

COLLECTING MODERN LITERARY ARCHIVES

Addressing the Challenges

Manuscripts Matter takes place against a backdrop of recent activity intended to preserve and make accessible one of the most important sources for British and Irish literary heritage. The issue of cultural patrimony, particularly with respect to spirited American collecting of British and Irish authors, sparks frequent debate.

- In March 2005 a group of key individuals drawn from libraries, dealers in manuscripts and archives, funding bodies, academia and the literary world was established. The Working Group on UK Literary Heritage, chaired by Rt Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury, seeks to examine and address the obstacles to acquisition by UK institutions, in particular calling for better tax incentives for individuals prepared to sell their archives to nationally recognised institutions. Its aims have been the subject of parliamentary debates in the House of Lords, and the Working Group has submitted evidence to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport's 2006 inquiry on Caring for our Collections.
- Consistent support is given for the purchases of modern papers by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Friends of the National Libraries and the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund. The Heritage Lottery Fund has signalled its commitment to modern literary manuscripts and archives through major awards and, in particular, an increased flexibility in respect of funding the papers of living individuals.
- A growing spirit of cooperation exists among collecting institutions with a shared interest in modern literary manuscripts. The recently formed Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM; <http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/glam/index.html>) seeks to develop a national framework within which to build and exploit literary collections, while an increasing number of transatlantic projects, including fellowships and conferences, bear witness to a growing understanding between collecting institutions internationally.

However, significant challenges remain

- Sources of funding are already stretched and institutional budgets are under pressure from competing commitments
- Decisions to purchase often have to be made quickly, while the process of bidding for funds can be lengthy
- Authors and their estates may not be sufficiently aware of the collecting policies within the UK, tax incentives and funding available
- Tax incentives could be developed, for instance the Working Group's proposals for an extension to the *douceur* arrangement, and to the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, to benefit living writers

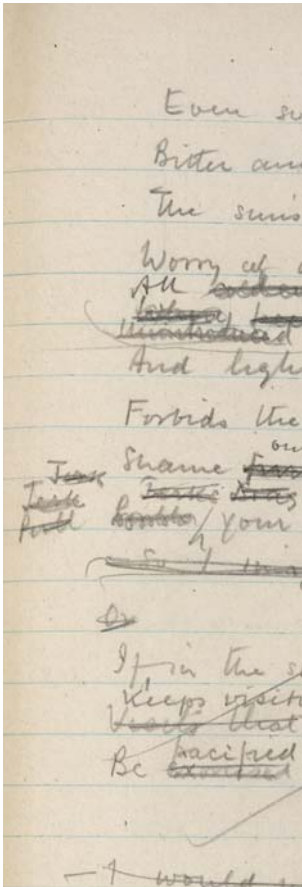


Image Philip Larkin. 'Deceptions', published in *The Less Deceived* (1955) and drafted in his first poetical notebook. Copyright © The Estate of Philip Larkin 2006. Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Authors as the literary representative of the Larkin estate.



- The traditional literary archive increasingly contains significant components of electronic media, particularly with regard to correspondence. E-mails, blogs and word processed documents may not be retained by authors in the same way as the notebook and manuscript, and also present challenges of long term preservation and access for collecting institutions

These common concerns, and in particular the proposals on taxation, could have a wider application beyond literary manuscripts to the archives of historians, scientists, economists, artists and screen writers.

We share the aim of ensuring that the preservation of literary manuscripts does not remain the 'neglected responsibility' identified by Philip Larkin in 1979, and of securing for the future the written witnesses of perhaps our most flourishing cultural activity.

