

## Preface

We hope that readers of *Volupté* are keeping well in these challenging times. Most, if not all, of us have experienced some kind of confinement over the last three months due to COVID-19, and some of us, of course, will have been directly affected by the virus. Our thoughts are with you.

The shocking rampancy of fever and disease – both the physical and political varieties – has meant that scholarly activities like attending conferences and visiting libraries and archives are now out-of-bounds. The kinds of in-person socializing that we were able to enjoy a few months ago have been reduced to Talking-Heads communications via glitchy web platforms and social media. We Whereby and we Zoom, but it is not surprising perhaps that technology falls short of human need. We feel sensory-deprived; we pine for the rust smell of foxed endpapers, for the must of an ancient tome.

It is timely and poignant, therefore, that this issue of *Volupté* is devoted to archives, an aspect of decadence research that is temporarily impossible, and a theme inspired by a two-day international conference on ‘Aesthetic Time, Decadent Archives’ at Goldsmiths, University of London, in July 2019. Our Guest Editor and bibliophile, Kirsten MacLeod, has brought together a wonderful range of contributions from scholars and archivists for an issue that celebrates the ‘archival turn’ in decadence studies, including some treasures: a translated extract from a Rachilde novel, an alluring photographic archive at Villa La Pietra, in Florence, and a tantalizing glimpse of the Walter Edwin Ledger Collection of Wildeana at University College Oxford.

Before I hand over to Kirsten, and as compensation for not being able to spend long days with book snakes and archive boxes, here is a link (kindly provided by Karl Hatton) to ‘The Sound of the British Library’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eesz6C4dHlw&feature=youtu.be>, one-and-a-half evocative hours of rustling, coughing, and soft knocking sounds. The restorative intensity of library and archive spaces is often underrated, but as all decadents know, they are sensoria of escapist delight. Holbrook Jackson puts it well in *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*:

all manner of passionate readers are a species apart finding their sustenance in the printed word as plants imbibe air and fishes animalcula; they do not look upon life with their own eyes, but through the eyes of books as through an optical glass, magnifying, intensifying, distorting or glorifying, according as they fancy it; sometimes they eschew all common affairs and use books as kaleidoscopes to make for their own delight fantastic patterns which they use as substitutes for life.<sup>1</sup>

Best wishes from the *Volupté* editorial team in these Covidian days. Stay well.

Jane Desmarais  
Editor-in-Chief  
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<sup>1</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1950), p. 333.