



THE
PROVIDENCE
ATHENÆUM

Universal Penman

SPRING 2019

Universal Penman

An Occasional Publication of
the Providence Athenæum

SPRING 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

KATE WODEHOUSE
A Rare Gift2

ATH STAFF
A Conversation with Susan Jaffe Tane4

MATT BURRIESCI
On the Unity of Effect9

MiscellanyII

A Rare Gift



Kate Wodehouse
Director of Collections & Library Services

The shelves in the Philbrick Rare Book Room literally overflow with incredible treasures.

From a 15th-century illuminated breviary to one of the first panoramic photographs ever taken, from rare and incredibly detailed natural history tomes to a first edition of *Leaves of Grass* with the copyright information inscribed by Walt Whitman himself, we are constantly moving, shifting, and re-shelving to find space in our small library to house such amazing and delicate artifacts.

But you might be surprised to learn that, until recently, we had no funds that were specifically dedicated toward the growth and care of our rare collections and artistic holdings.

Over its history, the Athenæum has been the recipient of over 50 restricted book funds dedicated towards the purchase of new titles for the circulating collection. These funds constitute the

backbone of our acquisitions budget each year and continue to provide for the readers of the future.

Fewer resources, however, have been directed towards the strategic development and conservation of the Special Collections. Many of the library's most valuable items were donated to, rather than purchased by the Athenæum, and our staff has never had the freedom or funds to expand our rare holdings in intentional and meaningful ways. Restricted resources have provided for the vitality of the contemporary collection, but the expansion and care of our

rare collections were left largely to inconsistent grant support and donor contributions.

But at the end of 2017, good fortune struck. We were approached by members



Lyn and Brian Hayden, who wanted to establish a different type of book fund for the library. Their vision was to provide an annual disbursement of funds specifically for the growth and development of the Special Collections and Art Collection, and also include much needed support for the conservation and preservation of the titles housed in the Rare Book Room. Their gift amounted to \$100,000, the single largest gift for the purchase of special collections in the history of the organization.


Since the establishment of the Hayden Fund, we have been able to make several exciting purchases to support collection strengths and enhance our regular exhibition program. The spring 2018 *Observing Nature* exhibit showcased three hand-colored bird prints from the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809), replacing plates stolen long ago from the Athenæum's set. In June, we commissioned two illustrations by local artists for an exhibition on the building, 251 *Benefit Street*, which celebrated our historic Greek revival building and the restoration of the 1873 Richmond Fountain. In October, our magnificent Travel & Exploration Collection took center stage for *Voyages: Mapping the World*, which included an exquisite pocket globe – now the only globe in a collection of several thousand volumes on travel. Our most recent acquisition made possible by the Hayden Fund is a beautiful 2018 illustrated edition of "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe, purchased for *Ravenous: The Enduring Legacy of Poe* and appearing on the cover of this publication.

Along with making such exciting acquisitions possible, this incredible gift provides for the care and preservation of our valuable collections, demonstrating the donors' true understanding of the needs of a library like ours. Simply possessing the books isn't enough – we must be true stewards of these objects and ensure that they survive into future centuries.

LEAVE A LEGACY

If you would like to make a transformative gift to benefit the Athenæum and its collections, please contact Executive Director Matt Burriesci for more information (401-421-6970 x11).

One project we have now been able to focus on is identifying, cataloging, and restoring all of the books from the Providence Library Company that remain in the collection. To date, we have located a third of the 1,680 volumes that first greeted visitors when the doors opened in 1838. About 45 of these, known as the Founder's Collection, pre-date 1758 and have been restored, but the remaining titles that were acquired between 1759-1836 still need to be identified, cataloged, and evaluated for repair. The first works selected for restoration this spring with the Hayden Fund is a group of five books on the subject of slavery that were donated to the library by Rhode Island abolitionist Moses Brown in 1801. Several of these books are signed by Brown and reflect his anti-slavery convictions. The Hayden Fund will allow for a portion of the Providence Library Company volumes to be conserved each year until the project is completed many years from now, and ensures that the collection will be restored and accessible for future readers and scholars.

Thanks to such foresight and generosity, our Special Collections continue to grow in the 21st century, and will delight, inspire, and educate members and visitors to the Athenæum for generations to come. All of us in the library community owe sincere thanks to Lyn and Brian for their lasting contribution to the Athenæum. 

A Conversation with Susan Jaffe Tane



Susan Jaffe Tane
Collector, Bibliophile, Philanthropist

Susan Jaffe Tane is the world's preeminent private collector of all things Edgar Allan Poe, and we are honored to include over 30 items from her personal collection in the *Ravenous: The Enduring Legacy of Poe* exhibition.

Susan has been a friend of the Athenæum for years and a generous supporter of the library's exhibitions and collections. In 2017, she loaned Walt Whitman's personal copy of THE WORKS OF ROBERT BURNS to the Athenæum for inclusion in the Scotch Bard exhibition, and is preparing a major exhibit on Whitman with the Grolier Club, coming to the Athenæum in October 2019.

We recently spoke to Susan about her passion for collecting, fascination with Poe, and connection to our library.

When did you first become interested in collecting works by and about Edgar Allan Poe?

More than 30 years ago, I wandered down the aisles of the New York Antique Show at the Park Ave. Armory and came upon a booth displaying first edition books in

beautiful bindings. I entered the booth, and there, prominently displayed on a glass shelf was a small copy of *The Raven and Other Poems*. I was stunned as I picked it up and examined it. I had no idea that an individual could own a first edition. I thought that all rare books were relegated to safes in libraries and museums. It was fascinating – actually, it was compelling. “The Raven” has been referred to as “the most important volume of poetry that had been issued up until that time in America.” But, Poe humbly referred to the poems in this collection as trifles, adding, “I think nothing in this volume of much value to the public, or very credible to myself.” As I fondled that cover, I knew I had to own it.

Seeing my interest, the saleslady came over extolling the virtues of this little gem finishing with the remark that she was sure would close the deal. “This copy is in

wrappers,” she exclaimed, “and is extremely rare and valuable.” Not knowing what she was talking about, and trying to look knowledgeable, I nodded my head in agreement – but my blank stare gave me away. Sensing my uncertainty, she continued again, this time an octave higher trying to justify the high price – “But this copy is in wrappers!” I knew nothing – I was such a neophyte, and she knew it as she pointedly asked, “You do know what wrappers are, don’t you?” But not to be diminished, I looked her right back in the eye and claimed, “Of course I do,” and thanked her for gift wrapping the book for me to take home!

This small book was the beginning of my collecting career combing through country auctions, rare book shops, book fairs, antique stops, and even eBay! That one book, bought a lifetime ago, is now part of the most important Edgar Allan Poe collection held in private hands in the world.

How has bringing together this collection impacted your life?

Believe it or not, it’s changed my identity. People now define me as a Collector and include me in bibliophile books, magazines, and articles. I endow scholarships to worldwide Poe conferences to further education, I get involved in exhibitions, books, movies, and plays – some successful, some not. Some fun, and some not so much! Along the way I’ve met some very interesting people as I became more involved within the Poe community. I didn’t even know

there was such a thing as a Poe community but there are Poe Museums, Societies, and Associations all over the world.

You split your time between Connecticut and New York. How did you become acquainted with the Athenæum?

My collecting obsession and exhibitions began to generate interest in the book world of collectors, libraries, dealers, and auction houses which led to election into the Grolier Club. All bibliophile associations such as the Grolier belong to FABS (The Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies) and 10 years ago (even that seems a lifetime ago) I signed up for one of their tours going to bibliophile sites in Newport

and its surrounds. I didn’t know a soul, but since I love Newport, I said, “why not?” I have my own car and if I’m not having a good time I can easily make an escape.

But what I found, as 40-odd people introduced themselves, was that I really did have something in common with most of them. They were all die-hard collectors in their field, whether it be bookbinding, Civil War memorabilia, medieval literature,

or even midwifery of the 17th century. We were all kindred souls.

As a group, one of our first stops was at the Providence Athenæum. We gathered around the tables as Kate Wodehouse and Christina Bevilacqua showed us the Athenæum’s gems. I knew I had found a home as they pulled out their Edgar Allan





Ravenous

Edgar Allan
POE
1809-1849

The Raven
The Raven

THE RAVEN

The Raven

The Raven

*I knew I had
found a home...
This is where
I belonged.*


Poe and Sarah Helen Whitman holdings.
This is where I belonged.

That evening I was seated at Kate's table for dinner, and our connection was forged. Her enthusiasm for the Athenæum's future was contagious and we soon became a team. I admired [the staff's] hard work in putting together inspiring exhibitions on the proverbial shoestring! So, for *Ravenous*, as in the others, I am just honored to be a part of it.

What is your favorite object you lent to the Ravenous exhibition? Can you tell us a little about it - its history and how you acquired it?

I receive thoughtful presents from all over the world. My friends have given me stuffed ravens, puppets, candles, band-aids, pillows, scarves, etc., etc. But my favorite is a Poe

skateboard given to me by my friend Peter Fawn from Brighton, England who brought it to New York City to place in the ephemera display case of my *Evermore: The Persistence of Poe* exhibition at the Grolier Club in 2014.

We are so grateful to Susan for sharing her thoughts and collection with us! Be sure to check out her incredible loans, including that amazing skateboard, in Ravenous, on view through the end of April. 



RAVENOUS: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF POE EXHIBITION

Exhibition on view through April 30 in the Philbrick Rare Book Room

Highlights include a rare 1849 daguerreotype, a lock of Poe's hair, a bust of the writer, numerous first editions, and Poe's signature in the Athenæum's circulating records. We are grateful for the support and partnership of the John Hay Library, Brown University; RISD'S Nature Lab; Levi Leland; Christie's; the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities; and, of course, Susan Jaffe Tane.

Gallery hours: Tues & Thurs, 12-6pm; Sat, 1:30-3:30pm. Other times by request.

On the Unity of Effect



*Matt Burriesci
Executive Director*

The Athenæum celebrates Poe for many reasons, the most obvious of which is his personal connection to the institution. It's fun to say that famous writers have been here, and even more fun to say that the Athenæum and its members were important parts of their lives.

In the broader literary community, Poe is often remembered as a prime mover in two whole genres: horror and the detective story. Today, mysteries remain the most highly circulated books in our collection. Strangely enough, the Athenæum also boasts a strong connection to H.P. Lovecraft, Poe's direct literary descendant in the horror game.

But, for whatever reason, horror and detective stories often aren't considered "great literature," whatever that may be. Poe's stature has grown, of course, but for the most part, we read "The Tell Tale Heart" or "Murders in the Rue Morgue," and then we're done with Poe. As for Poe's poetry, well - probably few in the smart-set would disagree with T.S. Eliot's (rather confused) thinking on it, saying that Poe's work was filled with "slipshod writing," "puerile thinking," and "haphazard experiments."

Eliot also scoffed at both "The Raven" and Poe's *Philosophy of Composition*, writing, "The result hardly does credit to the method."

But Poe's essays on writing show *precisely* why his impact on literature is felt far beyond his incredible genre innovations. Poe's most famous theory on writing is "The Unity of Effect," which argues that writers should first seek to create an effect upon the reader, and that this effect *is* the purpose of the work. This means that all the elements of a story or poem - the plot, the setting, even the names of the characters - are subordinate to that effect.

Of "The Raven," Poe wrote:

It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition - that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Poe wrestled with every word, every syllable, every single *sound* in his work, in order to create an effect – and the effect was not simply a trick, or set-dressing – the effect was the whole point.

Take the opening line of *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

Every opening line must convey essential information to the reader. All that is there. The who/what/where/when is right up top, almost like a journalistic lead – but it’s buried in the effect.


We see the clear consonance (during, dull, dark, day, dreary, drew...) giving us that droning "d" sound. The sentence includes eight (8!) commas and a semicolon. It’s caesura. He intends to slow the sentence to a crawl. Then there’s the syllabification. There are 60 words in this sentence. Remarkably, 57 of them are only one or two syllables, and yet the sentence feels relentless, and without feeling staccato. The three longest words in it are “singularly,” “oppressively” and “melancholy,” each clocking in at exactly four syllables. They stand out because of the shorter words around them. Surprise! These are the *precise* sensations the reader comes away with: *lonely* (singular), *oppressive*, and *melancholy*. They are not declared sensations – the narrator doesn’t say, “I feel singular, oppressed, and melancholy,” which would

have no effect – instead, Poe uses the setting to reflect these sentiments.

It’s not just style for style’s sake. Poe’s prose is often so controlled that it seems either labored or supernatural. This is why his work doesn’t translate well to film. One can stage all the events in the stories, but the medium of film can’t accommodate the effects he produces with language. It’s not just a nifty plot and well-rounded characters. There are a million literary devices working underneath the surface, shaping our sensations.

A man walls another man alive in his cellar, a woman comes back from the dead, a man is driven to madness after hearing the beating heart of his victim – these are *unbelievable* tales. And yet we *believe* it, and more than that, we *feel* it. We are terrified of the corpse banging on the door, we feel overwhelming pity for Fortunato. The *effect* is what resonates with us – the tone, the atmosphere, the shared *feeling* – those ineffable, elemental, and eternal sensations shared by all humanity, and across all time. This is why Poe’s work has endured. He isn’t speaking to the small idioms of his age – he’s speaking to the eternal idiom of the human condition.

Obviously Poe’s descendants include writers like Hammett and Lovecraft who, like Poe, were flawed, innovative, and promptly dismissed in critical circles. But his descendants also include writers in that “great literature camp,” who all owe him the same debt. Even grumpy old T.S. Eliot had to concede that some of Poe’s works “enchanted him for a time as a boy, and... do somehow stick in the memory.”

Why...one might even say Poe’s work *affected* him! 



PROVIDENCE: UNVEILED

A new exhibit in partnership with Year of the City, on view June 3 - September 10

The Athenæum has occupied its home on Benefit Street since 1838, bearing witness to the evolution of the city of Providence for nearly two centuries. PROVIDENCE UNVEILED: STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES aims to uncover the stories of people and places of 19th-century Providence through an exploration of materials housed in the Athenæum’s archives, painting a picture of the surrounding neighborhood throughout time.

Year of the City: The Providence Project is an unprecedented year-long exploration of the history, life, and culture of Providence’s 25 neighborhoods through exhibitions, performances, walks, lectures, and conferences produced by more than 50 different curators.

STAFF UPDATES



If you've attended a program recently, you have probably met a new face! We are thrilled to welcome **Jenny Young** as our Events Coordinator.

Jenny comes to us after years of managing a diverse array of events at downtown’s beloved multi-use creative venue Aurora Providence. She also handles our building rentals, so talk to her to book your next one-of-a-kind party in the library!

And we're also delighted to let you know that Circulation Assistant **Juli Anna Herndon** has moved into the role of Executive Assistant. After finishing up her Master in Library & Information Science degree in December, she couldn't stay away from the desk entirely; you can still find her there a couple times a week.



SIX-MONTH SNAPSHOT

Since September...

25,404

Visitors to the Athenæum

Most popular title, fiction (it's a tie!)

Kudos by Rachel Cusk

Florida by Lauren Groff

Providence by Caroline Kepnes

Warlight by Michael Ondaatje

Most popular title, non-fiction

Educated by Tara Westover

Most popular title, children's

Robinson by Peter Sis

Most popular DVD

Shetland, Season 4

ROLL THE CREDITS!

The Athenæum is so grateful to the incredibly supportive businesses, organizations, and individuals whose generosity keeps the library ticking: Campus Fine Wines; Carter Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Champlin Foundation; Chas A. Miller III & Birch Coffey; Christie's; Easy Entertaining; Gertrude N. Goldowsky & Seebert J. Goldowsky Fountain; Haffenreffer Family Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Ida Ballou Littlefield Memorial Trust; Ira S. & Anna Galkin Charitable Trust; June Rockwell Levy Foundation; M&S Rare Books; Mabel T. Woolley Trust; Mullen Scorpio Cerilli, CPAs; National Endowment for the Humanities; Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP; Pearl W. and Martin M. Silverstein Foundation; the Philbrick family; Providence Journal; Residential Properties Ltd.; Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission; Rhode Island State Council on the Arts; Rhode Island Council for the Humanities; Richard and Barbara Bell Fund for Social Justice; Rustigian Rugs; Starkweather & Shepley; Variable Data Printing; and Yankee Travel, Inc. We especially thank our Spring 2019 season sponsor *Bank of America*.

A hurrah and a handshake must go to this year's presenting partners: Audubon Society of Rhode Island; Brown University Bookstore; Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; Sparky Davis; Edna Lawrence Nature Lab at RISD; English Speaking Union of Rhode Island; First Unitarian Church; Goat Hill Writers; John Carter Brown Library; John Hay Library, Brown University; Dave Marchetti; Mary Ann Hall's Music for Children; Providence Children's Film Festival; Providence Preservation Society; The Public's Radio; Rhode Island Historical Society; Ricky Rainbow Beard; RISD Museum; Rock-a-Baby; Save the Bay; School One; and Trinity Rep.

We salute our stellar and steadfast volunteers: Jennifer Kiddie (Program Volunteer-Wrangler-In-Chief), Leslie Atik, Jennifer Becker, Karina Bertsch, Adele Bourne, Ellen Bruzelius, Erin Dahill, Carol Delaney, Peggy Edwards, Carl Farmer, Grace Farmer, Sarah Gleason, Greg Healy, Lucia Huntley, Jenn Huntley, Jane Lancaster, Lucy Lepreau, Iveta Madden, John Moran, Elsie Morse, Joanne Oechler, Cynthia Shattuck, Sarah Shaw, Carol Tatian, Claire Uziel, and Jessica Weinstein.

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RHODE ISLAND
COUNCIL *for* the HUMANITIES

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IMAGE CREDITS

FROM THE COLLECTION

COVER: *The Raven*, by Edgar Allan Poe. Illustrated by James Reed, 2018. Hayden Special Collections Development Fund.

GLOBE: *Joslin's Terrestrial & Celestial Globe*, by Gilman Joslin & Son, [1885]. Hayden Special Collections Development Fund.

WOODCUTS: *The Raven (Le Corbeau)*, by Edgar Allan Poe. Illustrated by Jack Roberts, [1920]. Collection of Susan Jaffe Tane.

EXHIBIT CENTERFOLD:
Chris Vaccaro Photography

MONOGRAM: *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by John H. Ingram, 1899.



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