

BOYDELL & BREWER

Boydell Press

Chapter Title: 19 Autobiographical Museums
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Book Title: Museums and Biographies
Book Subtitle: Stories, Objects, Identities
Book Editor(s): Kate Hill
Volume: 9

Published by: [Boydell Press](#), an imprint of [Boydell & Brewer](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctn3370>

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Museums as Autobiography

Autobiographical Museums

BELINDA NEMEC

By an autobiographical museum I mean a museum of which the principal subject is the story of the life and/or career of the person who established the museum. Many of these museums are well known, but the autobiographical museum as a distinct genre has been given little scholarly attention.

Although it can be argued that all personal collecting is an exercise in self-expression and identity-formation, not all personal collecting is autobiographical. Conversely, some highly personal collections, dwellings or environments arranged for the purpose of permanent public display were not dubbed 'museums' by their creators but can be characterised as autobiographical museums. Other collections include a specifically autobiographical element but go well beyond this in scope and ambition; Henry Ford, for example, began his collecting by re-purchasing his own Quadricycle, acquiring children's readers of the type he had used at school, relocating his family farmhouse and then excavating the site for remnants of his childhood. Later he built a scale replica of his first assembly plant and relocated the mill where he and his father had taken the wool from their farm. Although Ford's Greenfield Village and its associated folk museum eventually grew into something broader in scope and larger in scale, its nostalgic autobiographical origins were significant in defining its character (Kaufman 1989, 36–8).

The various types of autobiographical museum tell, or illustrate, their maker's life-story in different ways, and although 'autobiographical' is a convenient term by which to identify these museums or collections as a genre, the analogy with the typical book-length, chronological, written autobiography is not always a close one. Some of the museums, for example, are similar to a diary or journal, being regularly maintained as the life is being lived; others are more like a memoir, a sequential narrative written towards the end of a life and based on recollection; while others may resemble a scrapbook, with no clear chronology but containing numerous anecdotes or clues which, taken together, reveal much about the creator's life, milieu, tastes and personality. The 'scrapbook' museum may also have characteristics of the reliquary, with relatively insignificant objects being imbued by the collector with a high level of spiritual, almost religious, significance. Many of the museums also include elements of the memorial, for which there is not necessarily a strong literary analogy; the similarity here is more with the biographical records formed by plaques, tombstones and other permanent physical biographical records that society depends upon to preserve historical information. Normally, memorials are created posthumously by a group or an individual who admired the deceased subject; but in autobiographical museums these memorial elements are created, or at least initiated, by the subject himself.

My first example is the Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne, which preserves the material evidence of the multi-faceted life of its creator, the Melbourne-born composer, pianist, folklorist and educator Percy Aldridge Grainger (1882–1961). Grainger himself conceived the idea of the museum. Although he had already been collecting since his youth, in the early 1930s he

proposed to the University of Melbourne (which he had never attended but which was located in his 'birth-town') that he would pay for the construction and upkeep of a 'Grainger Museum' on the campus. The University provided a small piece of land for the purpose. Grainger himself paid for the building, briefed the architect, donated the exhibits, recruited, paid and supervised the curators, and met the running costs during his lifetime. The remarkable breadth and diversity of Grainger's interests are reflected in the size and variety of his collection of letters, scores, books, pictures, garments, ephemera, furnishings, decorative arts, musical instruments and other materials which over his lifetime he accumulated or deliberately acquired, and then documented and preserved. Grainger's Museum represented a significant element in his life-long campaign to leave a legacy which would position him as a major international modernist composer, and as Australia's first great composer.

Grainger originally envisaged the museum as having two distinct halves: the 'Grainger Museum', to be filled by Grainger himself and devoted to Grainger as subject matter, and the 'Music Museum' – possibly to be complemented by a future Music Library (Grainger 1938a) – to be filled by the University and 'to preserve and exhibit things of general musical interest and things connected with the general musical life of Australia' (Grainger 1938b). Due partly to a lack of interest by the University but also to Grainger's own over-riding interest in his own personal story, the Music Museum element rather withered on the vine. The actual museum as realised in Grainger's lifetime was far more personally focused even than its aim as stated by Grainger in 1955: to illuminate the processes of composition (rather than performance) from about 1880 onwards, a period in which Australia had been prominent in music (Grainger 1955).

The catalyst to the establishment of the Grainger Museum was the most tragic loss to occur in Grainger's life: the suicide of his mother Rose in New York in 1922. Percy and Rose's relationship had been unusually close, with Rose directing every aspect of her son's education, career, social life and sexual relationships. Her death was a terrible shock to Percy and led him to feel that he too might die soon. His immediate emotional response was extreme but, rather than dwelling only on his loss, he fixed his eye firmly on the future, taking steps towards confirming his place as Australia's first great composer through the publication of all his works and the establishment of two museums. He wrote a detailed letter to his old friend, composer Henry Balfour Gardiner, setting out precise instructions in case he, Percy, died before he could get home to New York (he was in California when his mother died), together with a blank cheque to use for publishing his music:

I am all in life that remains of my beloved mother, & I wish to live so as to make her as sweetly remembered as possible [...] You understand the general need of bringing out everything [...] that, together, could place me a[s] Australia's 1st great composer & make Australia & my mother's name shine bright. [...] Long list of compositions and tasks includes:]

- 29 All very intimate letters or notes should be deposited in an Australian Grainger Museum, preferably in birth-town Melbourne
- 30 Mother's ashes & mine (both cremated) to be placed beside her mother's in cemetery (which?) in Adelaide South Australia [...]
- 31 Could plot of ground (owned by me) next to White Plains home be used for building small *fireproof* Grainger Museum? (Grainger 1994)

Although collecting and preserving objects are well-recognised means of relating to the deceased

(Gibson 2004; Pearce 1995, 238), and the death of a loved one has been a catalyst to many prominent collectors, such as Sigmund Freud, J Pierpont Morgan and le Duc Jean de Berry (Belk 1995, 28, 49; Muensterberger 1994, 169), Grainger took this response to a further extreme. He was concerned not only with preserving memories, but also with preserving truth: 'When remarkable people die (such as my mother [...]) no-one seems able or willing to describe them justly, faithfully [...] There is some conspiracy going on anent the remarkable dead' (Grainger 1949–54, 66). His compositional output declined after Rose's death, but the bereavement triggered autobiography (Perry 2001, 126), a documentary habit which ran parallel to his collecting. Although a prolific correspondent and essayist, Grainger never wrote a formal autobiography, but from 1922 onwards he produced over 500,000 words of rambling memoirs, essays and anecdotes (Gillies *et al* 2006). Characterised as a manifestation of Grainger's long-standing documentary obsession (Perry 2001), their underlying motives were principally to examine Grainger's relationship with his mother, to place himself and his circle in a position of primacy in the history of 20th-century music, and to explain his own sexuality (Gillies and Clunies-Ross 1999). These also figured among the concerns of the Grainger Museum. This alignment between his writing and museum activities demonstrates how Grainger moved seamlessly between collecting, recording, preserving, analysing and promoting; all were integrated in his project of creative memorialising. However, his continuing work on the museum suggests that Grainger did not feel that his written narratives and memoirs, albeit lengthy, were sufficient to communicate the full depth and breadth of his life and work to future generations; the vast quantity of raw data contained in the museum collection was also necessary. Conversely, in recording his memories in such detail, Grainger was acknowledging that the museum was also insufficient in itself, although the very act of writing appears to have been of therapeutic value.

Collecting and preserving were significant in giving meaning to Grainger's life and to defining his sense of personal and artistic identity. To Grainger, 'art & things are unsunderably twined together' (Grainger 1933–34, 65). Grainger's parents had also been collectors. When Rose died, Percy preserved her collection of his childhood memorabilia and other items, not only for their relevance to his own life, but also as part of Rose's legacy. If collecting is indeed 'identity work' (Belk and Wallendorf 1994, 240), then Grainger's incorporation of Rose's collection into his own after her death demonstrates their close relationship, the feminine nature of his upbringing and his strong identification with her; the very identification which, potentially ruptured by her suicide, initiated his Museum project.

THE GRAINGER MUSEUM AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

'Let the genius be presented *whole*, as life made & moulded him' (Grainger 1944).

Grainger's museum has characteristics of the archive, library and museum. His collection includes the most trivial, and intimate, items, including those relating to his sado-masochistic flagellantism (Pear 2003). Grainger felt that his sexuality was an integral and significant part of his creative personality and therefore its evidence should be preserved. Here Grainger diverged from the typical museum- and exhibition-makers of his day, who maintained a clear distinction between the 'higher' cultural and intellectual pleasures and 'lower' pleasures such as sexual ones (Greenhalgh 1989, 86). Grainger claimed to be, and perhaps sincerely believed that he was, all-encompassing in what he included in his museum. In 1941, for example, he wrote, 'Most

museums, most cultural endeavors, suffer from being subjected to TOO MUCH TASTE, TOO MUCH ELIMINATION, TOO MUCH SELECTION, TOO MUCH SPECIALISATION! What we want (in museums & cultural records) is ALL-SIDEDNESS, side-lights, cross-references' (Grainger 1941). In fact, however, Grainger, like all museum makers, made choices about what to include and exclude, both within the stored collection and presented in the displays.

Even Grainger's idiosyncratic method of cataloguing his correspondence was autobiographical, embodying a hierarchy based on the degree of closeness of the personal relationship between Grainger and the correspondent, or their significance in his eyes. For example, letters from 'Servants to RG [Rose Grainger], PG [Percy Grainger], EG [Ella Grainger]', were grouped together under one catalogue number, as were 'American (not closest) friends to PG, EG' and letters from 'RG to British (not special) friends'; but each correspondent whom Grainger considered important – such as his fellow students from Frankfurt, Rudyard Kipling, and his Museum's curator Richard Fowler – was given his or her own catalogue number.

Grainger was familiar with house museums and memorials to geniuses and believed that, as he too was a genius, he was equally deserving of a museum. He was particularly inspired by visiting the childhood home of one of his favourite authors, Mark Twain, that had recently opened as a museum in Hannibal, Missouri (Grainger 1939). But Grainger wanted autobiography, not posthumous biography. In 1956, he wrote that museums 'should be done while the composers themselves are still alive & able to provide information that outsiders don't know' (Grainger 1956).

COLLECTORS' HOUSE MUSEUMS

Most collectors' houses, such as that of the Pittsburgh steel magnate Henry Clay Frick, the house and library of J P Morgan in New York, Dr Axel Munthe's Villa San Michele on Capri, or the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, are autobiographical only insofar as all collections reveal *something* of the collector, and all homes reveal *something* of their occupants. Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924), initially with her husband, purchased the 'best' she could afford of the accepted high-art canon, often based on professional advice. In establishing her museum, Gardner was influenced by European house museums, particularly Milan's Museo Poldi-Pezzoli (Coolidge 1989, 4; Goldfarb 1995, 6). I contend that such a museum is less personally revealing, less autobiographical than Percy Grainger's, which centres on his own creative output. Works of 'high' art such as those acquired by Gardner have a ready reception and market, and bring social prestige upon their owners, even if only recently acquired. Much of the material in Grainger's collection would not have been considered museum quality at the time he preserved it. Grainger was operating to a different, much more personal, set of values.

Conny Bogaard argues that intentionally educational collectors' house museums such as the Gardner emerged in western Europe and North America between about 1870 and 1930, alongside wealthy private citizens donating their fortunes or collections to public art museums (Bogaard 2002, 1–4). Other examples include Museo Bagatti Valsecchi in Milan, Museo Sibbert and Museo Horne in Florence, Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris, and Palazzo Primoli in Rome. While they do reveal something of the tastes and lives of their founders, these do not meet my definition of an autobiographical museum. However, one collector's house museum with a strong autobiographical element is that of C H C A Van Sypesteyn (1857–1937), heir to a patrician Dutch family which had lost much of its traditional property. In 1902, Van Sypesteyn established a foundation:

to gather, keep and maintain and extend the family archives and portraits, coat of arms, valuables and rarities and all other objects related to or proceeded from the Van Sypesteyn Family [...]. The Founder, as the last male descendant of the Van Sypesteyn Family, wishes with this foundation to honour the family's name.

(Van Sypesteyn Foundation Archive, 16 May 1902, quoted in Bogaard 2002, 8)

Thus autobiography here is defined as family heritage rather than personal chronological narrative. I would argue, however, that this is indeed how some people define themselves, and can therefore be legitimately argued to be autobiographical. Between 1911 and 1922, Van Sypesteyn built a museum in the style of a gothic castle, on a site which had once belonged to his family. As Bogaard points out, the result was ahistorical with a highly illusory sense of habitation, the collections (some of which had been gathered by his forebears) simulating 'an atmosphere of generations of domestic life'. Van Sypesteyn was creating an autobiographical/family history museum in a historically based faux-domestic building in which he sought to contextualise his family history within the Dutch national golden age (Bogaard 2002, 8–16). The closest literary analogy for this aspect might be the fictional elaborations or 'improvements' sometimes inserted, either deliberately or subconsciously, by a family into its own historical narrative.

ARTISTS' HOUSE AND STUDIO MUSEUMS

The display of an art collection can, however, result in an autobiographical statement, when it is displayed by a painter or sculptor, rather than by a connoisseur collector like Frick or Gardner. Closer to Percy Grainger's conception of an autobiographical legacy was the creation of the controversial Australian artist and writer, Norman Lindsay (1879–1969). Late in life, Lindsay facilitated the sale of his home 'Springwood' (where he and his wife Rose had lived since 1912) to the National Trust, modifying it for its posthumous opening as a house-museum-memorial containing artworks, his painting and etching studios, letters, manuscripts, furniture, personal relics and his books comprising 'works of the writers who have meant most to me in prose and poetry' (Norman Lindsay, quoted in Hetherington 1973, 256). His will bequeathed to the National Trust: 16 watercolours; 17 oil paintings; 9 original pen drawings; together with pencil drawings, ship models, sculptures and statuary: plus 'all my paints, painting table and other materials dealing with my craft', and 'all book cases and other pieces of furniture decorated by me, together with all books which may be therein at the date of my death' (National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), n.d.). Such self-memorialising was a Lindsay family trait. Norman's brother, the artist and gallery director Sir Daryl Lindsay (1889–1976) and his wife, the writer Lady (Joan) Lindsay (1896–1984), bequeathed their home 'Mulberry Hill' (containing Daryl's painting studio and Joan's writing room as well as all their more prosaic domestic chattels) as a house museum to the Victorian National Trust, of which they were among the founders (Clark 1996, 11–12, 51, 62). Daryl and Joan's decision might have been prompted by sibling rivalry upon learning of Norman's actions to preserve Springwood, but it also followed Daryl's disappointment in an earlier plan to create a National Trust museum of 'Lisnacrieve', the Lindsay family's original country home (Lindsay 1965, 197–8).

The only woman artist I have come across who independently created a museum entity along these lines was a sculptor and to a lesser extent painter, Adèle d'Affry (1836–1879), the Duchess Castiglione Colonna, known professionally as 'Marcello'. Her most famous work is the bronze

sculpture *Phythia* of 1870, installed in the Paris Opéra since 1875. Suffering for some time from tuberculosis, she spent her final years painting rather than sculpting, designing her tombstone (on which the epitaph included a comment to the effect that her works survived her: '*Elle aime le beau et le bien et ses oeuvres lui survivent*'), organising her affairs, and planning the creation of the Musée Marcello, to open posthumously in her Swiss birth-town, Fribourg (Pierre 2003). The eventual result was predominantly memorial in nature: a pair of rooms (within Fribourg's Cantonal museum) displaying her collection of her own works, those of her contemporaries, and her own furniture, tapestries and other possessions, including gifts from artist friends. One of these rooms was set up as an artist's atelier. This museum closed in 1936 (Pierre 2006).¹

A substantial museum legacy was left by the French symbolist painter Gustave Moreau (1826–1898). The museum he established late in life on the premises of his Paris studio and family home shares some characteristics with the Grainger Museum, as did the two men's lives. Like Grainger, Moreau pondered immortality. At 36, when his father, his teacher and a dear friend all died in the one year, Moreau wrote on a sketch: 'This evening 24 December 1862. I think of my death and of the fate of my poor little works and all these compositions which I have taken pains to keep together. Separated, they perish; taken together, they give some idea of what I was as an artist and of the milieu in which I pleased to dream' (Mathieu 1986, 31, trans B Nemeč). Although achieving public acclaim as a painter and continuing to exhibit sporadically, Moreau largely withdrew from the public eye from his early forties. From about 1890 he envisaged a permanent museum in which his life's work and family history could be kept together and displayed, in 1895 commissioning architect Albert Lafon to enlarge and redesign his house to achieve this end (Listri 1997, 76; Mathieu 1986, 31; Lacambre 1999, 90–91). He made detailed plans for the museum, which opened in 1903, some five years after his death (Musée Nationale Gustave Moreau). Ironically, Moreau's painting studio, created for him by his father in 1853, was destroyed as part of these alterations (Lacambre 2006, 6). The crowded, dim, claustrophobic domestic spaces contrast dramatically with the large, airy (although densely hung) galleries on the second and third storeys which he commissioned to display his artworks: mostly large paintings on historical, biblical or mythological subjects, supported by cabinets of preliminary drawings, watercolours and other works. The collection also includes a vast documentary archive. In the rearranged private rooms on the first floor, Moreau created a 'musée sentimental' by displaying possessions of personal value, preserving his parents' belongings, hanging family portraits in his bedroom and furnishing one room as a memorial to his beloved friend Alexandrine Dureux (de Contenson 1998; Lacambre 2006), whose death he also memorialised in the mournful painting *Orpheus at the tomb of Eurydice* (Lacambre 2006, 16). Like Grainger – who was unconcerned with the monetary value of his collection – Moreau valued things for their associations, numen, aura, or souvenir value, rather than for their more widely acknowledged aesthetic qualities which often translate into market value. When a friend commented on Moreau's mediocre furnishings, he replied: 'Do you think I don't know as well as you that the chandelier, the candlesticks and most of the furniture here are valueless? But they suited my parents, and that's enough for me. When I want to see beautiful things, I go to the Louvre' (Paladilhe 1972, 55). Moreau bequeathed all to the State on the condition that it 'retain its character of ensemble in order to bear witness

¹ Another larger museum that includes a discrete autobiographical element is the recreation of his Beverley Hills office that Sir Arthur Gilbert insisted be included in the display of his lavish collection of decorative arts at Somerset House in London (Blom 2003).

forever to the sum of the artist's labour and effort during his lifetime' (Gustave Moreau, Will of 1897, quoted in Mathieu 1986, 31, trans B Nemeč). His student and friend Henri Rupp brought the master's ideas to fruition, arranging the collection in accordance with his wishes.

Moreau's one-time protégé Edgar Degas (1834–1917) was in the 1890s planning to establish a museum, to display his work not in 'splendid isolation' like Moreau's, but among that of selected (mostly French) predecessors and contemporaries in a context 'both autobiographical and polemical' (Loyrette 1998). He subsequently gave up the idea, due perhaps to his negative response to Moreau's museum which reminded him of a mausoleum and thesaurus or *Gradus ad Parnassum* (Dumas 1997, 25). Other painters and sculptors who established museums dedicated to their own life and work include the English botanical artist Marianne North (1830–1890) at Kew Gardens; the Dutch marine painter Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831–1915); the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) (said to have been inspired by Moreau's example); the Norwegian–American sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen (1872–1940); the Basque painter Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta (1870–1945) and the Spanish surrealist Salvador Dalí (1906–1989).

As mentioned earlier, many autobiographical collections and museums also serve as a memorial. Percy Grainger's will provided for his skeleton to be displayed in the Grainger Museum. Although this did not eventuate, some artists or founders have had their physical remains placed in their museums or libraries: Yale University's Trumbull Gallery, the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, Antonio Canova's *Tempio* in his home-town of Passagno, the founders of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, the Henry E Huntington Library in California and the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, the last designed by Sir John Soane (1753–1837).

Surprisingly perhaps, Soane's own remarkable autobiographical house museum does not hold its creator's tomb. It does, however, hold the resting place of his wife's dog 'Fanny', scale models of ancient tombs and mausoleums, and Soane's proudest acquisition – the impressive alabaster sarcophagus of Pharaoh Sethi I (Blom 2003, 224–5). Soane combined in one house a family residence, studio, laboratory, teaching facility, classical cabinet and museum (Black 2000, 67–70). He began this project at the turn of the 19th century in his country home, Pitzhanger Manor, where he hoped through his sons to establish an English architectural dynasty (his own father had been but a humble bricklayer). But his sons disappointed him and Soane transferred his efforts to his London townhouse at Lincoln's Inn Fields, which he expanded and transformed from 1811 until his death in 1837. He collected classical antiquities and neo-classical objects both architectural and non-architectural; medieval, Peruvian, Chinese and Indian works, some fossils and minerals, many oil paintings, thousands of architectural drawings and nearly 8000 books (Millenson 1987, 77–8). Described variously as 'an autobiographical creation' (Millenson 1987, foreword) and a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Blom 2003, 223), the result served, amongst other things, to demonstrate its creator's place in architectural history. Soane used his collection to situate his own architectural creations as the culmination of a tradition stretching back to classical antiquity (Elsner 1994), and in a more nationalistic vein, sought to elevate the status of the architectural profession in England (Feinberg 1984, 225; Black 2000, 69; Elsner 1994, 157–8). In this sense, therefore, his museum serves the typical purpose of the traditional written autobiography of a successful, high-profile professional. His legacy became permanent through his bequest of the house and collection to the State. Although Soane, like Isabella Stewart Gardner, collected material widely prized by contemporary private collectors and museums, the complex project in which he realised some of his own design and technical innovations, and his positioning of his own work in the classical tradition, gave the material from past eras an immediate personal relevance.

There are of course many autobiographical collectors who never think of establishing a museum. It is arguable, for example, that any person who retains his or her archival records – letters, bills, tax records, school reports, testamurs, legal papers, family birth, death and marriage certificates, greeting cards, etc – is creating an autobiographical collection. Some of these individuals, usually if they have achieved some public renown during their lifetime, give or bequeath their papers to an existing institution such as a national archive. But they do not usually go that extra step, to create a stand-alone establishment dedicated exclusively to the subject of themselves. The composer Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), for example, collected autobiographically in great detail (Archivo Manuel de Falla 2010), but the organisation now dedicated to preserving his archive was established posthumously and there is no evidence of his having considered establishing a museum (Garcia de Paredes de Falla 2005).

For some creative people, their autobiographical collecting interacts with their artistic output. Soane used collected architectural fragments, casts and statuary as examples for his own work (Millenson 1987, 6–7). The folk music that Percy Grainger collected served as the source for much of his musical output. Andy Warhol (1928–1987) collected art and artefacts intentionally through purchase, as well as accumulating (and boxing up in ‘time capsules’ which he then placed into cold storage) the vast quantity of material generated in the course of his daily life (Barclay 2005). Both of Warhol’s modes of collecting – active and passive – were relevant to his art practice, being concerned with contemporary consumerism and mass production. The writer Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) extended his book collecting – his ‘central passion’ – to collecting quotations, which became source material for some of his writings (Arendt 1968, 38–9), and the graphic designer and collage-maker Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) collected rubbish and ephemera to include in his artworks (Cardinal 1994, 71–6).

Sigmund Freud, although not an artist, formed a collection which interacted with his professional practice. From 1896, shortly after the death of his father, he gradually accumulated a collection of more than 2000 artefacts, mostly archaeological finds, displayed in his study. Janine Burke discusses the interplay between Freud’s collection and psychoanalysis: ‘The collection offers multiple readings: as the embodiment of Freud’s theories; as an investigation and celebration of past cultures; as an exercise in aesthetics; as a quest for excellence; as a memento of real and imagined journeys; as a catalogue of desires; and as a self-portrait’ (Burke 2006, 2). The metaphor of an archaeological collection to represent a method of mental analysis built on the gradual, layer-by-layer uncovering and interpretation of childhood memories is easy to see. But again, these individuals did not create a museum (or at least did not intend to: Freud’s home in London was turned into a museum by his family after his death; see Forgan, this volume).

CHRISTIAN C SANDERSON

For another example of an autobiographical collector who was intentionally also a museum maker, I look to a more unpretentious, unknown person than those discussed so far. This was Christian C Sanderson (1882–1966), a rural Pennsylvanian school teacher. Sanderson was an active, well-liked and respected member of his community, a bachelor who lived with his widowed mother, who through lectures, broadcasts and re-enactments also served as an unofficial or vernacular local historian over many decades (Thompson 1973; Barnett 2003, 223–4; Dorst 1989, 192–203).

Sanderson’s collection, accumulated over his entire life, is vast but meticulously – if idiosyncratically – labelled. It mostly comprises ‘relics’: thousands of numinous souvenirs or relics that

tell his own life-story, and that of his mother and forebears. Many of these items also link Sanderson's own life with the past and unfolding history of his nation, and to some extent, other world events. Examples include a fragment of the raincoat Sanderson wore at President Eisenhower's second inauguration; the match Sanderson used to light his own 60th birthday candles in 1942; a string from the violin he played at his mother's funeral; Easter eggs dyed by his mother in 1886; melted ice from the South Pole; a fragment of tile from Eva Braun's bathroom; and a piece of the fuel tank of the *Spirit of St Louis* (Barnett 2003, 222; Maines and Glynn 1993, 24–5; Dorst 1989, 195). By acquiring such items, Sanderson forged links between his own life-story and American history. He also collected more overtly 'national' symbols – such as a lock of George Washington's hair and a piece of bandage placed on Abraham Lincoln's final wounds – which he labelled as 'relics'. Teresa Barnett describes Sanderson as:

a compulsive memorialist – an individual who seemingly felt a need to turn every object he came into contact with to the task of remembering. He preserved his life and he preserved the century's life, and he preserved them with a fervor that seemed undeterred by any generally accepted notion of significance. (Barnett 2003, 222–3)

This is also a collection that resembles a scrapbook, one which Sanderson shared with visitors – that is, the public. From 1906 to 1922 he and his mother lived in a house which had been George Washington's headquarters for two days in the revolutionary war, running what was in effect a house museum and battlefield memorial. They welcomed thousands of visitors, free of charge, to this and their subsequent dwellings (Thompson 2002, 23).

As with Grainger, closely connected with Sanderson's collecting was his assiduous record-keeping. Both these men blurred any possible distinctions between recording, producing and collecting. Sanderson wrote thousands of notes and letters and was a compulsive photographer and diarist, documenting in particular his own participation in, or response to, national events. For example, on Armistice Day he wrote in his songbook:

I am writing this on Monday morning, Nov 11, 1918. This morning I used this book for singing in the Dilworthtown School which stands on the spot where Lafayette was wounded, Sept 11, 1777. We sang America and the Star Spangled Banner and Marsellaise [sic] from this book. Those singing were Anna Norman, Walt Dilworth, Howard Collins, Lee Parry, William Winston, Russell Kitzleman. Thus celebrating the surrender of Germany to the United States. Christian C Sanderson, Teacher. (Quoted in Thompson 1973, 198)

Thus Sanderson created a link between the American War of Independence, World War I, his own life, and those of his students; the songbook which he happened to be using on the day came to embody this moment of historic convergence.

Sanderson's approach to collecting has parallels with Grainger's. Although Grainger was interested in Australia's evolving *cultural* history while Sanderson focused on military events, political inaugurations, anniversaries and nation-building, both saw themselves as active participants in a living history which was contributing to the forging of their respective nations. Neither discriminated between 'high' and 'low' culture in his collection and each perceived even the most trivial item as integral to the whole.

MAISON PIERRE LOTI

Another striking example of a domestically focused autobiographical collection and display was the home of the French writer Louis-Marie-Julien Viaud (1850–1923), known as Pierre Loti. Loti's collection reflected, on a personal level, the European imperial project, combined with a compulsion to preserve souvenirs of his past to counter a fear of death, and the creation of an alternative persona, based partly on his own travels as a sea-captain, partly on the adventures of the protagonist of his semi-autobiographical but exotic novels. Although constituted only posthumously as a public museum, the house was a deliberate and strongly personal memorial and showcase, and its creator an artist and life-long collector. I would argue that the result today is in part an autobiographical museum, although one that is presented much more theatrically than Grainger's, which is more literal.

Loti's sometimes autobiographical novels evoked sea voyages and exotic, faraway places, for a readership of largely armchair travellers (Blanch 1983, 12). In a period of accelerating colonisation, he penned tales of distant lands explored or conquered by the West. Loti was also a naval officer, traveller, artist and photographer. The modest middle-class house in which he had been born and raised served as a display case for his childhood memories, treasures gathered during his naval adventures, and his historical fantasies. From 1877 he began creating a series of thematic display rooms: a Turkish room, an Arab room, a Japanese pagoda, a Renaissance hall, a mosque, a Chinese room and a monk's room. By appropriating the trappings of exotic or colonised lands visited during his naval career, Loti linked his personal and national stories. Contrasting with these theatrical creations was the more intimate universe of his own personal and family life, as shown in the Red Sitting Room, his bedroom, his father's study and the conventionally bourgeois dining room (Scaon 2001, 49, 55; Pavoni 2002, 1–2). He also purchased the two houses adjacent to his own, gradually adding more display rooms, although leaving the exterior intact, giving no hint of this fantastic interior (Armbrecht 2003).

Although he did not specify that his house become a public museum, Loti went to great lengths to ensure that all his treasured objects would be taken care of after his death. He left meticulous instructions on preservation, destruction, or sale, even for the care of his pets and garden. He arranged for future publication of unpublished works, particularly his journals. He specified that he be buried alone in the garden of his mother's ancestral home (Blanch 1983, 313–17). His desire to freeze the passing moment through the creation of elaborate interiors based on the peregrinations of his own life, even if originally intended for his own benefit and that of his friends, shares much with the self-museumising spirit of the Grainger Museum, and the common if unacknowledged motivation of many collectors, including Grainger, to cope with the passing of time, and thus by implication the approach of death, as observed by Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1994, 15–18).

Young Julien created a museum in the attic which he preserved all his life, always kept a journal (Blanch 1983, 31–6), and preserved *memento mori* 'as holy relics' (Blanch 1983, 22–3). Loti's writing may also have reflected his urge to memorialise. Interestingly, Loti was Marcel Proust's favourite author of prose (Armbrecht 2003). As Armbrecht points out, although Loti's writings and his house rooms were wildly fantastic, not realistic – that is, they were utopias – they were still personally revealing: 'Loti's utopias are perfect places in that he recreated only the most personally important features of a culture or time period in his writing and architecture, that is, those that meant something to him' (Armbrecht 2003). And the only link between these rooms,

which represent wildly different cultures, places and time periods, is their creator or, more specifically, his memories. They were 'idealized memories of places from his past; in other words, they were utopias in which he took refuge'. 'Loti lived through his literature, not only for his public but also for himself.' His first room creation, the Turkish room, Loti created while simultaneously writing his first novel, *Aziyade*, both begun soon after his return from Turkey in 1877, and named after Loti's actual Turkish mistress, a married woman (although possibly in reality a man) whom he could not bring back to France (Armbrecht 2003). It is important to note that in his novels, Loti's hero/protagonist was called Pierre Loti. Loti was a pseudonym for Julien Viaud but its use for his literary creation shows that his books are a type of invention of self, an autobiography but also fantasy. This literary creation is paralleled by his exotically theatrical domestic creation.

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO AND *IL VITTORIALE DEGLI ITALIANI*

Another highly artificial, theatrical place that is now in effect an autobiographical museum, although not called a museum by its creator, is *Il Vittoriale degli Italiani*. This was the final home of Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863–1938), a celebrated Italian writer turned flamboyant military hero and right-wing, nationalist political identity (Klopp 1988). It was created by its subject during his own lifetime, with a view to establishing a public memorial to himself and his contribution to his nation's history. The result combines a strongly nationalist narrative with autobiography.

By 1921 D'Annunzio felt dissatisfied, disappointed, uncertain and disoriented, firstly with the outcomes for Italy of World War I and subsequently at the failure of his own audacious Fiume escapade (Bonadeo 1995, 143; Woodhouse 1998, 2, 315–52). Rather than entering the political fray of the Fascist years, he retired to the fashionable holiday resort area of Gardone Riviera, acquiring a substantial 18th-century farmhouse which he gradually transformed and expanded into the extravagantly decadent *Vittoriale*, funded largely by monies extracted from Mussolini's government (Licht 1982). According to his biographer:

For most of his life D'Annunzio's sole concern was self-gratification and glory [...] to create a work of art from his life and to immortalize it in words. [...] And when inspiration for creative writing ran out, after his expulsion from Fiume in 1921, he spent the next sixteen years in the creation of a vast physical artefact which might reflect his life and achievements: the Vittoriale. (Woodhouse 1998, 4–5)

Thus, like Grainger but unlike Loti, D'Annunzio began creating his memorial when he had achieved celebrity but his most artistically fruitful years had ended. In collaboration with architect Gian Carlo Maroni, D'Annunzio transformed the estate into an ostentatious monument to his life and Fascist-leaning political beliefs, and eventually into his mausoleum. He covered the façade of the main house with emblems, coats of arms, statues and bas-reliefs, all recalling incidents from his life, created stifflingly claustrophobic, dimly-lit interiors, filled with objects ranging from casts of famous sculptures to bric-a-brac, relics and personal mementoes, and named the rooms after his personal philosophical and literary preoccupations (Woodhouse 1998, 372–5; Mazza 1987).

In 1923 D'Annunzio declared:

Everything here has, in fact, been created or transfigured by me. Everything here bears the stamp of my style. My love for Italy, my cult of memory, my striving after heroism, the presentiment of my country as it will come to be, all these things are embodied here, in every search for a line, in the matchings and clashings of colours. (Singley 1996, 1)

He added a war museum displaying the car from his triumphant march into Fiume and the aeroplane from his celebrated wartime propaganda flight over Vienna hanging under a grand cupola. His torpedo boat was exhibited behind the house, while projecting impressively from a hill was the prow of the battleship *Puglia* from his Fiume campaign. In 1930 D'Annunzio donated the Vittoriale to the Italian State, and in the same year commissioned a mausoleum on the site's highest point, inspired by ancient Roman tombs. D'Annunzio was eventually interred there, surrounded by the remains of ten of his comrades-in-arms from Fiume and his architect Maroni² (Mazza 1987, 84–5). Many of the Vittoriale's rooms are like theatrical tableaux; in this it is similar to the Maison Pierre Loti, and it is perhaps no coincidence that two writers should turn to elaborate visual display to complement or expand upon their mostly literary careers.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that all collecting is autobiographical to some degree, in that it tells us something of the collector's tastes and personality. Thus the countless public collections which were originally private collections have an autobiographical element. Many art collectors have gone to great lengths to present their collections as an expression of their intellectual and artistic pursuits or social status, often for the benefit of visitors to their homes. Some are now open to the public as house museums, whether due to the express wishes of the collector or through the efforts of other individuals after the collector's death. Some collections embody information on the facts of the collector's life. But relatively few collections can be described as autobiographical in the sense that they were deliberately created in order to communicate the detailed narrative of the collector's life. Of those collections that do convey such a narrative, rare examples such as Percy Grainger's, Gustave Moreau's and Gabriele d'Annunzio's were presented with the intention of permanence and public accessibility – a museum, even if not always called by this name. Of these, the Grainger Museum is unusual in two ways: it was never a house – indeed it is the only example I have come across that is in a building that was conceived and created deliberately and solely as an autobiographical museum – and it was created over a long period while the life being documented was actually being lived, rather than towards the end of the life or career. Examples of the latter – museum-based retrospectives or memoirs – include the museums of Gustave Moreau and 'Marcello'. John Soane's house-museum was created over a long period of time but is less literally autobiographical than Grainger's. Christian Sanderson's collection is intimately autobiographical although not organised or presented according to any clear narrative.

I would argue, therefore, that no other museum shares the singularly personal detail, focus or intimacy of Grainger's museum, its long period of gestation, and its attempt to describe its creator's familial, artistic and social milieu. Only in Grainger have I been able to find the combination of a lifelong and consistent collector and retainer of *explicitly, primarily and self-consciously*

² D'Annunzio's body was relocated in 1963 to the Tempietto on the Vittoriale site (Mazza 1987, 85).

autobiographical material with an urge to create a dedicated, permanent, physical display space. The Grainger Museum can therefore be seen at one end of a spectrum of 'autobiographicalness' of museums, with other museums and collections showing this trait to varying extents and in varying ways.

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