

The Library of Congress has received a \$540,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to evaluate the physical health of the national collection of books in American research libraries and to guide their archive retention and preservation decisions. Since there currently is no objective formula to assess the condition of millions of books in the custody of the nation's libraries, this scientific study will help inform best practices and provide a baseline for libraries to analyze their print collections based on established scientific guidelines. This is the first effort of its kind to lay the scientific groundwork for the development of a national effort to preserve the corpus of books held in American libraries. Entitled "Assessing the Physical Condition of the National Collection," the 40-month grant project through the Scholarly Communication Program will compare the physical, chemical, and optical characteristics of a representative sample of bibliographically identical books across five large research libraries in distinct regions of the country to quantify and objectively assess the condition of these volumes. The five participating institutions are Arizona State University, Cornell University, University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Miami, and University of Washington. The study will help provide a comparable and reliable decision-making method for libraries to follow in deciding what books and how many should be kept in the national collective. The collected data will build a knowledge base for how materials naturally age and decompose, provide a rich set of data about books as artifacts, and lead to a stronger predictive model for the condition of books. One

objective of the project is also to develop simpler testing tools that could be used on-site in library book stacks. PRTD will host two researchers for three years, each of whom will complete the analysis of 500 of the same volumes from the five selected American research libraries, totaling 2,500 volumes. The library will convene an expert advisory body to review the work in process and schedule conferences periodically to report the project's progress. The study's findings will be shared nationally at a major event in 2022.

Acquisitions

The John Ashbery Reading Library has been acquired by the Houghton Library at Harvard University. When Ashbery died in 2017, he left behind more than 30 collections of elliptical, often collagelike poetry, including "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," which won the 1976 Pulitzer Prize. The John Ashbery Reading Library includes more than 5,000 books of poetry, art criticism, architectural history, philosophy, religious history, and cookbooks collected over the poet's lifetime. There are annotated editions of books by Boris Pasternak, Franz Kafka, Friedrich Nietzsche, and others, as well as the copy of the *Oxford Book of American Verse* Ashbery used as an undergraduate, with pressed flowers used as bookmarks. Harvard began acquiring Ashbery's papers in 1986, when it paid \$200,000 for the first portion of them (at the time, the highest price it had ever paid for a manuscript collection, a curator told *The Harvard Crimson* in 1987). The final portion of the papers, delivered in December, brings the total holdings to 250 linear feet of manuscripts, letters, memorabilia, and other material. ♪

Ed. note: Send your grants and acquisitions to Ann-Christe Galloway, production editor, *C&RL News*, email: agalloway@ala.org.