Introduction: the last guitar Shelley ever played

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In 1898, Edward Silsbee, an elderly American sea captain and self-proclaimed Percy Bysshe Shelley enthusiast, purchased a beautifully crafted Italian guitar that the poet once owned. Many people care about objects that once belonged to Shelley, and many objects that once belonged to Shelley have been lovingly preserved.\(^1\) There are Shelley watch fobs and Shelley snuffboxes, a Shelley baby rattle and a Shelley raisin plate, Shelley hair and Shelley doodles. There may also be extant, or so it has been hoped, a volume of Keats’s poems found in the drowned Shelley’s pocket.\(^2\) This sodden volume, which Edward Trelawny saw in Shelley’s jacket when his body washed up on shore, was “doubled back, as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away.”\(^3\) The book has fueled the longings of Shelley collectors everywhere. But neither the tragedy-laden Keats volume nor the surfeit of Shelley effluvia surpasses the Shelley guitar installed in the same fleece-lined wooden box in which it was encased when an infatuated Shelley gave it to Jane Williams. When Edward Silsbee bought the guitar from Jane Williams’s grandson,
he was asked to donate it to a British institution. And so Silsbee promised the in-
strument to Oxford, the university from which Shelley had been expelled.4

It is easy to understand why Shelley’s guitar was, for Silsbee, a particularly
resonant object, why its capture might stand as the pinnacle of a Shelley collector’s career. A newspaper account of the Bodleian’s acquisition of the guitar rec-
ognized its unique status among literary artifacts: “There is probably no other relic of a great poet so intimately associated with the arts of poetry and music, or ever will be, unless Milton’s organ should turn up at a broker’s, or some excavating explorer should bring to light the lyre of Sappho.”5 The guitar epitomized
the musicality of Shelley’s verse, the incantatory loveliness, for example, of
“Lines: When the lamp is shattered,” in which Shelley writes, “When the lute is broken, / Sweet tones are remembered not; / When the lips have spoken, / Loved accents are soon forgot.”6 The guitar also evoked the poet’s romantic
longings, his construction of an idealized romance as an escape from an increas-
ingly complicated marriage, shadowed by the deaths of three children. In the poem “With a Guitar. To Jane,” Shelley, writing as Ariel in The Tempest, de-
scribes the guitar as the dwelling of a “spirit” that would speak in “its highest holiest tone” only for Jane, figured in the poem as Miranda.7 The guitar, in its physical substantiveness, conjured up Shelley’s Shakespearean fantasy, as well as
his own prematurely silenced poetic tones. Or, rather, it allowed the viewer to project all these associations upon it.

The newspaper account went on to describe the instrument’s pristine state, a
result of its having been “religiously preserved since Shelley’s death.” The chances of the guitar’s being so preserved had been greatly enhanced as a direct result of this mythologized death. The legendary moment when Trelawny reached into the conflagration of Shelley’s funeral bier in order to snatch Shel-
ley’s heart from the flames is etched in literary history as a morbid example of
romantic sentimentality, but it anticipated and inspired subsequent instances of Shelley relic worship. The heart was eventually buried with the bodies of Mary Shelley and her parents in the Shelley family vault at Bournemouth, but not be-
fore it became the object of a custody dispute that ended with the relic residing in Mary Shelley’s desk drawer.
Romantic era poets were particularly prone to having their hearts dried to a powder in a desk drawer or enshrined apart from their bodies.³ They lived and died at a time when the notion that objects are imbued with a lasting sediment of their owners, one that can be kept in a box or encased behind glass, informed the public commemoration of fallen heroes such as Lord Nelson (whose body was pickled in alcohol so that it could be returned, intact, to England) and Napoleon (whose grave site's foliage was stripped clean of branches by souvenir seekers). This desire to possess material vestiges of the celebrated dead also influenced responses to living literary figures. A parade of tourists peered over Wordsworth's wall at Rydal Mount and gathered sprigs of laurel from the site as keepsakes. The Reverend Charles Valentine Le Grice, having successfully prised a walking stick from a reluctant Wordsworth in a manner unbefitting a clergyman, referred to his treasure "as if it were a piece of the true Cross."⁹

The kind of material longing that would cause a man to covet a poet's walking stick stands in striking contrast to the spiritual desire that is so often inscribed in romantic poetry. Shelley, when he sat down to write about his guitar, saw it primarily as a vehicle for a Spirit whose high holy tones served as an echo of its interlocutor's feelings. This Spirit is just one of many abstract emanations that circulate through Shelley's poetry and highlight the ephemerality of material—as opposed to spiritual or imaginary—things. In his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Shelley courts the "awful shadow of some unseen Power," and this "various world" stands as an ephemeral stage set for encounters with the "Spirit of Beauty" which consecrates all that it shines upon. The actual world serves chiefly as a font of metaphors which Shelley employs as a means of describing a total abstraction that visits "with as inconstant wing / As summer winds that creep from flower to flower."¹⁰

Twentieth-century critics of romanticism speak of romantic poets as turning away from the physical world.¹¹ M. H. Abrams posits a shift in the romantic period from a view of poetry as a mirror reflecting the reality of the world to a conception of poetry as a lamp that, in William Hazlitt's terms, not only shows us an object but also "throws a sparkling radiance on all around it."¹² The physical object becomes less important than the way in which it is transformed by the poet's
consciousness. In a bracing example of the New Historicist critical approach that dominated romantic studies in the 1980s and 1990s, Marjorie Levinson points out how the historical details of Tintern Abbey—the ruin, the air pollution, the impoverished hermits—get elided in Wordsworth’s most celebrated poem. Jerome McGann states that “the poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities.” Mary Poovey refers to the romantic poets’ “turn away from phenomenal particulars and toward the mind that contemplates those things” as the precursor of postmodern displacements of the stable fact. Romantic poetry, accurately or not, has become known for enacting an escapist aesthetic, one that permits the poet to retreat from obdurate physical reality.

We might reasonably view the activity of collecting as being severely at odds with the poetic value system of romantic poets. Wordsworth, a poet who, far more than Shelley, based his poetic practice on clear-eyed description, on a resolve “to look steadily at [his] subject,” distances himself in his poetry from a too close attachment to material things, from the “getting and spending” of his day, but also from collecting practices. One can detect a specific distaste for the collecting impulse in Wordsworth’s professed inability to “class the cabinet” of his sensations in book two of *The Prelude*. He faults those who create distinctions and then deem that these “puny boundaries are things / Which we perceive, and not which we have made” (2:218–19). But at the very moment when Wordsworth was writing these lines, romantic era collectors were amassing cabinets of books, birds, relics, antiquities, and fossils in greater numbers than ever before. If these collecting projects were motivated by the kind of calculating scientific impulse that Wordsworth condemns (the desire for mastery by way of totalizing classificatory systems), they were driven also by Wordsworthian modes of longing (for permanence, immortality, pleasure, recognition) which suffuse romantic poetry more generally. Romantic poetry’s acute awareness of passing time and human loss contributed to, and reflected, a culture’s new understanding of the past as an idealized lost world, partly salvageable through the recovery and preservation of old objects and documents. According to Stephen Bann, “more people came to
share the passion for historical objects that had previously been confined to the antiquarian milieu" as history “became a substratum to almost every type of cultural activity.” This passion manifested itself in many forms; it led to the proliferation of antiquarian societies, the development of the historical novel, the rise of national libraries and museums—and the popularization of collecting.

Long the exclusive bastion of the very rich, collecting became democratized during the early decades of the nineteenth century as opportunities for participating in this activity, directly or vicariously, proliferated. Periodical editors, for example, capitalizing on the public enthusiasm for collecting, equated magazines to museums or cabinets of collectible objects. The *Attic Miscellany* (a title that calls to mind preserved artifacts with both senses of the word “attic”), published in London from 1789 to 1791, included as part of its subtitle “The Correspondents’ Museum.” Other journals that constructed their readers as collectors included *The Cabinet Magazine or Literary Olio* (London, 1796–91); *The Lady’s Monthly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction* (London, 1796–1807); *The Cabinet; or, Monthly Report of Polite Literature* (London, 1807); *The Museum; or, Record of Literature, Fine Arts, Science, etc.* (London, 1822); *The Literary Museum* (London, 1828); and *The Lady’s Magazine, and Museum of the Belles Lettres* (London, 1832–37). The journal titles depict the act of periodical reading as a form of connoisseurship. Even those readers who could not afford their own collections could partake of a magazine museum.

The romantic period stands as a unique moment in collecting history—the halfway point between the princely private enthusiasms of the Renaissance wonder cabinet and the public institution of the Victorian museum—but it is a moment much less adequately historicized and theorized than the more familiar manifestations of collecting that serve as its temporal bookends. Recent cultural histories of wonder and curiosity, which address the phenomenon of collecting, have stopped just short of the romantic period. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park’s remarkable analysis of wonder focuses on medieval and Renaissance collecting; Barbara Benedict’s exploration of the cultural status of curiosity in the eighteenth century encompasses the early nineteenth century, but not as a chief focus of interest. Contributors to the burgeoning field of museum studies—for
example, Annie E. Coombes in *Reinventing Africa*—understandably analyze in most detail the fully institutionalized museum of the Victorian period. Studies of romantic poetry in the context of museum collections, such as *Poetic Exhibitions* by Eric Gidal and *The Sculpted Word* by Grant F. Scott, focus attention on poems that take museum objects as their subjects, using the politics of museum formation and the aesthetics of ekphrasis as suggestive explanatory contexts for literary works. By contrast, I set out to focus on collected objects in the romantic period rather than on the poetry that addresses these objects, and to use romantic poetry as a means of explaining the popularization of collecting.

The spiritual longings of the romantic poets coexisted alongside early-nineteenth-century collectors' material pursuit of "rare" and "curious" objects, a pursuit so frenzied that Benjamin Robert Haydon attributed his contemporaries' acquisitiveness to a national character flaw. "Oh England, never were such a people," he wrote. "On every English chimney piece, you will see a bit of the real Pyramids, a bit of the Break Water, a bit of Stonehenge! a bit of the first cinder of the first fire Eve ever made, a bit of the very fig leaf which Adam first gave her." At the same moment when romantic poets sought to escape the material realities of the actual world through a poetry that celebrated the transcendent power of the imagination, their contemporaries gathered, assembled, catalogued, and fictionalized the physical detritus of history. These seemingly diametrical pursuits—the displacement of history in romantic poems that glancingly engage actual places such as the ruins of Tintern Abbey, and the stockpiling of history by collectors who, given the opportunity, would have carried away bits of the ruin like marauding ants—are not unrelated. And these twinned romantic desires—to transcend the passage of time and to preserve the wreckage of its passage—influence us still.

In the catalogue of the bicentenary Shelley exhibition at the Bodleian Library, there is a description of "Shelley's spy-glass"—the quotation marks signal the cataloguer's mild skepticism. The entry for this relic quotes Daniel Roberts on his successful salvaging of Shelley's boat. Out of a wreck "half full of a blue mud," Roberts claims to have "picked out Cloths of all sorts (mostly rotten) books & spy glass broken." The catalogue entry points to this reference as "pre-
sumably” the context for the small spyglass “now preserved—after repair?—amongst the family relics,” before concluding, “If the identification is correct, Shelley may have looked through it on his last voyage.” How we long to believe that the buffed and polished spyglass in the exhibition catalogue is the mud-caked broken spyglass that Roberts poignantly describes. One reads the cataloguer’s last suggestive sentence and hears the slap of the waves. It is easy to glide past the cataloguer’s qualifying “may” to conjure up a worried Shelley, scanning the coastline in a storm.

Edward Silsbee, the elderly American sea captain, was probably more susceptible than most people to this kind of imaginative supposing; in pursuit of Shelley relics, he insinuated himself into the Italian household of the elderly Claire Clairmont (Mary Shelley’s half-sister and Byron’s mistress), providing Henry James with the premise for *The Aspern Papers*. Clairmont’s home in Florence was a pilgrimage site for Shelley acolytes. When William Michael Rossetti visited her in June 1873, “she was a slender and pallid old lady, with thinned hair which had once been dark, and with dark and still expressive eyes.” She was “more than moderately deaf,” with a face “such as one could easily suppose to have been handsome and charming in youth,” and a “clear, even-toned, and agreeable” voice. Although Rossetti’s intentions were scholarly—he sought to “ascertain distinctly what are Shelley’s documents in Miss Clairmont’s possession”—he was not immune to the allure of Shelley relics. He was delighted to acquire, through Edward Trelawny’s intercession, a sofa
that Shelley had reportedly purchased for Leigh Hunt. At least that was the original story. The sofa took on more intimate associations, thanks to Trelawny’s assurance that it had, in fact, been the one on which the poet had regularly slept at Pisa, and that Shelley had dozed on it before setting off on his doomed voyage in the *Don Juan*. The sofa was, therefore, as Rossetti was pleased to note, “the last couch Shelley ever slept on, which makes it extraordinarily interesting.”

When James turned Silsbee into a scholar-collector in *The Aspern Papers*, he might have modeled his fictional character after any number of Victorian scholars for whom the pursuit of a sofa on which Shelley once slept was a perfectly legitimate endeavor. By contrast, the attitude that present-day scholars adopt when they talk about collectors is very often one of condescension verging on disdain—this despite the fact that they, too, are collectors by avocation. The literary critic plucks extracts from literary works and reassembles them in the anthology of the critical essay. The historian sifts through the flotsam of archives for usable details; as Carolyn Steedman writes, the historian’s craft is “to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater.” Still, we are reluctant to equate our own trolling for the perfect *aperçu* or revelatory object with the avidity of Shelley relic collectors. On the particular fascination with Shelley’s heart, Sylva Norman writes, “Its treatment has been slightly absurd, a trifle vulgar, wholly sentimental—which is not to be wondered at, since, after leaving Shelley’s body, it was handled by no one free from fanaticism, exaltation, misery, or some such abnormality of feeling towards Shelley.”

Norman’s association of collecting with abnormal feeling is the legacy of Freud, whose writings overwhelmingly inform scholarly responses to this avocation. The Freudian collector is a sexually maladjusted misanthrope who hoards his quarry of books, stamps, or paintings as a means of compensating for a deficient self. The original Freudian collector, that is, Freud himself, kept a collection of antiquities—“amassed figures of Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods that lined the wall and swarmed over the desks and tables in [his] professional space.” These figurines likely faced him when he wrote the passages that would be used by others to pathologize the activity of collecting. “When an old maid...
keeps a dog or an old bachelor collects snuffboxes,” Freud wrote, “the former is finding a substitute for her need for a companion in marriage and the latter for his need for—a multitude of conquests.”

There are comparatively few passages in Freud’s writings that comment on the collector, but this small and tangential legacy has been expanded upon and popularized by Jean Baudrillard, among others. “In later life, it is men over forty who most frequently fall victim to this passion [of collecting],” Baudrillard writes, going on to describe collecting as “a regression to the anal stage, which is characterized by accumulation, orderliness, aggressive retention, and so on.” He calls the possession of objects and the passion for them a “tempered mode of sexual perversion,” and compares the collector to the keeper of a harem: “Man never comes so close to being the master of a secret seraglio as when he is surrounded by his objects.”

The explanatory preeminence of Freudian collecting theory is partly a result of the eloquence of its latter-day proponents—most notably Susan Stewart, whose compelling *On Longing* is essential reading for any student of collecting—but it is also a function of the general, if also sexist, applicability of Freud’s ideas. Silsbee’s acquisition of a guitar may seem easy to explain by way of psychoanalytic paradigms (phallic substitute, displacement, sublimation), but if we slip Silsbee into a Freudian case study folder and close the file drawer, some of his story’s more interesting nuances fall away.

Silsbee longed to know the romantic poets in a tangible way. He quizzed Clairmont on her former acquaintances and took notes on her comments. His memoranda of these conversations reveal a preoccupation with how the romantic poets looked or sounded or moved. “Shelley’s lips fine & not too thick,” he noted, and “Shelley had the voice of a child—high tenor from back of the head.” Silsbee’s underscoring communicates his wonder at these intimate details, but also his awe of the woman who had communed with Shelley. “These were her words,” Silsbee wrote.

George Edward Woodberry recalled encountering the “Shelley-mad” Silsbee while breakfasting at the home of a Harvard professor and being permitted to hold a Shelley notebook, a “thin quarto bound in parchment” that Silsbee had
acquired from Claire Clairmont. Eggs were allowed to cool and toast to harden as the “sacred relic” was displayed. Woodberry recalled the way Silsbee handled the volume, “carefully, fluttering the leaves as he picked out some of the more characteristic pages of the script, passing over others quickly, as if he felt a trust in his hands, and a privacy not to be lost sight of—something precious and intimate and inviolable.”

Silsbee donated the notebook to the university in order to bring Shelley “near to the hearts and eyes and senses of Harvard youth” and to allow students to feel “the touch of Shelley’s living hand upon the page.”

Woodberry, who was a Harvard senior when he met Silsbee over breakfast, shared the collector’s vision of the volume’s numinous power. “I can still feel the thrill in my fingers, as they moved over lines where Shelley’s hand had hovered,” Woodberry wrote years later, recalling that Silsbee’s enthusiasms were “reduplicated from the fervors of my ardent youth.”

Silsbee’s love of Shelley relics and manuscripts was accompanied by a possibly naïve but certainly heartfelt immersion in Shelley’s poetry. According to Richard Garnett, the British Museum librarian who helped arrange the guitar purchase, Silsbee spoke chiefly of poetry and art, “on both of which he would utter deeper sayings than are often to be found in print... He was the most enthusiastic critic of Shelley the present writer has known,” Garnett continued, “but also the most acute and discriminating.”

Describing Silsbee reciting Shelley verse, Woodberry wrote, “He had caught the magic by which the music in the verse brought the landscape emotionally, as well as objectively, before the mind and eye, the mood of the scene as well as its visual aspect.”

Silsbee was a primarily self-taught Shelley scholar whose chief credentials for fashioning himself as the poet’s posthumous cup-bearer were an adventurous past (he had voyaged twice around the world as a captain engaged in the East India trade) and a striking appearance. Garnett claimed that Silsbee resembled Edward Trelawny, who had styled himself after Byron’s dashing Corsair. Another of Silsbee’s contemporaries recalled him sitting “gloomily in an armchair, looking like some deep-sea monster on a Bernini fountain,” while John Singer Sargent, whose portrait of Silsbee followed the guitar into the Bodleian’s collections, described a man “dramatized by a buccaneering appearance and by a crop of piratical legends and tales.”

Since Shelley’s reputation was not particularly
high in New England academic literary circles at that time, Silsbee could seem Shelley-like, that is, impassioned and iconoclastic, by virtue of his championing of Shelley’s verse.

To understand Silsbee, we need to adopt something of his own affection for the objects he fleetingly owned, to hold collecting practice up to more than one light so that its nuances and contradictions can emerge. Silsbee collected Shelleyana, but, in the case of the guitar, he was able to do so only on the condition that it would immediately be placed where he would rarely have the opportunity to see it. Silsbee’s love of Shelley relics was inseparably intertwined with his enthusiasm for Shelley’s poetry, a poetry that advocates a lofty remove from earthly things. Silsbee sought to achieve a measure of immortality through association with a physical vestige of Shelley’s verse, but what small fame he achieved came as a result of his story’s being taken up by Henry James to demonstrate the deathliness of the collecting pursuit.46

Henry James shared Silsbee’s belief in the power of Shelley’s former possessions, and in the romantic past as a nobler era than his own. In his preface to The Aspern Papers, James writes, “I delight in a palpable imaginable visitable past—in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table.”47 When James heard the story of the “Shelley-worshipper” Silsbee’s attempt to procure Shelley and Byron letters in Claire Clairmont’s possession, he noted, “Certainly there is a little subject there: the picture of the two faded, queer, poor and discredited old English women—living
on into a strange generation, in their musty corner of a foreign town—with these illustrious letters their most precious possession.” James was thrilled by the notion that he himself could have crossed the Clairmont threshold in Florence. He wrote, “The wonder of my having doubtless at several earlier seasons passed again and again, all unknowing, the door of her house, where she sat above, within call and in her habit as she lived, these things gave me all I wanted” (preface, viii).

James was most fascinated by “the fortunate privacy, the long uninvaded and uninterviewed state” of Claire Clairmont; it was this aspect of the Silsbee saga that he retained in his tale (preface, ix). In *The Aspern Papers*, the cloistered quality of Miss Bordereau’s chamber, and of her life in Venice more generally, makes the collector’s invasion seem all the more shocking. “Ah you publishing scoundrel,” Miss Bordereau hisses when she discovers her tenant trespassing in her bedroom, his hand on the latch of her secretary cabinet. Newly unveiled, the extraordinary eyes of Miss Bordereau glare at James’s narrator “like the sudden drench, for a caught burglar, of a flood of gaslight” (*Aspern*, 118). The narrator’s publishing plans threaten the pristine isolation of the Aspern letters. Miss Bordereau’s furious exclamation damningly associates the collector with a modern age in which, according to James, “photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise” (*Aspern*, 49).

James’s repeated allusions to photography as the form of technology that separated his own age from that of the romantics possibly stemmed from the threat it posed to the mysteriousness of the earlier era. The romantic poets were the last literary generation to go unphotographed, and so their faces are shrouded in a more opaque mystery than those of the literary figures who followed them. Claire Clairmont, the subject of James’s and Silsbee’s particular fascination, lived well into the age of photography, but her image was apparently never fixed on an iodized silver plate. *The Aspern Papers* portrays Miss Bordereau as the last person standing who is possessed of a “single pair of eyes into which his [the poet Jeffrey Aspern’s] had looked,” and a hand that his had touched (*Aspern*, 8). Marveling that she is still alive, James’s narrator says, “It was as if I had been told Mrs. Siddons was, or Queen Caroline, or the famous Lady Hamilton” (*Aspern*, 5–6).
James’s narrator celebrates the romantic period for its supposed remove from the pushy, aggressive modernism he associates with celebrity culture and technology (he does so in blithe disregard of the fact that the female icons he mentions were regularly featured in newspaper gossip columns). Of his elderly heroine Miss Bordereau, James writes in the voice of his awestruck narrator, “It was a revelation to us that self-effacement on such a scale had been possible in the latter half of the nineteenth century—the age of newspapers and photographs and interviewers” (Aspern, 8).

Shelley’s guitar was photographed several times at the moment it was about to be handed from the guitar seller John Wheeler Williams to Silsbee, and then, immediately afterward, to the Bodleian Library. Williams believed in a relic’s ability to serve as a bridge between the past and the present, to ennoble members of a later generation by association, and he had no squeamishness about the demystifying effect of photography or the intrusiveness of the press. He had photographs taken of himself with the guitar and sent prints to Garnett, writing, “Enclosed I beg to offer for your acceptance some photos of the Guitar & of myself that may be interesting to you. I have just had some done for a few friends specially interested in the Guitar & its history. . . . I had the one taken with the guitar as a reminder that I am the last link in the chain that connects the past with the present” (see fig. 1). Williams wrote approvingly of Garnett’s plan to write an account of the guitar transfer for the Times: “I have no doubt there are many people who would like to see the Guitar & thro’ the medium of the
Fig. 1. Photo of J. W. Williams with guitar. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.
‘Times’ will be able to do so.” In a postscript to this letter, making reference to a popular tabloid, Williams added, “Should you like another photograph of guitar for Ill. London News I can send one.”

James’s disparaging allusions to the advent of photography anticipate the writings of the philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin, who, like James and Silsbee, understood the allure of resonant objects and speculated about the impact of reproduction technology. Benjamin claimed that “the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition” and that “by replicating a work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence.” The object, once photographed, loses something of its historicity and its originality, becoming less curious and rare as its facsimiles proliferate and spread.

Benjamin also shared with Silsbee and James a fascination with material objects. His sympathetic view of the collector stands in contrast to Freud’s written comments on collecting, and it is tempting to attribute this difference to the disparity in their personal circumstances: Freud’s collection of ancient artifacts made it safely from Vienna to London, where he had moved to escape Nazi persecution in 1938, two years before Benjamin, seeking to escape Nazi-occupied France, was turned back by Spanish border authorities. But that would be reading Benjamin’s commentary on collecting through the dark lens of his final peripatetic days and his ultimate suicide at Port-Bou. Benjamin had already written what he had to say about collectors when he tried to cross the border into Spain;
he was carrying a large black briefcase possibly containing the manuscript of “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” a vast collection of quotations from which he was composing a cultural history of the Paris arcades. Benjamin was exploring “the extent to which it is possible to be ‘concrete’ in the context of the philosophy of history.” He wrote to his friend Gerhard Scholem, “The issue here is precisely what you once touched on after reading One-Way Street: to attain the most extreme concreteness for an era, as it occasionally manifested itself in children’s games, a building, or a real-life situation.” One-Way Street is an autobiographical montage consisting of short essays with titles such as “Chinese Curios,” “Gloves,” and “Toys.” Sometimes these titles act as aids to memory, conjuring up objects that inspire musings on tangential topics, but sometimes Benjamin stays focused on the material world itself, as when he describes the collections of an untidy child: “His dresser drawers must become arsenal and zoo, crime museum and crypt. ‘To tidy up’ would be to demolish an edifice full of prickly chestnuts that are spiky clubs, tinfoil that is hoarded silver, bricks that are coffins, cacti that are totem poles, and copper pennies that are shields.”

In a section of The Arcades Project organized around the topic of collectors, Benjamin gives a nod to the Freudian stereotype of the collector in a convolute that conjures up an elderly hoarder stockpiling hairpins and bits of string. Benjamin, however, ends the passage with this exclamation: “But compare collecting done by children!” Benjamin’s child collector changes chestnuts into clubs, tinfoil into silver, cacti into totem poles. That is, the objects becomes launchpads for imaginative take-offs. No sooner does the collector handle the items in his showcase, Benjamin writes, than “he appears inspired by them and seems to look through them into their distance, like an augur.”

There are two photographs of Walter Benjamin working in the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1937. In one, he is consulting the Grand Dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle. “Walter Benjamin at the card catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale” reads the caption on the other photo; Benjamin is writing intently at a library table, with an ink pot in the foreground and a bank of card catalogue drawers behind. In a passage of The Arcades Project, Benjamin writes, “Collecting is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge,” and in
these photographs, Benjamin is preserved forever as the scholar-collector, bent over a dictionary or furiously transcribing notes, ideas, critical concepts. The photographs raise the possibility that a critical work modeled on a collection might go on forever, that Benjamin, left to his own devices, might never have left the library. "For everything that matters is to be found in the card box of the researcher who wrote it, and the scholar studying it assimilates it into his own card index," Benjamin writes.

In his work on the Paris arcades, Benjamin was innovating a mode of scholarly writing based on the juxtapositioning of quotations and reflections. Since Benjamin died before he could complete this project, and since it survives only in the form of notes that he arranged according to topic, it is a matter of debate whether the novelty of the work’s structure is a product of deliberation or incompleteness. Benjamin’s American editors describe the work’s discontinuous presentation as a determined effort to oppose traditional modes of argument, noting his preference for the montage form, “with its philosophic play of distances, transitions, and intersections, its perpetually shifting contexts and ironic juxtapositions.” But Benjamin’s German editor compares the work’s “oppressive chunks of quotations” to the “materials used in building a house, the outline of which has just been marked in the ground or whose foundations are just being dug.” We can read The Arcades Project as the playful innovation of a writer rebelling against the linear style of the academy or as the stillborn blueprint of a scholar stuck at the note-taking stage of research.

In a list of “Principles of the Weighty Tome, or How to Write Fat Books,” Benjamin writes: “The typical work of modern scholarship is intended to be read like a catalogue. But when shall we actually write books like catalogues?” In a catalogue, each separate entry is discrete; the white space separating one item from the next encourages the reader to stop or pause. One entry may be connected to the next in some way, or no such connection may exist; in either event, the reader is left to discover, or note the absence of, a link. In a work of modern scholarship, one idea leads directly into the next with only the smallest gasp of white space between chapters. Holes in arguments, whether as small as pinpricks or as large as manhole covers, get their edges tugged together by
rhetorical force so that every idea seems perfectly defended. In his call for a scholarly book like a catalogue, Benjamin seeks to make overt the parallels between researchers' and collectors' avocations, to demonstrate how scholars pluck details out of their original contexts and mount them in display cabinets of their own construction.

Perhaps the reason why Benjamin's *Arcades Project* so fascinates is that it breaks the stylistic stranglehold of the scholarly monograph, its formal air of seamless certainty. Susan Sontag's work provides one testimony to the allure of Benjamin's critical method. In *On Photography*, Sontag describes photography's summing up of reality in "an array of casual fragments" as "an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world." She characterizes Benjamin's collecting of quotations as a sublimated version of the photographer's activity, as manifesting "a disavowal of empathy, a disdain for message-mongering, a claim to be invisible." But despite these stern comments, she ends *On Photography* with a collection of untethered quotations, subtitled "Homage to W. B."64

Benjamin's method has a peculiar appeal for scholars approaching literary texts that are always already encased in layers of critical verbiage, a century's accretion of response and counter-response. The *Arcades* collage, in its interrupted and interruptive form, proposes letting words from the past speak on their own, without the din of scholarly paraphrase and qualification.

“What withers in the age of the technological reproductibility of the work of art is the latter's aura,” Benjamin writes in his most famous essay.65 And, in his “Little History of Photography,” Benjamin asks: “What is
At his death, James, too, left behind an incomplete work, *The Sense of the Past*, a novel whose protagonist longs to revisit the past through its physical vestiges, and who manages to project himself from the year 1910 back to 1820 after inheriting a London town house containing a portrait of himself in that earlier era. Ralph Pendrel is a writer whose chief work, "An Essay in Aid of the Reading of History," has moved an elderly relative to bequeath his house to its author. The old man "had nowhere seen the love of old things, of the scrutable, palpable past, nowhere felt an ear for stilled voices, as precious as they are faint, as seiz­able, truly, as they are fine, affirm a more remarkable power than in the pages that had moved him to gratitude." James writes of his protagonist, "He wanted evidence of a sort for which there had never been documents enough, or for which documents mainly, however multiplied, would never be enough."67

Although James sympathized with Silsbee's belief in the resonance of poets' relics, and although he shared Silsbee's fascination with the romantic period, whose poets, however unwittingly, encouraged that belief through their celebration of authenticity and originality, James's version of Silsbee's story ends badly, with Miss Bordereau's papers burned and the collector left in possession of only a small portrait of Jeffrey Aspern. "When I look at it I can scarcely bear my loss," James's protagonist comments ruefully in the story's final line. This half sentence holds open the possibility that the collector may be mourning for something other than the destroyed papers, for his failure to associate honestly with
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living human beings, perhaps, or for his botched effort to commune with Jeffrey Aspern through material remains. But then the sentence swings closed on the hinge of a central dash. “When I look at it I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers” (Aspern, 143). James takes the more ennobling possibilities out of circulation.

The actual Silsbee suffered a different fate. Let us imagine the scene at the Bodleian Library on the day he was supposed to hand over the guitar: a scattering of librarians scared up for the occasion, and tea ladies standing ready to pour once the presentation ceremony was over. Since John Wheeler Williams, the guitar seller, was to transport it to Oxford, Silsbee may not yet have had an opportunity to touch the vine-scrolled face of the instrument or to tune the strings or to imagine himself as an infatuated poet strumming a chord. He might have done these things at the Bodleian—if he had ever managed to get there. An explanation for why he failed to show up for the ceremony is inscribed on the back of a letter that Lucy Derby Fuller wrote to the Bodleian librarian E. W. B. Nicholson.68 Silsbee, unfamiliar with English train stations, and assuming that the ticket office was (as in the United States) close to the track, waited there for Richard Garnett. When the Oxford train left the station, Silsbee was still waiting at the ticket office. It is not clear whether Williams was also wandering around Paddington Station, finding or not finding Garnett, and catching the Oxford train to the Bodleian ceremony.

Silsbee at Paddington, waiting perplexed amidst purposeful commuters in dark suits and trilbies, stands as an emblem of the grandiloquence and futility of certain romantic longings, the desire to connect to the past and also the desire to achieve one’s own immortality through this alliance. Silsbee saw himself as being uniquely suited for the role of Shelley acolyte. He took perhaps excessive pleasure in associating himself with Oxford through his gift of the guitar—“Oxford is what that vale in Greece was to the Egyptians,” he burbled in a letter to Nicholson.69 In penning an inscription for the glass case that was to hold the guitar he had donated, Silsbee crafted a piece of purple prose that Garnett diplomatically described as “far too eloquent for Oxford,” hoping that the donor would “take a reasonable view, and leave the matter to the Bodleian.”70 Lucy
Derby Fuller later requested that the words “Salem, Massachusetts” be inserted after Silsbee’s name in the inscription. “I knew how much he desired it—and that inscription is his only monument,” Fuller wrote. Nicholson, with admirable frankness, noted in the margins of Fuller’s letter, “I meant to do it anyhow,” but he never honored this request. 1

When James’s narrator in The Aspern Papers looks back in time, he fondly imagines a society “less awake than the coteries of to-day . . . to tatters of old stuff and fragments of old crockery” (Aspern, 48). He imagines those who lived during the romantic period as loftier beings, removed from the grubby materialism of his own later moment. James’s narrator is, of course, mistaken in this regard. What does one see when one looks into the museums, cabinets, libraries, and exhibitions of the early nineteenth century? An inordinate number of dead hummingbirds, for one thing, as chapter 1 demonstrates. Their feathered remains, still eerily iridescent, show how a collection might seem to stave off death without actually doing so. By gazing steadily at these specimens, and by examining the attachments collectors formed to particular birds, one begins to see how romantic aesthetics and collecting practice are intertwined, and also what Keats’s immortal nightingale has in common with the dead husks of hummingbirds that, today, fill rarely opened museum drawers.

This book stands as an attempt to explore the potentiality and limitations of resonant objects, and to explain the popularization of collecting in the romantic period. The pages that follow focus on collectors from all walks of life, men and
women who fashioned identities for themselves out of the compilation and arrangement of dead birds, books, botanical specimens, Napoleonic relics, Egyptian artifacts, and fossils. The range of people who collected each of these types of objects allows me to explore the uses of collecting for individuals who least resemble the stereotypical collector. I do not, for the most part, discuss renowned romantic era collectors—William Beckford, William Hamilton, Horace Walpole, Lord Elgin, George IV—all of whom have inspired museum exhibitions and elicited critical attention. When I turn to the royal family, for example, as I do in chapter 2, I look to Queen Charlotte rather than her more famous collector husband and son. Although all the royal family members were, by turns, diverted and oppressed by their collections, Charlotte’s forays into bibliophilic and botanical collecting were uniquely driven by queenly ennui. Her collecting practice allows me to challenge the too automatic association of collecting and imperialistic endeavor by revealing how Charlotte used an escapist version of this activity to reinvent herself as a humble cataloguer rather than a ceremonial figurehead. In general, my choice of collectors allows me to call into question oft-repeated tenets of collecting theory, critical commonplace best suited for describing men rather than women, aristocrats rather than parvenus, archivists rather than entrepreneurs.

In this book I also set out to read romantic era collecting practice in the context of romantic poetry, to reveal the entanglement of literary and collecting aesthetics. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, and spurred by the rise of industrial manufacturing and by the reach of mercantile exploration, there was an explosion in the number and type of physical things—dishware, fabric, foodstuffs. I am not the first to pursue links between romantic poetry and consumer culture. Elizabeth Jones shows the ways in which Keats employs in his odes “icons that once had meaning for political cultures, but that had become commodities in a market economy.” Andrea Henderson analyzes how, in Joanna Baillie’s introduction to her *Plays on the Passions*, human passions “function as discrete items available for inventory, display, and sale.” Colin Campbell posits a causal relationship between the romantic ethos of transcendence and the culture of avid consumption that characterizes modern consumerism. Building on
this distinguished work, I set out to show how romantic poetic preoccupations—
with immortality, pastoral escape, fame, sublimity, loss—underpin the accumu-
lative practices of both early-nineteenth-century collectors and their like-
minded descendants.

One sees, for example, in the widespread fascination with Napoleonic relics a
peculiar instance of the romantic preoccupation with authenticity. The collec-
tors and purveyors of these relics, intent on establishing their objects’ creden-
tials, sometimes went so far as to create authenticating stories for entirely inau-
thentic relics, narratives that served a variety of ends. In chapter 3, I explore the
role that Napoleon’s carriage, which had been captured at Waterloo, played in
the imaginative self-constructions of Napoleon collectors such as William Bul-
lock, who exhibited the carriage at around the same time that Byron was travel-
ing across Europe in a replica of that vehicle. William Godwin’s “Essay upon
Sepulchres,” in its curious preoccupation with the grave sites of fictional charac-
ters, provides us with a means of understanding how a facsimile of Napoleon’s
carriage enhanced Byron’s peripatetic poetry writing, and also how the story of
the actual carriage’s capture served to legitimate objects far removed from
Napoleon’s last battle.

Another concern, which surfaces most overtly in the book’s final chapters—in
chapter 4, my account of the self-made Egyptologist Giovanni Belzoni, and in
chapter 5, my discussion of the fossil-finder-turned-tourist attraction Mary An-
ning—is the obduracy of objects, the ways in which they refuse to cooperate en-
tirely with the collector’s and, ultimately, the scholar’s best-laid schemes. One
sees, particularly in the case of Anning’s and Belzoni’s scattered remains, how
collected objects float free of their possessors and come to exist in inscrutable
isolation, defying scholars’ efforts to recast them as definitive evidence.

Directly or indirectly, all of the collectors featured in these pages had dealings
with William Bullock. A hummingbird cabinet that may once have belonged to
Bullock is the impetus for chapter 1. Queen Charlotte, the focus of chapter 2,
donated a Japan peacock and a painted pheasant to Bullock’s museum, gifts fea-
tured prominently in his catalogue.77 Bullock was the mastermind behind the
Napoleonic carriage exhibition, and Bullock’s museum, remodeled as the Egyp-
tian Hall, became the venue for Belzoni’s exhibition of Egyptiana. Some of the fossils collected by Mary Anning passed through Bullock’s hands when he served as the auctioneer for the collection of Thomas Birch, an Anning family benefactor. But if I were to follow the red thread that Bullock provides, I would risk winding up with an artificially linear and misleadingly coherent account of romantic collectors and their meandering obsessions.

This book is, in one regard, a romantic history of romantic collecting. It takes seriously, and by necessity shares, the tendency of romantic histories to dwell upon their own fragmentariness, on the impossibility of capturing an intact history. Ann Rigney describes the history writing of Thomas Carlyle as “historiography in a negative key,” since “what a historian could and should do [was] . . . constantly silhouetted against what for better or worse had been left out.” Hayden White, also writing on romantic historiographers such as Carlyle, comments that they looked to history “for neither understanding nor explanation but rather for inspiration—the kind of inspiration, moreover, that an older aesthetics called sublime.” This is a sublimity that derives from the impossibility of comprehending the enormity and obscurity of history. Because the collectors in whom I am most interested had a limited renown, or a fame that faded quickly after their deaths, what remains of their collections has been carelessly edited and destroyed over time. My narrative dramatizes that reality with its disjunctiveness; the fragmentary nature of my telling mirrors the fragmentary state of less well known collectors’ surviving collections. Wordsworth wrote of the danger of trying to piece together the past from idiosyncratic remains, of overlooking “the large over-balance of worthlessness that has been swept away,” and assuming that the best of the past is “typical.” My structuring method underscores the idiosyncratic aspect of the remains I examine, but it also pays homage to what has been swept away by making a place for what has disappeared and by questioning the forces behind the disappearance.

Despite increased scholarly interest in material culture, objects sometimes receive short shrift even in critical work that traffics in them. Academic writing often does a poor job of capturing the sensuous appeal of particular objects, which may be one reason why collectors do not always receive judicious treat-
ment. Benjamin (both as a sympathetic commentator on collecting and as a collector who has himself benefited from sympathetic commentary) is, of course, the exception to this generalization, particularly when he talks about himself as a collector of books. In a passage titled “Fancy Goods” in One-Way Street, he writes, “When a valued, cultured and elegant friend sent me his new book and I was about to open it, I caught myself in the act of straightening my tie.”83 In contrast to those who see the collector projecting himself onto everything he collects—“For what you really collect is always yourself,” Baudrillard insists—Benjamin imagines the owner of an object courting its favor. He writes of collected objects, “We don’t displace our being into theirs; they step into our life.”84

This book traces the particular ways in which objects stepped into the lives of romantic collectors, and also the ways in which the objects moved on, leaving their collectors inevitably dead and almost as inevitably bereft of the forms of recognition they thought would accrue to them by association. The Shelley collector Edward Silsbee, both in his devotion to the poet’s material remains and in his confidence that this devotion would win him a measure of immortality, stands as the inheritor of a constellation of romantic beliefs that fueled the practice of collecting.85 In the pages that follow, I trace Silsbee’s ardent and misguided pursuits back to their literary origins.
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2. The Victorian Shelley editor W. M. Rossetti wrote to Richard Garnett of his attempt to track down this volume during a proposed visit to Sir Percy Shelley. "One detail that I had wished to look into is that affair of the copy of Keats said to have been burned along with Shelley's corpse: Lady Shelley, herself is (I think) the only authority in print for this story of the burning, tho I find collateral indications that Leigh Hunt affirmed the same thing. Now I dare say I have told you that Trelawny says the book can certainly not have been burned: that no one save himself burned anything, & he did not burn the book... [I.]ately, in looking over some old letters, I found one of yours (1870) saying that Mrs Garnett saw the Keats among the Shelley relics, & therefore rejects the story of burning." Letter 392, 5 November 1875, in “Letters about Shelley from the Richard Garnett Papers, University of Texas,” ed. William Richard Thurman (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1972), 274–75.

3. E. J. Trelawny, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), 120. Richard Holmes calls Trelawny an incorrigible myth-maker and notes that he obsessively rewrote his account of Shelley's death, which accumulated "more and more baroque details, like some sinister biographical coral-reef." Richard

4. The institution was chosen, according to Richard Garnett, because it was already the depository of the Shelley manuscripts and relics belonging to Lady Shelley, wife of the poet’s son. Richard Garnett, introduction to Journal of Edward Ellerker Williams (London: Elkin Mathews, 1902), 11. Lady Shelley, writing to Garnett in May 1894 expressed her pleasure at the Bodleian’s reception of her relics: “They have given me a cabinet all to myself with a covered glass top under which are placed the relics I have treasured so dearly for the last forty years of my life—It is a great happiness to have seen them there & to know that they are considered the most valuable collection they have ever received.” Thurman, “Letters about Shelley,” 206. William St. Clair wryly describes University College’s acceptance of another Shelley object, the sentimental Onslow Ford sculpture of the drowned poet, as “part expiation for having expelled the most distinguished man ever to attend the college.” William St. Clair, Trelawny: The Incurable Romancer (London: John Murray, 1977), 231. Shelley was expelled for advocating atheism.

5. Times (London), 22 June 1898.


11. This is not true of critical commentary on the verse of those women poets whose work, as Stuart Curran notes, is “occupied continually in discriminating minute objects or assembling a world out of its disjointed particulars.” Stuart Curran, “Romantic Poetry: The I Altered,” in Romanticism and Feminism, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 189.

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Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent, 1930), 3. Frederick Pottle also, in his 1952 article “The Case of Shelley,” writes of that poet, “He seldom takes a gross, palpable, near-at-hand object from the world of ordinary perception and holds it for contemplation: his gaze goes up to the sky, he starts with objects that are just on the verge of becoming invisible or inaudible or intangible and he strains away even from these.” Frederick A. Pottle, “The Case of Shelley,” PMLA 67.5 (1952): 601.


16. For a refutation of this critical view, see Onno Oerlemans, Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). Oerlemans argues for the importance of romantic empiricism and an openness to the material, particularly as a component of environmentalism.


Related to these studies of the avocation of collecting are the essays gathered by Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*
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on a sexuality divorced from social practice and the personality as a whole can offer only a fatally limited account of human motive,” and she points to empirical evidence showing collectors no more likely to be living solitary lives than anybody else. Pearce, *On Collecting*, 8, 226.


42. Ibid., 23, 19.


46. Silsbee’s desire for immortality echoed the romantic poets’ tendency to imagine for themselves a posthumous fame, to insist that final judgment of their work rested with future, more discerning readers. Andrew Bennett explores this phenomenon in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).


48. *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 72. Even before James took up the story of the Clairmont archive and its pursuers, this history was being transformed. William Graham, who claimed to have visited Clairmont one spring day in the early 1880s—that is, four years after she died—fondly recalled her as a woman whom time had bypassed; she still had her “slender willowy figure,” her “merry silvery laugh,” and a complexion “clear as at eighteen.” Graham also claimed that Clairmont, whose middle name was Jane, was the Jane who had received the gift of a guitar from Shelley. He remembered having seen this guitar, the one that had actually been given to Jane Williams, in Clairmont’s possession. William Michael Rossetti chronicles Graham’s inaccuracies in *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*, 2:354–55. As Marion Kingston Stocking reports, Claire Clairmont’s name was actually Clara Mary Jane Clairmont, but her family called her Jane. See *The Clairmont Correspondence*, 1:xvii.

50. Ibid., 419.


54. Walter Benjamin to Gerhard Scholem, 15 March 1929, ibid., 348.


57. Ibid., 207. Susan Pearce, too, describes the collection as an act of the imagination, as “a metaphor intended to create meanings which help to make individual identity and each individual’s view of the world.” Pearce, On Collecting, 27.

58. The photographs are reproduced in the English translation of Benjamin’s Arcades project; I am referring to the caption provided in that edition. Benjamin, The Arcades Project, 889.

59. Ibid., 210.


63. Walter Benjamin, “Principles of the Weighty Tome, or How to Write Fat Books,” in One-Way Street, 457.

capes them can be seen as a late manifestation of romantic historicism, since romantic historians such as Carlyle laid as much emphasis on the limitations of history as on its possibilities. She notes that contemporary theoretical reflections on the limits of representability have impinged very little on the way in which histories get written, and she points to the need for new discursive forms. Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), esp. 102–3 and 139. James Chandler, too, addresses this issue in his discussion of the generic hybridity of W. G. Sebald’s four fictions. Chandler writes, “If history is necessary to the purposes of human memory, and history needs a form, and if its forms have degenerated into cliché, then the forms of historiography as we know it must be revitalized by rhetorical genre crossing.” Chandler, “About Loss,” 258.

71. Lucy Derby Fuller to E. W. B. Nicholson, 22 May 1900, ibid. Newspapers on the day following the guitar transfer wrongly reported Silsbee at the ceremony, the event having been described by Garnett in advance of press deadlines.
73. Susan Pearce calls the surge of material manufacture and the consequent rise in numbers of objects “one of the most significant, and most neglected, aspects of what we can loosely call capitalism.” Pearce, *On Collecting*, 111. See also James H. Bunn, “The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism,” *New Literary History* 11.2 (1980): 303–21.
78. Alan Liu analyzes the romanticism of most recent cultural criticism, pointing out its proclivity for "constructing micro-worlds each as intricately detailed, yet also as expansive in mythic possibility, as a Wordsworthian Lakeland, Blakean ordered space, [or] Keatsian Grecian Urn." Liu characterizes the "miraculously sustained bubbles of recreated or created context" as a "mock reality," and he notes how "the discourses of particularity" tend to lean heavily on a rhetoric of inexpressibility or incompleteness." Liu, "Local Transcendence," 91 and 80.
85. Months after the Bodleian ceremony that Silsbee missed, the *Pall Mall Gazette* picked up his story. In an article titled “An International Episode: American Generosity to Oxford,” the newspaper informed its readers of his gift: “It met with cordial acceptance from the governing body of Bodley’s Museum, and the guitar was installed in a glazed case, with a record of the donor’s benefaction and nationality. Mr. E. W. Nicholson, librarian, when formally acknowledging the gift to Mr. Silsbee, expressed on behalf of the curators a desire for a personal remembrance of him in the shape of a likeness of some description.” A clipping of the article in the Bodleian Library holdings has been annotated by Nicholson with a handwritten “§” placed between the two sentences so as to lead the reader to this marginal notation: “Quite a mistake.” It is unclear whether the reporter was mistaken in his assertion that the Bodleian would record Silsbee’s benefaction and nationality, or in his claim that the curators cherished a desire for Silsbee’s portrait. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 November 1899, 4.