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The Keeper of the Collections and the Delta Collection: Regulating Obscenity at the Library of Congress, 1940-1963

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President Eisenhower, in a 1953 commencement speech at Dartmouth College, called upon new graduates to courageously and honestly examine their lives and their country in order to correct their problems. He suggested that one way to do so was to seek knowledge by turning to dangerous texts: “Don’t join the book burners. Don’t think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they never existed. Don’t be afraid to go into your library and read every book.” Eisenhower seemed to imply that the public could trust their librarians to select the materials worthy of being read and that the public should, in fact, read subversive literature, if only to know and confront the enemy. Dissenting voices should be brought into view and made accessible to the U.S. citizenry. Censorship, Eisenhower suggested, was to be reserved for documents that “offend our own ideas of decency.” As obscenity was fuzzily defined by the courts, and perversion and vice were among the greatest domestic threats during the cold war, “offensive” materials were not likely to be found in a library, and materials containing ideas opposed to normative notions of common decency were thought best left to the censors.¹

During and after World War II, however, the Library of Congress held one of the largest collections of materials on sex and sexuality in the world. Largely composed of erotica and items considered to be pornographic or obscene, including books, motion pictures, photographs, and playing cards, the Library’s Delta Collection was separated from the general collection with highly restricted access. Many of the materials in the Delta Collection had been seized by the U.S. Customs Bureau and the U.S. Postal Service, and the Library of Congress made the final decisions regarding destruction, storage, and circulation of such items. Others were obtained through the Copyright Office and were considered vulnerable to theft and damage. The Delta Collection served to protect the materials from mutilation, preserve the cultural record, protect citizens from harmful obscenity, and serve as a repository of sample materials for consultation by federal agencies.

The Library of Congress’s participation in the postwar regulation of obscenity is, as yet, an untold chapter in the story of government policing of sexual deviance in the United States. Scholars have explored the roles of the Customs Bureau, the Postal Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in intercepting, seizing, and storing materials deemed to be obscene (Boyer, 2002; Paul & Schwartz, 1961; Charles, 2012). They have not, however, examined the

1 Note on language: Throughout this paper I will use the terms “erotica,” “obscenity,” and “pornography” almost interchangeably. This is in keeping with the language of the period. Obscenity would be more clearly defined in 1973 in *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15.

Library of Congress's role in this process. Paul and Schwartz's 1961 account of federal censorship does give the Library's involvement a brief mention, praising LC for saving materials from the agencies who would destroy them:

Material that is seized is either destroyed or sent to the Library of Congress. The Library does not collect obscene or pornographic materials as such; it receives such materials because it is a repository for publications produced the world over...Selection criteria are broad, for the Library is not worried about protecting the public; it is worried about retaining all materials—anything which may reflect some facet of the world's culture or may be useful for research (Paul & Schwartz, 1961, p. 273).

While this position is perhaps limited and uncritical, it would be equally short-sighted to argue that LC's actions described below simply constitute a sweeping act of censorship.

In her analysis of similar collections at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the British Library, Alison Moore argues that one might view such hidden collections of obscenity and erotica as ones "that sought to contain desire, to designate it and to command its parameters while sanctioning sexuality as an inherently validated system of meaning" (Moore, 2012, p. 199). Further, I view collections of this type to be designed in such a way as to confine desire to a private, closeted realm. In this paper I will demonstrate some of the central tensions that erotica and obscenity brought to the Library of Congress and how the Delta Collection provides a window into how labeling functioned as a mechanism in what seem to be ideologically opposed efforts to contain and preserve, and censor texts and serve government. The Library of Congress was one of many institutions that struggled to come to terms with the charge to protect resources, protect rights of individuals, and protect the public from the harm of an ever-increasing amount of sexually explicit materials. In addition, the library employees were interested in protecting the Library itself, as well as their own positions within it.

From evidence supplied by archival papers of the Keeper of the Collections, the office charged with maintaining the Delta Collection, I will show that an examination of LC policies and practices adds to our understanding of federal sexual politics and policing, particularly during the McCarthy era. I have examined the various challenges with which LC librarians struggled in determining how to manage the massive quantity of obscenity. This was complicated by the fact that librarians were reluctant to claim expertise or authority on the subject of these materials. The paper provides a narrative of the events that shaped the creation and maintenance of the Delta Collection and a discussion of its increased political significance during and after the war. It also offers an analysis of the use of the Delta symbol, which has origins in Greek

mythology. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the complexities of the Library of Congress's role as a federal cultural institution in the control of sexually explicit materials.

This study began with my 2010 search for materials on sexual perversion at the Library of Congress, where I encountered a number of bibliographic records that contained, instead of call numbers, a note that read "Problem location." Most of the titles designated by this location turned out to be in the Rare Books Reading Room, but a few searches ended up in dead ends, with librarians looking everywhere they could think of, only to return empty-handed. A few librarians had mentioned the Delta Collection in passing during my visit to the Library of Congress, simply stating that such a thing once existed and I may want to look into it. Attempts at finding published information on the collection proved to be fruitless, even with the assistance of LC historians and reference librarians. Encyclopedias, indexes of subject collections, and historical accounts of LC do not provide any information about the Delta Collection (Aiken & Cole, 2004; *Subject Collections*, 1958-). Cheryl Fox, head archivist in the Manuscript Reading Room, suggested consulting a collection of papers from the Office of the Keeper of the Collections. It turned out that this archive holds a wealth of information that revealed a virtually unknown history of sexuality at the Library of Congress.

Although the Delta Collection is described in unpublished annual reports, these accounts were never entered into the published reports submitted to Congress. Among the Keeper's papers, however, are records of transfers of materials to the Library, excerpts of the Keeper's diary detailing his thought processes regarding the Delta Collection, correspondence with other internal and external offices, policies, meeting minutes, and reports of items designated for destruction.

This collection undoubtedly carried a certain epistemology, and so underlying this paper is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of the closet because it serves as a guide in considering the ways in which the materials in the collection acquired a special status and how their silences tell a key story about the production and regulation of knowledge about sexuality. Following Sedgwick, a characteristic of my reading of the Delta Collection "is to attend to performative aspects of texts, and to what are often blandly called their 'reader relations,' as sites of definitional creation, violence, and rupture in relation to particular readers, particular institutional circumstances" (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 3). The Delta Collection is a critical site for analysis as it was housed in a federal library – one that serves the state and its citizenry through the provision of information and knowledge. The locking away of certain materials that threatened normative ideas about sexuality begins to reveal the relations of power at play across texts and federal officials. According to Sedgwick,

‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it. The speech acts that coming out, in turn, can comprise are as strangely specific. And they may have nothing to do with the acquisition of new information (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 3).

Indeed the “strangely specific” forms of speech hidden in the Delta Collection and their eventual release into the general collection were far from cohesive—the one unifying principal being that the materials were assumed to either pose or be subject to a threat of harm. It contained works on perversion and homosexuality, but also works on heterosexual relations, playing cards and photographs, literary works that were contested in the courts, such as *Ulysses* and *Lolita*, and some of the more ribald pornography of the time. What was contained in the collection was knowledge that was viewed to require a measure of special protection.²

Postwar Federal Sexual Policing and Censorship

For an example of how the Delta Collection was put to use by Congress and federal agencies, I draw attention to the occasion when seven uncataloged and unprocessed publications were loaned from the restricted collection to Congressman John Dowdy (D-Texas). This occurred on August 8, 1963, during a hearing on a bill to ban homosexual groups from soliciting funds (Henderson, 1963). The impetus for the bill proposal was an application for a license to solicit charitable contributions for the Mattachine Society, an early activist organization that worked toward improving the rights of homosexuals. As there was no municipal or state law prohibiting homosexual social and activist groups from receiving donations, Dowdy proposed a federal law to prevent such actions. In his statement to Congress Dowdy proclaimed:

If the laws of the District of Columbia indeed do not authorize the refusal of a solicitation license or any other official recognition to a society such as this, whose illegal activities are revolting to normal society, then I feel that it is our duty to provide such authority without delay. The Mattachine Society is admittedly a group of homosexuals. The acts of these people are banned under the laws of God, the laws of nature, and are in violation of the laws of man (Congressional Record Appendix, 1963).

The bill died in the Senate, so the Mattachine Society remained relatively unharmed. The librarian’s correspondence does not indicate which publications Dowdy viewed, but the record clearly states that the materials were obtained from the Library’s restricted Delta Collection on the day before Dowdy brought the bill

2 Interestingly, the Delta Collection was not as secure as was intended. In 1953 117 Delta books were mutilated. The books were then turned over to the FBI.

to the floor.³ On another occasion the Library made an exception to the rule that prohibited browsing of the Delta Collection for the Honorable Judge Leonard P. Moore, nearly three months after he upheld the decision of lower courts that had determined that *Lady Chatterly's Lover* was not obscene. Librarians provided the judge with small table and chair and a space "to exam volumes of particular interest at leisure" (Basler to Moore, 1960).

While the historical record on how the Delta collection was used is sparse, these examples begin to show that the Library of Congress is not simply a storehouse of information, but rather, it was a participant in the postwar regulation of sexuality through the restriction and provision of evidence in an anti-homosexual campaign, as well as wider projects to regulate proper sexual citizens.

It is important to note that the texts housed in the Delta Collection served as evidence of crimes. Those that were acquired via the Postal Service and Customs Bureau were seized through an arresting act, may have served as the basis for prosecution, and then were made available for Federal officials and Congress as sources in other investigations. Indeed the archival records reveal details of transfers from Customs offices across the nation, complete with names and addresses of those from whom materials were impounded. One gathers the significance of the connection between LC and the wider anti-obscenity campaign when one recognizes that books confiscated in headline-making arrests may have been among those that still bear the Delta mark today. For instance, the *Evening Star* reported in 1958 that 5,000 items impounded over eighteen months by New York Customs and Postal authorities were to be delivered to the Library. Many of the items were confiscated from seamen and students returning from Europe ("Congress Library to Get Big Haul of Obscene Items"). The same year, Lawrence Gichner, who authored three works housed in the Delta Collection, was arrested by eleven Morals Division detectives who seized from his home fifty crates full of "erotic literature from every corner of the world" (Landauer, 1958).⁴ Such observations call into question the wholesomeness of the Library in its mission to protect and preserve materials for the cultural record, as these resources arrived via punitive mechanisms and were then designated for use by federal agencies and Congress.

³For more on the Mattachine Society see D'Emilio, 2012, p. 156-157.

⁴ Gichner's titles include *Erotic Aspects of Hindu Sculpture* (1949), *Erotic Aspects of Chinese Culture* (1957), and *Erotic Aspects of Japanese Culture* (1953).

By enacting laws prohibiting the importation, mailing, and distribution of “obscene” materials, Congress has historically acted as censor. The most influential act was the first sweeping anti-obscenity law, now commonly called the Comstock Act, passed in 1873. The law outlawed importation of obscenity from foreign countries and made it a felony to send or receive obscene materials through the mail. In wartime the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 required the registration of all foreign agents and foreign political propaganda disseminated in the U.S., essentially bringing war propaganda and obscenity under the same umbrella of outlawed subversive materials.

Part of the World War II and postwar hysteria over censorship resulted from an increasing struggle to strike a balance between the desire to allow adults to decide for themselves what to read, and the mass exploitation of commercial forms of speech that were viewed as potentially harmful to the public. Whitney Strub (2013) suggests that, beginning in the 1940’s the American public tried to reclaim moral authority from Comstock’s disciples, insisting on their right to make decisions about their own media consumption. At the same time, though, cold war efforts “consisted of programs to normalize and reproduce atomized nuclear families—predicated on heterosexual marriages in which wives avoided the workplace—in an effort to sustain the consumer culture that had begun to replace industry as the heart of the American economy” (p. 13). Indeed, opening obscene books with their suggestions of nonprocreative sex, vice, homosexuality, and other “perverse” acts to the public might render the entire citizenry vulnerable to outside forces. After all, homosexuals were purged from the ranks of federal agencies precisely because they were viewed to be weak and susceptible to blackmail, in addition to being ineffectual and unable to participate in the national project to increase and multiply. As scholars have pointed out, “whereas communism embodied the greatest political perversion,” homosexuality and other sexual perversions posed the greatest domestic threat (Strub, 2013, p. 14; See also Canaday, 2011; Chauncey, 2004; Terry, 1999).

World War II and the postwar era also brought heightened passion from the American Library Association. The A.L.A. had adopted the Library Bill of Rights in 1938 partly in response to the 1938 House Committee on Un-American Activities to investigate subversives, and in 1948, with the expansion of World War II and McCarthyism, the A.L.A. strengthened the Library Bill of Rights by taking a firmer stance on censorship and intellectual freedom, stating that libraries have a responsibility to challenge coercive measures that limit access to resources that inform moral and political opinion (Robbins, 1996). LC, however, opposed or disregarded many of the A.L.A.’s resolutions, and in 1948 Verner Clapp, Chief Assistant Librarian of Congress, led the opposition to the A.L.A.’s Resolution

Protesting Loyalty Investigations in Libraries (Robbins, 1996, p. 42).⁵ This move firmly indicates LC's position as being in service to the federal government, at the expense of intellectual freedom.

Relatedly, the Delta Collection stood in opposition to the 1951 American Library Association's "Statement on Labeling," as the collection served to hide items from view and placed a Delta symbol on the spine labels of the books. In 1950 Rutherford D. Rogers, chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee (I.F.C.) of the A.L.A., reported that a number of groups, including the Sons of the American Revolution, had petitioned libraries to implement labeling systems for restricting access to communist and subversive materials (A.L.A., 2012).⁶ Such labels would not only mark materials as subversive, but would place them in a segregated collection, to be given out only upon application. In response the I.F.C. drafted a six-point statement on labeling that echoed Eisenhower's sentiments, asserting that labeling is a censor's tool that deterred the democratic ideals libraries hold: "Although totalitarian states find it easy and even proper, according to their ethics, to establish criteria for judging publications as 'subversive,' injustice and ignorance rather than justice and enlightenment result from such practices, and the American Library Association has a responsibility to take a stand against the establishment of such criteria in a democratic state." The A.L.A. firmly indicated its position as anticommunist, but stated their opposition to labeling and "any group which aims at closing any path to knowledge" (A.L.A., 2012, p. 158). The statement on labeling was approved as policy by A.L.A. Council on July 13, 1951.

In 1952, in what Eli Oboler (1970) called "one of the most extraordinary bills ever to come out of Congress," former FBI agent and Representative Harold Velde (R., Ill.) proposed that "a bill to provide that the Librarian of Congress shall mark all subversive matter in the Library of Congress and compile a list thereof for the guidance of other libraries in the United States" (p. 69). The bill died, but

5 Louise Robbins (1994) has revealed LC's participation in the 1947 Federal Loyalty Program, which included the purging of homosexuals from its workforce in the early 1950s. Although LC was not required to participate in the Federal Loyalty Program because it was not an executive branch agency, the Library did engage in the federal investigations and firing of employees. Robbins found that, "according to the congressional investigation, between April and November 1950 fifteen LC employees were charged with 'perversion.' Nine resigned under pressure, one was fired, and five cases were pending" (Senate Document 241 quoted in Robbins 1994, 377). More people lost their jobs during this phase of the purges at LC than during any other.

6 Rogers would become Chief Assistant Librarian at the Library of Congress in 1957 after having worked at the New York Public Library.

presumably the Delta materials would have been conscripted into this proposed effort to assist librarians in nationwide censorship efforts. In 1956 Congress passed a law which permitted the Post Office to impound mail suspected of promoting fraud, obscenity, and gambling, except for publications with second-class mail privileges (Oboler, 1970, p. 70).

By 1957, according to Robbins (1996), “the ‘obscene’ had begun to overtake the ‘subversive’ as the target of censorship” (p. 90). That year, the Supreme Court’s Roth decision tested the constitutionality of the conviction of a New York man for mailing obscene materials. It ruled that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment and upheld the conviction of Samuel Roth for sending obscene materials through the mail. The ruling also stated that the “federal obscenity statute, 18 U.S.C. 1461, punishing the use of the mails for obscene material, is a proper exercise of the postal power delegated to Congress” (Roth v. United States, 1957).⁷ At this time definitions of obscenity had not been formalized, and evaluations of content were inconsistent and subjective. At the Library the terms pornography, obscenity, and erotica were often used interchangeably.

It was amid this tense and confused climate of sexual policing that LC was faced with the responsibility of assessing and storing sexually explicit materials that arrived through the Copyright Office, the Customs Bureau, and the Postal Service. It must be pointed out that, as the nation’s library, the Library of Congress holds a position unlike any other library in the U.S., so the guidelines on intellectual freedom and labeling set forth by the A.L.A. can be disregarded if in conflict with the terms set forth by the U.S. government. Although it is considered a public library, LC is first the library of the Congress, a federal agency subject to federal demands. Additionally, as obscenity was still not well-defined, it would have fallen outside of the scope of materials that should be protected from censors. At that time the restriction of the Delta Collection would have been unlikely to draw the kind of criticism that the censorship of politically subversive materials received.

Managing the Delta Collection

A local Washington, D.C. publication, undated but published when the Delta Collection still existed, claimed that the origins of the Delta collection date back to the 1880s with the bequest of a valuable rare book collection from a California tycoon. Included in that collection, according to the author, were such

⁷ This is a necessarily selective summary of censorship. See Strub 2013, Boyer 2002, and for an account of the FBI’s treatment of obscenity see Douglas M. Charles, *The FBI's Obscene File: J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau's Crusade Against Smut*. University Press of Kansas, 2012.

titles as the *Khamasutra*, the 18th century spanking novel *Fanny Hill*, and a version of the 15th century *The Perfumed Garden*. The author states, “The greater part of the erotic treasure was saved by an anonymous administrator with foresight. He realized, regardless of its contents, or because of them, the collection was rare” (Race, n.d., p. 54).

Although the article is quite sensational, and as of yet its assertions about the early formation of the collection remain unsubstantiated by LC employees or archival evidence, it is worth entertaining the idea that Ainsworth Spofford was the librarian who inaugurated this secret collection. Spofford is now recognized as a visionary who, emblematic of his era, promoted the “best” reading, but also recognized the cultural value of books of that might be considered to be of lower quality (Ostrowski, 2010, p. 74). He distinguished the mission of smaller public libraries from that of a national library and said that, while books of questionable morality may not belong in a small public library, “national libraries...would be derelict in their duty to posterity if they did not acquire and preserve the whole literature of the country” (Spofford, 1900, p. 20). He also observed, “what is pronounced trash today may have an unexpected value hereafter, and the unconsidered trifles of the press of the nineteenth century may prove highly curious and interesting to the twentieth, as examples of what the[ir] ancestors...wrote and thought about” (Spofford, quoted in Ostrowski, 2010, p. 74). This position paralleled those of librarians who maintained closeted collections at the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale around the same time (Moore, 2012).

The Delta Collection has always contained a sampling of books that would generally not be held by LC, and part of the rationale for retaining these items was preservation of the cultural record. While Library policy was to not maintain a collection of obscenity for its general collection, a 1954 acquisitions document outlined a policy for adding items of value for the history of manners and customs, art and literature, or those having a bearing on psychological or legal studies, even if they had some pornographic aspects. Pornographic or obscene materials that did not fit such categories were to be acquired in order to serve as samples (Library of Congress, 1954). It certainly wasn't only texts on homosexuality, or even pornography, for that matter, that the Delta Collection contained. As with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the British Library collections, the Library of Congress's Delta Collection held a mix of the scientific/sexological texts along with what was considered erotica and pornography, as well as the literary texts that were challenged in the courts. There was a remarkable amount of books on sexual relations within marriage and birth control. And most of the works in the collection contained illustrations, which would have been easy prey for vandals if available in the general collection.

The officially documented history of the Delta Collection seems to begin in 1920, when a librarian wrote to a member of Congress requesting he return the book *Madeleine*, which had recently been identified as immoral and outlawed. The letter stated that the book was to either be withdrawn or kept in a special collection in the Copyright Office as part of the legal record there (Librarian to Booher, 1920). This may have been the precursor to the Delta Collection (or it may have actually been the Delta collection).

The earliest correspondence that actually names the Delta Collection dates from 1936, when U.S. Congressman Millard Caldwell (H.R., Florida) wrote to the Librarian of Congress concerned about obscene items that might be in LC's collection. Librarian Herbert Putnam informed Caldwell that the books were indeed held by the Library of Congress in a restricted collection. An attached letter from the Superintendent of the Reading Room to Putnam specifies that the four books in question were copyright deposits and "Items 1 and 2 are now in the 'Delta' Collection [sic] (a collection whose use is restricted to adults and only consulted under supervision in the Rare Book Room). Items 2 and 3 are in process of being catalogued and classified and will soon also be part of the "Delta Collection" (Putnam to Caldwell, 1936).

Arguably, the collection was initially formed in an effort to preserve the historical record, and while the Library maintained this as its mission (even as it was burning materials), the political significance that the Delta Collection assumed during World War II and the McCarthy era distinguishes it as much more than a preservation mechanism. Not unlike the Collection de l'Enfer at the Bibliotheque Nationale, which has a much longer history, these preservation efforts were entangled in state regulatory projects. In the final years of the Ancien Régime, for instance, the state seized and stored pornographic works during arrests. According to Moore, it was during the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon that these materials were secured in the restricted collection, marking the point at which the ambivalence of the collection became apparent—that the preservation and integrity of materials, which were in fact acquired in efforts to rescue banned books, derived from state censorship activities.

The Delta Collection officially became the purview of the first and only Keeper of the Collections, Alfred Kremer, when he was appointed by Archibald MacLeish in 1940. The Keeper's primary duties were to protect collections from war damage.⁸ MacLeish also appointed Luther Harris Evans director of the

8 The Keeper was also in charge of Defense planning for the protection of the collections, determining the effects of nuclear war on library materials, fire prevention, water damage prevention, binding, preservation, organization and maintenance of the collection, thefts and mutilations, security of rare materials,

Legislative Reference Service (currently the Congressional Research Service) in 1939 and Chief Assistant Librarian in 1940. On May 30, 1942 Evans delivered the address, "The Library of Congress and the War" before the Librarian's Council, during which he told Council members that the Library, in support of the war, had increased its circulation of books and opened its facilities and services to researchers. Evans also described the struggle to find a balance in its role as a national library in serving the federal government and the general public, and he reported that over 400 employees of other federal agencies were conducting research at the Library of Congress and 150 other people were designated by the Coordinator of Information at LC to do research on foreign countries (Evans, 1942).

Wishing to play a more personal role in the war, MacLeish resigned as Librarian of Congress on December 19, 1944, and Luther Evans was appointed acting Librarian by President Truman in 1945. It was with a patriotic spirit that LC leaders made decisions regarding selection and maintenance of war-related and subversive and obscene materials. This climate no doubt altered the very nature of the Delta Collection from being a repository for the cultural record to being a political actor in the postwar era, with increasing significance as McCarthy's policies took hold.

In 1952 Evans wrote to the Commissioner of the Customs Bureau to express concern that subversive materials were being destroyed in customs and postal seizures. Until then the Library had been receiving confiscated materials, but there was no official policy requiring such action on the part of these agencies. Evans petitioned to amend the *Customs Manual* to require the delivery of seized items to LC for official use in lieu of destruction, thereby precipitating a dramatic growth in volume. The amendment stated:

Printed matter of all kinds...for which an assent to forfeiture has been obtained, will be forwarded by the Bureau to the LC... If libel action is necessary in connection with items of the above specified kinds, the United States attorney shall be requested to have the condemnation decree provide...for the delivery of such items to the LC for official use in lieu of destruction (United States Bureau of Customs, 1952).

These materials, which would have included propaganda, obscenity, and other items considered subversive, were then placed in a Federal Agents Collection, with selected obscene materials going to the Delta Collection. When the *Customs Manual* was first amended to deliver items to LC, the Library requested that up to fifty copies of each text should be kept for distribution to other government

door passes, security of exhibits, access controls, and allocating book stack space for protected collections.

agencies. By 1953 the range of shelving was overflowing, as they received an average of two to three mailbags of subversive materials per day (Cronin to Keller, 1953). The understanding was that items used for official use would either be destroyed or returned to the Customs Bureau once they had been withdrawn from the Library (Evans to Dow, 1952).

The 1956 unpublished annual report of the Exchange and Gift Division stated that the Post Office Department transferred 224,113 pieces of war propaganda, which were excluded from the mails in accordance with the *Postal Manual*. Two copies of each were segregated for LC's collection and those not selected by other Federal Agencies were pulped monthly. Approximately 4,000 pieces (mostly press releases and tourist information) were received under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Of these most were sent by the British Information Service, The Australian News Information Service, and the Turkish Information Office (Exchange and Gift Division, 1956). That year the Bureau of Customs also transferred "several thousand pieces of obscene literature and motion picture films" as required by the Customs Manual. Representative selections were kept for the collections of LC, and the remaining items were forwarded to the Keeper of the Collections for disposal (Exchange and Gift Division, 1956). The amount of obscenity relative to the quantities of other types of materials is not readily knowable.

The massive quantities arriving at LC proved to be virtually unmanageable, hindering efforts to preserve and protect. And it seems that, for the most part, the obscene materials were disposable, at least in the eyes of the Keeper of the Collections. He lamented in his notes that the volume of the seized obscenity held and the work required to evaluate and select from it just didn't seem to be worth the trouble. He resented the fact that earlier policies resulted in a chaotic, unmanageable amount of materials, with which he was left the responsibility of overseeing in addition to his other duties as preservationist. The Keeper used terms like "pornography," "obscenity," and "erotica" interchangeably, and used words like "dirt," "filth," and "perverted" to describe such materials. On July 17 and 30, 1956 Kremer's diary entries read:

I visited the Delta Collection to survey the status of "inventoried" intercepts and large quantities of unprocessed filth...A sizable quantity of seized dirt was obviously sent to the former custodians of the Delta Collection with little or no formality involved in the transactions...I still hold the view that the value of the materials selected from this source is hardly equal to the expense in time required by the messes thus far.

Still, the Keeper did not have jurisdiction over selection of materials. That was left to the subject divisions and Selection Officers, and in his diary entry dated March 8, 1957, Kremer expressed frustration about waiting for selectors to wade through the accumulated materials that he would have preferred to destroy.

I have to be very careful in not giving the impression that I am meddling into the affairs of the Processing Department and possibly, into the affairs of the Reference Department in connection with this very touchy business. Believe me, any residue of this seized material which will be fed to us in the future will be destroyed just as quickly as we can get it off the premises.

Kremer was also frequently perplexed by protocols concerning the Delta materials and where his responsibilities began and ended. There was clearly disagreement among the staff about what to do with the materials received from Customs and the Postal Service. Without the authority to burn materials, Kremer was careful not to overstep his bounds. He finally made a formal request to be granted such authority on February 19, 1957, when he found himself burdened by innumerable cartons of unselected films, books, and other printed material (Kremer to Gooch, 1957). As he wrote in his Annual Report for 1957, he “assumed an active role as the Library’s Security Officer in sponsoring action leading to the appropriate disposition of large masses of such material, and finally established and effected [sic] the security measures resulting in satisfactory disposal measures.” (Keeper of the Collections, 1957, p. 2). Once these policies and procedures were enacted, Kremer set out to reduce the amount of obscenity coming into the library and destroying the bulk of LC’s existing holdings of such “filth.” Around that time, the Customs Manual was again amended in 1957 stating that only one or two copies of intercepts should be sent to the LC, and in 1958 it was decided that 500 duplicate copies of Delta items needed to find a new home, preferably in another library (Kelly, Customs Manual Amendment No. X-532; Stevens to Rogers, 1958). These particular duplicates had mostly come through copyright and were not viewed to be grossly obscene, but rather, were sealed away to prevent mutilation by the public. The materials received from the Postal Service and Customs Bureau were not to be exchanged or transferred (Letter to Rogers and Coffin, 1958). Precautions were taken before exposing this collection to other libraries, because, although the vast majority of the surplus designated for removal was not obscene or pornographic and had come through normal copyright or gift channels, the librarians expressed concern about revealing the entire contents of the Delta Collection.

Reports of quantities retained or discarded do not seem to have been kept with regularity, but in 1960 it was reported that 1,233 total pieces in the Delta Collection were selected from intercepts through the fiscal year of 1960, including 917 photos, 158 printed matter, 26 prints, eight decks of playing cards, three handkerchiefs, and a variety of other types of materials (Lot inventory of materials in Delta Collection selected from Customs and Post Office intercepts, 1960). In 1962, the last year that the number of Delta materials was reported, 227 pieces were added, totaling 1,570 items in the Delta collection. The Keeper

reported that certain Delta items were to remain unprocessed and contained in a secure area of the Rare Books Division (Keeper of the Collections, 1961, p. 14).

A May 23, 1963 report indicated that 123 burn bags were filled with Delta materials, and 600 books and 500 magazines still awaited review (Hall to Gooch, 1963). On Nov. 5, 1963, 487 monographs sent from Customs were rejected and designated for destruction. Nine monographs were sent to the Descriptive Cataloging Division to be forwarded to Delta Collection through regular processing channels, and seventeen sample monographs were sent to the Delta Collection without cataloging. Fifty-six serials were rejected, and thirteen were selected for the sample file and forwarded to the Delta Collection (Einhorn to Edlund, 1963).

Toward the end of his tenure at the Library of Congress, Alvin Kremer indicated in his diary, dated February 25, 1960, that he was firmly opposed to the idea of placing the Delta books in the general collection but apparently did not share his opinions with his colleagues. Robert D. Stevens, Coordinator for the Development and Organization of the Collections wrote:

I can make no claim to a knowledge of the workings of the perverted mind. Consequently, I asked the Keeper of the Collections, who has had some experience in this area, to assist me to the extent of pointing out publications he felt to be particularly vulnerable to mutilation or theft. He did not care to prepare this advice. The recommendations that follow then are solely my own based on my best rational judgment (Stevens to Rogers, 1960).

It appears that Kremer and Stevens had serious differences of opinion regarding the preservation and access to the Delta books. Stevens recommended transferring the entire collection (with the negligible exception of a few discards) to the open shelves. In fact, all items except for those determined to be rare books were moved to the general collection beginning in 1964, after the office of the Keeper of the Collections was eliminated upon Kremer's 1963 retirement (Office of Collections Maintenance and Preservation, 1963).

Monstrous knowledge

But now the family disgrace had grown up / And its mother's sordid adultery was revealed / In the strange hybrid monster. Minos intended / To remove this shame from his chambers and enclose it / In a dark, winding labyrinth. Daedalus, / A renowned master architect, did the work, / Confounding the usual lines of sight / With a maze of conflicting passageways.

—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Librarians of Congress must have had an idea of what was at stake when they locked the secret collection of erotica away from the public. I would like to think that librarians named the collection for Daedalus's symbol. In Ovid's

Metamorphosis, Daedalus told the King's daughter Ariadne the secrets of the labyrinth he had built, and she, in turn, instructed her lover Theseus in how to navigate its lines and passageways in order to find the Minotaur and slay it. The monstrous being—the most unnatural kind of offspring, produced by the union of King Mino's wife and a bull, waited within the depths of the maze to devour its victims. But Theseus, armed with the key to finding the Minotaur's lair, conquered the beast, thereby rescuing any Athenians who would otherwise be sacrificed and devoured by the beast.

Housed in the labyrinthine Library of Congress was the semi-secret Delta Collection, hidden and locked away, before it was dispersed across the general collection in 1964. The knowledges held within this closeted collection were perceived to be of the monstrous and dangerous sort. The Delta Collection contained materials about “natural” and “unnatural” sex acts—the kinds that might result in something as bestial as the minotaur and threatened to devour the entire nation's citizenry. Even Foucault (1998) has described the monster's lair as an alternative, underground space, which perverts and threatens the laws and knowledge upon which society is built. He says that it is in “the space symbolized by the Minotaur” that “modern perversity” finds its proper space, as it is where the human is transformed into a desiring animal: “the truly transgressive forms of eroticism are now found in...the direction of the counternatural, there where Theseus is headed when he approaches the center of the labyrinth, toward that corer of darkness where, voracious architect, Knowledge keeps watch” (p. 67).

Just as in the mythical and fictional tales of labyrinths, dangers may lurk in any given alcove. Indeed, one starts to grasp the truth of Borges's idea of an infinite library when one considers the fact that in precisely one hundred years the units of shelving have expanded from 40 miles in 1897 to over 800, with 12,000 items added daily, forcing the collections out to off-site storage facilities (Small, 1898, p. 82; Library of Congress, FAQs). We begin to apprehend the reality upon which the library's mythical status has been based, particularly in the works of Borges and Eco, and LC's self-conscious associations with Greek and Roman

gods and goddesses of knowledge and wisdom.⁹ Even Theseus makes an appearance on the walls of the Library as part of a series in a corridor that opens to a richly ornamented reading room for members of the House of Representatives. As painted by Walter McEwen, we meet Theseus after he has slain the Minotaur, when Minerva commands him to leave his lover Ariadne

9 I am thinking in particular of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Jorge Luis Borges's “Library of Babel,” but Borges has written numerous stories on libraries and labyrinths.

behind on the island of Naxos (Small, 1897).

Only select librarians held the key to the knowledge held within and could deliver the books to those who inquired—as Ariadne to Theseus, so to speak. The librarian visitors most directly consulted was Emily Jahn, the Assistant Curator of the collection, who in 1953 had been employed by the library for twenty-three years. No card catalog was available for the public to consult. One had to know of the existence of the collection and the name of the volume of interest. They had to register as a reader of this collection, and request the item in person, at Jahn's desk. Browsing was not an option, and viewing of films and photographs was off limits to anyone other than federal officers.

Sedgwick would say that this closeted collection informs speech about sexual relations more generally, as it illustrates what happens when sex acts cannot be made sense of within a given grid of intelligibility. The books within this collection stood outside any rules of library classifications, and so with a single mark -- Δ -- not a name or a notation, but a symbol, they were banished to a closed location. The fear and loathing surrounding this collection provides a glimpse into the centrality of sexuality as an organizing principle upon which all else is based. The regulation of sexually suggestive texts and the withholding of such texts from the American people brings to light the extent to which everything, including the safety and security of the nation, comes down to sex. We must recognize the silences and sanctioning of reading enacted by the demarcation of the obscene through the Delta symbol as a reproduction of norms through the organization of knowledge. Placing the collection within the social context from which it gained political significance illustrates the nature of the complexities inherent in LC, the oldest federal cultural institution in the U.S. The threats of sexual vice and perversion were considered particularly dangerous in the postwar era because of the unknowable aspect of the sexual pervert and the belief that the perpetrator was hiding in plain sight. In the war on perversion, the enemy was the U.S. citizen—a sort of traitor, and all the more dangerous because he (as was usually the case) was employed in federal agencies, taught in schools, and resided in American neighborhoods, where they could undermine U.S. policy and the American family. The books that were seized by Customs and in the mail were dangerous because they had the power to unleash monstrous desires and threaten the strength of the family, which was viewed to be the fabric of the nation and the first line of defense against the enemy. Such desires were closeted off and locked away in the Delta Collection. Remarkably, the decision to integrate the Delta Collection into the general collection in 1964 coincides with social and political shifts that preceded the rise of the gay liberation movement. It is a particularly telling coming out story, as the contents became available to readers and eventually entered the general catalog.

Final Word on the Catalog Record as Historical Record

It is a credit to the Library of Congress that the Delta label has been preserved in the catalog. Little explicit discussion of the cataloging practices concerning the Delta Collection has survived, but a Delta shelflist was mentioned in a 1956 procedure memoranda labeled “Handling Customs Intercepts” (Procedures for Handling Customs Intercepts now on Deck 39, 1956). As of this writing, a shelflist has not been unearthed. However, a search of the LC online catalog using “Delta” in the call number field turned up 543 bibliographic records. An additional search using “delta” as a keyword anywhere and “problem” as a keyword in holdings, turns up 467 more records, which reveal the “Problem location” in the holdings. The staff view of such MARC records indicates that these were former Delta books. All together, precisely 1,010 bibliographic records indicate items that were formerly part of the Delta Collection. This is relatively close to the last reported amount in the Delta Collection in 1962 (1570 items) and may reflect the number of books still in the Delta Collection when it was removed to the General Collection. And this means that librarians took the time to enter these details when cataloging moved from cards to the computer.

It is remarkable that these items still bear the marks of the Delta Collection, particularly because policy memoranda explicitly state that the Delta symbol was supposed to be erased from the spine labels and catalog cards. Either this project simply was never completed, or the policy was changed at some point. This trace of the Delta Collection serves as an affirmation of the importance of library catalogs as historical records, as it is by way of this record that we are admitted entry into the complexities of the management of obscenity and erotica at different points in U.S. history. It gives voice to a history of texts that were once silenced by precisely this symbol.

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