

hardly to be expected that he should take its condemnation seriously." I cannot agree with such a facile interpretation. With Wilde's own personal letters here before me, I am able to read them only with a consciousness of the cumulative and inescapable tragedy in the life of that strange and fascinating character.

Lest this essay be labeled, "Garrulities of a Collector," I must bring it to a close. Perhaps I could mention just a few other approaches which might be explored if there were time. As I look about at my shelves, I see that I have not mentioned the important contributions to fine printing made by the Kelmscott, Daniel, Ballantyne and Vale presses during the 1890s. And I have not done full justice to the illustrators of the period, from Burne-Jones, Ricketts, Beardsley, and Houseman to the caricaturists such as Beerbohm. Nor have I mentioned any of George Moore's work, although there are over twenty of his first editions on my shelves, many with presentation inscriptions to figures prominent in the 1890s. In fact, I have slighted many of the most interesting "association copies." Again, I should like to have discussed some of my favorite books which do not fall definitely into the tone and temper of the period, but which are of the period—books as diverse as Kenneth Grahame's *Dream Days*, Kipling's *Jungle Books*, Du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson*, Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, and Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. But I discover from my loose-leaf catalogue of this collection—and to other collectors I commend the pleasures of compiling an informative and descriptive catalogue of their favorite collection—that I have over sixty authors represented by separate publications in my 1890s collection. Obviously someone must be neglected in such a restricted essay.

I hope I may have convinced the reader that there was no single aspect or direction dominating the 1890s. The decade was as full of birth as of death. Individualism shot to new heights during those celebrated years, much as a gigantic skyrocket bursts to illuminate the sky with a multiplicity of colorful flashes. The era is gone, the show is over, and almost all of these men are now dead. But the variety and strange wonder may still be found today, by the discerning, as it is reflected imperishably in the books, letters and drawings which remain as our heritage.

The Princeton Archives of American Letters

A PROGRAM TO MEET AN OBLIGATION TO FUTURE HISTORIANS

BY JULIAN P. BOYD

IF there had existed a century ago some systematic program for collecting and preserving the diaries, manuscripts, and correspondence files of American authors, present-day historians of American literature would find at their disposal immensely rich collections of source material. The original manuscripts of *Moby Dick* or *Tamerlane*, if now available, would be important documents for critical literary studies. Correspondence files, diaries, invoices, waste-basket scraps of manuscripts and other daily ephemera would be even more important in revealing what authors ate, wore, felt, and attempted as they struggled under the compelling demands of the creative urge. Nor would such a systematic program have fulfilled its function by confining itself to the Poes, the Melvilles, the Emersons, and the Longfellows: it would have met its obligation in full only if it had been concerned with a broad and inclusive definition of literature, with those who created badly as well as with those who created well. Its inclusiveness would have told us much more than we now know about the Laughton Osbornes, the Gulian C. Verplancks, the George Lippards, the Jacob Hestons and the other writers whose names now are merely names.

But no such program existed a century ago. "Time and accident," as Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1791, "are committing daily havoc" among original documents. Fire, water, mice, prim housekeepers, maiden aunts who needed spills for their coiffures, and many other enemies of records conspired to deprive scholars of the documents they need for an understanding of our literary heritage. Even theology and morals, in their changing evolution, exacted toll in the form of a well-meant but misguided censorship. Autograph collectors, especially those indiscriminate ones of the nineteenth century, were responsible for much mutilation, dispersion, and ultimate loss. Even librarians were not guiltless: not only did they not lift their voices against this slaughter of the sources, but on some occasions they aided and abetted the destruction. Authors themselves, with rare exceptions, did nothing to dispel the

prevalent notion that literary history could be written—if indeed it needed to be written at all—from the printed works of its dominant figures. Here and there, to be sure, a lone voice cried in the wilderness and occasionally saved some precious documents.

The Princeton University Library, profiting from the omissions and neglects of the past, has firmly resolved to meet its obligation to future historians by doing all in its power to collect *now* the records that serve to illuminate and document the contemporary American scene. We have proceeded upon the broad assumptions that librarians have concentrated their attention chiefly upon the printed word to the neglect of the much more voluminous and often equally important mass of records in other forms; that contemporary or nearly contemporary ephemera and documents ought to be gathered now and preserved for future use; that a university library, serving graduate students and faculties constantly engaged in research, ought to be able to command an immense reservoir of original sources for such research; and that some systematic effort ought to be made to accomplish this object. In consequence, we have projected The Princeton Archives of American Civilization, the purpose of which is the collection and preservation of all forms of records relating to all important aspects of American civilization. This will include the enormous documentation of radio, industry, dramatic arts, public affairs, history, literature, etc. We have taken the last-named subdivision as our first field of activity and under it we have organized our effort in a way that we hope may be followed to advantage in other areas of knowledge, that is, by organizing a committee of those whose careers are identified with literature, either as authors or as scholars or as publishers.

This committee is concerned with the task of building up The Archives of American Letters. Its chairman is Carl Van Doren, a distinguished teacher, critic, and historian of literature, and its members include many prominent American writers, some of whom are Princeton alumni*: *John Peale Bishop*, R. P. Blackmur, *James Boyd*, *George Bradshaw*, *Struthers Burt*, *David L. Chambers*, Joseph Hergesheimer, Rupert Hughes, *Hugh MacNair Kahler*, Joseph W. Lippincott, *Robert C. Mc-*

* Those whose names are italicized are graduates of Princeton.

Namara, H. L. Mencken, Maxwell Perkins, Bliss Perry, Kenneth Roberts, Muriel Rukeyser, *Booth Tarkington*, Allen Tate, *Ridgely Torrence*, Mark Van Doren, and Carl Van Vechten. The committee have enthusiastically and unanimously agreed that the need for an aggressive and systematic effort to preserve contemporary letters and manuscripts is perhaps greater today than ever before. The character of modern communication by telegraph, telephone, and radio has not only changed the nature of documentation in some degree but has made more imperative the need for robbing avaricious wastebaskets of the records that should be preserved. Space or rather lack of space is another enemy of history, especially in respect of publishers' massive records. House-cleaning for sorely needed space is a recurrent phenomena in publishing firms, and it is a firm conviction of the committee that libraries and scholars rather than pulp mills ought to be the beneficiaries of this enforced house-cleaning.

We do not minimize the problem of bulk and the problem of storage. Much of this material can and should be destroyed, with little or no loss to scholarship or history. But we believe that the error in this direction should be on the side of liberality: in general, the problem of reduction of the mass should be left to the future when the passage of time will furnish a more correct perspective for evaluating certain types of records. The important thing is that there should be no meagre selection such as to violate the integrity of the whole. Plans are under consideration for making available large areas of space for the literary archives, and the microfilm camera can be counted upon to play its part in the problem of space-saving. What we in the Princeton University Library like to read now is such a statement as Rupert Hughes made in a recent letter: "It is only my doubt as to the infinite capacity of your library for taking painful things that keeps me from shipping you a few boatloads [of manuscripts and letters]." Our reply to Mr. Hughes' generous support of our program, and to others who we hope will feel as he does, is this: "Dispel your doubts, Mr. Hughes, and dispatch the boats—we will somehow solve the problem of space. And we will send the boats back with our appreciation and with the assured gratitude of future scholars."

Already the Committee's enthusiasm for the program has produced gratifying results. Mr. Booth Tarkington has contributed the manuscript of his play *Poldekín*—two copies with variant endings. We have received the manuscripts or typescripts (together with what publishers so charmingly describe as the "dead matter") of Struthers Burt's *Powder River*; Allen Tate's *The Fathers*; Hillel Bernstein's "A Visit to Berchtesgaden" (long version); John Peale Bishop's "The Hours," an elegy on Scott Fitzgerald recently published in the *New Republic*; David Loth's *Woodrow Wilson*; Carleton Beals' *The Great Circle*; F. Van Wyck Mason's *Stars on the Sea*; the manuscript and related documents of Carl Van Doren's *Sinclair Lewis*; Meade Minnigerode's *The Terror of Peru*; and J. B. Rhine's *New Frontiers of the Mind*. Mr. Ridgely Torrence has been an exceedingly helpful member of the committee. From him we have received 253 typescripts of letters written by Edwin Arlington Robinson to Lewis Isaacs, Daniel Gregory Mason and Mrs. Daniel Gregory Mason, Miss Edith Monahan and many others. Through Mr. Torrence's good offices Mr. and Mrs. Mason have presented 51 original letters and two post cards written by William Vaughn Moody to Mr. Mason, 14 original letters written by Moody to Mrs. Mason, and 3 manuscript poems by Moody, one of them a long version. These represent only the documents actually received: a much larger total may be expected shortly under generous assurances that members of the committee and others have given us.

This beginning is encouraging not merely for its accomplishments thus far, but especially for the promise that it holds forth, a promise that the present trickle will become a broad and powerful stream, watering and enriching the history that is yet to be written. Authors and publishers have been both generous and enthusiastic. They have agreed that the plan is worth while; they have also helped us to face some of the complex problems evoked by such a program. We do not minimize the obstacles: a perfect solution of the problems of mass documentation may not be possible, but we are firmly convinced that a systematic approach will accomplish more than the old method of leaving our literary records to the mercy of time and accident.

Confessions of a Custodian

OR

AN ORIGINAL RECIPE
FOR A LARGE THEATRE COLLECTION

BY MARGUERITE LOUD MCANENY

Bold foragers who have recently threaded the intricacies of the Library far enough to arrive at the Theatre Collection will remember that it has overflowed into a newly constructed cage; that the cage seems to be filling so fast that more space may be needed at any time to care for latest accessions. Much of the credit for this steady increase goes to the custodian of that collection, Mrs. McAneny, who broods over the amorphous whole and brings order out of chaos. In this essay she permits us to understand a few of her problems.

WHEN I happen to inform some new acquaintance that I am Custodian of the William Seymour Theatre Collection, do I get in response a gushing, "How fascinating!" Or even an awed, "Oh?" Not at all. First I get a baffled silence, and then, "But *what* does a theatre collection collect?" I used to overwhelm my new acquaintance with an unexpected barrage delivered in such a way as to catch him in a cross-fire of hopelessly unrelated details. It usually went something like this:

"Well, *our* collection has such varied items as the dimensions of an elephant; the embroidered bag carried by the famous tragedienne Jean Davenport, in the 1850s, while playing a part as Queen Elizabeth; an account of Nijinsky's reactions while enjoying his first view of a football game; an extraordinarily complete *History of Knighthood*, with illustrations; a circular issued by the Buckingham Palace Hotel, London, in 1904, telling us that while hot or cold bath in the bath room is one shilling, a hip bath in a bed room is six shillings and that there is an hydraulic lift to every floor; a letter from an alleged murderer; a bibliography of *Short Health Plays for Children*; a copy of the *Premium Speaker*, containing hundreds of "readings," ranging from an address to the Veterans by General Sherman (that could be used verbatim as publicity for "Defend America by Aiding the Allies") to a comic anecdote that must have rolled them in the aisles in 1882 but would have to be reborn to amuse an audience in 1941; a play entitled *TI-ME-KUN-*