher . . . 425 copies of each, on Japan vellum, in flexible covers and in uniform size. They are called the 'Brocade Series.'"⁸ Mosher's advertisements in the 1897 *Atlantic Monthly* claimed, "So far as known this was and is the first attempt to issue books printed on Japan Vellum at a price so moderate as to almost cause incredulity."⁹

Further research revealed the rarity of the "Emilie" bookplate in Lalique's oeuvre. While Lalique designed a letterhead, one or two book covers, and frontispiece plates, to date there is no available documentation about his elegant bookplate design.¹⁰ Donald V. L. Kelly, the namesake of the Small Press Collection, was a librarian and professor at Adelphi for fifty-three years and was responsible for collection development. He passed away a few years before these bookplates were discovered but would have been thrilled to count them among his precious finds.

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Notes

1. Alice Beckwith, *Illustrating the Good Life: The Pissarros' Eragny Press, 1894–1914: A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Books, Prints & Drawings Related to the Work of the Press* (New York: Grolier Club, 2007).

2. John Franch, *Robber Baron: The Life of Charles Tyson Yerkes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Tim Sherwood, *Charles Tyson Yerkes: The Traction King of London* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: History Press, 2009); "Emilie Loses Last Trick," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 3, 1906; "Yerkes' Dual Life That of a Sybarite," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 31, 1905.

3. Philip L. Gerber, "The Alabaster Protégé: Dreiser and Berenice Fleming," *American Literature* 43, no. 2 (May 1971): 217–30, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2924238>.

4. "Emilie Busbey Grigsby Dead; American Hostess in England," *New York Times* (1923–current file), February 14, 1964, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.adelphi.edu:2048/>.

5. Interestingly, a Camille Pissarro landscape painting, *Environs d'Eragny*, was auctioned at Christie's in New York in 2009; its provenance included Charles Yerkes's purchase from Durand-Ruel and Emilie Grigsby's sale. Sale 2164, Impressionist and Modern Evening, May 6, 2009, Christie's New York, lot 237, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.christies.com>.

6. *Illustrated Catalogue of the Art and Literary Collections of Miss Emilie Grigsby of New York City: Part II: Books and Carbon Prints* (New York: Anderson Auction Company, 1912), 9. Reprint from the University of Michigan Libraries collection at <http://openlibrary.org/search?q=emilie+grigsby>. Lots 832 and 1232 correspond to Mosher and Vale Press titles at Adelphi. Part 1, "Objects of Art," lists a Lalique jeweled box and eight lots of his jewelry owned by Emilie.

7. Philip R. Bishop, "Welcome Home Miss Emilie," *Delaware Bibliophiles Endpapers*, September 2008, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://marauder.millersville.edu/~mosher/other/welcome.htm>; Philip R. Bishop, *Thomas Bird Mosher: Pirate Prince of Publishers* (New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 1998).

8. "Books for Gifts: Some Expensive New Volumes and Some of Moderate Price," *New York Times* (1857–1922), December 13, 1902, accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.adelphi.edu:2048/>.

9. "Autumn List of Books Issues in Choice and Limited Editions by Thomas B. Mosher at XLV Exchange St., Portland, Maine, Season of MDCCCXCVII," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1897, n.p.

10. Nicholas Dawes of New York City is the leading Lalique expert in the United States and kindly provided information about Lalique designs on paper during a telephone discussion on August 3, 2010. On August 3, 2010, Véronique Kientzy of the Musée d'Orsay's Documentation objets d'art and on August 20, 2010, Carine Picaud of the Bibliothèque nationale de France's Département de la réserve des livres rares confirmed by e-mail the lack of documentation in the sources available to them in Paris. Picaud also indicated that this bookplate appears to be the only one designed by Lalique.

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