

THE BIRD BOOKMARKS
AT
The MILCOM MEMORIAL READING ROOM
and ATTENTION LIBRARY

PRESENTED BY THE
ESTHETICAL SOCIETY
for TRANSCENDENTAL and APPLIED REALIZATION
(now incorporating the SOCIETY of ESTHETIC REALIZERS)



A special supplement to the Proceedings

“Souvenir Programs and Pamphlets”
(In continuation of “Contributions on the ‘W’ Cache and Related Sources”)

Documents Ostensibly Pertaining to the Origins and Development of
“The Order of the Third Bird”

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THE BIRD BOOKMARKS

The Milcom Memorial Reading Room
and Attention Library
at
MANA CONTEMPORARY



2019

THE MILCOM MEMORIAL READING ROOM
AND ATTENTION LIBRARY
of ESTAR(SER)

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About ESTAR(SER): *The Esthetical Society for Transcendental and Applied Realization* (now incorporating the *Society of Esthetic Realizers*) is an established body of private, independent scholars and amateurs who work collectively to recover, scrutinize, and (where relevant) draw attention to the historicity of the Order of the Third Bird.

About the Order of the Third Bird: There remains some confusion about the history and practices of the body known as *Avis Tertia*, but evidence points to its having been for some time a loose network of cell-like groups that engage in ritualized forms of sustained attention to works of art. The canons of secrecy around these activities — their structure and purposes — have traditionally been sufficiently restrictive as to leave some doubt as to whether any individual professing intimacy with the Order could in fact be genuinely associated therewith.

[†] Trustees residing more than fifty miles from New York City.

SINCE ITS OPENING at Mana Contemporary in the autumn of 2018, the Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library has served as a vibrant hub of activity both for researchers associated with ESTAR(SER) and for other individuals experimenting with practices of attention (and investigating the history of such practices). The trustees have had the pleasure of supporting a range of resulting projects. One appears in the following pages: emerging from D. Graham Burnett and Jessica Palinski's patient study of the volumes bequeathed to ESTAR(SER) by the Milcom Estate (and now housed in the Reading Room), "The Bird Bookmarks" offers fleeting views onto a rich legacy. As the present pamphlet was going to print, a new shipment of books arrived at our door, containing an additional twenty-five items from Milcom's collection that were believed to have been lost in 1967. We are thrilled to reunite these volumes with the rest of the library and to invite researchers to flip through these new/old pages, which almost undoubtedly carry material traces of various unique histories. A second endeavor that bears mentioning is a change at *Communiqués*, the Society's "Notes and Queries" forum: one of the Milcom Room's trustees, Matthew Strother, has recently been named to the editorship of this venerable platform. We look forward to seeing that (online) publication, under his careful guidance, continue its important work of recovering evidences of historical and contemporary attentional practices. Finally, it is with great pleasure that we announce two new appointments to the Board: Iciar Sagarminaga, Trustee; and Hermione Spriggs, Honorary Trustee. Each brings a wealth of scholarly acumen and practical experience concerning matters of attention. For the opportunity to concentrate the Society's recent efforts within the space of the Milcom Memorial Reading Room, I, and the entire ESTAR(SER) community, would like to express deep appreciation to Mana Contemporary.

Alison Burstein



A BOOK IN THE HAND

by D. Graham Burnett and Jessica Palinski

How do we pay attention to a book? It is a question for our time, and it is the foremost challenge posed by the Milcom Memorial Reading Room and Attention Library. What follows in these pages bears directly on this core matter. We present here a series of twenty-one snapshot photographs (together with two color slide transparencies and a single commercial postcard) all of which came to light in the course of collaborative efforts by ESTAR(SER) researchers to catalogue the book collection belonging to Learned (aka Lennard) “Hogfoot” Milcom (1928-1972).

A proper biography of Milcom lies beyond the scope of the present volume, but the reader may consult various sources for an overview of the life and work of this talented, idiosyncratic scholar, who looms across the topology of ESTAR, SER, ESTAR(SER), and the *Avis Tertia* as a vast *asterisk*.^{*} Salient among the reliable sources on this not-wholly-reliable person, Easter McCraney’s recent “Special Supplement” to the *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*, “Milcom the Metagnome,” helpfully résumés Milcom’s picaresque trajectory from rural Alabama to the utopian late-1960s “attentional phalanstery” outside Asheville, North Carolina (via Muggia, Trieste, and a whistle-stop tour of the great capitals of European learning). For our purposes here it will suffice to recall that, as the (re)founder of ESTAR(SER) in its modern form, Milcom made mighty contributions to the history of attentional practices in general, and to the history of the Order of the Third Bird narrowly construed.

Obviously, then, his personal library is of twofold import: on the one hand, it is a valuable resource for those thinking about matters of attention; on the other hand, it is of no less value to those concerned with Milcom himself — with his mind and manner, his habits and *habitus*. The discovery, in that library, of what have come to be called “The Bird Bookmarks” touches each of those hands. Indeed, we would go so far as to assert that it is

* Imagine the shadowy starform radiating from a human figure spotlighted by dozens of converging Kliegs set at a raking angle.

an *ambidextrous* discovery: not only was it *made* with both hands, it wants to be *read* with both hands as well. Like this pamphlet.

There is no need to be cryptic (though Milcom himself often was). What can be stated with certainty is this:

1. Again and again, in Milcom's library, *we came upon books that contained a photograph of a bird or birds, in most cases accompanied by one or more person(s)*;
2. These photographs ranged from the 1880s to the early 1970s;
3. In each case, the photograph was found *intercalated within the volume in question in the manner of a bookmark*;
4. Moreover, in each case of this "bookmarking," a short textual passage on the right or left page thusly marked had been *indexed by means of some marginal annotation* (always in pencil, generally in the form of an asterisk in the margin, though sometimes via underlining, or even a "boxing" line).

Which is to say, we seem to have stumbled upon evidence not merely of Milcom's *reading* (meaning "the things he read") but of his *reading practices* themselves (meaning his readerly *techniques*).¹ Questions immediately followed: Is some thematic/analytic/expressive/hermetic *link* intended between the indicated quote and the "Bird Bookmark" image that held its place in the volume? Does the *total aggregation* of these text/image conjunctions carry a larger significance? Who are the individuals depicted in these photographs? And were any of them, perhaps, associates of the Order (or one of its adjacent tendencies)?

At this point, it feels too early to hazard any definitive answers on these overarching problems. What we can say with confidence is that the images, and the textual citations they appear to signal, are clearly of the greatest interest to those concerned with the practices and sensibilities of the *Avis Tertia*. Delicate gestures of *care* point to the hallmark sensitivity of Birdish practitioners. A palpable mood of *generosity* prevails. A frank address to embodied *form* predominates — even, here and there, overwhelms. Judgment is obviously everywhere *suspended*. A nearly reckless *indifference to mere "learning"* is

¹ The classic study in the epistemic implications of reading practices remains: Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy," *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 30-78.

legible in essentially all the images (and the exceptions in this regard, e.g., figs. 14 and 18, seem rather to prove the general rule). Though one might well wish to ask — initially, upon first confronting the Bird Bookmarks (either *in situ*, or in this publication) — how all of this is to be “interpreted,” we sense that the conjunction of word and image on evidence in these pages again and again *waylays* this velleity, leaving it insensible in a back alley of consciousness. The effect is a little like finding oneself in a small garden of signposts, each of which has been brought into queer conjunction with that-toward-which-it-points. Yes, there is a moment of vertigo in such a garden. But eventually, one notices that there is nowhere to go, and a *henotic complacency* solaces the weary searcher.

This, at any rate, has been our experience in the course of the preliminary researches that inform the present album. Was any of this Milcom’s *intention*? Was something like this *his experience*, as he read in the volumes of his library, and annotated them, and slipped these images between the leaves? We would be speculating.

But we need not speculate to discern some of the larger scholarly questions raised by the Bird Bookmarks. Particularly interesting in this regard is the general historical problem of bookmarks and book-marking, of which the work in these pages manifestly represents a notable instance. While we are in possession of a small but growing body of literature that deals explicitly with the material culture of the bookmark as an artifact, the deeper issue of *bookmarking as an attentional practice* remains, we believe, imperfectly understood.² More work is surely needed.



How do we pay attention to a book? It is indeed a question for our time. But it was also a question with which the great asterisk himself, Uncle Hogfoot, had extensive commerce. Not only was he a reader of wide appetites, as his

² A useful point of departure on the physical form of bookmarks is Karl Heinz Steinbeißer’s *Lesezeichen Sammeln: Geschichte und Formen der Lesezeichen aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Ingoldstadt: Ant. Steinbeißer, 2005), though the text does not discuss the use of snapshots or amateur photographs as bookmarks. For a very valuable discussion of the significance of bookmarking in the larger history of books and reading (e.g., “The history of the codex is the history of the bookmark”), consider: Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible,” chapter 2 of *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, edited by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

library and this chapbook of his bookmarked passages clearly demonstrates; we also have excellent evidence that he designed (or at least made use of) a “Protocol” by which books from his library were apparently drawn temporarily from their shelves in collective “Actions” of synchronized, metempsychotic bibliolepsy. The details remain obscure.³ But however such gatherings actually worked, our vague sense of their tenor is a helpful reminder of Milcom’s numinous *feel* for his library. Here is Easter McCraney, reminiscing on Milcom and his lively life with books:

*Sometimes, for instance, when we got together, he was endlessly, childishly delighted by games of bibliomancy — flipping open random books to random pages and lines, seeking solutions to quotidian problems. He always found them.*⁴

Is it possible, then, in this context, that the Bird Bookmarks in some way preserve (in their bookish positions, and perhaps in their bird imagery as well) occasions like these? And if that were the case, have we here assembled, in this “commonplace book” of Milcom’s text-excerpts and album of bird-snapshots, nothing less than the ephemera of a series of *sortes virgilianae* in the “Birdish” key? We have come to suspect as much.

In the *sortes*, as practiced in the days of old, one put a question to a book, and then let it fall open, dropping a finger at random on the open leaf. The index pointed to the answer — though some skilled work of the imagination was often necessary to discern the logic of the response. It is a form of reading that closes several gaps: between the hand and the text, between reading and wondering, between books and life.

Closing this introduction (and also, perhaps, the distance between ourselves and our subject), we propose that the present little volume may best serve its readers in precisely such usage.

³ A preliminary report by the “Milcom Shelfmark Working Group,” filed with ESTAR(SER) in 2017, reconstructed what it called Milcom’s “Shelfmark Protocol,” which reads, in major part: “First shelf ranks – Encounter – wind instruments, Italian satire, serials. Second shelf ranks – Attending – herbaceous plants, hygiene, American literature, love, rhetoric, building materials, fossil cold-blooded vertebrates, etc. Third shelf ranks (or omitted) – Apophysis – fishing, hunting, shooting, GLASS, related vibrations, shorthand, cytology. Fourth shelf and related (beyond, other libraries also) – Realization – small forge work.” The workings of this protocol, if that is indeed what it is, are quite unclear.

⁴ Easter McCraney, “Milcom the Metagnome,” *Proceedings of ESTAR(SER)*, “Special Supplement” no. 2 (2018): 10.

THE BIRD BOOKMARKS



Fig. 1 — “With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects...”

JOHN DEWEY, *ART AS EXPERIENCE* (NEW YORK: CAPRICORN BOOKS, 1958), 14.



Fig. 2 — “Whatever the worries of the hour or the threats of the future, once the picture has begun to flow along, there is no room for them in the mental screen.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL, *PAINTING AS A PASTIME* (NEW YORK: MCGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, 1965), 31.



Fig. 3 — (Of the “chough” or *Coracia gracula*), “When tame, it shows a very inquisitive disposition, examining every novelty with the greatest attention.”

J. G. WOOD, *ILLUSTRATED NATURAL HISTORY* (BOSTON: D. LOTHROP & COMPANY, 1886), 175.



Fig. 4 — "They are the humorists, the musicians, the conversationalists of the animal world; so fully occupied in talking, singing, joking, eating, and rearing their families, that they have little time to devote to those immense beings, pantalooned or hooped, whom they undoubtedly regard from their airy heights with a sort of contempt, as they behold them slowly plodding along, confined to the dull earth and unable to take a flight even equal to that of one of their newly-fledged offspring...."

SOLON ROBINSON, ED., *FACTS FOR FARMERS: A COMPEND OF RICH MATERIALS FOR ALL LAND-OWNERS*, VOL. I (NEW YORK: JOHNSON AND WARD, 1865), 179.



Fig. 5 — "If an expert archer shoots arrows in quick succession, the end portions of which are attached with feathers, to an onlooker it gives the impression as though the feathers are flying in a procession."

SWAMI POORNANANDA, *JNANA SUDHA (NECTAR OF KNOWLEDGE): THE HIDDEN ESSENCE OF VEDANTA* (BOMBAY: M. K. JULKARNI, 1964), 97.



Fig. 6 — (From Act II, Scene I of *Otho the Great*; the speaker is Ludolph), "You see now how I dance attendance here...."

H. BUXTON FORMAN, ED., *THE POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN KEATS* (LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1920), 379.



Fig. 7 — "Who has been able to tell us what the soul is, where it is, and how it maintains its relations to the body?"

ABRAM H. DAILEY, *MOLLIE FANCHER, THE BROOKLYN ENIGMA: AN AUTHENTIC STATEMENT OF FACTS* (BROOKLYN: PRESS OF EAGLE, 1894), 3-4.



Fig. 8 — “The higher truth of art consists, then, in the spiritual having attained a sensuous form adequate to its essence.”

J. LOEWENBERG, ED., *HEGEL SELECTIONS* (NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 1929), 320.



Fig. 9 — “Pour observer un objet present, il faut avant tout faire l'éducation de l'attention primitive, posséder des organes de perception bien constitués et très bien exercés.”

ÉDOUARD REHRICH, *L'ATTENTION SPONTANÉE ET VOLONTAIRE* (PARIS: FÉLIX ALCAN, 1907), 149.



Fig. 10 — "When a man has for any reason been led to give attention to a subject for a lengthened period, the attention ultimately becomes instinctive, and his progress in learning or in thinking regarding this subject becomes correspondingly rapid."

JAMES L. HUGHES, *HOW TO SECURE AND RETAIN ATTENTION* (NEW YORK: E. L. KELLOGG AND CO., 1887), 86.



Fig. 11 — “Regardez attentivement pendant quelques seconds vos mains ainsi placées. Puis fermez les yeux et suivez mentalement le contour de vos doigts.”

RAYMOND DE SAINT-LAURENT, *L'ATTENTION* (AVIGNON: EDOUARD AUBANEL, 1931), 34.



Fig. 12 — “Were it not for his song, he would pass unnoticed by most people.”

ANGELIA KUMLIEN MAIN, *BIRD COMPANIONS* (BOSTON: R. G. BADGER PRESS, 1925), 167.



Fig. 13 — “Wherefore cease to spew out reason from your mind, struck with terror at mere newness, but rather with eager judgment weigh things, and, if you see them true, lift your hands and yield, or, if it is false, gird yourself to battle.”

CYRIL BAILEY, TRANS., *LUCRETIUS ON THE NATURE OF THINGS* (OXFORD: CLARENDON PRESS, 1950), 100.



Fig. 14 — “Describing, it will be remembered, is picturing with words; and the first step toward it is to realize the picture vividly in the imagination.”

JOHN F. GENUNG, *OUTLINES OF RHETORIC EMBODIED IN RULES, ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES AND A PROGRESSIVE COURSE OF PROSE COMPOSITION* (BOSTON: GINN AND COMPANY, 1893), 255.



Fig. 15 — "There is a little of the missionary in almost all of us."
 HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON, *THE ARTS* (NEW YORK: SIMON AND SCHUSTER, 1937), 176.



Fig. 16 — "In much the same way, a substance to be tasted is rolled over the tongue and pressed against the roof of the mouth in an endeavor to bring it as completely as possible in contact with the tongue."
 W. B. PILLSBURY, *ATTENTION* (LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN, 1921), 17.



Fig. 17 — "In truth, the love of repetition is the only happy love."
 SØREN KIERKEGAARD, *REPETITION* (PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1946), 4.



Fig. 18 — “During the winter months, many happy moments can be spent planning the herb garden and selecting the plants: first those really necessary, and then letting your imagination run riot over the less familiar.”
 FLORENCE RANSON, *BRITISH HERBS* (LONDON: PENGUIN BOOKS, 1954), 195.



Fig. 19 — (From *The Ghost of Benjamin Sweet*), “Bolt the doors. Fasten the windows. Turn out the lights. Sit down quietly in the dark (long pause).”
 A. H. LASS, EARLE L. MCGILL, AND DONALD AXELROD, *PLAYS FROM RADIO* (NEW YORK: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1948), 81.



Fig. 20 — “For many people today, works of the mind are thus little straying souls which one acquires at a modest price....”
 JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *LITERATURE AND EXISTENTIALISM* (NEW YORK: CITADEL PRESS, 1964), 32.

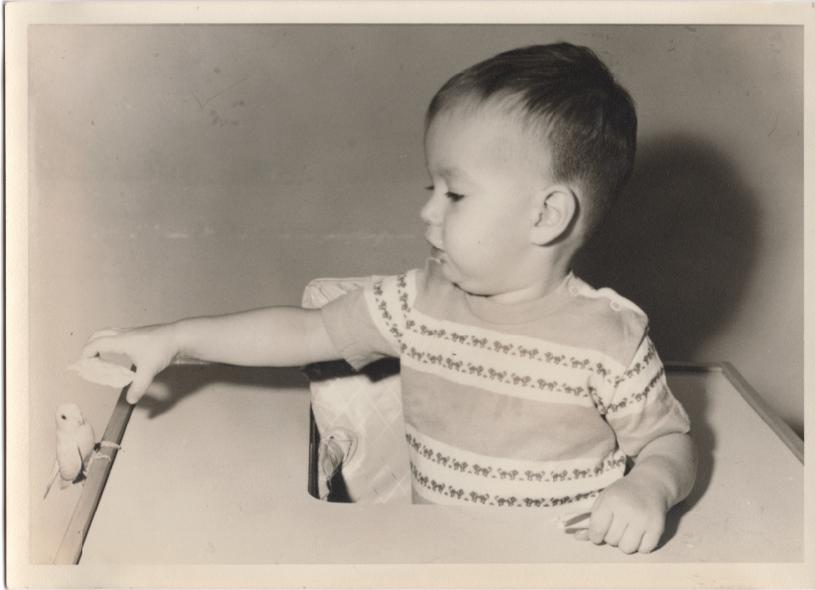


Fig. 21 — “Moreover, the noble resignation, the high moral and humane zeal, which characterized the Epicurean School at its best, as well as its easy decline into hedonistic appeals, made it popular.”

CLIFFORD HERSCHEL MOORE, *PAGAN IDEAS OF IMMORTALITY DURING THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE* (CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1918), 24.



Fig. 22 — “Il est très simple: on ne voit bien qu’avec le cœur. L’essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.”

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, *LE PETIT PRINCE* (CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS: RIVERSIDE PRESS, 1954), 47.



Fig. 23 — “It is due to art’s poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual.”

MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *POETRY, LANGUAGE, THOUGHT* (NEW YORK: HARPER AND ROW, 1971), 72.



Fig. 24 — “A strange bird is hatched sometimes in a nest in an unaccountable way and the fate of such a bird is bound to be ill-defined, uncertain, questionable.”
JOSEPH CONRAD, *THE ARROW OF GOLD* (NEW YORK: DOUBLEDAY, 1948), 36.

NOTES



