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In Praise of Bookshops / Old New York Book Store, Atlanta, GA

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New Feature!! In Praise of Bookshops

by Jack Walsdorf (Blackwell)



(Note: This is the first of what will be a continuing series co-authored by **Tom Leonhardt** of the University of Oklahoma and **Jack Walsdorf** of Blackwell's, detailing their experiences visiting little-known and well-known used, rare, and sometimes antiquarian bookshops throughout the United States.)

The title of this column is taken from an essay written by Harold J. Laski, "In Praise of Booksellers," which first appeared in *The New Statesman and Nation* in 1943. One of my favorite quotations from this short piece concerns both bookshops and booksellers: "A good bookshop, after all, is one of the supreme temples of the human spirit; and a good bookseller is one of the finest of human creatures." Such a good bookshop can be found near the city center of Atlanta and it carries the unlikely name of **Old New York Book Store**. If, by some stroke of good luck, Christopher Morley and his bookselling friend Roger Mifflin (he of *Parnassus on Wheels* and *The Haunted Bookshop* fame) should ever pay a visit to Atlanta, they would undoubtedly find their way to 1069 Juniper

Street, and there they would find a shop much like Mifflin's own shop in Brooklyn: "Two stories of the old house had been thrown into one: the lower space was divided into little alcoves . . . The air was heavy with the delightful fragrance of mellowed paper and leather. . ."

The Old New York Book Store, which was established in 1971, is such a delightful place, turning what was once a 1915 carpenter-style house, still with the vestiges of living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedrooms, into a quiet, well-organized and neatly shelved hardback bookstore. The 20,000 or so volumes cover most subjects, but clearly American history, theology, literature, fiction, modern firsts and signed books are some of the strong points. Since I am a collector of Southern writers, the room devoted to modern first, limited editions, and signed books took up most of my spare cash and most of my spare time. After two hours of book hunting, I left the shop with two wonderful additions to my **Anne Tyler** collection, finding a copy of her 1993 children's book, *Tumble Tower*, with illustrations by her daughter **Mitra Modarressi**, this copy signed by both the author and the illustrator. I also found a copy of the 1993 Twayne's United States Authors Series, *Anne Tyler* by Elizabeth Evans. This was the specially signed edition limited to 110 numbered copies, signed by both Evans and Tyler.

I also collect **Willie Morris**, the Mississippi writer and author of the recently published *New York Days* (Little Brown, 1993). Perhaps my most unusual find at The Old New York Book Store was a set of page proofs and an early manuscript copy of an essay Willie did for the magazine *Goodlife* in the early 1980s. This essay, originally entitled "One for my Daddy," later appeared as a chapter in his book *Always Stand in Against the Curve*. I'm happy to add this to my collection both because of the Willie Morris association and because of the baseball connection, a collecting interest I share with my son.

While a small minority of the books

found at The Old New York Book Store can be classified as antiquarian, and are priced accordingly, the vast majority of books (with the exception of art books) are under \$15, with a nice selection of recent novels priced at \$10. For pure book hunting, the kind of hunting which requires getting your hands dirty and perhaps your knees too, as you check the lower shelves, the basement is the place to be. Here you will find first editions and later printings of **Updike** and **Tyler**, **Robert B. Parker** and **Dick Francis**, and even a whole mystery section. In the basement will also be found rooms and sections devoted to gardening, travel, sports, drama, theology, cinema, philosophy, a full room of quality paperbacks, cooking, anthropology, Latin American history, Asian history and travel, Western and Eastern European history, African-American studies, and even a smallish bookcase devoted to "Books about Books and Printing." It was here that I found an inexpensive edition of Oscar Wilde's *The Sphinx*, published by John Lane in 1910. This particular copy was made the more attractive and had found a home in the Books About Books section because it bears the Ex Libris label of **Thomas B. Mosher**, the renowned turn-of-the-century printer from Portland, Maine.

The main floor of the shop devotes the best room, what was once perhaps the sitting room, to the best books, holding the modern first editions, limited editions, and signed copies. The other major rooms on the ground floor are devoted to history, literature, and art. A hallway which runs the length of the house is devoted to biography, Southern history, and English and American literature. The shop is open Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. It is closed on Sunday and open on Mondays on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Phone number (404)881-1285. Address: 1069 Juniper Street NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30309. **Mr. Cliff Graubart**, owner, publishes catalogs on an infrequent basis for both art and literature. ☛