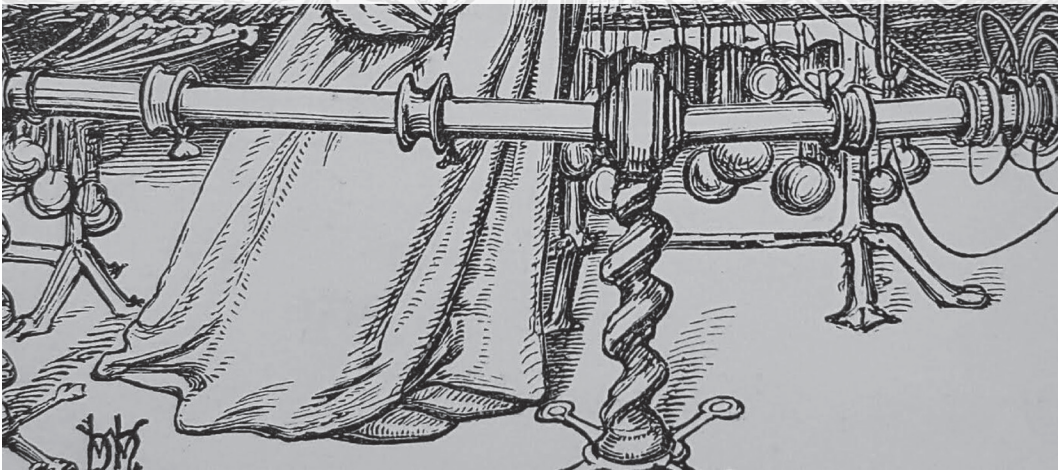
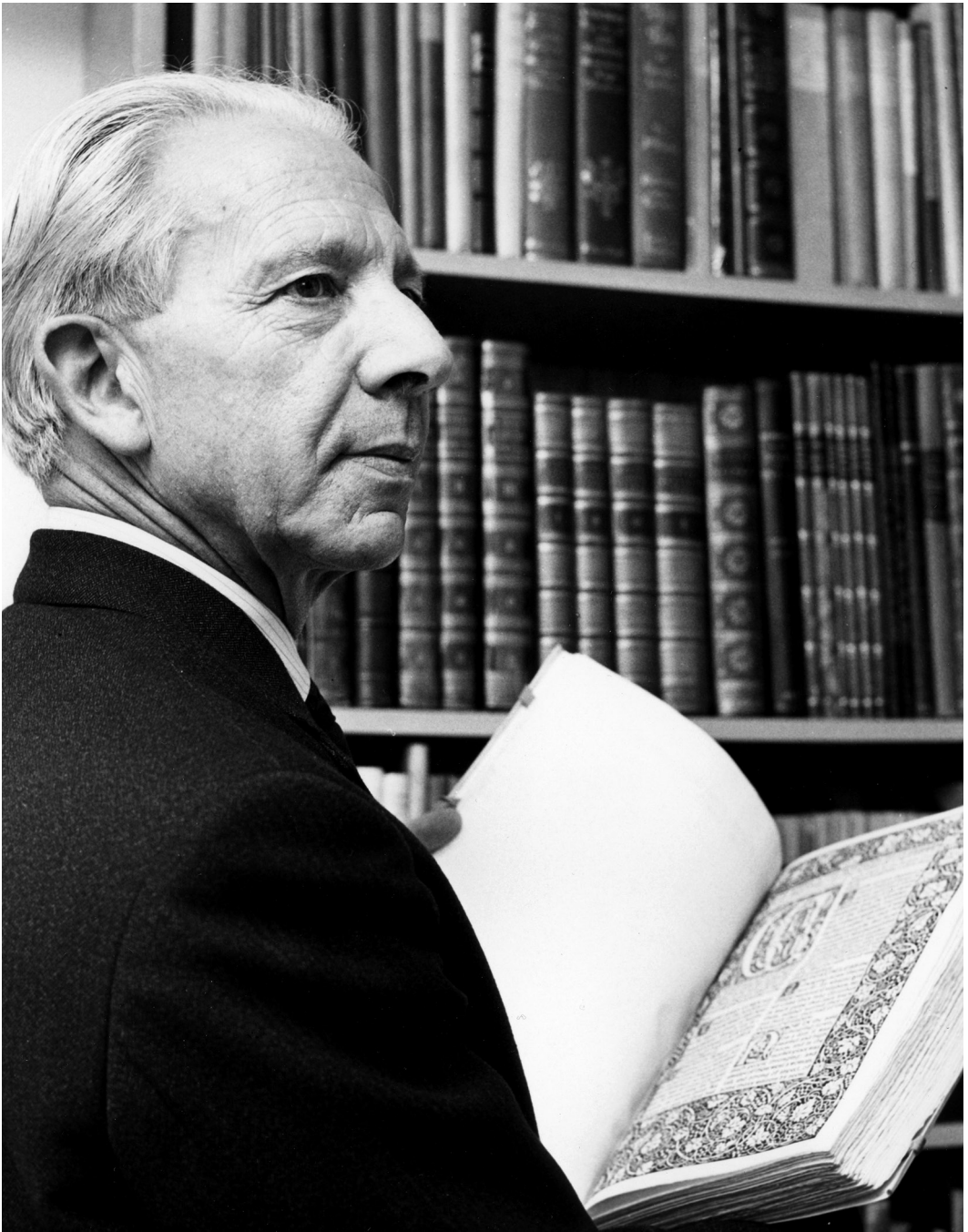




AN
UNMATCHED DEVOTION

A 50th anniversary celebration of the Norman Colbeck Collection
of 19th-Century and Edwardian Poetry and *Belles Lettres*.





Norman Colbeck (William Fredeman photo). (Courtesy of UBC Archives Photograph Collection)

An Unmatched Devotion

The 50th anniversary of the Colbeck acquisition is a reason to celebrate,
explains GREGORY MACKIE.

THE NORMAN COLBECK Collection of 19th-century and Edwardian poetry and *belles lettres*, which is housed in the University of British Columbia Library's Rare Books and Special Collections, is one of the world's most comprehensive collections of 19th-century and Edwardian English and Anglo-Irish literature. This year marks the 50th anniversary of its arrival at UBC, along with the British bibliophile and collector Norman Colbeck. The collection's acquisition was the brainchild of William E. (Dick) Fredeman, professor of English and a major figure in Pre-Raphaelite studies. Colbeck came with the collection, moving to Vancouver to catalogue its extensive holdings.

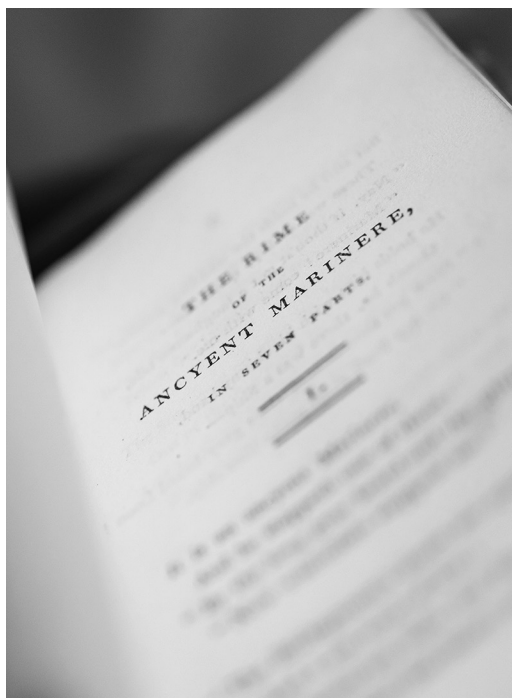
The collection comprises some 13,000 volumes and includes rare first editions of works

by the Pre-Raphaelites, writers associated with Aestheticism and Decadence, and major figures in British and Irish Modernism. The collection is also very strong in unique presentation and association copies of books by and about its 450 representative authors. The catalogue of the collection, *A Bookman's Catalogue* (UBC Press, 1987), remains a vital work of reference for scholars, collectors, and members of the book trade.

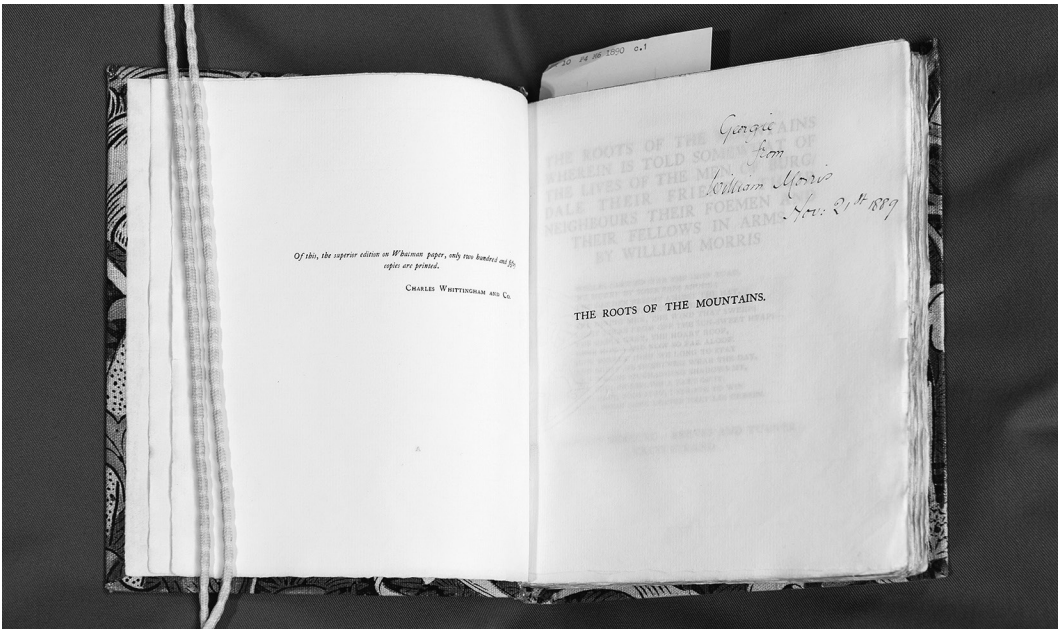
To celebrate this indispensable research and teaching asset, the library, in conjunction with the English department, will mount a major exhibition in the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre on the Vancouver campus from October 23 to December 20, 2017, titled *An Unmatched Devotion*. The exhibition's scope is ambitious. It will be distributed across multiple sites throughout the learning centre, including the Rare Books and Special Collections reading room and the Community Concourse. A one-day symposium on October 25, devoted to scholarship and research related to the Colbeck collection, coincides with the exhibition.

LITERARY JEWELS EXHIBITED

Choosing items to display from this vast repository will inevitably be an idiosyncratic exercise, but I am reassured by the fact that the collection is in many ways idiosyncratic itself. It contains (almost) nothing by William Wordsworth, for instance, because Colbeck apparently hated Wordsworth. Indeed, in the catalogue entry for a first edition of Romanticism's seminal collection *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), whose famous preface and all but one of whose poems were Wordsworth's, Colbeck wrote that "the first poem in this book is 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts,' which must be an acceptable excuse for putting Wordsworth's book in a Coleridge collection." That volume's reputation in English literary history certainly



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*William Wordsworth, Lyrical ballads:
with a few other poems (1798).*



William Morris, *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890).

makes it a highlight of the exhibition, but many other gems have equal lustre.

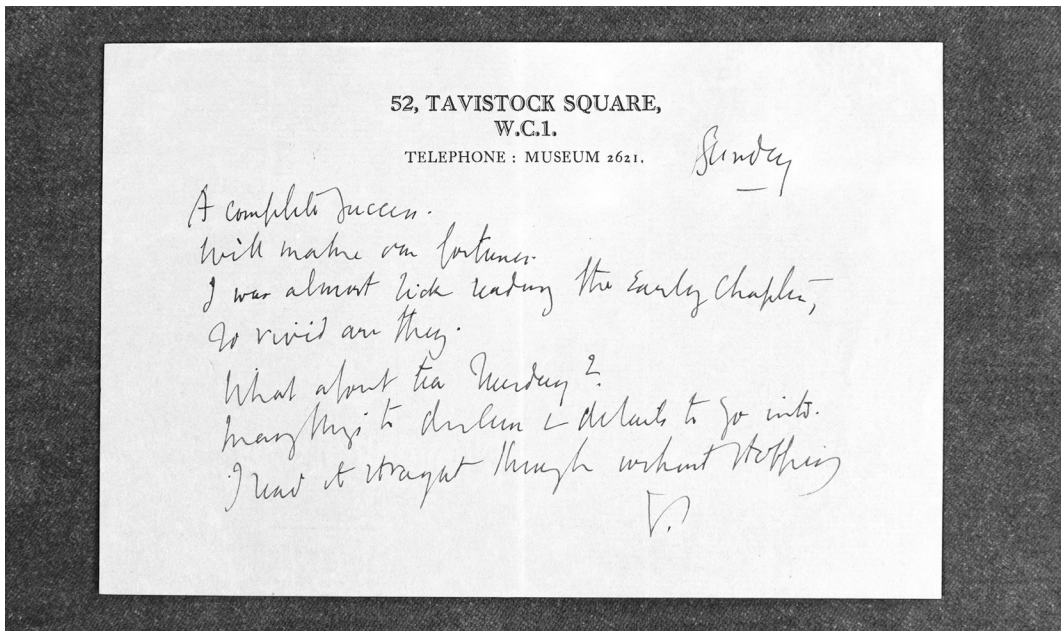
Colbeck's collection contains a high number of association and presentation copies, including the first edition of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Poems* (1870), which he inscribed to the poet Robert Browning. This volume's critical notoriety (many contemporary critics were shocked by its eroticism) is matched by its extraordinary pre-publication history, as several of Rossetti's manuscripts had to be exhumed from the grave of his wife Elizabeth Siddal, where, grief-stricken, Rossetti had left them wrapped in her flowing red hair.

Other notable association items on display include William Morris's romance *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890), said to have inspired J.R.R. Tolkien, which is bound in Morris-designed fabric and inscribed to "Georgie" Burne-Jones, the wife of Edward Burne-Jones and a friend of the novelist George Eliot; and Thomas Hardy's poetry collection *Time's Laughingstocks* (1909), which he inscribed to his creative collaborator Florence Henniker. Another marvellous association item on display is the letter Virginia Woolf wrote to her friend (and sometime paramour) Vita Sackville-West, accepting the manuscript

of the latter's novel *The Edwardians* (1930) for publication at the Hogarth Press. It was presented to UBC, along with a first edition of the novel, by Sackville-West's son Nigel Nicolson in 1979.

FIRST EDITIONS & MANUSCRIPTS

Splendid first editions of important literary works abound in the Colbeck collection, such as an extremely scarce large-paper copy of Oscar Wilde's controversial novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), signed by Wilde with a characteristic flourish. The exhibition also gives us the opportunity to present literary history in less finished forms. For example, the Colbeck collection includes some unique literary manuscripts, such as two sonnets from D.G. Rossetti's sequence "The House of Life." The Colbeck's manuscript holdings of Pre-Raphaelite poet and artist William Bell Scott (1811–1890) are also extensive. They are augmented by a bound and corrected proof copy of Scott's *Poems* (1875). What makes this artifact all the more astonishing is that the engraved steel plates that Scott had made for his illustrations accompany it, which allows us to display the entire process of the book's transmission from manuscript and illustration to print.



Letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, from the Norman Colbeck fonds.

The exhibition is divided into eight thematic areas representing the particular strengths of the collection: Poetry, the Pre-Raphaelites, the revival of printing and the fine press movement, literary and artistic periodicals, *belles lettres*, Aestheticism and Decadence, association copies, and unique archival materials. In commemorating this anniversary, we celebrate past achievements while looking towards the future. The library aims to showcase the enduring legacy of Norman Colbeck's contribution to UBC as well as the

potential for research, teaching, and the cultivation of knowledge that the collection represents.

We invite readers of *Amphora* to visit the exhibition and to have a look. They will be feasting their eyes at a veritable banquet of Victoriana.

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 ~ Gregory Mackie is an assistant professor of English at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C., and curator of the exhibition *An Unmatched Devotion*.



Engraved steel plates of illustrations to W. B. Scott's *Poems* (1875).