

INTRODUCTION

By MARTHA VICINUS

THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS describe the major holdings in the Lilly Library concerning nineteenth-century London—specifically, its popular entertainments, and literature, and contemporary histories, surveys, and descriptions of the city. John A. Degen has written on the Lilly's holdings in nineteenth-century drama; Donald J. Gray has written about the general histories and guidebooks of the city, and about books describing or depicting its picturesque aspects; Martha Vicinus has written on material describing the “fast” pleasures, crime, poverty and other features of the life and appearance of dark London. We have not written bibliographical essays, but rather have tried to describe some of the principal kinds of material in the Lilly's collections of nineteenth-century British drama, books, and ephemera concerning London. The titles we cite are a representative selection of those available. We have not tried to be complete or objective, but have organized the essays and cited titles according to our own ideas about the possibilities for research in the history and culture of nineteenth-century London.

Four major collections are described; two in theatre and two in the London collection. The Keith L. Stock collection of nineteenth-century plays and the Carroll A. Wilson collection of Gilbert and Sullivan material form the basis of the Lilly's theatre holdings. The Wilson collection was purchased in 1961 and the Stock collection in 1965 and 1966; since that time materials related to Victorian theatre have been steadily added. In 1965 the first

purchase of the Stock collection included some 5,000 plays printed between 1800 and 1850, including numerous adaptations or early nineteenth-century stagings of earlier plays, translations of continental works, prompt books, playbills, etc. In 1966, 7,000 plays from 1850-1900 were added. Several smaller collections were also purchased, which included 1,200 theatre books, memoirs, biographies, and theatre histories, along with 800 late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century French plays (not described here) and 300 opera libretti, including a large collection of Gilbert and Sullivan. The Stock collection is also particularly rich in prompt books, which are useful guides to contemporary performances of plays. These collections form the core of the material described by John A. Degen.*

The basis of the material described by Donald J. Gray and Martha Vicinus is the Michael Sadleir collection of low-life material, purchased in 1971. Consisting of some 500 items collected over many years, this is an irreplaceable file of primary sources for the study of London life, popular culture and entertainment in nineteenth-century England. Although much smaller than the theatre collections, the Sadleir collection has very little duplicate material, and each item is of interest to the historian or literary critic. This collection has since been augmented by the Virginia Warren collection of street cries, presented to the Lilly Library by Miss Warren in 1974, and numerous smaller collections supplementing areas of London life not covered by the original low-life definition of Sadleir's collection. The Warren collection contains illustrated street cries, dating from Shakespeare's time, but primarily published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A very wide range of cries is available, from half-penny children's chap-

books to expensive hand-colored engravings. The material offers an excellent example of the permeation of popular culture through all levels of society. The Sadleir collection of scandal papers, swell's guides, street literature, and sensational fiction and journalism has been supplemented by the purchase of contemporary accounts of London, government reports of social conditions, maps (the Lilly now has maps for virtually every year of the nineteenth century), city plans, school district plans, plans for tram lines, tourist guide books, history books, and fiction. Approximately another 500 items have been added to the original core collection, largely in the area we have defined as "picturesque London."

We have not described here the government documents or the maps. Some of the more specialized history and guidebooks also have not been described, such as those dealing with specific parks or regions of greater London. To be useful in extensive research all of this more specialized material needs to be supplemented by historical and government documents available only in London libraries.

Obviously our interpretations of the scope and nature of this material is provisional, and necessarily subject to revision and refinement by scholars who investigate specific areas more intensively than we have done. We felt, however, that it was more useful to describe some of the materials and suggest their interest than it would have been simply to enumerate titles without explanation or analysis. We do not pretend to offer a guide to future research topics, but we hope we have provided an introduction to the Lilly Library's material which will help students and scholars to find their own topics of study. While we have each been responsible for our own section, we would like to emphasize the inter-connections;

just as the theatre is a rich source for the study of popular entertainment and culture in London, so too does the material found in “picturesque” and “dark” London offer a more complex and fuller view of the period’s drama. Other examples of these connections will strike the reader as he or she becomes familiar with the material. To draw a phrase from one of the works we describe, much of nineteenth-century London remains unknown and unexplored. We offer our essays not so much as a guide, but as an invitation to the exploration of these valuable collections.

*The thoroughness of the Stock collections’ scope has been effectively suggested in a brief descriptive article by Walter Ray Stump, “Indiana University Acquires New Collection of Nineteen-Century Plays,” *Theatre Notebook*, 22 (1968), 120-121. However, Stump wrote before the second half of the collection became generally available, so he is misleading in implying that the collection primarily covers the first half of the century. In fact, it is as fully representative of the second half, and is particularly strong for the years 1850-70.