ing for women and Margaret Sanger’s birth control efforts.

But perhaps Abby’s greatest achievements were as a collector. She recognized modern and folk art as legitimate collecting areas (and ones within reach of her limited funds) and pursued acquisitions with skill and intelligence. Ultimately, she founded the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center and, her crowning accomplishment, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). It is remarkable to consider that Abby Rockefeller was open-minded enough to endorse acquisitions such as Meret Oppenheim’s “The Fur-lined Teacup” and aesthetically sophisticated enough to appreciate the primitive qualities of nineteenth-century folk art.

In addition to having great personal commitment to bettering the social and cultural conditions of her culture, Abby Rockefeller was equally devoted to being kind and thoughtful in her dealings with the individuals whom her life touched. On one occasion, when a young woman staff member from MOMA, invited to one of the Rockefeller homes for a swim, was clearly embarrassed because her swimsuit was too modern and skimpy compared to Abby’s, Abby calmly announced that she thought she would feel better without her stockings (a conventional part of a matron’s bathing costume) and removed them. On another occasion, after an opening at the museum, she thanked each member of the staff with a personal note and a check equivalent to a month’s salary. A more general indication of her tact and consideration was that, though she was founder and major supporter of MOMA, she never interfered with the decisions of its executive director.

So the life was good-hearted, generous, and worthy; how is the biography? Bernice Kert is an independent scholar, and perhaps because of this, her biography is refreshingly free of the cant that sometimes afflicts biographies written by academics. If occasionally Ms. Kert’s transitions between narration and quotation are not as smooth as they might be, her comments on marital relations or childbearing or domestic concerns are sensitive, insightful, and even moving.

Kert has accomplished what any scholar or writer would be proud to have accomplished: she identified a terrific subject not previously recognized, made thorough use of untapped archival sources, devoted a decade to writing and research, and completed a massive study. For all of us who read biographies to be inspired by admirable lives, Abby Rockefeller’s story reminds us not to be ungenerous ourselves. I am certainly not going to be an ungenerous reviewer. Bernice Kert’s book is an impressive achievement.—Victoria Steele, University of Southern California.


Think about our donors: do we ever really ask ourselves how or why donors amassed the collections they just gave us? What prompted them to begin purchasing the kinds of books they donated? Why did they become collectors in the first place?

Werner Muensterberger, a practicing psychoanalyst, delves into the psyches of collectors to substantiate his premise that “objects are inanimate substitutes for reassurance and care” (p. 256) which the infant uses to alleviate the trauma of its mother’s absence. As he traces back to childhood, he finds traumas which trigger the collecting to ease the pain. Muensterberger also discovers that the acquisitive need is never truly filled and the collector must seek a new bauble when, like drug withdrawal, the thrill of the hunt and/or purchase wears off.

The first part of the book concerns the psychological groundwork for his theory of collecting. Muensterberger analyzes the childhoods of his collector patients and discovers
the trauma which led to their specific collecting habits. When Nick earned an A, his father asked, "Why not an A plus?" followed by "You'll never amount to anything." When he grew up, Nick collected one object, repeatedly replacing it with a better specimen, striving for that A plus.

Other collectors need to have one of every type of whatever, or all, whether it be every edition of a particular book or all books on a particular subject. Muensterberger states that "collectors share a sense of specialness of once not having received satisfying love or attention or having been hurt or unfairly treated in infancy, and through their objects they feel reassured, enriched, and noted . . . but most characteristically, there is always an addictive component . . . ." (pp. 43-44). A historical document collector described his obsession this way: "I am a sponge . . . I go into this or that store and try to scoop the whole thing in . . . I have to have it" (p. 44).

From this psychological basis, Muensterberger discusses magic objects and holy relics such as saints' and martyrs' bones which medieval collectors revered. He correlates this with the practices of aboriginal peoples and their belief in mana, the life-force inherent within objects.

The most interesting parts of this book are the psychobiographies of British book and manuscript collector Sir Thomas Phillipps, French novelist and bric-a-brac collector Honoré de Balzac, and Oriental art collector Martin G. The obsessiveness of Phillipps bordered on mania. He wrote three years before his death, "I am buying Printed Books because I wish to have ONE COPY OF EVERY BOOK IN THE WORLD!!" (p. 74). At his death in 1872, an inventory estimated that sixty thousand manuscripts and fifty thousand books lay heaped in piles in every conceivable space in his house. In amassing this monumental collection, Phillipps deferred payments, incurred overdrafts, borrowed money—basically spent all he had and more to fill his bottomless need to collect. His spending bankrupted many printers and booksellers to whom he owed money.

Balzac bought a house that he filled with "rare furniture, rich carpets, chinaware, paintings, silver, and innumerable pieces of bric-a-brac" (p. 101). He, too, lived way beyond his means to indulge in his passion to collect. His semi-autobiographical novel, Le Cousin Pons, describes his fantasies and illustrates his obsession with collecting.

Martin G., an acquaintance of Muensterberger, collected Oriental objects with a provenance, akin to relics with mana. He thrilled at the discovery, the chase, his superior knowledge, competition—the treasure hunt.

Obsession can lead a collector to rash impulses, self-doubt, reliance on the opinions of others for justification, and possible manipulation and victimization from a scam.

Muensterberger's analyses allow us to understand the bibliomaniac's rationalization for appropriation as mere rescue. His description of fifteenth-century papal secretary Poggio Bracciolini, whose dedication to obtaining valuable manuscripts was stronger than his moral code, parallels Stephen
Blumberg’s recent escapades among our libraries and special collections. Muensuterberger found that Poggio, like collectors he had interviewed, truly believed in his intellectualized interpretation of thievery as rescue. However, Muensuterberger falls into the same trap these predators set so cleverly: “Indeed, those manuscripts would probably have disappeared or disintegrated since they were virtually buried and unprotected among the many other and presumably irrelevant documents in the dungeons of the monastic library” (p. 179). He accepts the fallacies that they were, first, improperly cared for and, second, that the thief automatically would provide a safer home. This was Blumberg’s defense; yet he stored the stolen books and manuscripts in deplorable conditions.

Muensuterberger jumps around from the twentieth to the fifteenth centuries, from book collectors to headhunters, his text tied together by the thread of psychological analysis of the relationship between collectors and objects. At times disjointed, the book nonetheless provides an insight into the minds of collectors. Muensuterberger best summarizes his thesis when he states, “Perhaps even more telling, these objects prove, both to the collector and to the world, that he or she is special and worthy of them” (p. 256). Special collections librarians who wish to understand why collectors and book thieves behave as they do may find Collecting: An Unruly Passion a book worthy of the circulating collection.—Susan Hamburger, Pennsylvania State University.

Keith Maslen spent nearly all of his scholarly career on the study and publishing of the Bowyer Ledgers, a group of manuscript business documents kept by the eighteenth-century London printing house of Bowyer, both father and son. The publication of the ledgers (jointly by the Bibliographical Society and the Bibliographical Society of America, and co-edited with distinction by John Lancaster) will become a major source of book information for both bibliographers and historians. Just how rich a resource the ledgers will prove to be is amply demonstrated in this collection of previously published essays by Maslen. Arranged chronologically (the first was published in 1952, the last in 1993), their single source of information is the ledgers themselves. The range of topics explored by Maslen is impressive: from the discovery of new printing ornaments to the identification of “French” imprints produced by the Bowyers (father and son) with seeming regularity.

The most obvious kind of information to be drawn from the ledgers is for book trade history, including virtually all aspects of production and distribution. In this regard two essays stand out. The first is “Shared Printing and the Bibliographer: New Evidence from the Bowyer Press” (pp. 153–164). The practice of shared or concurrent composition and presswork by more than one printing house for the same work not only seems to have been habitual in eighteenth-century London printing houses but also seems to have been used with books of modest length. Shared printing has traditionally been assumed to have been the norm only for extended works like dictionaries and multi-volume sets, but not normal for shorter books. Though the reasons for frequent shared printing are not fully explained by Maslen (further study of the ledgers will undoubtedly shed more light on the practice), his study does provide a more complicated, time-intensive view of book production. And as Maslen rightly observes: “The practice of shared printing can only increase the risk that the author’s inten-