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## "What Do You Do With Them?"

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# “What Do You Do With Them?”

by **Matthew J. Bruccoli** (President, Bruccoli Clark Layman; Phone: 803-771-4642; Fax: 803-799-6953)

**Column Editor's Note:** *The month's submission is revised from the paper read at the 2007 Chawton House Conference on books and book collectors.* — **MJB**

**B**ooks enrich your life, your mind, your spirit. It is good for you to be surrounded by them. You declare your gratitude and your reverence by what you do with your books and what you spend on them.

The function of serious book-collecting is to assemble evidence for bibliographies or to supplement existing bibliographies or to provide data for biographies. Otherwise book-collecting is just a hobby. The best book collections are for use — to support research generating more books. Not for show. The serious book collector should have an acquisitions plan into which each volume or magazine or letter or manuscript fits. Everything connects.

In book-collecting, as in every endeavor, there is a clear difference between the professional and the amateur. The pro knows what he is doing and why he is doing it. He works hard at it. His professionalism defines him. It is gratifying to witness the development of an amateur collector into a professional bookman.

Collectors have responsibilities to their collections. If they intend to break up their collections — and if their collections merit a permanent record — they should publish catalogues before scattering the books. An auction sale catalogue isn't good enough because it is intended as a sell-piece; catalogues don't devote space to worthless books — that is, books that aren't worth the effort of trying to sell them because they don't bring high prices.

If the collector lacks the education, training, and confidence to compile a catalogue or a bibliography or perform bibliographic work, he should cooperate with or collaborate with a competent bibliographer. See the five-volume catalogue of the **Brodsky collection of William Faulkner** compiled by **Louis Daniel Brodsky** and **Robert W. Hamblin**. It is not a question of time: There is always time to do the things you really want to do.

Many descriptive bibliographies have been mainly based on my collections of **Fitzgerald**, **Chandler**, **Lardner**, **O'Hara**, **Cozzens**, **Heller**, **Macdonald**, **Algren**, and **Dickey**. I could not have compiled them without my own completist collections — all of which are now institutionalized, except for **Cozzens**. I couldn't rely on library collections because they lacked the so-called ephemera that I needed. I couldn't assemble my collections now: a bibliographer needs bookshops. I am frequently asked: “Where did you get your books?” Books are where you find them. They don't tell you where they are or where they came from. Much of the time you don't know what you are looking for until you see it. There is no substitute for handling thousands of books in antiquarian bookshops, second-hand

book shops, used-book shops, junk shops, cellars, attics. Bookshops are places to discover books you don't know about.

The process of compiling a bibliography varies with the subject. The word “compile” is misleading because it implies that a bibliography is put-together information without much writing by the bibliographer. It requires long and hard work. You don't start compiling until you have seriously collected for at least ten years — and checked the private collections, and institutional collections. Depending on how good the bibliographer's own holdings are, the process of assembling the bibliography takes two years with luck. Less comprehensive jobs can be respectable. There are thorough checklists, which can be described as preliminary bibliographies or bibliographies-in-progress or skeleton bibliographies. Even when they don't result in the big job, they are useful to collectors and cataloguers, facilitating the discovery of missing pieces of literary or publishing history. A respectable checklist can be compiled in a year — if the compiler has the books. Finding the books is the fun part. You can rationalize any trips you take; and you make dealer connections that pay off in books, help, and friendships.

An American bibliographer can always alibi trips to Britain; but they've spoiled the BM. Bring back the bound catalogues.

All bibliographies are out of date the day they are published. The dumbest questions that I am asked by people who really ought to know better are: “What are you going to do now that you have finished your **Fitzgerald** bibliography?” And “What are you going to do now that you have given your **Fitzgerald** collection to the **University of South Carolina**?” A collector-bibliographer has the duty to keep improving his collection and to maintain notes for his revised bibliography. Nobody else can do it as well.

Two exemplary collectors who generated bibliographies and scholarship by other bookmen were the **Whitman** collector **Charles Feinberg** and **Hawthorne** collector **C. E. Frazer Clark**. It seemed that whenever I visited **Charlie** there were scholars working in his library.

The most admirable collector-bibliographer I have known was **Fraze Clark** — a marketing consultant who began collecting **Nathaniel Hawthorne** as a hobby and proceeded to build the most comprehensive **Hawthorne** research collection. He recognized that no one else could compile the descriptive bibliography based on — but not restricted to — his collection; therefore he learned how to do it, and he did it damn well. See his *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Descriptive Bibliography* (**University of Pittsburgh Press**, 1978). He also co-founded the **Bruccoli Clark publishing company** to produce literary reference books.

In the fields of nineteenth- and twentieth-

century literature it is possible for the bibliographer to own most of the books he needs. It may not be mandatory; but it accelerates the task and improves the result to have the books within reach for checking and rechecking. Library collections supplement the bibliographer's own books. I don't trust the work of a modern literature bibliographer who doesn't own the books he describes.

**John Cook Wyllie** — the best bookman I ever knew — taught me that the kind of bibliographical collection that justifies the activity is what has come to be called the “completist” collection: Every printing of every edition in the English language from the first printing up to a practical terminus ad quem — at least twenty years after the author's death, depending on the shape of the author's career and reputation. It includes galleys, proof copies, advance copies and review copies; binding variants and dust-jacket variants; piracies and mass-market paperbacks. **Mr. Wyllie** said that a bibliography should provide bibliographies of its books. An author bibliographer is not a collecting guide — although it serves that purpose. Literary bibliography is literary biography is literary history. **Samuel Johnson** decreed that “The gradations of a hero's life are from battle to battle, and of an author's from book to book.” A full primary bibliography assembles the evidence for reconstructing the author's career. Moreover, it establishes the history of each of this books — not only the publishing history, but the development of the author's critical reputation and readership. A proper bibliography documents what **William Charvat** termed the profession of authorship: the recognition of the ways in which the publication, marketing, distribution, reception, and sales of an author's work may influence what he writes.

A completist collection requires long, hard work. Anyone with money can pick up the phone or go on telly and buy almost any modern first. That's not collecting; that's check-writing. A serious collection is a working collection. **Mr. Wyllie** remarked that first editions are common; second editions are rare. The resettings and reprintings provide evidence of the textual transmission — often the mis-transmission — of the text, but sometimes reveal authorial emendations. The editorial work for what was called “a definitive edition” before that became a junk term requires access to all the rare worthless texts. Expensive rare books are easy to find; the cheap ones are really scarce. It gets harder every day because high rents and online search outfits have driven the used-book shops out of business.

A completist necessarily acquires duplicate copies or putative duplicates or possible duplicates. This is a matter that worries librarians — not bookmen. **Mr. Wyllie** believed that a

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book isn't a duplicate until bibliographical evidence proves it is a duplicate. Even then, two copies are better than one and three are better than two. You may have missed something in the copy you didn't buy, and now you can't find it to check.

The collector cannot recover his investment in a completist collection. Nobody else wants the reprints he has arduously gathered and preserved: dealers won't buy them because there is no market for them; most libraries don't want them — even for free — because librarians don't understand their utility. They understand shelf space. The solution to the problem of shelving is to build bigger libraries or enlarge existing libraries. That's simple. Libraries exist to hold books.

When a library receives the gift or bequest of a private library, the reprints, duplicates, and other worthless books are weeded out and consigned to the general stacks or discarded. Libraries are places where books are destroyed. In June 2007 I fished two good **Dreiser** volumes out of the garbage bin behind the **Thomas Cooper Library**; they were part of a personal library that had been donated by a colleague.

It is tough for an American collector to keep up with the UK editions and reprints of American books. But it is essential because the British copies may document the different receptions of the books and authors in the other country where they sometimes recognize a masterpiece before we do — as with *Catch-22*. The earliest **Cape** jacket has an excerpt from the novel on the back, which was replaced by two sets of blurbs: **Nelson Algren**, **James Jones**, **Irwin Shaw**, **Kenneth Tynan**, and *The New York Times*; then **Algren**, **Graham Greene**, **Shaw**, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and **Kenneth Alsop**. These are meaningful. American research libraries should pay attention to Brit books. **Cape** also issued a pamphlet with excerpts from *Catch-22*, which I have never seen. It is known to me only through one bookseller's catalogue. I am eager to acquire it. I am prepared to speak fervently about the importance of preserving and studying dealer and auction catalogues

## Rumors

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worked **Electronic Resources**) international initiative. **Peter Shepherd** in his column in this issue (p.92) talks about the collection of eBook statistics by **COUNTER**. He says that so far only eight book vendors are compliant as opposed to 70 journals and database vendors. He suggests several reasons for this. See this issue, p.92.

[www.thieme.de](http://www.thieme.de)

**Jose Luis Andrade** is the new President of **Swets North America**. He will be respon-

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and the irresponsibility or incompetence of librarians who discard them.

The British editions of American works include intentional authorial or editorial emendations, as well as inadvertent textual alterations or corruptions. These editions may precede the American edition: for example, in **Raymond Chandler's** *The Long Goodbye* there are 86 variants between the first and second British printings; the first American edition that followed included 65 of these alterations and introduced 64 new substantive readings.

**James Gould Cozzens** carefully emended most of his novels for their British editions. The British *Castaway*, which preceded the American edition by ten days, has a preliminary note explaining that the character is trapped in a New York department store after a catastrophe and provides a key to the allegory by describing him as "a commonplace little Robinson Crusoe." **Cozzens** omitted this note from the American edition.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald's** novels were emended between their New York and London editions; but it is uncertain which — if any — alterations were authorial: in *This Side of Paradise* there are 850 textual variants — of which 32 are substantives; in *The Beautiful and Damned* there are 700 variants — of which 82 are substantives — and 134 lines were cut from the British edition; in *Tender Is the Night* there are 860 variants — of which six are substantives.

The serious collector discovers, rescues, and preserves the kinds of evidence that libraries discard and destroy: the jacket text, the wrap-around band, the press release and promo material. These are literary history as well as bibliographical evidence; yet libraries have systematically discarded them for more than a century. The **Library of Congress** and the **British Library** have not retained them. A few rare-book libraries bet on certain contemporary authors by acquiring and keeping new jacketed copies. This is a crap-shoot. Literary history teaches that contemporary reputations are usually wrong. A curator who preserved a jacketed copy of the first *Great Gatsby* printing in 1925 would have been classified as deranged. Now it brings up to \$250,000.

Dust jackets are essential parts of the publishing effort: the art and the flap copy, the author bio, and the blurbs establish the way the book and author were regarded by the publisher and tame critics at the time of initial release. The jacket reprints may document the stages of the book's post-publication reputation. The initial blurbs and the replacement blurbs provide evidence about literary politics.

There are two remainder jackets on the **Chatto & Windus** first printing of *Gatsby*. Since the novel didn't sell at 7s, it was remaindered with a 2/6 label and then with a 2s label. This evidence — referred to by librarians as "mere artifacts" — documents the opaque reception of the novel in the other principal English-reading nation: the Limeys didn't get it. Dust-jacket evidence can be eloquent. Jackets on copies of the 1934 **Modern Library** reprint of *Gatsby* — the one with the first publication of **Fitzgerald's** brilliant introduction — are stamped **DISCONTINUED TITLE**.

They couldn't sell it at 95¢ while **Fitzgerald** was alive.

Finding and acquiring the third printing of the first edition or the second printing of the second edition requires time and hard work. What used to be a 50¢ used copy of a reprint may have really cost me \$50 when the travel expenses were factored in. There was no other way to obtain it except by looking and paying attention. Dealers don't catalogue reprints unless they are inscribed. **Charlie Feinberg** told me, "If you've never seen it before, you may never see it again. Buy it."

Good collectors help each other. The best men I have known — as well as some corrupt loonies — were collectors. I could have done it without **Fraze Clark** — but not as well and without the laughter. When I hesitated, he encouraged me; and he obtained for me the books that I lacked the courage or skill to get. It broke **Fraze's** heart when he was unable to keep his **Hawthorne** collection together in a research library because the book-dopes in charge of the **Hawthorne-Longfellow Library** were terrified by the specter of duplication.

For serious bibliographical-textual work it is necessary to collate multiple copies of the printings. By putting **F. Scott Fitzgerald** on the **Hinman collator** I was able to identify 42 textual alterations in the 4th and 7th printings of *This Side of Paradise*; 6 alterations in the second printing of *Great Gatsby*; and 1 each in the 3rd and 4th printings of *Tender Is the Night*. Every word matters in the published texts of a genius — except to critics and teachers.

When I was running the *Centennial Edition of Nathaniel Hawthorne* I was able to identify concealed printings in **Hawthorne** because **Hyman Kritzer** — then the **Ohio State University** Acquisitions Librarian and later the distinguished Director of the **Kent State University Libraries** — bought lots of duplicate **Hawthorne** copies for me. Working with fifty copies of *The Marble Faun* I identified thirty unrecorded textual variants in the seven previously unidentified 1860 printings of the novel and three more in 1864 and 1865 concealed printings which retained the 1860 date on their title-pages. The more copies, the more evidence. You never know what you are going to find until you find it.

A rationale for the function of book collecting is incomplete without the sentimental or spiritual factor: The reward of owning a copy of a cultural monument or a work of literature that influenced you, as it was first published and read. Buying a great book is a way of affirming what is meaningful to you. Bookmanship is a way of life: you live to acquire books. They shape your life. My need to own the books I use drove me to make the requisite money. **Charlie Feinberg** said it best: "Without books my life would have been a desert." He was the only big-time collector who encouraged me when I was commencing my work: maybe because he began buying books with the nickels and dimes he earned as a shoe-shine boy.

A serious book collection and what its builder does with it constitute his autobiography. 🐾