

# Literary Discoveries

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## ABSTRACT

Anyone who has done work in literary archives will have made discoveries of one kind or another — unknown letters, perhaps, or early versions of works that were published later in different forms. Occasionally a scholar will find a short story, poem, essay, or memoir that has never seen print. If the author is relatively unknown or the archive unexplored, there might even be an entire novel or book of poems or collection of nonfiction that has never been published. One's instinct is to put these texts into print. Before pursuing publication, however, certain questions should be addressed. What exactly has been discovered? Of what significance is the item? Is it finished work, or is it a project that the author abandoned? Is the discovery in the public domain? If not, who owns the literary rights? Has the piece been published already under a different title? How should the text be presented — as is, or with emendations? Where should it appear? What will the reaction from readers and colleagues likely be? Some tentative answers will be offered in this article.

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BACK WHEN I WAS GAINFULLY EMPLOYED I WOULD SOMETIMES TELL MY friends in creative writing that, during my career, I had published two short stories in the *New Yorker* and one in the *Paris Review*. I would detect signs of consternation. How could an editor and book historian, a plodding compiler of textual tables, possibly have cracked these two venues? I would wait a few beats and then tell them that, of course, I had not myself composed the stories. One had been written by F. Scott Fitzgerald and the other two by William Styron. I had discovered the stories among the papers of these writers and, with the help of literary agents, had placed them in the two magazines. I was not a writer of fiction; my fields were biography and bibliography. Still, it was I who had found the stories and caused them to be published. Otherwise they might still be resting in Hollinger boxes. I was happy to have made the discoveries and to have guided the texts into print.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Styron, "Rat Beach", *New Yorker* (20 July 2009); Fitzgerald, "Thank You for the Light", *New Yorker* (6 August 2012); Styron, "Spiral", *Paris Review*, 230 (Fall 2019).

George Bornstein was familiar with this kind of scholarship. George was an excellent critic and textual theorist; he was also a first-rate editor and an archive rat. In his two volumes of Yeats' early poetry for the Cornell edition (1987, 1994), he included alternate versions of the poems, transcribed and in facsimile; in his edition of Yeats' *Letters to the New Island* (1989), he used newly discovered material to annotate the writings; and in his edition of *Under the Moon* (1995), he demonstrated how to present unknown and unpublished poetry by Yeats to the lay reader. During his career George made many literary discoveries. The evidence is in his published work.

Anyone who has muddled around in literary archives over the course of a career will have made such discoveries. Often these items will show themselves at the end of a research visit, when time is left after the main business of the trip has been accomplished. In the summer of 1984, for example, I was working at Yale, at the Beinecke Library, examining some manuscripts and letters in the Edith Wharton collection. I had the afternoon free at the end of my final day, and I decided to do some sleuthing. I was working on a monograph about professional authorship in America during the twentieth century. I asked the curators whether they might possess any items having to do with "literary business". They suggested I have a look at the ledger of the Indiana novelist George Barr McCutcheon (1866–1928), author of the popular romance *Graustark: The Story of a Love behind a Throne* (1901). McCutcheon was one of the most prolific and widely read American authors of the 1910s and 1920s; during his career he published some forty-seven volumes of light fiction and saw his work adapted for the stage and the movies. His ledger, a detailed record of his contracts and earnings, turned out to be of considerable value. In the ledger McCutcheon revealed that, early in his career, he had made a beginner's mistake. He had sold his publisher all rights to *Graustark*, his first novel, for a flat fee of five hundred dollars. He had then watched the book become a bestseller, with adaptations for the stage and the silent screen. Thereafter in contract negotiations with his publishers he always insisted upon advances and royalties and was careful to retain subsidiary rights. He became successful and wealthy. Other than the initial five-hundred-dollar fee, however, he never collected another dime for *Graustark*, his most popular novel. I published a short article about McCutcheon's error and used the story again in the monograph I was writing.<sup>2</sup>

Most archival discoveries are modest: unknown letters or early versions of works that were published later in different forms. Occasionally someone will

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2. See WEST 1985 and 1988.

come upon a short story, a poem, an essay, or a memoir that has never seen print. If the author is relatively unknown or the archive unexplored, there might even be an entire novel or book of poems or collection of nonfiction that has never been published. It's exciting to make such discoveries. One's instinct is to put the texts into print. Before pursuing that end, however, certain questions should be addressed. What exactly has been discovered? Of what significance is the item? Is it in the public domain? If not, who owns the literary rights? Has the piece been published already under a different title? How should the text be presented? Where should it appear? What will the reaction from readers and colleagues likely be?

Literary discoveries are announced with some frequency. They are part of the ongoing commerce of publishing. Within the past several years a great many previously unpublished writings have come to light. A listing, certainly incomplete, with dates of discovery or first publication, includes the following: a lost chapter of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2014); a novel by Malcolm Lowry called *In Ballast to the White Sea* (2014); a poem by the enslaved writer Jupiter Hammond (2015); an essay called "The Contemporary Novel" by T. S. Eliot (2015); a short story, "The Field of Honor", by Edith Wharton (2015); an illustrated book called *What Pet Should I Get?* by Dr. Seuss (2015); *The Tale of Kitty-in-Boots* by Beatrix Potter (2016); two early poems by J. R. R. Tolkien (2016); an H. G. Wells ghost story, "The Haunted Ceiling" (2016); *Manly Health and Training*, a series of journalistic pieces by Walt Whitman (2016); *I'd Die for You*, a collection of stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald (2017); several unpublished poems by Sylvia Plath (2017); a nonfiction book, *Barracoon*, by Zora Neale Hurston (2018); a story by Ernest Hemingway called "A Room on the Garden Side" (2018); a Sylvia Plath story, "Mary Ventura and the Ninth Kingdom" (2019); unknown poems by Daphne du Maurier (2019); another book by Dr. Seuss called *Dr. Seuss's Horse Museum* (2019); letters and a poem by Edward Lear (2021); and a novel, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, by Richard Wright (2021).<sup>3</sup>

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3. Such discoveries are not limited to literature. The manuscript score of Igor Stravinsky's "Funeral Song" was found in 2014 and first performed in 2016. An early Disney cartoon called "Neck n' Neck", featuring Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, was discovered, restored, and shown in 2018. Architectural drawings and blueprints for an unbuilt fraternity house designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe were rediscovered by alumni of Indiana University in 2013; the structure was erected (dedicated in 2021) and is today used by the architecture school at the university as a mixed office and classroom building.

Many well-known literary works were found in authors' papers. In American literature, for example, we have Emily Dickinson's poems (1890), Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" (1916), Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (1924), Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers* (1938), Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1941), Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964) and *Islands in the Stream* (1970), James Jones's *Whistle* (1978), Theodore Dreiser's *An Amateur Laborer* (1983), H. L. Mencken's *My Life as Author and Editor* (1993), Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* (1999), and Truman Capote's *Summer Crossing* (2005). Unpublished novels, some unfinished and some completed, are known to rest among the papers of Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, J. D. Salinger, William Styron, and other writers. Unpublished poems in great profusion are said to survive in the papers of Charles Bukowski. Eventually, one presumes, all of this writing will see print.

When searching through literary archives one often finds "private" documents — letters, journals, or diary entries that were not created with publication in mind. Or one might come upon a "public" text — an early draft of a poem, story, memoir, or essay that *was* written for print. Such items, whether public or private, will be of interest to people who study the life and work of the writer. These discoveries can be published, usually in academic outlets, with commentary on the location of the document. Such publications can help to sustain beginning academics who are trying to juggle teaching and scholarship. The publications will likely not count on the c.v. as heavily as full-length exegetical articles would, but they will be evidence of scholarly activity and will put the young person in touch with older hands in the field — and with curators who might, in future years, alert the scholar to other acquisitions.

Curators of rare book and manuscript collections often function as brokers, bringing people and documents together. This has happened to me several times during my career, most memorably when Don C. Skemer, then the curator of manuscripts at Princeton, called to tell me that the library had acquired the personal diary kept by Ginevra King, Fitzgerald's first sweetheart, during the period of their romance, along with transcriptions of the letters that Ginevra wrote to Scott. I published a book based on these materials.<sup>4</sup> A few years earlier Don had let me know that an anonymous donor had given the library photocopies of eleven letters written by Fitzgerald to his agent, Harold Ober, between March and December 1936, along with the letters that had been sent to Fitzgerald (via Ober) during these months. The originals of the letters had "disappeared"

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4. See WEST 2005.

from the Ober files a few years after Fitzgerald's death in 1940. Some of these vanished letters appeared in an auction at Sotheby Parke Bernet in 1982 and 1983, then were auctioned again at Christie's in 1999. Only one of them had been published. Using the photocopies I was able to reconstruct the Fitzgerald-Ober correspondence for those months and publish it for scholars to consult. Among the revelations: Fitzgerald was approached in April 1936 by Gummo Marx, the fifth of the Marx Brothers, with an invitation to come to Hollywood "to do a picture" for Groucho. Fitzgerald's response to Ober: "Who on Gods earth is 'Gummo' — a nephew? Is there anything in it for me?"<sup>5</sup>

In introducing such discoveries to readers, it is important to say just what has been found. If possible one should make the materials tell a story. When was the item created? Under what circumstances? What else was the author doing at the time? Was the piece submitted for publication but rejected by a magazine or publishing house? Is the discovery a discarded scrap from the workroom floor or a completed poem or story that the author kept in a drawer and never published? Does the item show something about the author that he or she might have been reluctant to reveal? Would the poem or story have injured a parent or friend or former lover? Might its publication have resulted in unfavorable publicity, or even in a lawsuit? Some of these questions can only be answered if surrounding evidence (a letter, a note, a line scrawled in the margin) exists to fill in the story — but one can always speculate.

Perhaps the most important of these matters is whether the item was offered for sale by the writer — i.e., offered to a periodical or a publisher. If the work was submitted for publication, then the author considered it finished and ready for print. This makes the matter of publication, years later, much simpler. If on the other hand the item is obviously unfinished, or completed but unrevised (as nearly as the internal evidence shows), then a justification for its publication must be given. It would not be wise to call such a work "aborted" or "abandoned". This might invite unpleasant comments: "The author would never have wanted this piece of writing to be seen". But if the item is presented by the finder as unfinished, or as an early draft, then the act of publication can be defended. We can often learn more by examining what authors choose *not* to publish than by studying what they *do* publish. By the same token, a work that has been completed but not published should probably not be called a "lost masterpiece". This suggests the "Antiques Roadshow" mentality, in which treasures from the

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5. See WEST 2004.

attic or garage are revealed to be of great monetary value. The scholar should follow a middle course, insisting on the value of the item but not claiming too much for it.

In 1988 I published, in the *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald that I had found among his papers. The story, completed by Fitzgerald but unrevised, had never been published and, so far as I could determine, had not been offered by his literary agent for sale. It was a curious piece of writing in which Fitzgerald introduced a character named Gwen Davies, one of his familiar heroines, in the early pages of the story. Then, after an event-filled plot, he proceeded in the final paragraph quite literally to blow her up. "I'm full of dynamite," Gwen explains just before she explodes, "so I always thought I'd go off." Fitzgerald wrote the story in March 1937 during his "Crack-Up" period, a time during which he found himself unable to manufacture the light tales of romance that he had sold, for high fees, to mass-circulation magazines throughout his career. His detonation of Gwen was likely a private act meant to express his frustration with the demands of popular fiction and the necessity of recreating, over and over, his stock female character. I made all of this clear in the headnote to the text of the story, but an enthusiastic university publicist announced its publication in much more laudatory terms. Press coverage ensued, and another Fitzgerald scholar became angry, denouncing me for publishing the piece. I later learned that this scholar had come upon the story earlier in Fitzgerald's papers but had dismissed it as inconsequential. This person, I suppose, was upset because I had received credit for the discovery. Perhaps I should have tried to control the press release, but at the time I had no way of doing so. I learned thereafter to be careful about publicists and journalists and never to allow them to overstate the value of a find.<sup>6</sup>

Where should a discovery be published? Ideally one wants to put the item into print in a respected academic journal or in a magazine with national circulation. If an author society exists for the writer, and if that society publishes its own journal or newsletter, then found items can be placed there. Another possibility is digital publication, which is almost certain to come about more quickly than publication in paper and ink. The lag time between completion of proofs and the appearance of printed stock is now five or six months for academic journals and monographs. These delays, caused by supply-chain and labor issues, are not likely to go away. Publication in digital form, by contrast, can take place in a few weeks. What

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6. See WEST 1988a; this story, called "A Full Life", was reprinted in WEST 2017, 221–26.

is more, many journals now appear only in digital open access, with whole issues and individual items available as downloadable PDF files. One does wonder whether the text of the item will disappear into some enormous mosh pit of such publications, never to be seen again. A colleague of mine hopes that a giant Faraday cage will someday be built to protect major digital repositories from destruction by electrostatic and electromagnetic forces, this to preserve digital-only publications for future readers.

The internet has been of great value to RBMS librarians who want to make their holdings available to wide audiences. If images mounted on a special collections website are accompanied by introductory matter, explanatory notes, an emendation table, and a searchable transcription, then the whole is in effect a scholarly edition. And digital publication solves the problem of distribution. The late William L. Joyce, a distinguished curator who worked at the University of Michigan, the New York Public Library, Princeton University Library, and Pennsylvania State University, once told me that the libraries at which he had served during his long career had produced numerous and beautiful publications (many of them facsimile editions) but had never been able to sell them. A great many copies had remained in boxes stacked in closets. This was before the era of digital publication. Today, an online edition that is mounted on a website is immediately available at no cost to anyone who has access to the internet. Copies need not be ordered, paid for, or shipped.

Many rare book and manuscript repositories, in fact, now make digitized images of selected materials available to the public on their websites. The archivists cannot, of course, put all of their holdings online. What most of them do is to put up portfolios of manuscripts, typescripts, correspondence, and other material from their most important collections. This can be useful, especially for teaching, though it is less helpful for research. In order to sift through an archive that comprises thousands of documents — the Theodore Dreiser papers at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, or the William Styron papers at Duke, the Random House collections at Columbia, the A. A. Knopf archives at Texas — the scholar must go in person to the library.

Scholars today conduct many searches online, certainly before the visit and perhaps afterward as well. In our post-Covid world, many special collections libraries now limit in-person visits to faculty members from their own institutions and to a few other scholars. This is understandable but regrettable. Many discoveries occur via serendipity: one simply pokes around in a box of documents to see what might be there. Today, however, it's not possible to go searching in this way. If one knows what one wants to

see, an archivist will scan the document and attach it to an email; but this takes time and, if fees are charged, can be expensive. One hopes that the situation does not last much longer. It discourages random research, takes much of the fun out of library visits, and increases the demands of work on librarians.

How should the texts be handled, once publication has been arranged? If the discovery is a letter or other private document, the conventional practice is to present the text without emendation, as nearly as that is possible in a printed medium. If a private document is to appear in an academic journal, the editor will likely not object to the preservation of misspellings, factual errors, slips of the pen, and other irregularities. The scholar should, however, keep a close eye on the proofs when they appear. Copy-editors, if not instructed otherwise, will often introduce well-meaning alterations, and spell-checking software will make automatic corrections in orthography. If a private document is to appear in a magazine of wide circulation, it might be necessary to tolerate a heavier dose of correction. Texts peppered with misspellings and other errors are sometimes not taken seriously by the laity and, as with Fitzgerald, can make the author appear to be a lightly educated fellow who wrote graceful sentences but spelled Ernest Hemingway's name "Hemmingway" and habitually used the spellings "appartment" and "yatch".

For public texts — fiction, poetry, and other writing meant for publication — the strategy is different. If the item survives in final or near-final form, then the scholar should treat the text as the author presumably would have wanted. Misspellings, factual errors, and mistakes in grammar and punctuation should be corrected unless they appear to be intentional. A statement about the correction policy and a table of emendations should be included.

Who owns the literary rights to the discovery? Most researchers know that the library in which the item is preserved (or the collector who has possession of it) will own the physical document, the paper and ink, but will not control the literary rights.<sup>7</sup> If there is an active literary estate, permission to publish must be sought from the heirs, or sometimes from an agent or attorney who manages the rights. The curators at the RBMS repository will usually be able to provide the name and address of the

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7. Sometimes control of the literary rights has in fact been granted to the library or the university at which the documents are kept. For example, the literary estate of Theodore Dreiser is now managed by trustees at the University of Pennsylvania, where his papers are preserved.

person or entity from whom permission should be requested. If the discovery is a single item in the collection, however, the curators might not know who owns the publication rights. The best thing to do in such a case is to search online in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* for the major collection of the author's papers. The librarians who keep that archive should know whether there are literary executors and, if so, how to get in touch with them.

It is possible, of course, that the document is in the public domain and can be published by anyone. Under current United States copyright law, an unpublished and uncopyrighted work is protected from publication only for the life of the author plus seventy years. After that it enters the public domain and can be published without permission. It is a courtesy to ask the library to give its blessing to publish, and it is certainly advisable to record, in the introductory matter, where the manuscript or letter is located, but permission from the library is not actually required. For this reason, many heavily used special collections libraries no longer concern themselves with these matters. All that is necessary is to include their standard credit line, to give the name of the library correctly, and to send a copy of the publication to the curators.

The scholar should be sure that the discovery has not already been published under a different title. In July 2019, I was at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress looking through the papers of two writers who interest me — Edna St. Vincent Millay and Truman Capote. In the finding list for Capote's manuscripts I noticed a reference to an unpublished story with the title "A Curious Gift". I asked for that box of materials to be brought to me (Box 3) and found inside a complete typescript of the piece. The folder in which the typescript was kept was indeed labeled "Unpublished Story". I read the typescript. It was a wonderful narrative, by turns humorous and poignant, about a bird that wants to be a dog. The correspondences to Capote's life were obvious. Could this be a major discovery? A quick check on my cell phone turned up no publication by Capote under the title "A Curious Gift". I returned home the next day and found, as I should have guessed, that the item was too good to have remained in the box. It had been included in a posthumous collection of Capote's writings called *Portraits and Observations* (Random House, 2007) but under another title, "Lola". I was happy not to have been wrong-footed. I might well have contacted Capote's literary executors, informed them (excitedly) of my discovery, and asked for permission to publish. The typescript is still in Capote's papers at the LC and is still labeled "Unpublished Story". Curators cannot be faulted for this sort of thing. It's up to the scholar to check.

The collection of papers for the other writer I was interested in, Edna St. Vincent Millay, contained her diaries — including several journals that she kept as a teenager. One of these early diaries, which Millay kept in 1910, was revealing. It showed a great sensitivity to nature, an awareness of God, a love of her mother, and a desire to return to childhood. In the entries we learn that Millay does not like wearing skirts or using hairpins. She feels that she is not understood by her teachers or by other adults. She is already writing poetry, some of which she has copied into the diary. It is overly rhythmic and has predictable rhymes but is quite promising. The early pages of the diary are inscribed neatly in the copy-book handwriting that someone of Millay's vintage (b. 1892) would have learned in grammar school; but soon the cursive hand is replaced by a teenager's undisciplined scrawl. Selections from this diary have recently been transcribed and published in *Rapture and Melancholy: The Diaries of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, edited by Daniel Mark Epstein. It seems to me that eventually the 1910 diary should be published in its entirety, perhaps in facsimile or in an online edition. But would there be readers for the diary? I still have my notes. Perhaps I'll pursue the project within the next few years.

George Bornstein understood the questions that come up when one makes a literary discovery. For the rest of us, and particularly for young scholars, it is important to know what to do when one opens a box of archival material, comes upon something new, and wants to publish it.

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