Alexander Turnbull’s “Dream Imperial”: Collecting Shakespeare in the Colonial Antipodes

EDMUND G. C. KING

By the end of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare had become a global phenomenon. The omnipresence of Shakespeare’s books reflected the worldwide expansion of English itself. Higher literacy rates boosted the number of English readers, while colonialism pushed the language outwards, beyond national boundaries. In their luggage, English settlers carried with them their family Bibles and Shakespeares, “twin talismans,” as Mark Houlahan puts it, “of sacred and secular English authority.” The idea of books as patrimony, as cultural bloodline, provides the centrepiece for William Pember Reeves’ poem “The Dream Imperial,” written for the Shakespeare tercentenary in 1916. Reeves’ romanticized English colonists—“our warring, trading, reading race”—carry Shakespeare triumphantly towards the imperial margins:

They bore his universe of tears and mirth
In battered sea-chests to the ends of earth,
So that in many a brown, mishandled tome,
—Compacted spirit of the ancient home,—
He who for man the human chart unfurled
Explored eight oceans and possessed the world.

For the first generation of antipodean book-collectors, the transportation of Shakespearean books from Britain to the colonies held a similar charge. David Scott Mitchell, in Sydney, ordered copies of Shakespeare’s Fourth Folio (1685) and the 1684 players’ quarto of Julius Caesar. In Cape Town then Auckland, Sir George Grey bought from English booksellers copies of Shakespeare’s First, Second, and Fourth Folios and a 1619 fourth quarto edition of Pericles. In Tasmania, Robert Carl

1 I would like to thank the reference staff at the Alexander Turnbull Library for their assistance—and forbearance—while I researched this article. I owe a particular debt of thanks in this regard to Ruth Lightbourne, whose advice and willingness to share her knowledge were invaluable.
5 The Mitchell Library, Sydney: Historical and Descriptive Notes (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, 1936), 14–15.
Alexander Horsburgh Turnbull was what bookseller E. P. Goldschmidt once jokingly referred to as the ideal customer—someone who ordered through catalogues and “lived a long way away.” New Zealand’s most ambitious antiquarian collector, Turnbull was born in Wellington but raised in London, where he attended Dulwich College as far as the Upper Fourth Form. In January 1892, he left London and returned with his parents and sister to Wellington, where he started work in the family firm, W. & G. Turnbull & Co. By this point in his life, Turnbull had already amassed a sizeable library, and he continued to add to it from Wellington, mostly by correspondence with dealers overseas. London booksellers Bertram Dobell, Bernard Quaritch, Maggs Bros., Pickering & Chatto, and Sotheran’s feature prominently in his surviving accounts, jostling with parallel orders for English tailored clothing, cigarettes, hats, and accessories. However, Turnbull also ordered from a range of booksellers outside London—Otto Lange in Florence, Mullers in Amsterdam, Tyrell’s Bookshop in Adelaide and Angus & Robertson in Sydney. While connections with London booksellers and merchants linked him with the metropolitan centre, in other words, they by no means defined his collecting horizons. Turnbull’s purchasing enquiries frequently took him beyond the economic circuits of the British Empire, to continental and American dealers as well as colonial ones.

Although Turnbull enjoyed the opportunities that Wellington provided for golf and yachting, in some ways he seems to have never quite reconciled himself to his new surroundings. His letters complain wryly about the weather—“last night it rained as it can rain only in this lovely Empire City”—and, as a political conservative, he found himself at odds with the Progressive and labour-friendly mood of the New Zealand electorate. A letter that he sent to his brother from London shortly before shipping out makes the reactionary nature of the young Turnbull’s politics vividly apparent. “What an awful set of thieves the present members of Parliament must be,” he wrote.

Just fancy them passing an act to increase their own salaries!!! But they are all a set of b...y lamplighters, carpenters & bricklayers & deserve to be strung up and needles

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9 For details of Turnbull’s education, see McCormick, *Alexander Turnbull*, chapter 3.
10 Alexander Horsburgh Turnbull to Mr. Reid, 19 June 1895, Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL) qMS-2054.
inserted underneath their toenails in order to teach them manners like they did in the old days.\textsuperscript{11}

Turnbull’s jocular tone cannot hide his unease at the election of New Zealand’s first Liberal Government and the plebeian nature of its support base. As Rachel Barrowman has observed, Turnbull’s collection might be seen as a response to this sense of cultural, political and geographic “alienation.”\textsuperscript{12} The library that he eventually constructed on Bowen Street was a refuge—a small island of genteel conservatism in what he otherwise saw as “this beautiful land of Seddon & Socialism.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Turnbull collection, amassed largely for Turnbull and his associates and only selectively available to others during his lifetime, accords with what Kevin Dettmar calls the late nineteenth century’s “increasing fetishization of the private, home library.” The Bowen Street premises were, to employ Dettmar’s terms, “a place where cultural and symbolic capital [were] guarded by economic capital” in the shape of the building itself, its “heavy … doors” restricting access to a trusted set of book-loving associates.\textsuperscript{14} Turnbull’s posthumous bequest of his collection to the nation can also be read as a conservative act. A piece of conscious monument building, it was a way of foregrounding connoisseurship, of promoting “the genteel and socially restricted social practices” that underpinned the collecting impulse and habituating them to a new environment.\textsuperscript{15} Turnbull himself seems to have been aware of the incongruity that sometimes arose between his carefully-crafted bibliographical haven and the wider geography that surrounded it. Early in 1893, Wellington suffered a severe earthquake, and Turnbull regaled one of his correspondents with a comic account of its effect on his household furnishings:

There was a sound of grumbling & the grumbling grew to a rumbling & over the earth the quake came tumbling and for forty seconds vibrated the whole of Wellington & well nigh the whole of New Zealand … Napoleon nodded to me from the wall and the bust of Burns, which I knew had long been wishing to speak to me, left its lofty perch and nestled close beside me on the pillow.\textsuperscript{16}

What place was there for the literary, Turnbull seems to ask, in the new and unpredictable landscape in which he now found himself?

\textsuperscript{11} Turnbull to Robert Turnbull, 30 October 1891, ATL qMS-2053.
\textsuperscript{13} Turnbull to Jones and Evans, 12 May 1897, ATL qMS-2055.
\textsuperscript{16} Turnbull to Clarke, 23 February 1893, quoted in McCormick, \textit{Alexander Turnbull}, 119.
By the time of his death in 1918, Turnbull’s collection had swelled to over 55,000 volumes. However, although the library was bequeathed in toto to the state, determining exactly what Turnbull acquired and why can be surprisingly difficult. Many of Turnbull’s letters—including practically all of his outward correspondence after 1900—have been lost.  

(Legend has it that they were left on a Wellington street-car by his brother and never seen again.) An acquisition book covers only the years 1898–1902, and the library’s original card catalogue has also largely disappeared. Turnbull did retain a selection of the booksellers’ catalogues sent to him, and these survive (largely uncatalogued) in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Particularly revealing are the significant, though incomplete, runs of Sotheran’s *Price Current of Literature* and Quaritch *Rough Lists* (1887–1918) and the selection of Maggs Bros. catalogues (1887–1912) in the library’s stacks. Turnbull sporadically annotated these when items caught his eye, and the marks he left in them—pencilled crosses; blue-grease-pencilled vertical lines—provide a valuable insight into his collecting interests and purchasing patterns. However, where it is possible to crosscheck the evidence surviving in annotated catalogues against particular sales invoices, the limitations of this kind of evidence become clear. On 9 December 1892, for instance, Bernard Quaritch billed Turnbull for orders he had made several weeks earlier from Quaritch’s *Rough Lists* 124 and 125. Only one of the three items that Turnbull unambiguously marked with a cross appears on the invoice, a quarto collection of five of Henry Glapthorne’s *Plays* (1639–40). The others, a work by Drayton and John Foxe’s 1585 *Acts and Monuments*, were not purchased for the library, either because other buyers had pre-empted Turnbull, or because he had changed his mind. Three further items, however, do appear on the invoice. In each case, Turnbull had simply dog-eared the page on which the book in question appeared, without indicating which of the several dozen possible listings he was marking. These ambiguous dog-ears abound in the surviving book catalogues. The folds obviously indicate some form of purchasing intention, but without other documentary evidence to support them, further interpretation is usually impossible.

The most immediately obvious evidence that a book now in the Turnbull Library was part of the original 1918 bequest is the presence of one of his distinctive bookplates, which he pasted into most—but not all—of his books. Penny Griffith has described these in detail, indicating whom Turnbull commissioned to produce them and roughly when each came into use. Even these, however, can sometimes be

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18 On Turnbull’s card catalogue, see McCormick, *Alexander Turnbull*, 220.
19 For an example of the rich data that this kind of study can yield, see Kerr, *Amassing Treasures*.
20 B. Quaritch to Turnbull, 9 December 1892, ATL MS-Papers-0057-111.
ambiguous. An unused stock of Turnbull’s original and favourite bookplate (Griffith 1) passed to the Alexander Turnbull Library along with the collection. It seems to have been customary for staff to affix these to certain new acquisitions well into the 1920s.22 This practice, which mirrors a similar one by early staff at the Mitchell Library in Sydney, presents an obvious problem for anyone researching Turnbull’s collecting practices through the medium of the collection itself.23

Despite these difficulties, an adequate picture of Turnbull as book collector can be pieced together from the remaining strands of evidence, the most substantial of which is his surviving correspondence. Something of his ambitiousness and self-conscious aestheticism can be gleaned from a letter written to his brother Robert when he was just twenty-three. “My catalogue,” he writes,

> advances apace and from ‘an infant mewling and pewking in its nurse’s arms’ it has grown into quite a respectable book…. Some day perhaps it will appear in print, like a rivulet of type ‘meandering through a meadow of papers’ and with those rough uncut edges so dear to the eyes of your genuine bibliophile. Who knows?24

Awkward as their effect might be, the quotations from Shakespeare and Sheridan show how keen the young Turnbull could be to display the breadth and quality of his reading. He also knew the value of his collection and its potential importance to future readers. Self-deprecatingly equating himself with Sheridan’s Sir Benjamin Backbite, he imagines his own future library catalogue assuming the fetishized physical form of the books he collects, with “uncut edges,” and in due course becoming a collectors’ item itself. This early letter encapsulates a number of features of the young Turnbull—his precocious awareness of his own potential as a collector, his self-consciousness, and his early interest in English dramatic literature.

A number of Turnbull’s specific directions to individual booksellers also survive. They illustrate both the range of his interests and his obsession with completeness. In a letter to Dulau and Co., he outlined his plans for a “total archive” of New Zealand–related publications: “Anything whatever relating to this Colony, on its history, flora, fauna, geology & inhabitants, will be fish for my net, from as early a date as possible until now.”25 In 1915, he asked Pickering and Chatto to supply him with all the eighteenth-century theatrical pamphlets listed in volume eleven of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.26 A letter to Bernard Quaritch saw

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Turnbull “anxious to make [his] collection of books bearing upon Capt. Cook’s
voyages as complete as possible.”

Turnbull’s plans for Milton were similarly worded: “I intend forming a Milton collection & making it as complete as possible
if I can see my way to do so.”

Even as it expresses his desire for totality, however, Turnbull’s language betrays a sense of his own limitations. As a resident in “this Colony” at the end of the nineteenth century, Turnbull knew that he was at the very limit of global communications. The most efficient postal route, the San Francisco mail, took four to five weeks to deliver catalogues from London; any transaction would therefore take at least two months to complete. Most English dealers also had telegraph numbers (Quaritch prominently displayed theirs on the front cover of each Rough List), but although he did occasionally send overseas cables, Turnbull does not seem to have used this mode of contact for ordering books. Although New Zealand had been part of the “Red Route” since the laying of the trans-Tasman cable in 1876, sending telegrams from New Zealand to Britain was a highly expensive and sometimes unreliable means of communication. Writing in 1887, J. Henniker-Heaton put the price of a telegram between Britain and New Zealand at not less than “half a guinea,” or ten shillings sixpence a word. These “practically prohibitive” overseas rates, he noted in a later article, restricted international cable traffic to a small range of business transactions “yielding extraordinary profits, or when sheer necessity compels us.” By 1905, these rates had dropped to three shillings per word, but this was still a significant price to pay for immediacy. As a result of these costs, New Zealand-based book collectors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to persevere with the postal service, and resigned themselves to the inevitable disappointments this would cause.

Turnbull himself was highly aware of the disadvantage that geographical distance placed him at with respect to other buyers. “I am afraid I shall be too late and that the book is sold,” he wrote to Quaritch when seeking a rare Joseph Banks item. One had to be “spry,” he noted on another occasion, when competing via catalogue with

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27 Turnbull to Bernard Quaritch, 25 April 1896, ATL qMS-2054.
28 Turnbull to Bernard Quaritch, 14 July 1892, quoted in McCormick, Alexander Turnbull, 111.
29 Turnbull cabled Quaritch’s, for instance, upon hearing of Bernard Quaritch’s death in 1913, evidently anxious about the future of the business. See Quaritch’s to Turnbull, 3 September 1913, ATL MS-0057-112.
30 See James Smithies, “The Trans-Tasman Cable, the Australasian Bridgehead and Imperial History,” History Compass 6, no. 3 (2008): 703–4.
34 See the parallel case of Frank W. Reed, discussed in Donald Kerr, “Frank W. Reed and His Dumas Collection,” Book Collector 45, no. 1 (1996): 55.
35 Turnbull to Bernard Quaritch, 8 August 1895, ATL qMS-2054.
foreign collectors.\textsuperscript{36} One significant feature of Turnbull’s library, however, highlights the marginality of the antipodean collector in the global book trade—its seeming absence of Shakespeare. Instead, Turnbull focussed his bibliomaniac impulses on amassing a comprehensive collection of Milton. A number of commentators have concluded that Milton was therefore simply Turnbull’s substitute for Shakespeare. “Shakespeare,” K. A. Coleridge writes, “was beyond Turnbull’s financial means; Milton was within his means.”\textsuperscript{37} Milton, Coleridge implies, became the head author in Turnbull’s collecting pantheon practically by default. Rachel Barrowman echoes this judgement:

For the private collector aspiring to completeness in a literary subject, but with insufficient resources to embark on Shakespeare, the smaller, more affordable, and as yet uncrowded field of Milton was a wise choice.\textsuperscript{38}

According to the narratives that Coleridge and Barrowman present, there is a void in Turnbull’s collection where Shakespeare should be. This insufficiency becomes a point of contrast, an implied failure to place against Turnbull’s “successes”—Milton and, especially, the New Zealand and Pacific collection.

The shape and composition of Turnbull’s library provides much support for this viewpoint. The Shakespeare and Shakespeareana sections of Turnbull’s surviving book catalogues are almost entirely unmarked—sometimes, even, unopened. The only seventeenth-century Shakespeare imprint that Turnbull owned was the 1632 Second Folio, and this, as Clyde Taylor has argued, may have been bought more for its Milton epitaph than its Shakespearean provenance.\textsuperscript{39} (It is worth noting, however, that Turnbull’s copy is a particularly fine one, and would have been regarded as a noteworthy acquisition by any contemporary Shakespeare collector.) Indeed, of the thirty pre-1801 items in the Turnbull Library listed under “Shakespeare, William” in \textit{Early Imprints in New Zealand Libraries}, only two seem to have been part of the original bequest.\textsuperscript{40} By the time Turnbull started collecting, early Shakespeare imprints were beyond the reach of all but a select few. In 1888, the editor of \textit{Book Prices Current} noted that, “The first four folios of Shakespeare … are now becoming excessively scarce, owing to every available copy being secured at almost any price for the Libraries. The early quartos are not to be got.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{36} Turnbull to S. Percy Smith, 29 June 1911, ATL MS-0057-112.  
\textsuperscript{38} Barrowman, \textit{Turnbull}, 8.  
\textsuperscript{40} This count is based on a physical examination of all Turnbull Library items listed under “Shakespeare, William” in \textit{Early Imprints in New Zealand Libraries: A Finding List of Books Printed Before 1801 Held in Libraries in the Wellington Region} (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library, 1995), 262–63.  
\textsuperscript{41} J. H. S. [J. Herbert Slater], “Preface,” \textit{Book Prices Current} 2 (1888): vii.
Turnbull apparently kept an eye on these price trends. Tipped into his copy of T. F. Dibdin’s *Library Companion*, there is a newspaper cutting reporting the results of the 1904 Shakespeare anniversary sale at Sotheby’s, headlined “Shakespeare at Sotheby’s: £1,035 for a Quarto.”43 In this climate, even edited collections and facsimiles could attract high prices, especially if they had rarity or association value. In 1903, Sotheran’s advertised a limited-edition set of the 1853–65 Halliwell-Phillips *Shakespeare* at £94.10.0, justifying the high price because the imprint was “very rare.”44 The Oxford University Press collotype facsimile of the Shakespeare First Folio was puffed in similar terms. Sotheran’s gave it a full-page advertisement, advising collectors “that the edition is strictly limited, and the whole number have for some time been subscribed for, a very few of which can still be obtained from the advertisers.”45

Despite these difficulties, however, Turnbull by no means excluded Shakespeare from his collecting horizons. A surprisingly wide variety of Shakespearean books ultimately ended up in Turnbull’s possession. While this body of material lacks the focus and bulk that might have been expected of it had Turnbull pursued Shakespeare systematically, examining how and when he acquired it provides a number of insights into Turnbull’s collecting practices and the wider book-buying world he participated in. It reveals the kinds of opportunities available to an ambitious collector at the edges of the European book market at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, the Shakespeare collection at the Turnbull Library also reveals some less expected features—Turnbull’s interest in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literary history and biography, for instance. He sought out the works of John Payne Collier and Frederick Furnivall, and corresponded briefly with the latter. Turnbull’s letters and invoices also show how influential individual booksellers could be in guiding their customers’ tastes, offering particular books and suggesting new areas for collecting. Finally, the Shakespeare material in Turnbull’s library shows how varied Turnbull’s book-collecting activities were and highlights the sometimes unexpected ways that Shakespeare intersected with them.

In early May 1910, Turnbull discovered that he had bought J. G. Symonds’s *Shakespeare’s Predecessors* (1884) twice. He wrapped up the duplicate copy—“discovered among some old unopened parcels of books bought … I don’t know

44 Sotheran’s *Price Current of Literature*, no. 635 (1903), item 508.
45 Sotheran’s *Price Current of Literature*, no. 623 (1902), 27.
Alexander Turnbull’s “Dream Imperial”

where”—and sent it as a gift to his friend Charles Wilson, librarian at Wellington’s General Assembly Library. (A pencilled cross in Turnbull’s copy of Maggs Bros. Catalogue no. 251 suggests that he acquired the duplicate the previous year, for £3.3.0.) In a letter he wrote to accompany the gift, Turnbull gave a brief précis of his thoughts on the current state of Shakespeare criticism:

One of the sanest accounts I have read for a long time of Shakespeare, his life and work and those of his contemporaries … is in the third volume of Jusserand’s Literary History of the English People published last year. This writer, whilst glorying in the stupendous genius of our Shakespeare points out the weak spots in his plays and insists that he was a man of flesh and blood and not a God: nor does he read into every ‘and’ and ‘but’ that the dramatist wrote mysterious meanings and self-revelations like many of Shakespeare’s ingenious adulators do.46

Turnbull was not only a buyer of such books, in other words; he could also be a thoughtful and critical reader of them. What scope was there, however, for a collector interested in the field of Shakespeare and early English drama, but who lacked the financial means to compete for its most coveted imprints?

One strategy was to seek out playwrights whose works were on the margins of desirability. Turnbull collected extensively in the then relatively unfashionable area of Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, seeking items such as Margaret Cavendish’s 1668 Dramatic Works.47 Another strategy was to find more accessible editions than the early folios and quartos. One of Turnbull’s earliest recorded purchases was a first edition of A. J. Valpy’s fifteen-volume illustrated Shakespeare (1832–34), bought from Sothean’s for £2.12.6. in October 1888.48 Turnbull followed this practice throughout his life, buying recent popular and scholarly editions of Shakespeare, alongside those of other seventeenth-century dramatists. In 1889, he started acquiring volumes in the New York Shakspere Society’s innovative new Bankside edition, and he subscribed to H. H. Furness’s Variorum Shakespeare series.49 He also commissioned Maggs Bros. to find him a copy of the limited-edition Shakespeare’s Head Press Complete Works, eventually paying £6.10.0. for the set.50 Other notable editions that Turnbull evidently bought included the nine-volume

46 Turnbull to Charles Wilson, 3 May 1910, ATL MS-Papers-4512.
47 See Turnbull’s mark in Quaritch, Rough List, no. 281 (1909), item 383.
48 Henry Sothean, receipt dated 12 October 1888, ATL MS-0057-111. This set is not in the Alexander Turnbull Library; it may have been discarded before Turnbull left London. For details of Valpy’s Shakespeare, see Andrew Murphy, Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 174, 353.
50 Turnbull placed his order on 15 March 1911, but had to wait over two years for it to be filled. See Maggs Bros. to Turnbull, 14 June 1913, ATL MS-0057-112.
His collection may have lacked original versions of the First Folio and the early quartos, but Turnbull compensated for this by purchasing facsimile editions of each. A 1908 Quaritch catalogue bears a large pencil cross beside the forty-three volumes of the Griggs and Prætorius Quarto Facsimiles series, for which Turnbull apparently paid the not inconsiderable sum of £12.12.0. He also evidently purchased Sidney Lee’s opulent Clarendon facsimile of the First Folio and its companion Census of surviving copies. In 1913, he sought a first edition of Charles Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare, and was offered a set at £30 by Bertram Dobell.

Turnbull pursued his interest in non-Shakespearean English Drama in similar fashion. From local booksellers Whitcombe and Tombs he requested a copy of “Beaumont & Fletcher’s works,” and in an 1898 letter to Jones and Evans he ordered the full set of the Mermaid dramatists, inquiring also “whether J. C. Nimmo has published any more volumes of the ‘English Dramatists’ series since I bought Marston (3 vols.) Middleton (7 vols.) and Peele (2 vols.).” If so, he asked for the new volumes to be “sent out” to him. In April 1910 he asked Quaritch to furnish him with Robert Greene’s Works, and he seems to have had a standing order with Quaritch for Willy Bang’s edited series, the Old English Dramas. McDonald, Wilson, and Co. provided him with a copy of William Gifford’s 1805 edition of Massinger in four volumes, at £1.12.0. Local booksellers Bethune’s, meanwhile, were the source of an inexpensive set of the 1811 two-volume Dramatic Works of John Ford, acquired with two other items for the sum of eight shillings.

The Shakespeare’s Head Press edition, with its “rough uncut edges,” and Lee’s Folio facsimile, with its soft calf binding and air of exclusivity, were desirable objects in their own right. Their presence in the collection reflects what Rachel Barrowman has called Turnbull’s “pleasure in the book as artefact.” His efforts to obtain relatively cheap scholarly editions of English literature like the Mermaid English Dramatists, however, seem to reflect something else—Turnbull as reader. As Mary Hammond

51 I have been unable to find records of purchase for these sets, but both bear Turnbull’s bookplates.
52 Bernard Quaritch, A Catalogue of Selected Editions of Works in English Literature (London: B. Quaritch, 1908), item 869.
53 Sale records are again lacking, but Alice Woodhouse, who joined the Turnbull Library staff in 1926, attributes its purchase to Turnbull. See Woodhouse, “Shakespeare,” 1.
54 Bertram Dobell to Turnbull, 31 October 1913, ATL MS-0057-112.
55 Whitcombe and Tombs to Turnbull, 21 April 1910, ATL MS-0057-111; Turnbull to Jones and Evans, 13 April 1898, ATL qMS-2055. The Beaumont and Fletcher edition was probably Arnold Glover and A. R. Walker’s The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905–12).
56 B. Quaritch to Turnbull, 27 May 1910; 27 September 1912, ATL MS-0057-111.
57 Entry in Turnbull’s Acquisition Book, 11 April 1900, ATL MS-2169, item 1767.
58 ATL MS-2169, item 1905.
59 Barrowman, Turnbull, 19.
notes, these editions, with their notes and critical prefaces, presented themselves as offering something like “a formal course of education.” Turnbull's ownership of them perhaps reflects his on-going attempts at self-education and his desire to absorb himself in the literary aspects of English culture. It also suggests that he believed such “classic” texts to be foundational to any serious reference collection.

Turnbull's connoisseur-based approach to collecting, guided as it was by bibliographic manuals like Lowndes, also saw him buy single, historically important items in the history of Shakespeare publishing. As we have seen, Turnbull sought out a copy of the Second Folio, probably due in part, at least, to its connection with Milton. The seller on this occasion was Bertram Dobell, who wrote in the accompanying letter that the volume was “as fine and as large and clean a copy as it is possible to obtain.” A small note in Turnbull’s hand, written on foolscap and tipped inside the front cover, further describes the book's condition: “Very fine copy of the Second Folio. The page ‘To the Reader’ has torn margin & page 419 has tear in sewn flank margin repaired.” (Since none of the invoices survive, it is unclear how much Turnbull paid for this item.) On 24 April 1912, he commissioned Bernard Quaritch to find him a copy of Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 Works of Shakespeare, the first of the luxurious eighteenth-century Shakespeare editions published by the Tonson family. Quaritch replied a month later, offering a “very fine” large paper set of Rowe’s edition at the considerable cost of £58. In his letter, Quaritch stressed the rarity and desirability of the item: “The large and thick paper copies are extremely scarce. I only know of two copies being sold by auction in London the last was in 1904 which was also in modern calf and sold @ £40…. As I feel sure that you would be glad to have this,” he continued, “I have withdrawn it from sale pending the receipt of your reply.” Quaritch’s stress on exclusivity was apparently successful—Turnbull bought the item. Not long afterwards, Quaritch was offering another copy of this “extremely scarce” item for sale by catalogue at £32.

Turnbull’s purchase of the single, shilling-issue of Samuel Johnson’s Preface to his 1765 Shakespeare edition and John Dennis’s Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare (1712) no doubt reflected his enduring interest in the literature of the English eighteenth century. Turnbull’s correspondence shows that booksellers sought to further cultivate their customer’s interest in antiquarian Shakespeare collecting and old English drama in general. Quaritch sent him Malone Society publications
on inspection, and Maggs Bros. offered him a series of tempting seventeenth-century quartos. Turnbull acquiesced to Maggs’ offer of a fourth edition of Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Maides Tragedie* (1638) at £5.5.0. He also bought from them a volume that bound together two Webster and Rowley first editions—the 1661 quartos of *A Cure for a Cuckold* and *The Thracian Wonder* (£42).

Inevitably, there were occasions where Turnbull allowed a valuable item to pass him by. At the same time as he bought the *Maides Tragedie*, he ignored Maggs’ offer, at £8.8.0, of James Boswell’s personal copy of Benjamin Heath’s 1765 *Revisal of Shakespeare’s Text*. (Maggs were presumably looking to quickly pass on a purchase from the March 1916 sale of Boswell-family books from Auchinleck Library.)

Turnbull’s surviving catalogues reveal many other missed opportunities. He showed no interest in the 1685 Fourth Folio when it was offered at £55 in 1900, nor did a copy of the rare 1664 Third Folio tempt him at £175. In 1905, he could have bought an inscribed presentation copy of Edward Capell’s 1767–68 *Shakespeare* for £15, or a plain set for £2.5.0 in 1909. Although he collected many of Pope’s works, he passed up a number of chances to buy Pope’s 1725 edition of Shakespeare. Other unique association copies also failed to interest him—a copy of Ben Jonson’s 1616 *Works* presented by Jonson to Francis Young (£300), or a 1692 Jonson Third Folio containing annotations and an index by Pope (£52.10). Not long before he died, a series of marks in Quaritch’s *Rough List* 345 (July 1916) show Turnbull looking to plug some of the large gaps in his collection of early dramatic imprints. However, although he showed an interest in rare and expensive quartos of plays by Thomas Heywood, George Chapman, and Shackerley Marmion, he seems to have been unsuccessful in any attempts he might have made to secure them.

Sometimes, a fortuitous intersection with other collecting interests brought a Shakespeare-related item to Turnbull’s attention. Turnbull seems to have been attracted to literary forgeries, either wittingly or otherwise. He collected Thomas Chatterton, buying, for instance, the 1778 third edition of *Poems, Supposed to Have Been Written at Bristol, by Thomas Rowley* from Maggs for thirty-six shillings. It may have been this interest that led him to obtain a collection of William Henry Ireland’s notorious 1796 Shakespeare forgeries. The *Miscellaneous Papers* are in a

66 Bernard Quaritch to Turnbull, 27 May 1910. ATL MS-0057-111.
67 Maggs Bros. to Turnbull, 6 April 1916, ATL MS-0057-111.
69 *Sotheran’s Price Current of Literature*, no. 600 (1900), item 762, and no. 635 (1903), item 507.
70 *Sotheran’s Price Current of Literature*, no. 654 (1905), item 516, and no. 689 (1909), item 529.
72 Over a number of years, and at considerable cost, he unwittingly bought a number of the false imprints produced by Thomas J. Wise. See Elma Wright, “Nineteenth Century Pamphlets: Gorfin’s Correspondence with Turnbull,” *Turnbull Library Record*, no. 5 (1942): 13–14.
73 See Turnbull’s mark beside item 367 in Maggs, *Catalogue*, no. 232 (1907).
late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century calf binding with Turnbull’s armorial stamp, and have pasted in a cutting from an unidentified bookseller’s catalogue: “together in 1 thick vol. 8vo. IN THE ORIGINAL BOARDS, UNCUT EDGES, EXCESSIVELY SCARCE, ESPECIALLY IN THIS STATE.”74 (Unusually, Turnbull has scratched out the price he paid for this item.) The bookseller’s description reiterates the scarcity and consequent desirability of the forgeries: “This volume is now rising in value and there can be little doubt but in a few years it will become an object of great rarity.” Turnbull supplemented this collection of Irelandiana with a copy of Edmond Malone’s 1796 Inquiry, which conclusively exposed them as forgeries, and, at the very end of his life, with the 1799 and 1832 editions of Ireland’s supposed Shakespeare play, Vortigern.75

These multiple connections between Shakespeare and Turnbull’s other collecting interests brought a geographically diverse set of Shakespeareana to the library. Its author’s New Zealand connections were presumably responsible for Turnbull’s acquisition of Samuel Butler’s Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Reconsidered (1899).76 Turnbull’s interest in Australianana, on the other hand, led him to collect a number of small pamphlets, including published lectures by members of the Shakespeare Society of New South Wales. Examples include Henry Gullett’s Making of Shakespeare and Other Papers and Marian Harwood’s The Shakespeare Cult in Germany.77 Tyrrell’s Bookshop sold him a copy of J. H. Symons’s privately-published Shakespeare Quotations: A Lecture Before the Adelaide University Shakespeare Society among a selection headed “minor Australiana.”78 Editions of several of the Sydney-based actor and theatre manager George Rignold’s Shakespeare adaptations were also part of the library.79 The Australian historian and Shakespearean Percy Marks recognised the value of Turnbull’s collection.80 While compiling his 1915 Australasian Shakespeareana: A Bibliography, Marks seems to have corresponded with Turnbull, and he thanks him in the acknowledgements, listing several items as being in the “Private Collection of A. H. Turnbull, Esq., Wellington.”81

75 The purchase date for the last two is recorded in Bernard Quaritch’s final invoice for Turnbull’s “dramatic literature” as 28 June 1918. See ATL MS-Papers-0181-070. The former has Turnbull’s armorial stamp on the binding and bookplate.
76 Samuel Butler, Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Reconsidered (London: Longman’s, 1899).
78 Tyrrell’s Bookshop to Turnbull, 1 September 1913, ATL MS-0057-112.
79 See, for instance, Shakespeare’s Comedy of the Merry Wives of Windsor as Arranged for the Stage by George Rignold (Sydney: W. M. Maclardy, 1890) and Shakespeare’s Othello, as Arranged for the Stage by George Rignold (Sydney: Edward Lee, 1899).
80 On Marks and Shakespeare, see Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, Australian Readers Remember (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), 61–62.
81 Percy J. Marks, Australasian Shakespeareana: A Bibliography (Sydney: Tyrrell’s, 1915), [4].
More unexpected, perhaps, was Turnbull’s ongoing engagement with the works of two of the major figures of nineteenth-century Shakespearean scholarship, John Payne Collier and F. J. Furnivall. One of Turnbull’s early purchases was a bound manuscript in Collier’s hand entitled “The Old Dramatists from Lillis to Dryden.”

A pencilled note on the flyleaf records that the item was bought on 15 August 1890, when Turnbull was just 22. Turnbull seems to have placed a high value on the item. Some years later, he compiled an index for it, and at one point added a marginal note criticising Collier for praising Dryden. Beside Collier's entry, Turnbull wrote, somewhat melodramatically, “Oh! Read what Milton thought of this dreary dramatist who had to borrow his plots & tried to better other men’s masterpieces.”

To judge by listings of his works in book catalogues, Collier was surprisingly collectible at the fin de siècle. Sotheran’s devoted a third of a page in 1903 to advertising a “unique copy” of Collier’s 1878 subscription edition of Shakespeare, giving an elaborate account of its association value:

presentation set from the editor to his adopted daughter, Miss A. S. Wilson, with curious affectionate inscriptions written in pencil by him in nearly every part, and original autograph verses to her.

Turnbull was unmoved on this occasion, but he actively sought Collier items at other times. In 1898, for instance, he marked a copy of Collier’s Bibliographical and Critical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language, with a tipped-in letter to John Bowyer Nichols, listed at £3.3.0 by Sotheran’s. Turnbull eventually acquired over thirty Collier-related titles, including the first, second, and third editions of Collier’s Shakespeare. A pencilled note on the flyleaf of the 1858 set records the price that Turnbull paid for it—£6.6.0. Presumably on account of its Collier provenance, Turnbull also sought out a set of the Publications of the Shakespeare Society. A bookseller’s note in the preliminaries records: “Complete set 48 vos [sic] in 10. Very scarce.” A note by Turnbull elaborates further: “complete in 10 vols. This is the edition which was issued after the Shakespeare society ceased existence[.] The stock of publications was sold bound up into 19 or 20 vols. with title pages. See Lowndes p 2342 vol. 3.” On the corresponding page in his copy of Lowndes, Turnbull ticked off each volume with a pencil stroke, presumably checking that his own set was complete.

Turnbull’s interest in Furnivall may have been sparked by his famous contention with Algernon Swinburne. Turnbull collected Swinburne’s poetry and critical works...
extensively, including several of his books and pamphlets on Shakespeare. In the 1870s and 1880s, Furnivall and Swinburne had clashed after Swinburne ridiculed Furnivall’s New Shakspere Society. This “conflagration,” as Andrew Murphy puts it, “set practically the whole world of British Shakespeare studies alight,” and Turnbull himself seems to have been retrospectively fascinated by it. In early 1904, Turnbull wrote to Furnivall, apparently asking him for his opinion of Swinburne’s scholarship, while perhaps hinting that Furnivall might have some surplus pamphlets issued during the dispute in his possession. The original letter does not survive, but Furnivall’s reply, dated 2 May 1904 is preserved in the Turnbull Library’s manuscripts collection. “I have long forgotten about my controversy with Swinburne,” Furnivall informed him, and, although he had once had some pamphlets printed “to give to friends,” having “just been upstairs,” he could confirm that there were “no copies … left.” He also shared with Turnbull the news that he now thought Henry VIII was not Shakespeare’s work after all.

Having been rebuffed at the source, Turnbull eventually gathered through booksellers a unique collection of memoranda recording the controversy. In addition to Swinburne’s 1880 Study of Shakespeare, which had an appendix satirizing the New Shakspere Society, Turnbull acquired Furnivall’s privately printed pamphlet Mr. Swinburne’s ‘Flat Burglary on Shakspere’, with the author’s corrections, and the anonymous Furnivallos Furioso!, which Turnbull records in a flyleaf note as “a skit on Dr. F. J. Furnivall.” He also wrote to Quaritch seeking a complete set of the New Shakspere Society’s Publications. Like the Collier-related Publications of the Shakespeare Society, these were evidently scarce, and it took more than two years for Quaritch to find a suitable set, eventually billing Turnbull £7.7.0. In the interim, Quaritch gifted him a copy of a new festschrift volume compiled by Furnivall’s friends and colleagues.

87 See, for instance, A. C. Swinburne, Shakespeare (London: Oxford University Press, 1909). Turnbull annotated his copy with the flyleaf note “Published after the Poet’s death.” For Turnbull’s bibliographic interest in Swinburne, see his interleaved and annotated copy of T. J. Wise, A Contribution to the Bibliography of the Writings of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London: n.p., 1897).
89 Murphy, Shakespeare in Print, 211.
90 F. J. Furnivall to Turnbull, 2 May 1904, ATL MS-0057-111. Furnivall’s almost illegible handwriting makes much of this letter hard to decipher.
92 Turnbull wrote to Quaritch desiring the set in February 1911. See Bernard Quaritch to Turnbull, 14 January 1913, ATL MS-0057-112.
93 Frederick James Furnivall: A Record (London: Frowde, 1911). Turnbull has written on the flyleaf of his copy, “Presented to me by Quaritch Oct. 1911.”
The most scurrilous record of the dispute that Turnbull obtained was undoubtedly a copy of Furnivall’s privately printed pamphlet, *The “Co.” of Pigsbrook & Co.* This was a vituperative attack on Swinburne and the Shakespeare scholar J. O. Halliwell Phillips. The Turnbull copy is made even more so, however, by the inclusion of abusive autograph letters from both Furnivall and Halliwell Phillips. Furnivall’s postcard, for instance, called Swinburne “a drunken clown,” and cheerfully concludes that, “I’ve cut him dead & I’ve given him as good as he gave.” Shakespeare is central to these documents, but in some ways he seems almost incidental. Turnbull probably valued these items more for their rarity and famous associations—as glimpses behind the public masks of prominent literary figures.

In large letters above the stairway to the Alexander Turnbull Library in the National Library building on Molesworth Street, Turnbull’s instructions to Dulau & Co.—“Anything whatever relating to this Colony, on its history, flora, fauna, geology & inhabitants, will be fish for my net, from as early a date as possible until now.”—have been immortalised. None of Turnbull’s other, similarly worded, instructions to his booksellers for assembling comprehensive non-New Zealand collections appears there. Nor, indeed, does his somewhat bemused observation to William Georges Sons about the unforeseen consequences of success: “Yes, my New Zealand collection is now very large and I am appalled, when I contemplate it.” This retrospective distortion of Turnbull’s collecting aims bears out Tony Ballantyne’s remarks about the Library’s status as a monument to cultural nationalism:

Even though the Alexander Turnbull Library was the product of the assiduous efforts of an individual collector rather than the nation-state itself, it has been thoroughly assimilated into the nation-state’s archival complex…. despite the fact that many of its collections … sit uneasily within a national framework.

This process of assimilation was initially a pragmatic one. In the straitened economic climate following the First World War, the library’s custodians knew they lacked the resources necessary to collect as ambitiously as Turnbull had. The founding Librarian, J. C. Andersen, reckoned that Turnbull had spent “something like £2000 a year on the upkeep of the collection,” a sum he knew was “quite out of the question” for the new institution. Instead, he aimed for a compromise: an acquisitions budget that would

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95 Turnbull to William Georges Sons, 5 August 1896, ATL qMS-2054.
97 J. C. Andersen to Charles Wilson, 19 September 1919; Andersen to the Under Secretary, Department of Internal Affairs, 29 April 1919, ATL MS-74-183-1/8.
secure all local imprints without frightening his bureaucratic superiors. Andersen, at least initially, tried to maintain some degree of continuity with Turnbull’s wider collecting aims. In 1920, for instance, Maggs Bros. supplied the library with a new entry in the Furness variorum Shakespeare series.\(^9\) In later decades, when funds for new purchases became more easily available, the Library assiduously plugged many of the gaps in its Shakespeare collection, acquiring, for instance, most of the major eighteenth-century collected editions of Shakespeare. Over time, however, as the ideology of cultural nationalism hardened, the relevance of these kinds of additions to what had become a “national collection” came to be questioned. This reached a climax in the early 1990s, when Treasury was reported to be contemplating selling outright the Library’s non-New Zealand holdings.\(^9\)

It remains to be seen whether, after the planned refurbishment, the National Library building will valorise the New Zealand collection to the extent that it does now.\(^10\) In the meantime, however, reconstructing the history of collections like Turnbull’s Shakespeare holdings can contribute something to the recovery of the Library’s institutional memory. While Turnbull saw his library as forming the core of a future “National Collection,” he assumed that such a collection would necessarily have to extend far further than the nation’s borders.\(^11\) It is probable that he would have agreed with the imperialistic sentiments of Sir Charles Tupper, recorded in the *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* (1888): “As British colonists, we have all that you [i.e. metropolitan British] have. Your literature, your statesmanship, the achievements of your great generals and scientists, are the heritage of British colonists.”\(^12\) Shakespeare and the other fixtures of the English literary canon, in other words, would have been as much a part of Turnbull’s idea of national literature as locally produced books. Knowing what was collected can also be revealing in other ways. The substantial holdings of nineteenth-century critical and historical material that Turnbull gathered, now consigned to the “general” collection, are reminders of the considerable debt that New Zealand’s book and literary cultures owe to its sometimes-derided “Victorian heritage.”\(^13\) The “future national collection” that Turnbull assembled was, in fact, trans-national in scope, as it had to be, because the world of the book was, and is, inescapably trans-national. As James Belich has noted, there “has always been a sense in which national packaging falsifies history.

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98 Maggs Bros. to J. C. Andersen, 6 September 1920, ATL MS-0181-050.
100 For a perceptive reading of the cultural messages conveyed by the current building’s architecture, signage, and art-work, see Ballantyne, “Mr. Peal’s Archive,” 101–3.
101 See the terms of Turnbull’s will, quoted in McCormick, *Alexander Turnbull*, 286.
The actual past, especially in culture, is no respecter of national boundaries." This, I would argue, applies particularly to the world of books. The histories of collections like Turnbull’s remind us of how insufficient purely nation-based frameworks are for understanding library and book history in a world where technology and population movements carried texts “to the ends of earth” and beyond.

*The Open University, UK*

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