
Chapter 11

AND LO! YR LETTER HIT ME HARD: LIVE(S) & WORK(S) IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES

Patrick Williams

O sovereign was my touch
upon the tan-ink's fragile page!

Quickly, my eyes moved quickly,
sought for smell for dust for lace
for dry hair!

-Gregory Corso

"I Held a Shelley Manuscript (written in Houghton Library,
Harvard)"

Just above my office on the literature floor is our library's Special Collections Research Center, strong in materials relating to antiquarian books and printing history, radicalism in the arts, utopian communities, and cartoon and comics history, and with hundreds of poets represented among the little magazines, rare books, personal papers, and publisher's archives held there. I spend my work days generally concerned with our principal collections and the people who work among them, but always looming above me is the urge to take the elevator up to spend whatever time I can immersing myself in the collective aura of the archive.

If there is one poetic impulse that regularly usurps my professional duties as a librarian it is this: I seek to use my position to root through the lives of other poets. I know it will be a career-length endeavor to acquaint myself with the unwieldy, immeasurable expanse of the archive, learning along the way what invisible linkages among the books in our stacks and among the collections in other libraries exist there. To me it is the feeling of frantically assembling a jigsaw puzzle with no edge pieces, and maybe some of the pieces are from another puzzle. And really, where does any good puzzle truly end?

I have learned to employ this impulse in helping patrons and teaching students; I justify the indulgence in academic work about the strategies I use. Every interaction with these collections sets me off on questions I have no time to answer; they live in me and spill out into my work practice and my reading and my interactions with patrons. I've learned that in every box are untold secrets, and in every secret, untold boxes.

Part of me is always trying to reconcile my creative life with my professional life, my work as a librarian with my work as a poet. There is a strong connection between them, but I often have trouble articulating, or perhaps even recognizing it. While I may shift between fully inhabiting either, each is somehow ever-present, listening, searching, noticing, recounting, documenting.

One thing I've noticed about being a librarian working in archival collections is the privilege that comes along with knowing how systems of description and access are supposed to work and how willing other librarians, archivists, curators, and information professionals are to share with me.

It turns out that lots of what I know about our own local archives comes from conversations with the curators, archivists, and others in the reading room; telling stories and listening to stories about our experience in the collections. Despite being a vital part of this work, those conversations are never really present in the apparatus of archival description. But they are alive in the spaces around collections, in the break room, in the elevator;

whispered not because they are secrets, but in order not to disturb the other researchers. They feel like secrets.

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Patrick: I wanted to, quickly, ask if you could just tell me a little bit about your specific job and the kind of questions people ask you?

Tom:¹ Sure, yeah. So my title here is Public Services Specialist, I am sort of second in command in the Public Services Department here, and I do many different things but the way that I interact with the public is that I work our front desk and manage our reading room, and also deal with remote requests like yours.

Patrick: [laughs] OK, cool. I'm glad there are requests like mine. Um, so what type of materials do you handle on a daily basis? Are there things that you're looking at a lot? Or, is it all over the place?

Tom: Yeah, it's different day to day, you know. It's kind of funny actually because, you know, part of the reason that I work here is that I like dealing with the materials, but I really don't get to choose what I get to look at because my time is totally dictated by what other people want to look at [laughs]. So, I'm so busy helping other people, I rarely get to delve into it myself.

Patrick: I know exactly what you mean about ending up kind of dealing with—encountering lots of questions, but just happening to be the one who's there to help other people with it, and not ever knowing what you're going to end up with.

Tom: Right.

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Recently I led a session for our incoming MFA Creative Writing students; an introduction to some of our literature-related

1. Tom McCutcheon, Public Services Specialist, Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, interviewed via telephone, June 9, 2016.

special collections, featuring a hard sell on entangling oneself in the constellations of books and documents and ephemera they represent.

Alongside the fancy things like copy Q of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and our Kelmscott Chaucer, I laid out some more mundane items, things that reflect the actual lives of our writers, things that implicate them in the personal, literary, and business relationships that comprise the machinery of literature. Things like a manuscript of Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (Grove Press, 1984), with a sweet handwritten note to her editor.

Things like a folder of manuscripts from the Leroi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka)² Papers of poems from *Yugen* 6³ including a page with a Robert Creeley poem unceremoniously crossed out. Things like Diane Di Prima's 1966 pocket calendar, noting editorial tasks for *The Floating Bear* and Poet's Press, recipients of letters-to-be-written, dates designated "Cleaning Day," and one marked "New Moon / Buddhist New Year / Druid New Year / LSD." Things like a letter to Grove Press requesting permission to republish portions of *Ficciones*, signed by Jorge Luis Borges.⁴

The poet Brooks Haxton, who teaches at my institution, attended the session, and we both noticed that the young poets and fiction writers in the room seemed almost scared to move, despite having been given permission and training to handle many of the items. Brooks mentioned a Corso poem to me about being struck by the aura of something unique in an archive. I received an email a few days later containing a copy-pasted version of "I Held a Shelley Manuscript."



2. LeRoi Jones worked as the Night Librarian at Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico. Imamu Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), 114.

3. *Yugen* is the little magazine that Jones edited from 1958 to 1962. A PDF of issue six may be found here: http://cdn.realitystudio.org/images/bibliographic_bunker/yugen/pdf/yugen.06.pdf

4. He was denied that permission.

A slim folder in the Arna Bontemps Papers (42 linear ft.) contains correspondence between Bontemps, poet and Head Librarian at Fisk University, and Dudley Randall, poet, founder of Broadside Press, and librarian at Eloise Hospital Library and the Wayne County Federated Library.⁵ The nineteen letters, which span 1962 to 1967, document a relationship between two men whose poetic and professional lives were quite entangled. The earliest letter involves the submission of some of Randall's poems, along with some written by Margaret Danner, which Randall had typed up, for inclusion in *American Negro Poetry* (Hill and Wang, 1963), edited by Bontemps.

Despite both men being well into their respective library careers at the time, Randall's public career in poetry is in its early stages during these exchanges. It is clear in the reverence and care he takes in the letters that he holds Bontemps in very high esteem—Randall is very formal and comes across as nervous for years. This is exemplified by a telegram Randall transmitted at 7:16 in the morning on Christmas day 1963, to let Bontemps know a local review⁶ of *American Negro Poetry* would not be published in advance of Bontemps's upcoming talk in Detroit.

Throughout these letters, the poets discuss the networks of their literary lives, illustrating the dynamics of editor-poet relationships, but the most striking thing to me is the way in which their discourse is embedded in the profession. Bontemps almost always signs his letters with his title (first Head Librarian, later Director of University Relations), and the first letter Randall sent to him (referred to periodically, but not among those in the collection) was an inquiry about a job in the Fisk Library. My favorite piece in the folder is a 1965 hand-written card emblazoned with a portrait of Samuel Coleridge. It begins:

5. Julius E. Thompson, *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement in Detroit, 1960-1995*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company), 21.

6. Broadus Butler, "American Negro Poetry: An Enjoyment and a Revelation." *Michigan Chronicle* [Detroit, Michigan] 25 January 1964. Folder 78 of the Bontemps papers contains a clipping of this story.

Dear Mr. Bontemps,

I am Dudley Randall, who once asked you for a job, and who appeared in your *American Negro Poetry*.

I won this stationery from the Gale Research Company, publishers of *Contemporary Authors*, who issued a literary calendar with some blank dates and who offered a packet of literary stationery to anyone who suggested an author's birthdate for any of the blank dates.⁷ I looked in their book and found a name for October 13;⁸ and thank you for the stationery. (30 May 1965)

Randall goes on to invite Bontemps to visit his monthly poetry workshop when he assumes Bontemps will be in town for the ALA Annual Meeting in Detroit that year. Bontemps replies with delight about the calendar, but with regrets about ALA—he's skipping it that year to attend the PEN International conference, where he will eventually see Arthur Miller be elected the first American president of that organization.

A 1966 letter on the same Gale-supplied stationery (featuring James Fenimore Cooper this time) reveals that Randall and Bontemps met at the historic April 1966 Fisk Black Writers' Conference.⁹

Thank you for your kindness and courtesy to me at the Writer's Conference. I was looking for a place to eat, and you noticed and invited me to sit down at the table. And you invited me to the party after Saunders Riddings' speech. I shan't forget that. (12 May 1966)

The remaining items in the folder document Randall's emergence as a publisher, including a call for submissions to Broadside Press's memorial volume *For Malcolm: Poems on the Life and the Death of Malcolm X*, and, upon the death of Langston Hughes, a request for

7. I had eight volumes of *Library Journal* from 1964-1965 delivered to my office to find an announcement of this contest; a couple of hours of searching yielded nothing.

8. Bontemps was born 13 October 1902.

9. Nearly half of the June 1966 issue of *Negro Digest*, which is available in Google Books, is dedicated to the 1966 Fisk Black Writers Conference.

advice regarding royalties for Hughes's "Backlash Blues" broadside, which Randall was in the process of publishing.¹⁰ In these letters, the tone, and even the forms, of Randall's correspondence have shifted from being from a poet writing to his editor to that of a peer and a publisher. The last two items in the folder are Bontemps's personal copies of the first two Broadside Press broadsides, "The Ballad of Birmingham" and "Dressed All in Pink",¹¹ both written by Randall.

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Patrick: [laughs] So are there any items that you've encountered either in your career or in your research, that kind of had that effect of sort of stopping your heart, um, you know, things that stick out to you like the one item that had the effect on you that the Shelley manuscript had on Corso?

Tom: [long pause] I don't have instant access to it, so I'm sure I have a better example than the one I'll give you, but I think that . . . Well, a good one is, I got really excited the other day when I was looking through the archives that we recently acquired from Edith Schloss Burckhardt, and she was at one time married to a composer that I really love named Alvin Curran. And he was writing to her—I guess, I'm not sure exactly what time period in their lives that they were married, but the correspondence in her collection is all from a time when he was expatriating for the first time in Rome, and he ended up staying there his whole life. But he was writing her, like, drunk letters.

Patrick: [laughs]

Tom: Writing to her, you know, interacting with her, expressing to her how drunk he is and how much all the people at the party were

10. About which, Randall noted, "I have already listed it in Books in Print 1967." (29 June 1967)

11. The copy of "Dressed All in Pink," a poem following Jackie Kennedy during her husband's assassination, is hand-marked #56 (of 200) in red ink and has a heavy crease near the bottom of the page, I imagine, due to having been sent in a standard-size envelope.

assholes, and just how wild the whole thing is, but mixed with a kind of excitement. Talking about the various events and how the artistic connections are working out for him at a young age and everything. That was really special because it's the sort of thing that I didn't really expect to find here in the archives because it's not really connected to Columbia in anyway.

Patrick: Uh huh.

Tom: And, I think it was kind of rare to have this, like, fall in my lap, and it was such an . . . intimate thing and I got to, you know, really see this beautiful moment between two people [laughs]

Patrick: [laughs] Yeah, that sounds great. Is that collection even available yet? Is it being processed? It's new?

Tom: It's available, it's kind of . . . I would call it "minimally processed."

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From: Patrick Williams (Librarian)¹²
 Sent: Monday, September 28, 2015 7:41 AM
 To: Brooks Haxton
 Subject: RE: Corso

Hi Brooks-

Thanks so much for sending this—I need to find a way to incorporate it into the next session!

As for the actual effects of holding a Shelley manuscript, maybe we should see for ourselves:

http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/s/shelley_pb.htm¹³

Thanks for coming to the session last week. I hope to do another next fall with different items.

12. I'm not the only Patrick Williams at my institution, so I have to append (Librarian) to my email alias in order that correspondence meant for me arrives. It's a constant source of anxiety.

13. The URL of our library's EAD finding aid for the small Shelley collection.

Best,
Patrick

Box 1 of the William Van O'Connor Papers (1.7 linear feet) contains twenty-eight folders of correspondence demonstrating the critic, teacher, and poet's broad literary and professional world. The folder marked "1958" holds many letters pertaining to O'Connor's eventual *The New University Wits* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), including those penned by its subjects, Iris Murdoch, John Wain, and Kingsley Amis.

As I'm in the reading room thanks to some found time between meetings, I rush through letters by these poets until I arrive at the pale-blue Air Letter I see through the onionskin of the correspondence preceding it. Typed in mock-letterhead at the top of the form: "THE UNIVERSITY AT HULL / THE LIBRARY." It's from Philip Larkin, whom the lead chapter in O'Connor's book features.

In this letter, and many of the others from Larkin in this collection, he is equal parts aloof, tacit, and self-deprecating.¹⁴ O'Connor seeks to know of Larkin's involvement in "The Movement" along his contemporaries Murdoch, Wain, Amis, Donald Davie, and Thom Gunn. Rather than answer questions directly, Larkin refers O'Connor to an article on the topic¹⁵ for answers. He closes the letter:

I am in fact Librarian of the University of Hull and not any sort of English Teacher. If necessary I could supply a copy of the article I mentioned, but since I have only a very small and diminishing stock of these I should be relieved if you could find a copy or photocopy within the United States. I should be glad to answer any further questions you have. (2 April 1958)

14. This approach is continued in Larkin's correspondence regarding a 1982 *Paris Review* interview in our Robert S. Phillips Papers (33 linear feet).

15. "Four Young Poets, I. Philip Larkin." *Times Education Supplement*, 13 July 1956, 931. Larkin does not supply Phillips with the article's title.

In the letters that follow Larkin does exactly that, though he seems very interested in not confirming O'Connor's ideas about the cohesion of the "The Movement." Upon receiving a copy of the book in March 1964, Larkin thanks the author, letting him know he'd already obtained a copy for the library and therefore "what you said of me is not surprising..." He goes on:

Looking back at our correspondence in 1958 (yes, I still have it) I am rather ashamed of my somewhat laconic replies to your requests for information, but I suppose I was brought up to think that it is better to say too little than too much. (24 March 1964)

Even in literary conversations, Larkin seems to draw more authority and legitimacy from his professional work. Eventually, O'Connor is granted a one-year teaching placement at Hull, and Larkin helps to secure him housing. In Larkin's condolence letter to O'Connor's widow Mary the following year, he foregrounds their professional, rather than literary, relationship:

I particularly remember him as a genial and friendly colleague, whom one always felt better for having seen, and who was graciously tolerant of our many short-comings as a University. I was also grateful for the attention he had given to the few things I have written. It is good to know that you enjoyed your year here, and I am sure that we all retain very happy memories of your visit. (20 December 1966)

I present these findings as a work in progress at a campus archival research symposium, after being introduced to the audience as a librarian. I neglect to mention that I'm also a poet.

Scope and Contents of the Collection¹⁶

The Percy Bysshe Shelley Collection consists of one fragment in Shelley's hand and three letters concerning him. The letter from

16. From the finding aid for the Percy Bysshe Shelley Collection, http://library syr.edu/digital/guides/s/shelley_pb.htm

Percy Florence Shelley, dated 14 Nov 1883, contains comments about his father's vegetarianism. Of the letters from Jane, Lady Shelley, one contains remarks on an article about Shelley published in the *National Review* and the other expresses gratitude to the recipient (unnamed) for his "understanding of [Shelley's] character."

Poet-librarian Audre Lorde appears briefly in the papers of Arna Bontemps. In 1966 she wrote Bontemps inquiring about the planned new edition of *Poetry of the Negro* (Doubleday, 1970), and offered poems. In the letter, she mentions that her work had appeared on the syllabus for a class at Teachers' College at Columbia University. Bontemps responds with an invitation for Lorde to submit, and mentions he'd also consider the work Langston Hughes had published by Lorde in *New Negro Poets: USA* (Indiana University Press, 1964). In a letter sent along with her submission, Lorde, then thirty-two, requests that Bontemps pay closest attention to her more recent work, as the poems appearing in *New Negro Poets* were written when she was in high school.

No poems of Lorde's appear in *Poetry of the Negro*; a rejection.

Lorde is sadly absent from our Diane di Prima Papers (2.5 linear feet), despite the close friendship they maintained. In Lorde's first collection, *The First Cities* (Poets' Press, 1968), di Prima provides the introduction, revealing that:

I have known Audre Lorde since we were fifteen, when we read our poems to each other in front of our Home Room at Hunter High school. And only two months ago, she delivered my child.

A woman's world, peopled with men & children and the dead,
exotic as scallops.

In our copy, di Prima has signed and dated this page May 14, 1987, which for some reason, I run my finger over.

Though (non-librarian) poet Gregory Corso is present though poems and letters in no fewer than five collections in my institution's special collections, our small Gregory Corso Collection only

contains four items from 1961: outgoing letters to Marshall Bean and Richard Meltzer, a typescript of Corso's collection *Long Live Man* (New Directions, 1962), and a notebook with "Long Live Man" written in pencil on the cover. "I Held a Shelly Manuscript" appeared in Corso's previous book, *The Happy Birthday of Death*, so I was a bit curious to see whether there was any trace of it in that notebook.

There was not.

But while reading the typed letter Corso wrote to Marshall Bean from Athens, I copied down a single line: "and lo! yr letter hit me hard." "God I hope you ain't dead Marshall" is scrawled in blue ballpoint at the bottom of the page.

I'm holding a Shelley manuscript. I came across it accidentally as I was preparing for a class on local social justice archives, and it just happened to be in the same box. When I saw "Percy Bysshe Shelley Collection" on the folder tab, I couldn't quite catch my breath. But I quickly regained it on opening the folder.

To call it a fragment is perhaps too generous. It's about an inch and a half tall and five inches wide, clearly excised from a larger prose document. It is ungrand. Maybe it has fourteen words, but I can barely make them out. Is it French? "1818" is penciled in beneath the script. The ink is tan, as in Corso's observation, but the page is not fragile. It's been pasted and (and at some time matted) to card stock, with a scar of old adhesive underscoring its torn lower edge.

Patrick: So, I just wanted to let you know I'm sitting here with a copy of the poem that I printed out from a screenshot of the [Google Books preview version] of *Mindfield*, which is at least the third time the poem was republished in a book. So I'm looking at a really different copy than the one you looked at.

Tom: Yeah, I've got it in front of me right now actually.

Patrick: Oh really! [laughs]

Tom: There's actually two versions in this folder.

Patrick: Oh, wow!

Tom: One is a typewritten manuscript that he signed on onionskin, and the other one looks like it's an edited version.

Patrick: Do you have any connection to Shelley or Corso? In terms of what you've studied or what you're interested in?

Tom: Well, I was an English major in college, so, you know to some extent yes. But neither of them are intimates of mine.

Patrick: Got it. Ok, so can you tell me what you thought of the poem, just briefly?

Tom: Well, I thought that it was, you know, I know Corso was a Beat, or associated with them, and I always appreciate the economy of their writing and the emotion that they pack in to it, so that was nice. Looking at the manuscript, it was interesting to see how some of the edits made such a big difference.

Patrick: Uh huh

Tom: Particularly with punctuation. Because I think that the final, well I'm not comparing this to a final one, obviously, but the more polished version has much more punctuation.

Patrick: Oh.

Tom: The other one has no punctuation. That was quite interesting because it kind of changes things. The earlier version—I also just tend to like earlier versions of things in general. [laughs] Yeah, I

can relate to the feeling that he's got here. Just the sheer excitement of being able to connect with this item and the person through the item.

Patrick: Yeah! So you've already mentioned some of the things you've noticed about it, but are there other things you notice besides the differences between the versions, anything about the paper, or marking, or what have been involved other than the typewriters in their production?

Tom: Yeah, you know the onionskin is always a nice touch in this time period. You know it was more common in that period. I was born in '83, so it was never even commonplace for me. His—I'm guessing that it's his own edits—are here in red ink—I'll send you a picture of it—but he's got some formatting in some just really crude red ink that's childish and smearing and I feel like that's very endearing. The poem itself too, I think, increasingly becomes—the whole thing is kind of this affected tone, and gets more and more so as it goes on, which I guess is a testament to how much he's affected by the manuscript.

Patrick: Uh huh.

Tom: I don't know—it's neat that I'm wondering why he signed it.

Patrick: Does it remind you of anything? Like any other pieces, collections, items that you've seen?

Tom: Does it remind me of anything? Hmmm. Well, the thing that it reminds me of is sort of a non sequitur in a way, um, because, you know, all of these things kind of start to look similar after a while.

Patrick: Uh huh.

Tom: But, the interesting thing about it maybe is that what it reminds me of immediately is: a lot of times with the handwritten manuscripts, or correspondence, you have the version that is on the parchment or whatever, kind of more cloudy looking document, and then, you know, probably very difficult to read. Both of these [typed pages] are not so much this case, but then a lot of times you'll have, you know, some academic has gone through it and leaves their typed translation of it to make things easier on some future academic.

Patrick: Yeah.

Tom: And they're placed next to it. And that's what this is kind of immediately reminding me of.

Patrick: [laughs]

Tom: Having the cleaned up version right next to the other one, like maybe you couldn't understand the intent of what he was doing there.

Patrick: Yeah, and I imagine there is a handwritten version of this—I think it might be in some notebooks that are at UNC Chapel Hill—I haven't found out yet—because you can't imagine that he had a typewriter in there in the reading room while he was writing. [laughs]

Tom: Yeah, probably not. And the kind of drafty version on the typewriter also at the bottom says "Printed in OXFORD MAGAZINE" and "gregory corso" and then he signed it.

Patrick: Oh yeah, yeah, I feel like I see that a lot.

Tom: So it's kind of—I'm not sure why he would have re-typed it, what purpose.

Patrick: You said there was some red ink-- are there any sort of traces of, you know, Corso's body on it? Are there marks, or smudges?

Tom: [laughs] Yeah, totally. It looks like you know kind of the way a smudgy eraser marks up a page. Multiple marks like that. I don't know where they are from, but they are like the size of an eraser tip all over the page.

Patrick: Hmm.



The John Wieners Papers (0.75 linear feet) contains items relating to the poet, who once worked in the Lamont Library at Harvard,¹⁷ covering the period of 1955 to 1970. In it are a handful of correspondence files,¹⁸ some clippings and fliers, and manuscripts and production files for his collection *À ce of Pentacles* (Phoenix Books, 1964). It also contains photocopies of the three issues of *Measure*, the little magazine that Wieners edited, and various other writings, including a small notepad advertising the Atlantic Pipe & Supply Co., Inc., of Boston. It's a very compact collection, but I've returned to it often because it is dense with surprises.

In one letter, Marianne Moore (who worked in the New York Public Library's Hudson Park Branch¹⁹ from 1921-1925²⁰) graciously declines to send Wieners poems for the second issue of

17. Raymond Foye, "John Wieners," in *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar American* (*Dictionary of Literary Bibliography* Volume 16 Part 2), ed. Ann Charters (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983), 572-583.

18. Including a letter from Archibald MacLeish, poet and ninth Librarian of Congress.

19. My dear friend Miranda Murray became the manager of this branch library in 2013, and is quite proud of the Moore association: "We have a plaque!"

20. Richard Macksey, "Marianne (Craig) Moore: A Brief Chronology," in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 179-181.

Measure. But she thanks him for sending her the first issue, and excitedly quotes from the Charles Olson and Jack Spicer poems it contains. The Spicer poem, “Song for Bird and Myself,” concerns two birds who have found their way into a Rare Book Room²¹ like the one I sit in as I read from the thick and grainy sixties mimeo. For some reason, I prefer these ghostly surrogates to the actual copies sitting on my cart fifteen feet away.

Even Corso’s in there, asking for poems from Wieners for *Junge Amerikanische Lyrik* (Hanser, 1961), an anthology he co-edited with Walter Höllerer, and requesting copies of *Measure* and *Evergreen Review* to be sent to him care of American Express in Venice.

The notepad, which I have also returned to often, stopped my heart the first time I saw it. As I flipped through it, I experienced a feeling I’ve only had when dealing with priceless or fragile items—I was scared. The small cardboard cover features the dents and smudges one would expect from something kept so close to a body. To *his* body. What it contains feels so deeply personal: “I am miserable / but this misery I have to endure / It is what the gods demand of me,” lines written on the train, political poems, poems of erotic desire and action, and the addresses and phone numbers of fellow poets and acquaintances. About halfway through the notepad, Wieners works out the zodiac in diagrams and notes:

Jupiter in Leo gives people
big hearts.
...
Mars in the 12th could lead
to surgery.
...
Capricorn’s a politician’s sign.

Another page features only three words in Wiener’s gentle script:

Holy love affairs

21. Spicer himself worked in the Rare Book Room at the Boston Public Library in 1955-6. Michael Davidson, “Jack Spicer,” in *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar American* (*Dictionary of Literary Bibliography* Volume 16 Part 2), ed. Ann Charters (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983), 511-517.

I delete the images I take of these pages, and photograph them again when I return.

Patrick: Did you look at anything else in that box?

Tom: I didn't, no. I just went right for that one.

Patrick: Yeah, it seems like that finding aid is so, like, detailed, and looks like a really well-organized collection.

Tom: Yeah, it's unusual, actually. It's nice when you have that. It didn't lead me to wander.

Patrick: Is there anything about handling these two pages that is different from what you normally do?

Tom: Well I guess the thing that's different about it is just simply the fact that I had the space to think a little bit more creatively—sometimes you get seized by something and you'll just kind of create a little extra time for it, but given the nature of your request I did at least, you know, read and open myself up to it a little bit more.

Patrick: [laughs]

Tom: Whereas normally, I'm kind of just very purpose driven, and trying to get it done quickly.

Patrick: Yeah.

Tom: And move on to the next thing.

Patrick: I can imagine. So, does handling it make you—I'll reference the poem here—does handling it make you feel anything? [laughs] I guess I'm asking, um, did your hands numb to beauty?

Tom: [laughs] I guess you could say so. I think any time that I handle something that somebody else touched from another period, particularly something that's creative, you feel a little bit like you just eavesdropped on that person or peeked in their window or something. Or, for like a second, you were that person or something; like, you're seeing it through their eyes. That's a really cool feeling, always. It's funny because most of the time, you know, in these people's archives, you get so excited that you found a letter from whoever to whoever, and both are such interesting people, and then you read the letter and it's like, it's nothing. There's nothing to it, but you still feel so privileged to have eavesdropped on their little conversation. It feels so significant, but they're just talking about, "it was nice to see you the other day." [laughs]

Patrick: All right. I just have one last question, which isn't really a question. Do you know where Corso's ashes are buried?

Tom: I don't, no.

Patrick: They buried them right in front of Percy Shelley's grave in Rome.

Tom: Ah ha.

Patrick: I thought that was kind of special.

Tom: Yeah, that is.

Collections consulted:

Arna Bontemps Papers, Diane Di Prima Papers, Gregory Corso Collection, Grove Press Records, John Wieners Papers, Leroi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka) Papers, Percy Bysshe Shelley Collection, Robert S Phillips Papers, William Van O'Connor Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

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