

# LIBRARY JOURNAL

November 15<sup>th</sup> 2009

Victorian Manuscripts from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of the New York Public Library  
[also known as Literary Manuscripts (Berg)]  
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**CONTENT** This is a unique collection of original (many holographic) Victorian manuscripts, rare printed materials (including early editions annotated by authors themselves), literary drafts, correspondence, unpublished poems, diaries, working notebooks, photographs, financial documents, personal items, and drawings from the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. The authors represented include Matthew Arnold, the Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Wilkie Collins, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson, and William Makepeace Thackeray. Author collections are included in their entirety, so researchers can browse and search manuscripts online just as they would in the Berg Reading Room.

The opening screen has a Basic Search box in the upper right corner, with a link to Advanced Search beneath it. Advanced Search lets you do keyword searching, use word stemming, limit by date, and search by author collection, document type, document subtype, item author, and recipient. Below the search box is a tool bar of buttons for Home, Introduction, Documents, Biographies, Chronology, and Help. Much of the screen is occupied by (unidentified, but appropriately aesthetic) photographs and illustrations.

**USABILITY** I explored this file much more systematically than usual, because I wasn't sure what to expect from it. So I worked my way through the tool bar's buttons, going into the Introduction, Documents (to enter the author collections individually), Biographies, Chronology, and Help.

Next, I dove into the Documents section; I wanted to see what kinds of things I'd find there. I clicked into the Thomas Hardy collection, where I found six different subsections: Manuscript, Related Manuscript, Correspondence, Financial Documents, Legal Documents, and Pictorial Work. Here's just a smattering of what I found within these subsections: a check for 12 pounds and 12 shillings made out to Thomas Hardy by Ford Madox Ford on April 14, 1909, for the single serial rights to a contribution Hardy made to No. 5 of that year's *English Review*; the signed holographic manuscript of "A committee-man of 'The Terror,'" first published in the *Illustrated London News*, Christmas number, 1896; a letter dated June 18, 1911, to Ford Madox Ford (in the hand of Florence Emily Dugdale Hardy) declining his "kind invitation to the Court Theater"; the baptism and birth certificate of Hardy's first wife (Emma Lavinia Gifford); and so much more.

It is remarkably intuitive (and easy!) to manipulate images of documents and other items in the online image viewer, just as it's remarkably easy to download documents and images as PDFs, and easy to convert images to PDFs for saving and printing. This is high tech at its most accessible and usable.

A closer examination of the Biographies section revealed that "names in bold within each biography denote people whose correspondence or manuscripts are contained within each author collection"—a nice enhancement and appropriate use of digital technology. The Chronology makes it possible to compare events common to several authors' lives—or all of the authors in the file at once. It's nicely detailed, giving good context but not overwhelming in data. Help actually does! And the FAQ usefully spells out the uses researchers can make of the materials in the collection for their own purposes.

Again, not quite knowing what to expect in this collection vis-à-vis searching, I started very broadly, with a search for "sister\*" (the asterisk being the multiple character wildcard symbol), and got results in nine author collections. I pulled up the Elizabeth Barrett Browning results to find pertinent hits within Manuscripts, Related Manuscripts, and Correspondence. At this point, the system displayed clear links for emailing results or for "exporting ticked items to RefWorks/EndNote." Very nice.

Next I tried an Advanced Search, looking for "moonstone" in the Wilkie Collins collection, and hit pay dirt: a holographic scenario and draft of Acts 2 and 3 of *The Moonstone* (with several pages mutilated

as described in the notes). A search for “james and yeats” located an August 25, 1915, letter from Henry James to William Butler Yeats, which sent a frisson of quivering excitement down my spine.

One note about the quality of images here, since that’s a key aspect to this file: for the most part they are very good, but in some cases the originals must have been faded without clear contrast, because it can be tough to read some letters or see some photographs clearly. The quality of the digitization is good, but no amount of digitization can bring back the vibrancy of original inks and images.

**PRICING** The list price for the Berg Literary Manuscripts Online is a one-time cost of \$25,500. There is no annual subscription and no maintenance fee or cost-per-user charge. Institution-specific discounts are available; discount levels are influenced by the Carnegie Classification of 2005 and JISC.

**BOTTOM LINE** For the excellent combination of content, displays, features, and usability, this file is a solid nine. Without doubt, it will be invaluable to those scholars of Victorian literature not based in close proximity to the print Berg collection. Recommended for libraries supporting serious researchers in Victorian literature.

[Click here to request a free, four week trial of Literary Manuscripts \(Berg\)](#)