

Archiving practices

The preservation and loss of autograph English literary manuscripts

Christopher Fletcher

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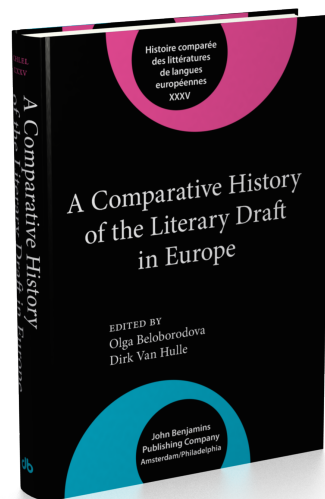
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2.1.3 Archiving practices

The preservation and loss of autograph English literary manuscripts

Christopher Fletcher

The survival or loss of autograph literary manuscripts is considered, particularly in the context of British materials and drawing frequently but not exclusively upon the holdings of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. A chronological approach demonstrates the accruing importance attached to manuscripts written in the hand of their authors by collectors, institutions, scholars, the public and other agents, including funders and legislators. Reference is made to recent developments in the area of joint acquisition and questions are raised about the future of the autograph manuscript in the digital age.

Keywords: archives, autograph, literary, manuscripts, collectors, born-digital, library, culture, heritage

Introduction

In 1905 the classicist and poet A.E. Housman noted a rediscovered fragment of Juvenal's sixth satire that Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, "brought out from the arsenals of divine vengeance, if I may so describe the Bodleian library" (Reeve 2009:146). Rediscoveries of manuscripts frequently challenge the assumptions of scholars. In 1934, a remarkable year for manuscripts, the sole surviving scribal copy of Thomas Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur" was rediscovered in a safe at Winchester School (BL Add MS 59678); the fair copy of S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" came to notice in a private collection a century after the poet's death (BL Add MS 50847); "The Book of Margery Kempe", perhaps the earliest form of autobiographical writing in the language, turned up in a hunt for a table tennis ball (BL Add MS 61823); while the letters of the Paston family, the most important surviving personal English medieval archive of its kind, surfaced from a long period of obscurity to be acquired for the British Museum Library after a campaign by the Friends of the National Libraries (BL Add MSS 34888–34889). Yet despite such materialisations, in the case of the autograph literary manuscript, whether in draft or fair copy form, the story is overwhelmingly one of loss rather than preservation.

It may seem self-evident that the rarity of survival increases the further back one looks. Signs of a writer's hand working on paper or parchment don't fare well against the random vicissitudes of time. Yet there are other broadly defined factors. Literary texts, until relatively recently, have never been afforded the cultural or political importance of religious works whose protection was better assured by their central place in worship and study. Great monastic buildings and cathedrals were designed to protect such objects, while Hebrew documents, for example, which were no longer required, were routinely placed in Genizot, effectively text mausoleums, to avoid the

accidental disposal of anything of sacred significance. This privileging of certain texts by institutions extended well into the age of print, with Sir Thomas Bodley expressing fear at the beginning of the seventeenth century that his refurbished Oxford library might fill up with “idle books” and “riffle raffe” (*Sir Thomas Bodley & His Library* 2002: iv).

Valuing the presence of an author’s own hand on a document appears not to have held any general sway until the early modern period and even then, as in the case of John Donne or the young Princess Elizabeth, the significance lay in a demonstration of personal care and effort resulting in fair-copy or calligraphic presentation pieces rather than anything that revealed working method. Literary drafts served as essentially utilitarian vehicles rather than items for study or indicators of authorial importance or genius. Once used for the purpose of producing a scribal copy, or to be set in print, their value was expended.

Alongside casual disposal and benign neglect, other factors contribute to this lacuna. The depredations of the Protestant Reformation emptied monasteries of texts, while important collections reflecting a nascent interest in literary alongside other manuscripts, such as that of the antiquarian Sir Robert Cotton, suffered serious accidental loss. The agency of authors or their friends in the wilful destruction of their own manuscripts has a long history but particularly developed in parallel with the growing association of such texts with questions of reputation and fame. Byron’s publisher John Murray committed his memoirs to the flames (the fireplace at 50 Albemarle Street, the Murray family home, still survives, and the publishing archive is now at the National Library of Scotland), while the poet and librarian Philip Larkin instructed his secretary to shred his journals. Such intentions could also be defeated: Franz Kafka’s wish that his manuscripts be destroyed was averted thanks to his friend Max Brod, while Robert Bridges ensured the survival and publication of the literary remains of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Cases of carelessness or benign neglect have attained a certain notoriety. If the story is to be believed, T.E. Lawrence lost most of his first draft of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) as he changed trains at Reading in 1919 (he burnt the second in 1922 and the third survives as Bodleian MS. Eng. hist. d. 112), while the emergence in the twentieth century of Thomas Traherne as an important seventeenth-century figure was helped by the rescue of his manuscripts from street traders and in one case a bonfire. Even the most zealous of librarians are not without blame. The autograph manuscript of Sir Thomas Bodley’s autobiography dated 13 December 1609, one of the earliest examples of the genre, has disappeared despite the antiquarian Anthony Wood noting in his *Athenae Oxonienses* that it was “kept as a choice rarity in the archives of his library” (Wood 1815: 126). A number of manuscript copies survive.

The commercial potential of manuscripts, and institutional and private competition to possess them at scale, whether as covetable rarities, sources for study or markers of cultural and national identity, changed the picture in the nineteenth century, providing ever stronger motivation for their preservation. By the twentieth century, literary manuscripts became in Britain an index of anxiety for the loss of cultural heritage, particularly in the case of their departure, through sale, from their country of origin, sparking protective legislation in relation to export, centralised funding opportunities, tax incentives and professional networks dedicated to their preservation. The early utilitarian function of the disposable draft reached a new status

whereby evidence of an author working towards a final text came to be seen as interesting, if not more so, as the finished product itself. Today, literary drafts generally command in the market higher values than first or unique editions or indeed fair copies of the work in question – a phenomenon evidenced by the sale within seconds of such items via online catalogues issued by dealers and immediately scrutinised by collectors and curators.

Antiquity and the Middle Ages

While this chapter mainly focuses on the British story, it is worth briefly considering some of the earliest instances of value attached to literary drafts. Roman authors might write out or correct their own works but would also have their own or other texts copied out by professionals, often slaves or freemen. References exist to manuscripts of famous writers in Rome in the second century AD, but these are cast into doubt by modern opinion that they might rather be evidence for a trade in fraudulent autograph manuscripts, a tradition that endures and perhaps reached its apotheosis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at the dubious hands of individuals such as Alexander Howland “Antique” Smith, unmasked in 1893 and given in particular to faking Robert Burns (McDonnell 1996: 478, n41).

Virgil’s *Aeneid* was famously left incomplete and unedited at his death: according to legend, his instructions for the manuscript to be destroyed were overridden by the Emperor Augustus, who tasked the poet’s friend Varius Rufus (with Plotius Tucca) with its completion. All the same, there are the odd early sightings of Virgil’s autograph manuscripts, for example by Valerius Probus in the first century AD, cited much later by Aulus Gellius as having claimed to have seen a manuscript of the *Georgics* with autograph corrections (Gellius 13:21:4). Even earlier, in the first century AD, Pliny the Elder claimed “of course we see quite often the handwriting of Cicero and the Divine Augustus and Virgil” (Pliny 13:83), but again the assertion is tenuous at best (see also Hendrickson 2018).

Sappho’s poetry has come down to us in fragments, some of the earliest of which can be found in the Bodleian Library (Bodleian MS. Gr. class. c. 76 (P)/1–2). As with all such texts from classical antiquity, the manuscript is a later fortuitous survivor, in this case dating from nearly a millennium after Sappho’s composition and discovered in a Graeco-Roman rubbish tip at Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt.

The earliest surviving literary manuscripts in English bear no evidence of authorial drafting. The manuscript of around 1000 containing *Beowulf* comprises the later scribal capturing of a poem descended from oral tradition (BL Cotton MS Vitellius A XV). That of King Alfred’s translation of Pope Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, which can lay claim to being the earliest surviving manuscript written wholly in the vernacular, may well be contemporaneous with its author. The celebrated preface, lamenting a perceived decline in learning, is a powerful rhetorical composition, evidently inscribed under the direction of the King at his court scriptorium before being sent out, in this case, to Worcester. It is in a professional hand and was likely to have been produced alongside other copies for wide distribution to the counties. The manuscript was bought in 1671 by the Bodleian from the London bookseller Robert Scot who had in turn

purchased part of the library of Christopher, first Baron Hatton (d. 1670), who associated with several antiquarians (Bodleian MS. Hatton 20). The sale predates what is probably the earliest recorded proper English book auction, the 1676 sale in London of the library of Lazarus Seaman by William Cooper, bookseller and publisher, itself an indication of increasing antiquarian fervour for the acquisition of books and manuscripts (Wall 1997: 3–4).

A number of manuscripts of Chaucer's works include portraits of the author (eight early images survive according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*), but the closest we can get to his act of writing is through the recent emergence of his scribe. Berated for his slapdash work by Chaucer in his poem "Wordes Unto Adam His Own Scriveyn", the unfortunate figure can now perhaps be identified as Adam Pinkhurst. The manuscript uniquely containing three of the great surviving works of English medieval literature, "Patience", "Cleanness" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", all of the late fourteenth century, is written in a slightly later scribal hand with naïve illustrations (BL Cotton MS Nero A X). Like that of *Beowulf*, it was collected by Robert Cotton (1570/71–1631) and stored in Ashburnham House in Westminster. Cotton's collecting reflects an interest in assembling coherent groups of literary texts and, later, an increasing national awareness that private libraries could suffer considerable vulnerability: on 23 October 1731 a fire destroyed many manuscripts and those that survived (some, like *Beowulf*, damaged and known as "burnt Cottons") were shortly after transferred as part of the foundation collections of the British Museum and are now housed in the British Library, where the smell of smoke hangs around the part of the secure stack in which they are held.

Other early manuscripts survive as relics, often valued for their association with individuals. Some provide autobiographical insights, albeit not strictly literary. The ninth-century "St. Dunstan's Classbook" (Bodleian MS. Auct. F. 4. 32), bears a frontispiece of the saint both naming and drawing a self-portrait of himself prostrate before Christ, though both the verses and the drawing are derivative. The late medieval inscription at the top of the page describes both picture and writing as being "de propria manu" of St. Dunstan. While the book itself contains no larger texts actually by St. Dunstan, three of its four parts do contain additions in his hand. At St. Augustine's, Canterbury, Thomas Elmham lists and depicts in 1414 the six book-relics displayed above the high altar of the abbey church, including biblical texts purportedly owned by St. Gregory I, St. Augustine, St. Adrian and St. Mildreth. He describes them as "the first fruits of the books of the whole English church" (see Barker-Benfield 2008). Some of these relics (probably all now lost) may have been genuine, but not necessarily all. In 2011 the British Library acquired the seventh-century Gospel of St John, known as "The St Cuthbert Gospel" and the oldest completely intact book in Europe (BL Add MS 89000). It was made to be placed in the coffin of St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne who died in 687 and was buried in a stone sarcophagus. In 698, he was removed to a newly created wooden coffin, together with his book. In 2016, Christopher de Hamel, formerly Parker Librarian at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, identified the Anglo-Saxon Psalter which Thomas Becket possessed throughout his time as Archbishop of Canterbury and which he may have been holding when he was assassinated in 1170 (Cambridge Corpus Christi College, MS. 411). In 2022 the Bodleian Library, using sophisticated scanning to render the profile of parchment at minute levels of detail, worked with researchers to dis-

cover that an eighth-century copy of the Acts of the Apostles bears several drypoint inscriptions spelling out, in what is probably autograph, the name of a woman associated with the manuscript, together with a number of childish doodles depicting human figures (Bodleian MS. Selden Supra 30). Eadburg, likely a Kentish woman, may have been an owner or even a scribe.¹

Only a very few medieval manuscripts in English bear witness to the author's hand. The most significant is known as "the Ormulum" (or "Ormulum"), some 20,000 lines of septenarian Middle English verse comprising a small fragment of the homilies on the gospels written by an Augustinian canon, Orm (or Orm), and dedicated to his brother (Bodleian MS. Junius 1).² Dating from some time before 1200, it has been identified as the earliest surviving autograph manuscript in English and, while another hand has added formal introductory elements in Latin, also bears textual revisions, deletions, insertions, and two references to the author himself, thus uniquely capturing a particular dialogue. Its physical structure exerts a powerful and complicated presence, the narrow rectangular format comprising additions of fragments which add to our understanding of compositional methods. It was probably purchased at auction in the Hague in 1666 by Francis Junius who rebound it, nevertheless leaving evidence of its earlier characteristics, and gave it to the Bodleian, which it entered in 1677.

Other notable authorial manuscripts include those of the monk and chronicler Matthew Paris. One in the Bodleian is almost entirely written out by him in the mid-thirteenth century at St Albans, although it cannot be said to be literary in any real sense, comprising Latin texts and diagrams on prognostication (Bodleian MS. Ashmole 304). Two even earlier examples surviving in Oxford libraries are both texts concerned with history. William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum*, for which the author's autograph working copy, showing successive revisions of the 1120s–1130s, survives in Magdalen College MS. Lat. 172.³ Roger of Howden's Latin chronicle is important for its account of the Third Crusade: the author's own two-volume set of his *Chronica* is divided between the British Library (Royal MS 14 C II) and the Bodleian (MS. Laud Misc. 582), both made between 1199 and the author's death in 1201 or 1202. The latter volume, covering events and documents of 1181 to 1201, is a fair copy which degenerates into corrected draft, partly in the author's own hand.

P.J. Croft identifies just four authors from whom any significant quantity of English poetical manuscripts has descended to us (Croft 1973: xii). British Library Add MS 46919 contains texts, some lightly revised, by the Franciscan preacher William Herbert, who died in the first half of the fourteenth century. While a few are his own compositions, the majority are texts by others. The same is the case with John Shirley, among whose compilations of popular verse there survives but one autograph example of his own work, a rhymed Prologue on a vellum fly-leaf (BL Add MS 16165). Three volumes of verse by Thomas Hoccleve survive in autograph, but only as later transcriptions of earlier works. Croft's final example is John Capgrave, an August-

1. See <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/theconveyor/women-in-the-margins-eadburg-and-bodleian-library-ms-selden-supra-30/>.

2. See also the Introduction and Chapter 1.1.1 in this volume.

3. See <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/haywardp/hist424/seminars/Malmesbury.htm>.

tinian friar from Norfolk, whose unique hand is according to him evident in six manuscripts (the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* suggests eight), including his metrical *Life of St Norbert* (Huntingdon Library, HM 55), with four others bearing his revisions.

Signs of authorial composition or intervention increase from the early Renaissance, though remain rare. Petrarch's copy of Suetonius' *The Twelve Caesars*, dating from the fourteenth century, is preserved at Exeter College, Oxford (Exeter College MS 186). The manuscript was evidently one of three copies owned by the poet and is a working copy bearing his annotations. The Visconti Library's inventory identified it in 1426 and it was later recorded in a sale in London in 1827 before its donation to the College by Exeter Fellow and Librarian C.W. Boase (1825–1895) in around 1868. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose own manuscripts would later take on the status of relics, provides a brief discussion of literary autographs of the period in a letter to T.L. Peacock from Ferrara, 6–7 November 1818, where he records seeing poems written out by Ariosto (1474–1533) and Tasso (1544–1595) on display in Ferrara's Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, founded in 1750–1753 in order to preserve in particular the manuscripts of local writers.⁴ Shelley provides a graphological analysis of their scripts:

The hand writing of Ariosto is a small firm & pointed character expressing as I should say a strong & keen but circumscribed energy of mind, that of Tasso is large free & flowing except that there is a checked expression in the midst of its flow which brings the letters into a smaller compass than one expected from the beginning of the word. It is the symbol of an intense & earnest mind exceeding at times its own depth, and admonished to return by the chillness of the waters of oblivion striking upon its adventurous feet. – You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object ...

(Barker-Benfield 1992: 99)

Early modern manuscripts and the rise of antiquarianism

The paucity of autograph early modern literary manuscripts has frequently been remarked upon, despite the period's reputation as a golden age of literary endeavour. Some categories of writings do survive which enable us to identify the largely derivative work of individuals: the German university tradition of the *album amicorum* developed from the mid sixteenth century into a flourishing fashion, whereby networks of friends would encourage one another to inscribe in their decorated books quotations, emblems or drawings. Yet we can count nothing witnessing the hands of Marvell, Spenser or Marlowe, while Shakespeare's writing appears solely across three pages of the composite play, "The Book of Sir Thomas More", now preserved in the British Library (BL Harley MS 7368). John Donne's poetry proliferated during his own lifetime in manuscript circulation, yet only one English poem survives in his own hand (two Latin verses appear in two printed books), a fair copy verse epistle written to a potential patron, Lady Carew (Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. d. 197). The document bears evidence of neat folding, perhaps indicating that it was passed discreetly to its recipient. The gap in the

4. For more on Ariosto, see Chapter 1.2.7 in the present volume.

Donne record is ironic given his own assessment of the relative value of manuscripts. His Latin poem “De Libro Cum Mutuaretur”, written to his friend Dr Richard Andrews on learning that the latter’s children had apparently destroyed his handwritten verse, notes in a translation by Edmund Blunden:

What Printing-presses yield we think good store,
But what is writ by hand we reverence more:
A Book that with this printing-blood is dyed
On shelves for dust and moth is set aside,
But if’t be penned it wins a sacred grace
And with the ancient Fathers takes its place.

(CELM: Introductions, John Donne)

One of the most important surviving manuscripts bearing witness to Donne’s own hand is that of his prose work *Biathanatos* in the Bodleian, presented by the author with an autograph letter to Sir Edward Herbert around 1608 (Bodleian MS. e Mus. 131). It includes numerous corrections, marginal annotations and a sixteen-word insertion. It joined the library’s collections as part of a class of miscellaneous donations and purchases acquired c. 1647–1683, first formed in 1655 by Thomas Barlow, Bodley’s Librarian, 1652–1660. Designated *in Musaeo*, the group was considered sufficiently important to be kept in a cupboard in the Librarian’s own study.

Those manuscripts which do survive from the period owe much to the rise of antiquarianism from the seventeenth century and in particular to collectors with the wealth and interest to assemble collections. As in the case of Sir Robert Cotton and the Francis Henry Egerton bequest of 1829 to the British Museum Library, some of these luckily found their way into public collections rather than being dispersed through salerooms. A manuscript sometimes referred to as including the earliest surviving examples of autograph composition is in the British Library, a volume of verse largely by Sir Thomas Wyatt. While many of the poems are written out in various scribal hands, a significant number are wholly autograph, with many also bearing his own corrections and revisions (BL Egerton MS 2711).⁵ The volume initially seems to have passed to the Harington family where it was used by Sir John Harington and others until the mid-seventeenth century as a vehicle for diverse writings, some obscuring earlier poems and indicating an apparent lack of interest in the status it has since come to accrue as a rare example of a literary manuscript bearing direct evidence of authorial composition. The survival of just one of the three examples of autograph works by Sir Philip Sidney, in Cotton’s library, his prose “Discourse on Irish Affairs”, is probably attributable to the fact that it forms part of a group of State Papers relating to Ireland, the political interest surpassing the literary (BL Cotton MS Titus B XII). On the other hand, his brother, Robert (1563–1626), may be credited as the author of the most sustained sequence of autograph poems to survive from the Elizabethan period. It emerged in 1975, after its acquisition by the British Library (BL Add MS 58435). Its earliest owner, from its inscription “the Countess of Pembroke”, was presumably the poet’s sister Mary

5. For more on the Egerton MS, see the Introduction to this volume.

Sidney Herbert, a writer and literary patron, and its significance was clearly recognised through the nineteenth century when it was owned by a succession of collectors and booksellers.

Surveying the major collections of early modern manuscripts in the Bodleian, only a relatively few notable examples of autograph manuscripts can be mentioned. The papers of Richard Rawlinson (1690–1755), variously donated and bequeathed to the library, include fair copies of verse from “*Orlando Furioso*” by Sir John Harington, among a majority contribution by an amanuensis, Thomas Combe (Bodleian MS. Rawl. poet. 125); sixteen poems by Mary Astell, presented in 1689 to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury (Bodleian MS. Rawl. poet. 154); and the “*Tangier Journal*” of 1683 (as well as official naval papers) by Samuel Pepys, who, as Stephen Parks (1983) has pointed out, was concerned with the authorial authenticity of documents in his collection, building up a body of facsimile signatures so he could establish whether he was in possession of autograph material or scribal copies (Bodleian MSS. Rawl. A. 170–195A). This tradition later found an exponent in the antiquary John Fenn (1739–1794), who assembled in several volumes facsimiles of signatures of notable figures made from original documents in public and private collections (among them those of Pepys himself), together with biographical glosses. While Fenn’s “*Repertorium Chiro-Typicum*” was never published (the manuscripts are now Bodleian, MSS. 12427/1–8), his editions of the letters of the Norfolk Paston family, which dating from the fifteenth century are some of the earliest English original letters to survive, were innovative in their use of facsimile plates and reflect a recognition of the importance of the appearance of manuscripts as part of an overall editorial effort.

The collection of Edmond Malone (1741–1812), critic, author, and a friend of Johnson, Reynolds, Boswell, Burke, and other celebrities, reflects a serious interest in the editorial possibilities of manuscripts. A particular focus on Shakespeare resulted in an edition of his works in 1790 (11 volumes) and many corrections and additions for a new issue which only came out after his death, in 1821 (21 volumes). His systematic purchase of early English plays enabled scholarly analysis and the exposure, in 1782, of Chatterton’s spurious Rowley poems, and in 1796 of William Ireland’s notorious Shakespeare forgeries (Petti 1977: 3). His receipt in 1793 of the honorary degree of DCL at Oxford would have been encouraged owing to literary research undertaken at the Ashmolean Museum and the Bodleian. Nevertheless, among the wealth of printed sources, his collection boasts few autograph manuscripts. Those that survive often do so as they are preserved in published works and are in any case mere signatures: Thomas Decker’s, evidently cut from an entry of 1602 in the diary of Philip Henslowe, can be found in an edition of the latter’s plays, for example (Bodleian Mal. 235), while a similarly extracted signature of Michael Drayton also travelled in a printed work (Bodleian Mal. 469). The only substantial literary work is a fair copy of John Ford’s “*Fame’s Memorial*”, again bound in a 1606 copy of his plays and made for presentation to Lady Penelope Rich – hence, presumably, its status as something valuable enough to preserve (Bodleian Mal. 238 [10]).

Francis Douce (1757–1834) was a fervent antiquarian, collector and Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum from c. 1807–1811, a post from which he resigned, exasperated by what he considered to be multiple institutional failings leading, as he put it in a letter preserved in the Bodleian, to “[t]he total impossibility of my individual efforts, limited, restrained & controlled

as they are, to do any real, or at least much, good” (Bodleian MS. Douce e. 28). Douce’s exasperation contributed to the bequest of his collection to the Bodleian, in which can be found just a few autograph signatures pasted into printed works among the many scribal copies of literary texts. The bequest of Bishop Thomas Tanner (1674–1735) was received three months after his death. The relatively few literary manuscripts form a part of a broader collection of ecclesiastical and state papers and few if any can be identified as autograph. The most famous text is that of George Herbert’s “The Temple” (Bodleian MS. Tanner 307). While this may have been compiled under (or after) the direction of the poet himself, its production was the responsibility of scribes, probably female members of the Ferrar family at the religious community of Little Gidding. The other major surviving Herbert manuscript, and arguably the more important, again derives from Little Gidding and comprises Latin and English verse in the hand of an amanuensis but bearing autograph corrections and revisions by the poet (Dr Williams’s Library MS Jones B. 62). The volume descended through Ferrar and a number of private individuals before being bequeathed by the Rev. John Jones to Dr Williams’s library in London in 1770.

Other notable early modern manuscripts in the Bodleian, of sometimes tenuous literary status, include four volumes of Thomas Traherne, an author represented in the period by, according to Peter Beal, “an almost unprecedented number of original, chiefly autograph manuscripts” (CELM: Introductions, Thomas Traherne). These emerged, in often astonishingly serendipitous circumstances since the late nineteenth century (his autograph “Commentaries of Heaven”, now in the British Library, was retrieved from a burning rubbish tip in Manchester in the 1960s, while others were hawked from London street-barrows) and established a previously obscure reputation (BL Add MS 63054). The Bodleian manuscripts contain autograph poetry, prose and revisions and formed part of the collection of the bookseller and publisher, Bertram Dobell, who established their identity. The “Brief Lives” of John Aubrey in various autograph manuscripts were presented by the antiquary to the Ashmolean, while the future Queen Elizabeth I is represented by presentation gifts written out in her calligraphic hand. Further calligraphic manuscripts of Esther Inglis prepared for patrons testify to the more frequent survival of this type of carefully conceived dedicatory work, another example being Elizabeth Cary’s translation of Ortelius’s *Miroir du Monde*, dedicated to her uncle Sir Henry Lee (Bodleian Dep. d. 817). The piety in which the Bodleian itself was held by members of Oxford University is witnessed in a Pindarique ode gifted to it by Abraham Cowley in a printed exemplum of his *Poems* of 1656 (Bodleian C 2.21 Art.). The majority of John Locke’s library and manuscripts are found in the Bodleian, some containing copies of literary texts made by the philosopher.

Beyond the Bodleian, important surviving groups of autograph English literary manuscripts attributable to authors of the early modern period (albeit often dispersed) include those of Thomas Middleton, whose *Game at Chess* survives in six copies, five of which are likely to be wholly and in one case partially in his hand. Beal attributes their preservation to their contentious status from 1624 when it was banned by the government (CELM: Introductions, Thomas Middleton). Many manuscripts of Ben Jonson have been identified, including a significant number of autographs, such as the complete copy of his “Masque of Queens”, a dedicatory

copy made for Prince Henry in 1609 which descended through the Royal Library (BL Royal MS 18 A XLV). Similarly, several autographs survive of Sir Walter Raleigh's work, including a notebook kept while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London (BL Add MS 57555). Peter Beal notes Katherine Philips, "the matchless Orinda", as being "among the rarer poets of her age to have left a substantial body of works in her own hand", a consequence perhaps of the cultish status she held among a coterie given to sharing her work (CELM: Introductions, Katherine Philips ("Orinda")). The fairly frequent survival of literary manuscripts of James VI of Scotland may be explained by their royal status (Croft 1973:xv), while according to Beal (CELM: Introductions, John Milton) the most important literary manuscript to come down from the seventeenth century is the "Trinity Manuscript", a substantial volume of drafts and working papers by John Milton, possibly given to Trinity College Cambridge, in 1691 or a little earlier, but apparently largely unnoticed until some fifty years later when arranged by two Fellows of the College, Charles Mason and Thomas Clarke (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.3.4). Croft notes that "Milton may be the earliest poet whose autograph drafts survive because they were consciously preserved as literary relics *ab initio*" (Croft 1973:xvi).

The eighteenth century

The proliferation of publishers through the eighteenth-century accounts for a concomitant increase in literary manuscripts from the period. While these often served a utilitarian purpose, this increasingly combined with a self-consciousness that the objects themselves possessed an inherent interest and even beauty through authorial association and were worth keeping beyond setting in type. The manuscript of Pope's "An Essay on Criticism", from which the first edition of 1711 was printed, is one such example (Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. c. 1). Purchased by the Bodleian at auction in 1889, it is written out in a form designed to be followed by the typesetter; in addition to explicit instructions about where page breaks should fall, it anticipates and indicates the appearance of the edition, most notably in the carefully drawn titling which was faithfully reproduced. It nevertheless bears autograph revisions and its functional purpose continued beyond the poet's death, as is shown by notes and instructions made for a transcriber in the second half of the eighteenth century. Less carefully contrived manuscripts by Pope include drafts of his translation of Homer's *Iliad*, written on the reverse of letters sent to him and interspersed with garden designs, and now in the British Library (BL Add MS 4808).

The increasing perception of the literary manuscript as a special token of creative merit linked to the author is well demonstrated by three autograph fair copies of Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", which the poet began around 1745. The poem, among the most celebrated of the modern age, was widely circulated in manuscript through fashionable and scholarly society (many transcriptions survive), meeting with an immediate favour which was consolidated and widened when first quickly brought to press in 1751 to circumvent piracy. The copy at Eton College Library, his school, was sent in a letter to Horace Walpole, who organised its publication (Eton College MS 281 A). A second copy is found in the Egerton Collection at the British Library, having first been sent by Gray to his Cambridge

friend Thomas Wharton as part of a correspondence often enclosing poems (BL MS Egerton 2400). The third manuscript, which bears his revisions, is found in Gray's commonplace book held by his old Cambridge College, Pembroke (Pembroke College MS GRA/1/3). The book is written across three volumes but was treated by the poet as a coherent paginated enterprise, following the organisational methodology influentially practised by John Locke. It was bequeathed to Pembroke in 1809, having been left to his friend Richard Stonehewer, who in turn had been given them by another friend and literary executor, William Mason (who printed some of the poet's letters, sometimes falsifying them and destroying the originals). Just two years after the publication of Gray's poem the British Museum's library was established with the poet among its earliest readers, able to access its foundation collections and undertake the programmatic study of his literary forebears.

Overall, significant quantities of literary drafts survive for many canonical authors of the period, with evidence of working method for most now perhaps the rule rather than the exception. William Blake's "Rossetti notebook", now at the British Library, is among the most celebrated examples, containing drafts of many of his most famous lyrics as well as sketches (BL Add MS 49460). It is almost exactly contemporaneous with the first of Jane Austen's three surviving volumes of *Juvenilia*, "Volume the First", completed in 1793 and now in the Bodleian (Bodleian MS. Don. e. 7, the other two being British Library Add MSS 59874, 65381). Although executed as a careful gathering together of earlier tales in fair copy and imitating a published text, the author fails to resist an occasional tendency to make revisions. A much messier and ultimately abandoned manuscript is her earliest surviving attempt at prose fiction, "The Watsons", a substantial fragment worked on in 1803 and now divided between the Bodleian Library, which holds the greater part, and the Morgan Library & Museum in New York (Bodleian MS. Eng. e. 3764, Morgan Library MA 1034.2). It is among the earliest surviving examples of a (partial) novel in draft, with Sterne's heavily revised manuscript of the first part of *A Sentimental Journey* (published in 1768), now at the British Library, having a fair claim to being the first (BL Egerton MS 1610).

The nineteenth century

Into the nineteenth century the cult of personality associated with British Romanticism afforded literary manuscripts the status of relics. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the treatment of the effects of Percy Bysshe Shelley following his drowning in 1822. Attempts to advance his literary reputation by his widow Mary were consolidated by wider acts of familial piety. Their son, Percy Florence Shelley and his wife Jane, established "a Sanctum" at Boscombe Manor in Dorset, housing papers, portraits and objects associated with the Shelley and Godwin families which were made available only to selected visitors. Literary manuscripts formed a particular focus of Jane's efforts to secure a permanent home for the collection, and she made significant donations to the Bodleian Library in 1893 and 1894. In addition to manuscripts, the library came to acquire objects from various sources including Shelley's rattle, watch, spyglass, guitar and several locks of hair. Other donations from the family followed through the twen-

tieth century as well as various batches of material put on long-term loan which were eventually purchased (the Abinger Collection) in 2004. Within the whole may be found extensive manuscripts drafts of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, purchased back into the family before 1887, bearing numerous interventions by Percy (Bodleian MSS. Abinger c. 56–58). The memorialisation of Shelley is graphically witnessed in the binding of a letter of 1822 from Mary Shelley to her friend Maria Gisborne, describing the poet's last months and cremation. Commissioned by the collector, bibliophile and forger T.J. Wise, one of the inside boards reveals a reliquary device shaped as an urn containing fragments of what purport to be Percy's ashes (BL Ashley MS 5022).

Many manuscripts survive of Shelley's literary circle, among them John Keats and Lord Byron. The printer's manuscript of Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807, bequeathed to the British Library by a former employee, Edward Meyerstein, is a remarkable document, comprising transcriptions of verse made by Dorothy Wordsworth, Sara Hutchinson and the poet himself, together with additions to one poem by S.T. Coleridge (BL Add MS 47864). Coleridge's literary manuscripts are voluminous and widely dispersed, with the highest concentration, including over sixty volumes, found in the British Library (BL Add MSS 47496–47558). The Brontës are well represented, including examples of their miniature books and, as with Keats, Wordsworth and Jane Austen, benefited from the establishment in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (although some, such as Walter Scott's Abbotsford, are earlier still) of literary societies dedicated to the preservation of their works and centred around the houses with which they were associated. Some twenty-four volumes of the works of George Eliot were placed in the British Museum Library in 1891, in line with the wishes of the novelist's companion G.H. Lewes, those wishes being known and understood by the author herself. Charles Dickens' House in London opened to the public in 1925 and holds a sizeable collection of artefacts, including several letters. His literary manuscripts are widely dispersed. The presence of his draft of *A Christmas Carol* in the Morgan Library & Museum in New York demonstrates the intensifying interest in such manuscripts by wealthy American collectors such as John Pierpont Morgan from the late nineteenth century onwards (Morgan Library & Museum MA 97).

The cult of the autograph through the nineteenth century and beyond inspired hunters to both preserve and, unfortunately, mutilate manuscripts. In 1824 William Upcott formed collections of original letters of British poets whether dead or alive (Bodleian MSS. Montagu d. 1–3 and 4–5), and of "British authors" in five volumes (MSS. Montagu d. 6–10). The desire to own a fragment – any fragment – physically associated with the writer, rather than a fuller literary or scholarly interest in their texts led others to take to the scissors: Mary Shelley in later life, for example, found herself cutting out and distributing single leaves from her husband's fair copy of *The Revolt of Islam* (Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 3).

The twentieth century

In addition to his collection of Shelleyana, T.J. Wise's Ashley collection is rich in nineteenth- and some twentieth-century literary manuscripts. While Wise was exposed as a forger of printed texts – essentially he fabricated obscure pamphlets by authors from whom, relying upon their cloudiness of memory, he would sometimes seek retrospective authentication – there is no evidence that he fabricated handwritten texts. However, in at least one case it might be argued that he vicariously put contemporary authors to that task. His relationship with Joseph Conrad is fascinating for this reason and an example of how the model of a willing seller and willing buyer, caught in the context of an increasingly febrile market for authorial manuscripts in the early twentieth century, could affect the nature of the text itself. Wise acquired from Conrad a typescript of his dramatisation of *The Secret Agent* (BL Ashley MS 2946). There is little evidence that Conrad had any real interest in the work (the play folded a few days after its first performance) but was happy liberally to sprinkle handwritten endorsements and signatures, and perhaps even emendations and corrections, to not only validate its authenticity but to add interest and value to a document otherwise mundane in appearance: as he suffered from gout, the main body of text was typed out by a secretary.

Conrad's acute sense of the commercial worth of his manuscripts and limited edition pamphlets is also illustrated in a series of letters, commencing in 1919, to the booksellers Hodgson & Co. Irritated and surprised by sales of privately printed material bearing his signature which had evidently made their way onto the market from their original recipients, Conrad offered the dealer further items directly from his own possession noting, disingenuously, that "it does go a little against the grain to sign copies destined for sale" (Bodleian MS. Eng. c. 4802). Conrad and J.E. Hodgson entered into a mutually profitable arrangement until Conrad's death in 1924. The following year Hodgson was entrusted by Conrad's widow with the sale of his library, the catalogue giving primacy to the few manuscript drafts remaining in his possession.

Conrad also sold many manuscripts to the Irish American collector John Quinn who served as an important patron, often through his purchase of their manuscripts, to several fellow writers, among them T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce. While such commercial benefit was seized upon by impecunious exponents of high modernism, a more candid and perhaps publicly spirited approach was taken by others. In 1911 Thomas Hardy entrusted his friend Sydney Cockerell with the discreet dispersal of several of his manuscripts to British institutions, eschewing the large sums offered to him by American rivals. Cockerell had already established for the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge a collection of literary manuscripts, among them that of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (Fitzwilliam Museum MS 1–1911). The reaction of libraries to his efforts, together with Hardy's own reservations about openly setting a value upon his own reputation through these donations, indicates varying levels of reticence surrounding the question of the papers of living writers. The trustees of the British Museum (and its library) took much greater deliberations over the acceptance of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (BL Add MS 38182), whereas the Bodleian almost immediately accessioned his *Poems of the Past and the Present* (Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. d. 18).

The British institutional reluctance to acquire literary manuscripts from living authors in the early part of the century, even by donation, had its exceptions. The Friends of the Bodleian was founded in 1925. While its remit was broad in that it sought to “provide a permanent income for the purchase of rare books and manuscripts” (*First Annual Report 1925–26*: 3), it early on developed an additional and more specific remit to collect examples of contemporary production. The report on Gifts and Purchases for 1927–28 noted that “[a]lthough the Bodleian is a depository of national literature, very few autograph works of contemporary authors have found their way into the Library” (*Third Annual Report 1927–28*: 7). The driving force to change this situation was Michael Sadler, Master of University College, Oxford (1923–34) and one of the Friends’ founding members, who used his literary connections to secure gifts from Hilaire Belloc, Maurice Baring and John Galsworthy among others. On 9 May 1930 T. S. Eliot wrote to him “I have not forgotten that I promised to fake for you a manuscript copy of *Ash Wednesday*” before opting instead to send “the genuine manuscript” of his annotated typescript of “*Marina*” (Bodleian MS. Don. c. 23/1).

In 1979, Philip Larkin, poet and librarian, published “A Neglected Responsibility”, a paper lamenting the loss of contemporary authors’ literary manuscripts to American universities. Pointing out in particular the collecting efforts from the late 1930s of Charles D. Abbott of the Lockwood Memorial Library in the University of Buffalo (whose letters of solicitation are regularly found in writers’ archives), he included responses to questions on the topic put to various authors known to him. One noted that “[t]he whole point is that England is not really interested in the manuscripts of anyone not securely dead” (Larkin 1979: 36). Another replied that “[i]f almost any English university had asked me five years ago to give them my manuscript collection, which happened to be unusually complete, I should certainly have said yes” (36). In response to this situation, Larkin helped to establish Britain’s National Manuscript Collection of Contemporary Writers, which subsidised the purchase of literary drafts and allocated them to various British university libraries. The scheme, while well-intentioned, did little to stem a significant flow of literary manuscripts from British shores, including the sale of the archive of Ted Hughes to Emory University in Atlanta in 1997, a year before the poet’s death. The sale of a Laureate’s papers, undertaken in the context of export licensing rules not applicable to materials of less than fifty years of age and the reluctance of a major national funder to support the purchase of papers of living figures (together with often jingoistic press), revived anxieties and resulted in the formation of further committees and lobbying groups. These had notable success, particularly in the areas of more targeted tax benefits for those choosing to donate rather than sell their literary assets and the relaxation by funders of age limits on archives. Initiatives such as the *Location Registers* for nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary manuscripts, established 1995 and 1988 respectively, together with the increasing availability of electronic catalogues, have heightened the visibility of such documents and, importantly, the very extensive network of British institutions, including record offices and smaller museums and libraries, which have been and remain active in the field of collecting.

Today the status of the literary draft in Britain is prominent, helped by a growing academic interest in material culture and manuscript studies; and while collecting remains enthusiasti-

cally competitive globally, interesting models have recently emerged for institutional sharing. In 2011 the Bodleian jointly purchased with the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach, a series of letters from Franz Kafka to his favourite sister Ottla, with each manuscript being owned indivisibly and available for exhibition exchanges (Bodleian MS. Kafka 49). In 2020 a consortium of libraries and writers' houses was established to try to acquire a collection of books and manuscripts long held in private ownership and destined for sale at auction and inevitable dispersal. The Honresfield Library, including manuscripts by the Brontës, Jane Austen, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott, was formed in the late nineteenth century by William Law, a Rochdale mill owner, and for some eighty years was largely inaccessible to scholars and the public. A fundraising campaign spearheaded by the Friends of the National Libraries and supported by Charles, Prince of Wales, successfully raised £ 15.3 million to secure the collection in 2021, with major grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and others (as well as many individuals) matching a leading gift of half the total from the philanthropist Sir Leonard Blavatnik. The contents of the newly named Blavatnik-Honresfield Library have been allocated by the Friends of the National Libraries in joint ownership models to the Bodleian, Jane Austen House, the Brontë Parsonage, the Brotherton Library, Abbotsford, The National Library of Scotland and the British Library (with printed books more widely gifted).

If the literary draft in analogue form is in rude health, a major challenge for libraries lies in the vast proliferation of “born digital” material. Emails, word-processed documents, websites and social media are all carriers of literary content little of which will be captured in the relative security of manuscript or print. In addition to the technical problems presented by long term preservation of materials created on proprietary platforms and how to capture and represent the context and appearance of original composition, the digital format presents issues of authenticity, rights and ownership as well as significant opportunities for the analysis of the genetic development of text, data at scale and shared access. The acquisition of the archive of the poet Wendy Cope in 2011 by the British Library signalled an institutional willingness to embrace the complexities of managing a collection comprising a hybrid of electronic and analogue material. Whether commercial value was assigned to the digital components as part of the £ 32,000 purchase price is unclear, though the recent emergence of Non Fungible Tokens assigning worth to such materials (including the first ever tweet of Jack Dorsey, one of the founders of Twitter) indicates that documents that can be immediately associated with their authors, even if detached from what Keats called “this warm hand my scribe”, continue to exert cultural and capital value and an acute anxiety about their loss.

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