

Aldus Society Notes

Spring 2008

Volume 8, No. 3

Complete the Set

Bill Evans

I know that there are some very fine collectors among you who don't even pause when you hear the Pavlovian challenge "Complete the Set," or "Collect all Five," or even "Louis L'Amour wrote 113 books ..." (an implied challenge!) but I find myself wanting to answer the bell. You could easily ask why should anyone collect all five of anything, if four of them are forgettable at best. Although Stuart Rose once wisely cautioned us at an Aldus Society meeting to never, ever try to explain to anyone why we collect, I want to plunge ahead and offer two of my reasons for collecting and especially for set collecting: The Thrill of the Hunt and Accidental Knowledge.



As a kid I dreamed of finding the elusive 1909-S VDB as I pushed pennies into a blue Whitman folder. Could one end up in milk money change in Washington, DC? I anxiously awaited the next stamps coming from the H.E. Harris Company on approval. Could I eventually find all of those



colorful Belgian Congo animal stamps? Every pocket full of change and every unsorted bag of cancelled stamps offered the joy of discovery to a boy without much money. Along the way, I learned a lot about history, travel and other cultures. Could any kid but a stamp collector ever find San Marino on a map? I think not, and I'm sure I wouldn't have

learned as much about the world we live in if I only wanted to own one great penny or one really nice stamp. Instead, those empty spaces in my albums teased my imagination. What was their story? *(Continued on page 2)*

Aldus Calendar

May

- 3 (First Saturday)** — Although the specific topic is yet to be announced, Jenny Robb of OSU's Cartoon Research Library will provide Aldus members with a hands-on experience with materials drawn from the holdings of that unique research resource.
- 6 (Related Program)** — Also, under the auspices of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of OSU, Frederic Tuten, critically acclaimed novelist, will give a reading on Tuesday, May 6th at the OSU Faculty Club. The event will begin at 6:30 PM. Refreshments will be served.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_tuten
- 8 (Regular Meeting)** — Our final regular program of the season is usually a special one, and this year will be no different. Steven Galbraith, formerly with the OSU Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and now Curator of Books at the Folger Shakespeare Library, will be returning to Columbus to share his recent bibliophilic adventures.

June

- 21 (Field Trip)** — Please join us for an Aldus first day of summer field trip to the Walter Havighurst Special Collections in the King Library at Miami University in Oxford. Aldus members will meet at the King Library at 11 a.m. for a tour by Aldus friend Betsy Butler, assistant curator of the rare books collection.

More information will follow through the Aldus listserv and web site, including driving and parking directions. Additional sites of interest on and around the Miami campus include the Miami University Art Museum and the William Holmes McGuffey Museum

<http://www.fna.muohio.edu/amu/>

<http://www.units.muohio.edu/mcguffeymuseum/>

July

- 22 (Field Trip)** — July 22nd is the tentative date when members of the Aldus Society will be able to combine a "hard-hat" tour of the \$109 million renovation of OSU's Thompson Library with a box lunch picnic at nearby Mirror Lake. More details will be announced as they are firmed up.



Aldus Society Meetings

Regular meetings of the Aldus Society are held at 7:30 PM on the second Thursday of the month at

**The Thurber Center
91 Jefferson Avenue
Columbus, Ohio**

☞ Socializing Begins One-Half Hour Before ☞



Visit the Aldus Society web site for up-to-date information about our programs and activities, in-depth articles about many of our speakers, and links to other book related organizations.

www.AldusSociety.com

The Aldus Society

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Complete the Set (Continued)

This compulsion, of course, followed me into my adult reading life. When my wife Marcia requested a book to read during recovery from surgery a few years back, as a joke, I grabbed a Louis L'Amour novel from the hospital gift shop and brought it to her along with another more appropriate paperback. To my utter surprise, she liked it. Well, I read it next, loved it, discovered he'd written dozens and decided to try to read them all over the course of a year. You may call it obsessive compulsive disorder if you want, but I call it fun! The challenge of first finding them, and then finding time to read them, made for a very interesting year. As a bonus, the appreciation of the Southwest I gained from reading an author who actually walked every trail he wrote about was far greater than I could ever have garnered in school.

A number of years ago I grew fascinated with poetry in general and Beat poetry in particular when I noticed after re-reading Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* that it was number 4 of the City Lights Pocket Poets series. Number 4? What was number 1? How many were there? I couldn't find a list on the internet, not even on the City Lights website. Nothing! It amazes me that publishers' websites in general are not helpful at all when it comes to listing past volumes in a series. If it's not currently available they won't take up web space with it. Seems to me that it would be good PR and might actually increase sales of available books to set-afflicted people like me, but that's another rant. Anyway, I found several in the series at Acorn Bookshop and then began scouring the shelves of shops all over Columbus. By looking at the other listings in the back of some of them, I pieced together a want list and begin filling in the blanks. Along the way I read some pretty good poetry, some pretty interesting poetry and some pretty bad poetry. But it was all poetry that I would never have encountered if I hadn't been trying to complete the set.

You can imagine what a challenge it is to find good quality first printings of fifty-seven numbered softcover books dating back to 1955. This series of mostly counterculture poetry was meant to be an inexpensive way to bring poetry to the people – to be read and re-read. Early copies are scarce in nice condition. First printings of early copies can be extremely scarce in any condition.

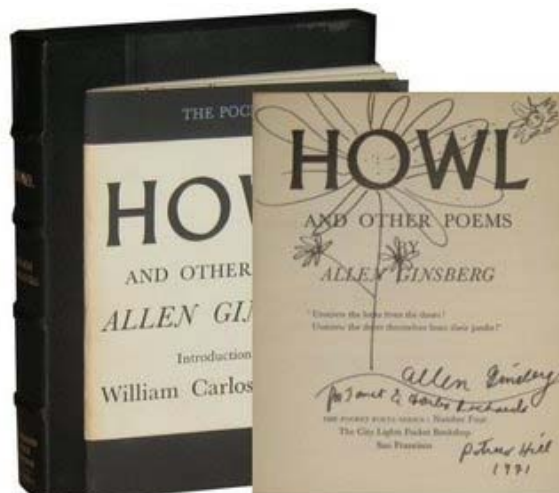
This week brought exciting news from Jon Beacham a book dealer in Beacon, New York who sold me a hard-to-find Pocket Poets book a while back. He had just come across a very nice copy of Alain Jouffroy's *Déclaration D'Indépendance* and remembered that I had been looking for it for years. It's an out-of-series (un-numbered) Pocket Poets book from 1961 written entirely in French. No records exist to say how many copies were actually printed, but I have only seen one other copy (on display at the Grolier Club). I couldn't thank him or pay him fast enough! I could go on and on, but the critical point to me is that this book effectively completes my set. I do still lack the 1st of Ginsberg's *Howl*. I own the 2nd printing – the one that was actually confiscated by customs officials leading to the famous obscenity trial – and the only thing keeping me from having the 1st is a few thousand dollars! That first printing is not especially rare, just expensive. When I finally succumb I'm sure it will feel more like a purchase than a find. I've already found the rare ones.

As a fitting close to the week, I received an email from City Lights saying that number 58 in the series is just now available. A couple of mouse clicks and it's headed to me!

Now if only Louis L'Amour were still alive ...

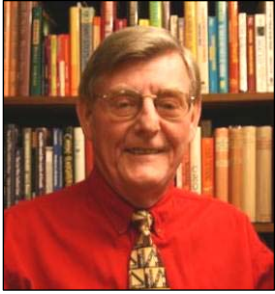
Read, Eat, Sleep

Bill



A Paris Bookstore-y (Part 5)

George Cowmeadow Bauman



In September 2006, Linda and I vacationed in Paris for the first time. Among many anticipated Parisian destinations was the famous Shakespeare & Company bookstore.

A few days earlier we visited the site of Sylvia Beach's first edition of the shop, lasting 1919-1941. We

were now experiencing the second edition, owned by socialist/communist/capitalist nonagenarian George Whitman since 1951.

Our first visit to Shakespeare and Company can be read about in previous parts of this essay – available at www.AldusSociety.com – which give helpful background. References to Jeremy Mercer are regarding his book, *Time Was Soft There: A Paris Sojourn at Shakespeare and Company* (2005).

On a sunny Sunday afternoon along the Seine in the Left Bank, I had just been invited upstairs by an attractive young blonde with a British accent to meet the legendary American-in-Paris bookseller.



Meeting George Whitman

She led me through the many international browsers of all ages to the back of the claustrophobic, book-filled shop and up the same narrow wooden steps Linda and I had ascended during our first visit on Tuesday past.

On the second floor we came to a bookcase-lined room which had one padded window-seat – doubling as a guest's bed each night – which overlooked Notre Dame, 300-400 feet away, across a branch of the tree-lined Seine.

We passed through this inviting room out into a stairway rising up through the middle of the building. Off the third floor landing we stepped into Whitman's apartment, consisting of 4-5 small, cluttered, book-loaded rooms, this first one having a round, beat-up wooden table in the center, a day-bed against the left wall, both piled high with – what else? – books.

That's where I finally met the in/famous George Whitman. He was wearing pajamas that looked as old as he was, and the many stains indicated that it hadn't been washed since, oh, maybe the '68 student riots. He looked all of his 90+ years, with fly-away hair and enough lines on his face admitting to every one of the accumulated pages in his book of life.

"What's your name?" he barked. "Do you have a card?" (He had already been given my Acorn business card by the blonde.) "Are you a vegetarian?"

Before I could reply, he growled, "I'm George Whitman, and from your card I see that you're in the business, too." Then the Bookseller of Paris reached out his long-nailed, bony hand to shake mine with a firm clasp, belying his age.

Youthful energy blasted out of his startlingly electric-blue eyes, and we jumped into a conversation about why I was in Paris, and how meeting him was such a highpoint for me. It *was* sincere, and I knew from reading Mercer's book that Whitman loved adulation.

George – there was never any question about calling this American-in-Europe entrepreneur anything but "George" – thanked me for visiting him, and said that he'd just awakened when his daughter had told him about my desire to meet him.

His daughter? His daughter?! The pretty young blonde with the inherited blue eyes and raised-in-England accent had been Sylvia Beach Whitman!

She'd given me no indication it was her *father* I'd asked to meet, or that it was her father that she led me to in bookstore heaven.

Before I could respond about how personable and professional she had been (I wasn't going to admit to her attractiveness), he turned and shuffled along in ratty slippers, leading me toward the hall connecting this front room to the back ones.

At the first door to the left, he threw a scrawny pajama-ed arm out toward the room and informed me, "You can have that bed there!" And continuing as though his offer were a done deal, he said, "You can stay with us for a while and work in the store."

I hadn't known the legend for five minutes and I'd been offered a bed *and* a job! Just as his reputation had it: spontaneously friendly and welcoming to all ... at least initially. I was to soon see how quickly his moods could turn, though fortunately not with me. Mercer had captured him well in much of his book.

My offered room was large by Parisian standards. However, at least half the space was filled with dozens of haphazardly stacked/piled boxes and manila folders of what turned out to be archival material. The walls were covered with overlapping Shakespeare & Company memorabilia, including many signed headshots of noted writers who had visited Shakespeare & Company, as well as various posters the store had printed up over the years to promote poetry readings, author appearances, the bookshop, and socialism. A large, unmade bed was in the right corner, adjacent to the door. Clutter was omnipresent, as was the sense of Shakespeare and Company history.



If I'd been on my own, I would have been tempted to accept George's hospitality, despite the lack of amenities – there's no shower outside of George's room, and the only toilet in the place according to the Mercer book was...um, not up to Martha Stewart's pre-prison standards.

But as I informed my would-be host, "I'm with my wife."

"It's a *double* bed!" he laughed, "the only one in the place!", hoping to persuade me to join his ever-fluctuating staff. "It's unusual we have *any* vacancies, so that's your bed!"

We were still in the book-lined hallway outside "my" room, and I was looking longingly at all the beat-up boxes and files. I asked George hopefully, "Are you writing a history of Shakespeare and Company?" As a bibliographer of the literature of American bookselling – he *was* American after all, I was eager to add a Whitman entry to my research project.

"No," he said dismissively with a wave of his hand, "but in here I've got some other things I've written to show you."

Hmmm, maybe something else for the bibliography.

As he searched through hundreds of books on the crammed hall bookshelves, I asked him about how he saw his significance to the book world.

"Oh, I haven't done much," he declared, distractedly ... and mistakenly.

"It's all out of print," he said, referring to his written works, ignoring the intent of my question, "but I might have something in here ..." and he started finger-walking the titles on

the packed shelves. The first thing he pulled out was a thick black binder, which he thrust into my hands.

"Take that and read those biographies of the people who have stayed here. One hundred thousand young would-be writers have stayed here over the years, and each one has to write at least a one-page biography of their lives if they want a bed in the store."

As I wrote in previous installments of this store-y, Shakespeare & Company has been a haven for anyone wanting a place to crash, particularly if they have aspirations to write.

Each hopeful young writer had the privilege of being associated with an important institution in the literary history of Paris. And George wanted them to pursue their dream; he strongly encouraged them to apply themselves to their writing, even as he understood the seductive lures of Paris. Whitman was a writer's bookseller, as Sylvia Beach was before him.

George kept rifling through the shelved hallway's files and books, pulling out a couple for me. "That's a brochure we did a while back," he said, handing me the full-color, laminated 12-page accordion-fold item, which I'd already bought downstairs for five Euros.

He then handed me *A Remembrance of Flings Past*, saying, "You can have this. It has a couple of essays about the bookstore by its writer from when he stayed here." I asked him to inscribe it to me.

"It already has the author's inscription!" he exclaimed impatiently.

"But I'd like *you* to sign it to *me*." Grumbling, he did so, with my pen.

Still rummaging through the books, he said that he couldn't find something particular he wanted to give me: a copy of *The Tumbleweed Hotel*, which is one of the informal names he's called the store, calling to mind the number of literature-loving transients, who, like tumbleweed, blow in and out.

One regular visitor to S & Co. is Whitman's longtime close friend, Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The poet had become fast friends with Whitman back in '51, when S & Co. first opened. A few years later he had opened his own to-become-famous-itself bookstore in San Francisco: City Lights.

When I noted a signed photo of Ferlinghetti in the hall, he thrust his face at mine and demanded, "Do you know Larry?"

I assured him that I hadn't had the pleasure, though I'd sold a lot of his books in the many bookstores I've run.

Quickly George invited me to come back on Tuesday. "Larry's going to be in town for about 48 hours, and we'll probably go to my favorite restaurant, Brasserie Balzar,

where I like to take my oldest friend,” he informed me. “You should come and meet him!”

Years ago I named one of my cats Ferlinghetti because I admired the poet’s work. I’d visited City Lights on both occasions I’d been in the city by the bay. Ferlinghetti was another hero, both for his bookstore and his writing. What a thrill it would be if I could meet Ferlinghetti and have a photo taken of us three booksellers.

I mentally filed that date away to tell Linda about, as I was trying to do with everything. I had my little notepad out and – with Whitman’s OK – was scribbling as fast as I could, whenever I could, without being rude.

A young woman named Catherine popped into the hallway, and George turned around and abruptly barked, “Where’s that letter that came today for me?”

Caught off guard, Catherine said that she wasn’t sure.

“You didn’t steal it, did you?!” George demanded, *not* in a joking tone. Whitman has a mercurial temperament, and can get worked up instantly about something, and just as quickly get over it. He’s a bit like a McDonald’s French fry: a bit crusty and salty on the outside with a soft interior.

While George pointed me into “my” room, Catherine went to search for the requested letter.

I didn’t know what to focus on first. Part of me wanted instantly to offer to help organize the very historic Shakespeare and Company ephemera in all the files: 55 years of the history of the bookshop, and Hall of Fame writers who have visited. It was a documentation of much of the half-century of Parisian literary events. A biographer’s wet dream. And I fantasized about being that biographer.

A few minutes later Catherine was back, producing the requested letter with a roll of her eyes at me. I liked her right away, and smiled conspiratorially back.

George grabbed the letter, waved it in the air as though drying the ink, then thrust it at me, saying that it had come from a woman in North Carolina, who had visited him recently, and had written to say thanks. He wanted to remind me of his fame.

He climbed onto the unmade double bed, laid back, and urged me to have a look around.

“Do you mind if I take a couple of pictures?” I boldly asked.

“I don’t care,” he shrugged.

As George was reading the letter, I asked Catherine how long she’d been at the store, assuming from her relationship with George that it had been a while.

In her Manchester accent, she told me that she and her boyfriend David had arrived just five days earlier, and would be leaving the following day. “But I’ve become kind of like the house-mother to George and everyone.”

I photographed her, then turned to try and catch the room on this one chance I had. Click: George reading the letter in bed. Click: the wall of posters and pictures. Click: the archival clutter.

Only when I reviewed the photos that evening on my laptop – I prepared a digital slide show of each day’s adventures for Linda every evening, sitting at the small table in the window of our apartment overlooking the night-lit south-facing of Notre Dame – did I discover with great regret that the photos weren’t as sharp as they should have been; I apparently had been a bit too nervous/excited to hold the camera still enough, rather unusual for the photographer I try to be.



As George began to get up, I turned to see if he needed help. I was close enough to spy a book tucked between his unwashed pillow and the postered wall. Do I believe my eyes?! It was the banned Jeremy Mercer book, *Time Was Soft There*, the very book I’d asked for downstairs on that first day and was told they weren’t allowed to carry it because George didn’t like it.

Yet here it was, within reach each night, with pride of place.

I had to ask him, albeit casually, “George, I see that you have a copy of the Mercer book.” Playing innocent of the knowledge already gained from one of his “staff”, I inquired, “What do you think of it?”

He exploded, “It’s full of god-damned lies!”

I didn’t respond, wanting to see how this played out.

“There’s a fabrication on every page!” he raged. “He said I proposed to a 13-year-old, and that’s not true!”



In the next/last segment of this essay, Linda and I have an unforgettable tea and dinner with George, the international literary legend.



Book Hunting Notes

Bill Rich

Victorian Poetry I

Tennyson, Browning, Fitzgerald

I liked some of Tennyson's poems long before becoming a book collector. Back in high school in Alexandria, Virginia, my English teacher was a wonderful Southern lady, Miss Quill. Of the old school was she, with a vengeance. We were to memorize poetry, and to recite back to her for a significant part of our graded work. There was a list of 'approved' poets, of whom Tennyson was one. We were absolutely required to have down pat, with the proper metrical emphasis, the famous lines from *Ulysses*, in which the now-aged hero, meditating on the good old days, longs for yet more adventure:

*I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.*

Despite this type of indoctrination, I retained a liking for old Alfred, including this poem in particular. An apotheosis of the Western ideal, it appealed to me as a teenager, and it still resonates. So Tennyson has always been around our home, and we rather like even the admittedly corny bits. When our daughter was 13, we were surprised to learn that her teacher also required her to get a few lines of classic poetry down by heart. In an effort to provide a consciousness-raising experience for a budding feminist (whose favorite toy for a couple years around the age of seven had been a suit of plastic armor), her parents suggested the *Charge of the Light Brigade*. This was a mistake. For weeks around the house, we heard nothing but:

*Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.*

Our liking for Tennyson survived even this. My acquisition catalog lists a copy of his *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, Macmillan, London, 1886, as bought from a country bookstore in central New York State in the spring of 1975, for \$10. I believe this was the first literary work I bought, for the sake of *it being a first edition*. This was the first step down a slippery slope that has continued for almost forty years. The book was in fine condition, and in the still-bright green cloth with which his publishers bound all the later Tennysons.

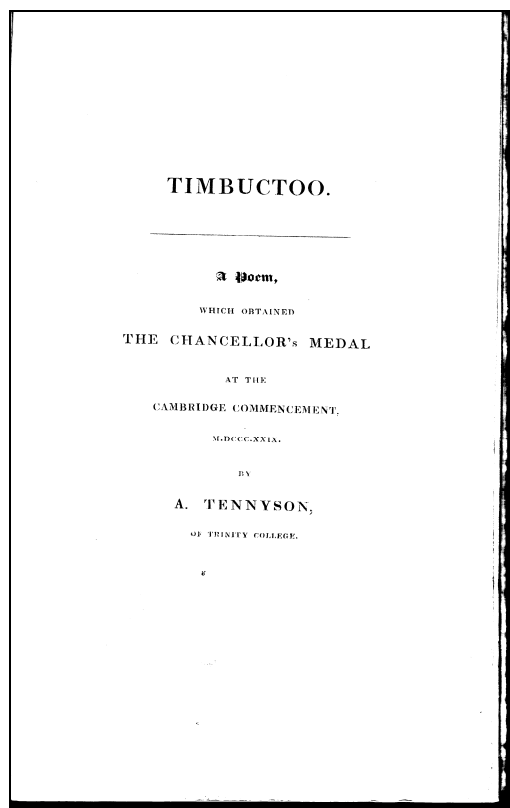
I was fascinated by finding that at least one book of a favorite poet could be obtained in first edition for the price of a



new novel, almost a century after publication. A large element of antiquarianism entered here, I suppose – the same instinct that attracts folks to old coins, old furniture, old silver, etc., etc. By the 1880's, Tennyson was at the height of his reputation and popularity, and had already been Poet Laureate of England for a generation. He was prolific, and his books were published in huge editions – 10,000, 20,000 copies, very large printings for the time. I searched the book stores for other Tennyson firsts, and, finding that they were readily available for the order of ten bucks, soon accumulated a little row of his firsts. Now, the first time one begins buying books for any purpose other than that of reading them, it is time to have a serious talk with yourself, and to decide what you are about. But the financial outlay was relatively harmless, and the whole thing seemed a rather trivial indulgence in something that was already a considerable source of fun. However, I did begin buying firsts of other Victorian authors which were not so readily available and were not so cheaply priced. I began to keep a hand-written catalog of each acquisition, which I still maintain. At this point, my spouse was the one who had the serious talk with me. Bea is a social worker and a mental health counselor, and she read to me some of the passages on dependence and addictive behavior from the "DSM", the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. This intervention didn't manage to stop the mad pursuit. Bea threw in the towel, and became what the DSM calls co-dependent, a condition that has persisted to this time, God bless her. I see in the same Vol. 1 of my acquisition catalog that by December of 1975 I had obtained the first of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Edward Moxon, London, 1850. This high spot is in full morocco, gilt extra, the works – and has the bookplate of R.B. Adam, one of the greatest of American book collectors. And the book was Bea's Christmas gift to me. From this time on, she has been truly "co-dependent" in my gentle madness.

Over the years, I continued to collect Tennyson. He is one of the few authors for which I have tried to achieve anything approaching "completeness" in my collection. Even for him, I have only managed to obtain the principal books and a few ephemeral items. This was not so easy. Alfred had a long publishing career – 65 years, from 1827 until 1892, when he died while reviewing the proofs of his last book, *The Death of Aenone and Other Poems*, Macmillan, London, 1892. The earlier books are much more scarce, and particularly hard to obtain in the original boards which were the customary publishers binding in the early decades of the 19th century. Some of my early Tennysons are in boards, some in contemporary half leather, and some, like *In Memoriam*, in the full glory of glistening morocco by Tout, Reviere, Zahnsdorf, and other turn of the (20th) century deluxe trade binders. Nevertheless, completing a collection of this most prolific of Victorian poets can be done of a fraction of the outlay for a popular Victorian novelist – say, Charles Dickens. I pointed this out to Bea, but she made the graceless observation that, by this time, I was collecting Dickens, too.

In 2002, I finally managed to find a copy of the most uncommon of Tennyson's early books. This is *Timbuctoo*, Cambridge, 1829, a poem written when he was a university student, and which won the Chancellor's Prize Medal in the Cambridge commencement of that year. The title page is shown below; my copy has a clipping of a contemporary review from the *Athenaeum* tipped in. The reviewer is surprisingly ecstatic, proclaiming the poem "indicates first-rate poetical genius, and would do honor to any man who ever wrote." This for a twenty-year-old college student, in one of the most critical of English literary reviews! Unfortunately, *Timbuctoo* does not seem to have stood the test of time; Tennyson did not republish it with his collected poetry, and it is rarely read or noticed today.



Finally, in 2004, I was able to complete the Tennyson books with a *Poems, by Two Brothers*, London, 1827. This was a collection of poems by Alfred and his older brother Frederick, both of whom were young undergraduates. Daddy Tennyson paid for the publication, and, again, none of Alfred's contributions were those for which he later achieved such fame. After many years of searching most-likely venues in the English-speaking world, I found a copy of this book in my home town. It came from Emerson-Hoffman Books here in Columbus.

Collecting the books of Robert Browning has some similarities to collecting Tennyson. The two were almost exact contemporaries, and both had long, productive publishing histories. Browning was not the people's poet that Tennyson became, and always had a reputation as the more cerebral writer, with some celebrated obscurities in his verse. Nevertheless, he was widely published (if less read!), and his later

books, published by Smith, Elder, and Co., are almost as common as the later Tennysons. These appeared in a brownish red cloth, complementing the green of the Macmillan Tennysons – and they are equally inexpensive. I have never attempted completeness with Browning, but have tried to pick up most of the major works, in either first English or first American publication – or both. I have the American first of *Dramatis Personae*, Ticknor and Fields, Boston, 1864, in the brown ribbed cloth that was the house binding of this famous publisher. This I found, with many several other U.S. Brownings, while browsing in Moe's bookstore in Berkeley, California, outside the University of California. *Dramatis Personae* includes the poem that introduced me to Robert Browning – *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. This was a sort of back-door introduction, indeed. As a thirteen-year-old, I was immersed in the science fiction of Isaac Asimov, and read his first book, *Pebble in the Sky*, a book that fascinated me then, and one I remember now. One of the protagonists is an elderly retired gent, walking along the street in his home town of Chicago, when an accident with a nearby nuclear research facility propels him into the far future. Earth by then is a backwater outpost of a great galactic empire, humanity having spread through the universe, and no one suspecting that Earth is the origin of all its inhabitants. Great stuff when you are thirteen, and that year (1950), I must have been reading (and owned) the first edition – a four figure book now, a science fiction cornerstone, and I have no idea what happened to my boyhood copy. But I digress. In the novel, the nice old gent, before he is transported into the future, is enjoying his declining years, content with himself, walking down the street, and quoting these opening lines from *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

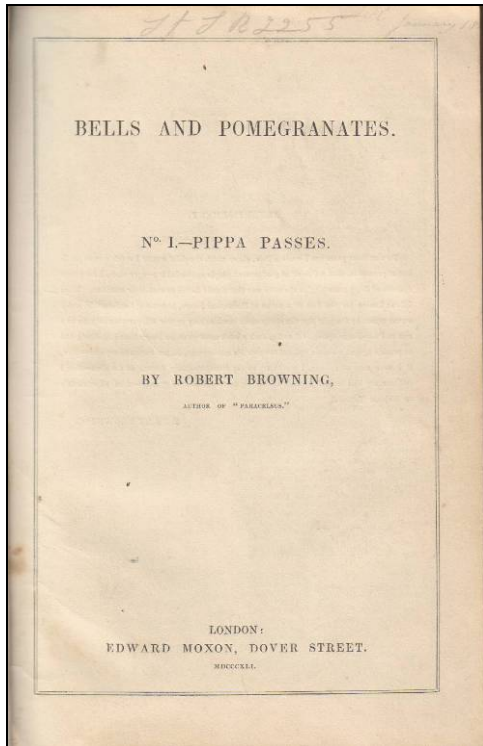
*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life,
for which the first was made*

The irony of this, with the protagonist propelled into an unimaginable future immediately after quoting these optimistic lines, was not lost on me at thirteen. But it attracted me to Browning's poetry then, and now, at seventy, I still like the poem, and am, of course, ever more aware of the cautionary implications.

So, I have a fair run of Brownings, with pride of place going to the first English and the first American of *Men and Women*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1855, and Ticknor & Fields, Boston, 1856; and to the first English and the first American of *The Ring and the Book*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1868-9, 4 vols., and Fields, Osgood & Co., Boston, 1869, 2 vols. Half a dozen years ago, I was finally able to find a copy of the first of Browning's books that contains some of his still-notable poems. This is *Bells & Pomegranates*, Edward Moxon, London, 1841-6. This was a series of plays and shorter poems, which were published in eight separate parts over a period of years. My copy came from Bertram Rota in London, and has the eight parts bound together in contemporary half leather and marbled boards. The first

owner put his initials and the date of acquisition on each part. About 500 copies were printed, it seems, and the book is quite scarce today. The first part is the memorable *Pippa Passes*; the title page is shown below. The song of young Pippa, an exploited child-laborer, remains a lyric of youth and optimism:

*The year's at the spring,
And the day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing,
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven -
All's right with the world!*

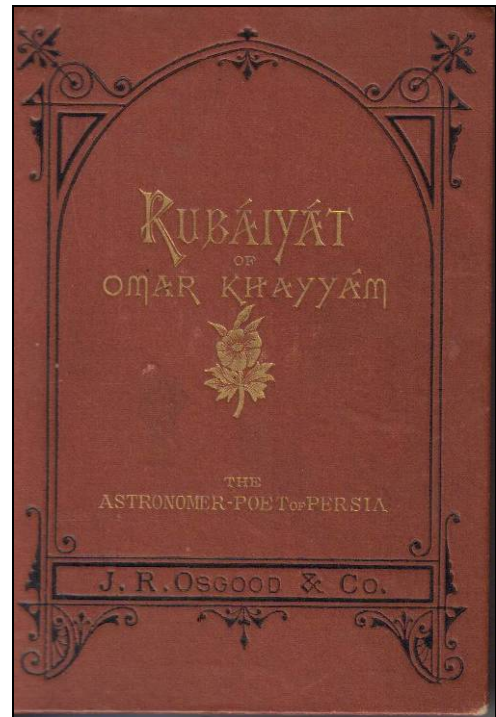


Finally, Edward Fitzgerald. He was born the same year as Tennyson (1809), and lived almost as long, but he is remembered only for one great poem, and this is a very free translation. We are talking about the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. These are quatrains of the 12th century Persian poet. However, Fitzgerald's translation was a major creative effort, producing English verse of exquisite, metrical phrasing transmuting the ideas of the old Persian cynic. Perhaps my favorite quatrain is:

*And much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,
And robb'd me of my Robe of Honour—well,
I wonder often what the Vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell.*

I remember a sign with this framed quatrain, hanging in the wine cellar of one of my more Epicurean friends. The thought occurs – is any copy of the book now allowed in the Iran of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the ayatollahs?

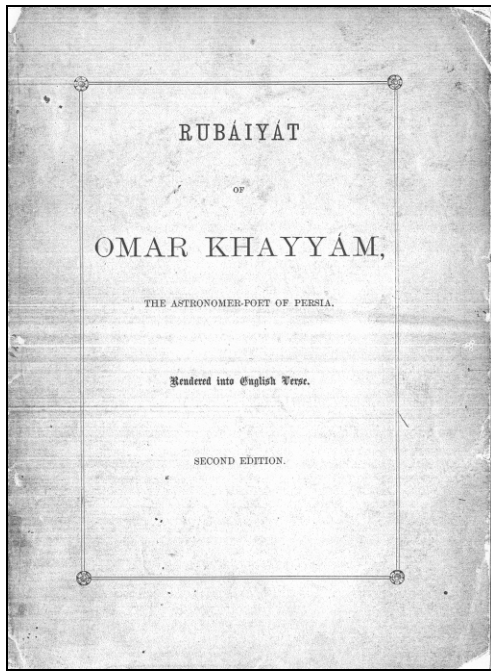
First published by Quaritch in London in 1859, Fitzgerald devoted several years to revising this great work, the last revision being in the 4th edition of 1879. The first, 1859 edition, was little regarded, sold for a penny as a remainder, but now sells for well into five figures, and has always been unattainable for this collector. The work was taken up by the Pre-Raphaelites and developed a considerable following later in the century. I have been content with a fine copy of what I long regarded as the first American edition, published by J.R. Osgood & Co. in Boston in 1878. A very pretty production in decorated cloth, the top cover of this book is shown below. The title page informs us that it is from the 3rd London edition, and is the first American edition. Well, as Sport'n Life sings, "it ain't necessarily so" – and hereby hangs a tale:



Joe Perko, of the Aldus Society, reported in our last newsletter on his visit to Washington, D.C., attending the FABS national meeting in October of 2007. He heard a lecture by the Curator of Rare Books at Georgetown University, Nicholas Scheetz, who, among other interesting book matters, discussed his personal collection of Rubaiyats, which includes all four of the early London editions. As Joe tells it, Scheetz also mentioned the true first American edition – a book published in Columbus, Ohio, no less, and a great rarity – one he had never seen, and despite sleuthing, had never able to turn up a copy. Reading Joe's account, I turned a slightly jaundiced eye on my Osgood, 1878 edition – despite the testimony of umpteen reputable dealers that this was the first American. My first recourse was to the standard bibliography on Rubaiyat, by A. G. Potter. This bibliography is itself not so common a book – published in 1929, it was limited to 350 copies. But, one copy is available in Columbus at the Ohio State Library. And, sure enough, while Potter notes the 1878 edition as the first trade U.S., it has notice

of a private U.S. printing, at the “Press of Nevins & Meyers”, in Columbus at the early date of 1870, from the second London edition, and limited to between 75 and 100 copies.

So much for the bibliography – what of the book? Looking in the obvious place, the OSU Libraries catalog listed a copy in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. With the help of Geoff Smith and Rebecca Jewett, I was soon holding the only copy of this rarity that I have found. A smallish 6” x 8”, 30-page pamphlet in grey wrappers, neither the cover nor the title page identifies the publisher, printer, place, or date. This cover is reproduced in the illustration below. The OSU copy is enclosed in a cloth case, where it is identified by a book plate as the gift of the Joseph Denney Memorial Endowment. Further, a penciled inscription on the case, dated in 1937, notes that it is the “exceedingly rare” and “valuable” first American; this is signed by “Elias [?] Francis [?] Thompson”, President of the O.K. [Omar Khayyam?] Club of OH”. The inscription confirms the 1870 publication date.



Now, this information of course brought out the most acquisitive aspects of the book collector in me. No – while larcenous thoughts might have passed through my mind with respect to the OSU copy, Geoff and Rebecca were already alerted, and their presence assured honesty on my part. But, golly, there is no date or publication place on this inconsequential pamphlet. Any bibliophile (or bibliopole) would probably ignore the thing, and put it aside as one of the hundred (thousands?) of reprints of this famous poem. So, I confess to immediately making a quick tour of the area used bookshops – and – came up empty. But I am still dreaming dreams. It is Ohio’s own version of a Tamerlane in the penny discard box. And, really, mirrors the history of the London first edition in this sense. I am going to keep on looking – and booking.



Book Quotes

Genie Hoster

You can’t make this stuff up. The following book descriptions have recently appeared in internet used book listings, and are reproduced here exactly as they appear on the web, spellings, punctuation, and all!

All of our products are cleaned with an disinfectant for your protection before shipping.

Book Condition: Fine. No Jacket. 8vo - over 7¼" - 9¼" tall. book in Fine condition, shelf wear to edges wear to head and tail of spine, front cover is coming away form spine inscription on title page browning to edges of pages due to age o/w pages are good clean and unmarked.

Terms of Sale: Books will be sold in the conditions described. Books will be mailed on the Monday following the finalization of the transaction. We accept visa MC or order from ABE. If it's in stock; we have it.

Huh?

Book Condition: slight taning speckes (sic) on top of outside pages, very soild, self help psychology

Only 3,258 listings utilize the word soild.

DESCRIPTION: This volume will have extensive marking/highlighting and-or bent pages and-or dinged pages/corners and-or weak/broken hinges and-or library stickers, stamps, or pouches and-or mildew and-or water damage. This volume will be usable but won't be pretty.

Condition: Like new with age being taken into consideration.

Book Condition: Reading Copy. No Jacket. Cover Art (illustrator). 1st Edition - 3 Rd Printing. 12mo - over 6¾" - 7¾" tall. X-Library-----Reading copy rated from good to very fine....We are very careful when we list our books, but sometimes something minor may get by. Paperback

Description: If you plan to keep this as a "working" copy, you will need to have it repaired or taped. As a book to add to your collection it should be fine.

I am dumbfounded by the seller who currently has *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* listed with the author given as “Unknown” ... until I found there are 10 sellers who list *The Works of Shakespeare* by the same anonymous writer.

Do you think it’s because they’re involved in a scholarly debate?



To Stand in the Presence of the Original

Ron Ravneberg

If only I were rich. The books, ... the books, ... the books I would have. Not necessarily a lot of books – just the right books. Maybe just one particular book. The Book.

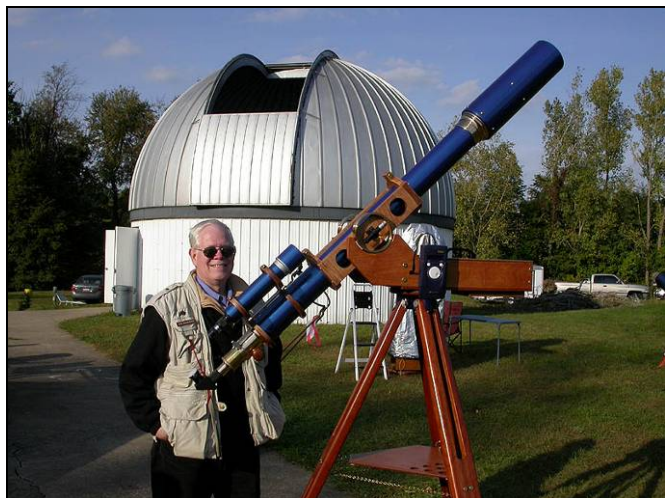
It’s probably apparent that I just returned from the 2008 New York Antiquarian Book Fair. I didn’t acquire anything

this year, but I was sorely tempted. Not to buy, perhaps, but possibly to contrive some more nefarious method to spirit one particular book out of the Park Avenue Armory, where the annual gathering is held.

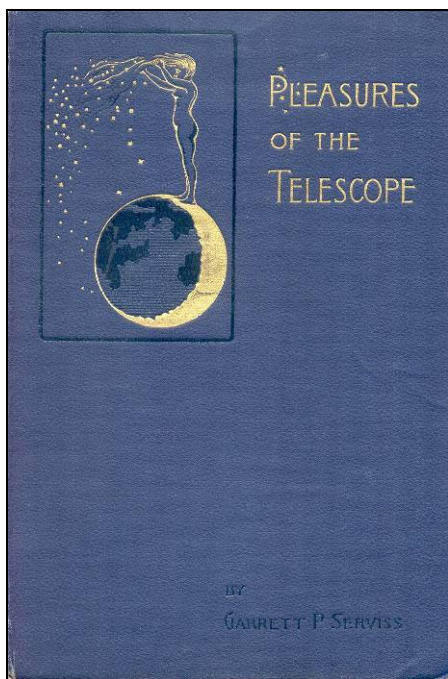
Let me explain.

I'm definitely a bibliophile, but in the story of my life there are chapters that come before books ... chapters about the stars.

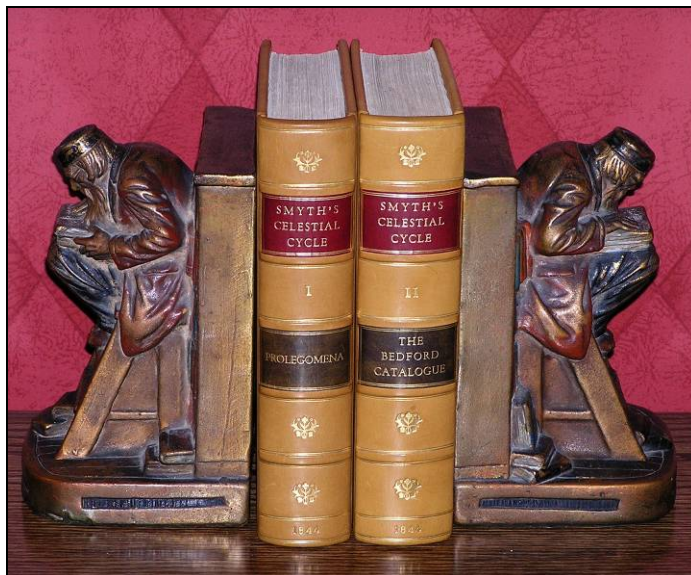
I have been in love with astronomy for as long as I can remember. I got my first telescope over 50 years ago and have been building my own instruments for over 40 years. Let's face it, down deep I'm a die-hard astro-nerd. Does it show?



But I also love books and sometimes books and telescopes converge. I have a number of modern observing books, and a few from the late 1800s and early 1900s. One of my favorites from the early part of the last century is *Pleasures of the Telescope* (1901) by Garrett P. Serviss. The book is an absolute delight, and is geared toward the types of objects that can be seen in a telescope similar to the one shown above.



A step above the Serviss book is a very special two-volume set of Admiral William Henry Smyth's *Celestial Cycle* (1844), the first astronomical observing guide ever written. After years of searching, I found these books at an astronomical gathering in the Florida Keys a number of years ago and simply had to have them. It's a prize made even better through the bookbinding skills of fellow Aldus member, Harry Campbell.



The *Celestial Cycle* is a wonderful set, and is close to being the best telescope book there is. Close, but not yet the best.

In New York I encountered the best. Indeed, possibly the best of the best – the finest extant example of the most significant telescope book, and one of the greatest books in the history of science.

First, a bit of background.

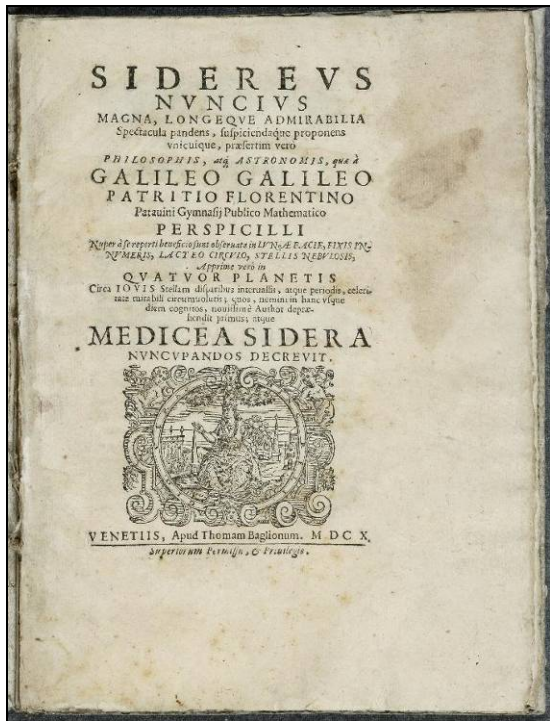
The telescope is 400 years old this year. Although its exact origins are a bit murky, the telescope appears to have emerged from a Dutch spectacle-maker's shop in 1608. It caused quite a sensation, but surprisingly, telescopes weren't systematically turned toward the heavens until over a year later, when forty-five year old Galileo Galilei pointed his improved version skyward to observe the lights of the night.

In 1610 he published a little 24-page pamphlet he called *Sidereus Nuncius* (Sidereal Messenger) wherein he described his discoveries, including the craters of the Moon, and the myriad stars that make up the Milky Way, that hazy band of luminance that can be seen crossing the sky on a dark night. But most significant of all was his detailed description of four small "stars" that appeared to be circling around the planet Jupiter, demonstrating once and for all that the Earth was not the center of all things in the universe.

Here was an early confirmation of the Copernican theory, and a repudiation of the concept that humankind is at the center of all creation, a view that had held since Aristotle.

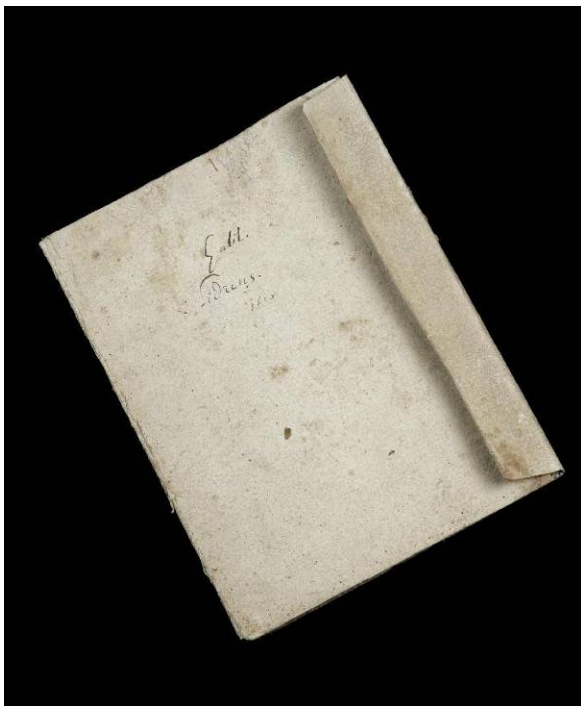
For me, the 1610 *Sidereus Nuncius* is the ultimate telescope book, and the book I would want above all others.

Fast forward four centuries to New York City.



Before leaving the Book Fair on my final day, I stopped by the booth of Jonathan Hill, a dealer who has had a copy of Copernicus' 1543 *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* that I hoped to see again. He still had it, now priced at a cool \$1,500,000. But I didn't ask to see it his year, because right next to it was a small uncut pamphlet in original limp boards in the form of a wallet binding.

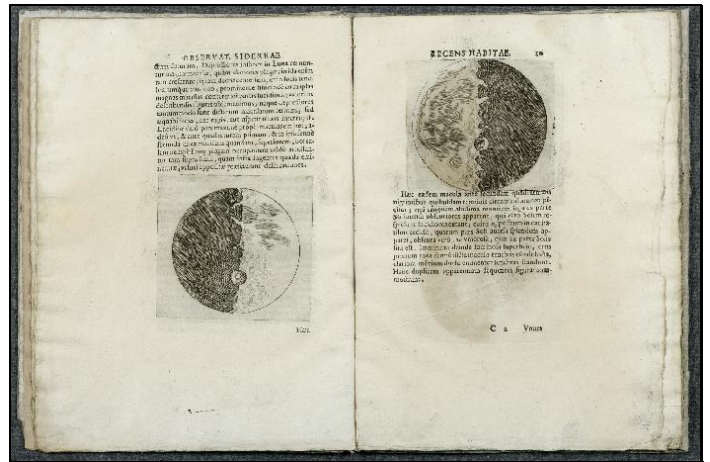
The Book – the 1610 *Sidereus Nuncius*!



I'd never seen a copy of the 1610 Galileo before (only 550 were printed), and this one was amazing. There were all the

illustrations I knew so well from other books (and books about books), but these were the originals, just as the likes of Johannes Kepler experienced them for the first time.

There were the first rough attempts to illustrate lunar craters and maria; there were the multitude of hitherto unseen stars in the Pleiades and Orion's belt; there were the detailed observations of night after night of plotting the four brightest satellites of Jupiter as they marched around their Jovian host. It was absolutely stunning!



And it was priced at \$1,000,000! I handed it back.

I may never hold another copy, but that's not as important now. For those few minutes while I carefully paged through the book – The Book – it was mine. I was holding the original. And that's something special.

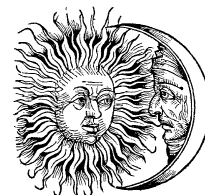
One of my modern observing guides is the three-volume *Burnham's Celestial Handbook* (1978) by Robert Burnham, Jr. In the early pages of the first volume, Burnham makes an observation that has stuck with me over the years.

Considered as a collector of rare and precious things, the amateur astronomer has a great advantage over amateurs in all other fields, who must usually content themselves with second and third-rate specimens. ...

In contrast, the amateur astronomer has access at all times to the original objects of his study; the masterworks of the heavens belong to him as much as to the great observatories of the world.

And there is no privilege like that of being allowed to stand in the presence of the original.

Being allowed to stand in the presence of the original. Burnham may have been talking about the stars when he wrote those words, but for this particular lover of the stars on that particular day it was all about The Book.





The Aldus Society

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Touching Treasures: A First Saturday Review

As most members know, our First Saturday programs are becoming more popular with each session. First Saturday events are informal hands-on sessions, wherein members are invited to the OSU Rare Books and Manuscripts Library to view and discuss several books selected from the OSU collection, and are designed to provide attendees with an opportunity to explore books in relative depth with commentary by a subject specialist.

In February, First Saturday presented a program on modern poetry with an emphasis on the Pocket Poet series published by City Lights Books. Bill Evans displayed and spoke about his own, almost inclusive, collection of first printings of the Pocket Poet imprints. In March, Geoff Smith showed some Irish books with an emphasis on the Cuala Press. April's program featured manuscripts and writings drawn from OSU's extensive collection of Samuel Beckett materials.

The events are held at the OSU Rare Book and Manuscripts Library's temporary location at 2700 Kenny Road. The events begin at 10:00 am. For directions, go to:

<http://library.osu.edu/sites/rarebooks/location.php>



An Aldus Moment

March 2008 – Dr. Jerry Tarver, retired Professor of Speech Communication at the University of Richmond speaks (eloquently, of course) about his extensive collection of pre-1900 works on rhetoric, elocution and oratory that he has generously donated to the Ohio State University.

(Image courtesy of George Cowmeadow Bauman)