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THE PIPER

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‘Nobody can rule Guiltlessly’

Antoine de St Just, the epigram at the beginning of *Darkness at Noon*

I first came across Koestler at Cambridge where I read *Darkness at Noon* his allegory of the Soviet Union published in 1940 about an old Bolshevik who is tried and imprisoned for treason by the Government he created. It blew me away and as I was then involved in left-wing politics it seemed very relevant.

When he wrote it Koestler had just been realeased from a Concentration Camp in the Pyrenees and was living in poverty in London, terrified that Franco's agents would discover him and snatch the text away. However he finished it and it was published that year, 1940. He then went off to join the Foreign Legion.

Always a conflicted, controversial figure he later became involved in parapsychology and established a Chair at The University of Edinburgh leaving his considerable and valuable Archive to Edinburgh University Library.

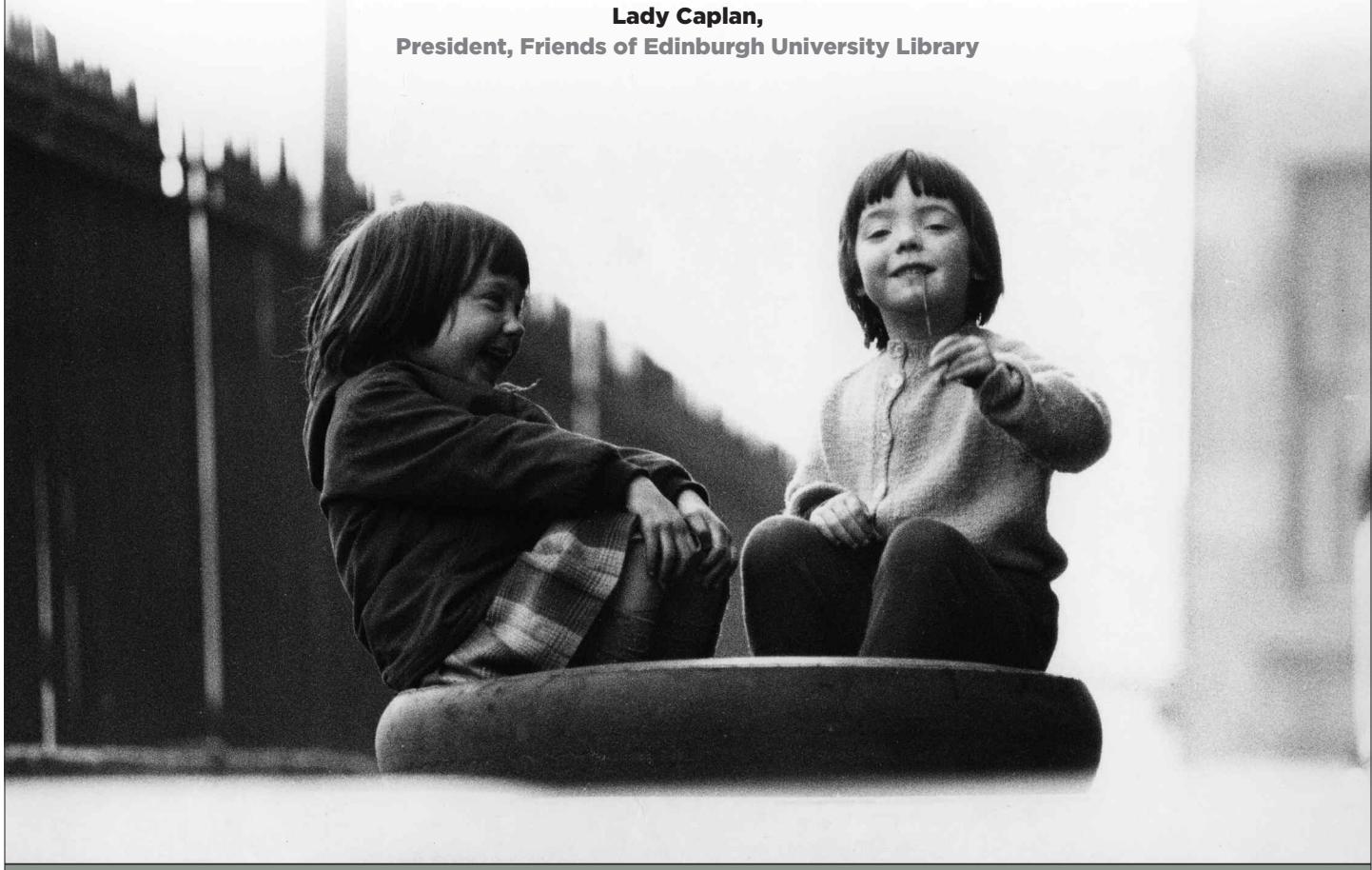
He was fascinated by the irrational and what he would write now about our current situation is speculative, but I am sure it would have been challenging and pertinent as a new translation of *Darkness at Noon* by Michael Scammell (published in 2019.) suggests.

We live in turbulent times and are returning to a new 'normal' that others will write about. Meanwhile we have events to share. A marvellous Exhibition in the Library of photographs by Robert Bloomfield: Student of Light containing images of his time at the University in 1950's and his many later perambulations around Edinburgh. A recent most welcome Bequest of the Archive from his family.

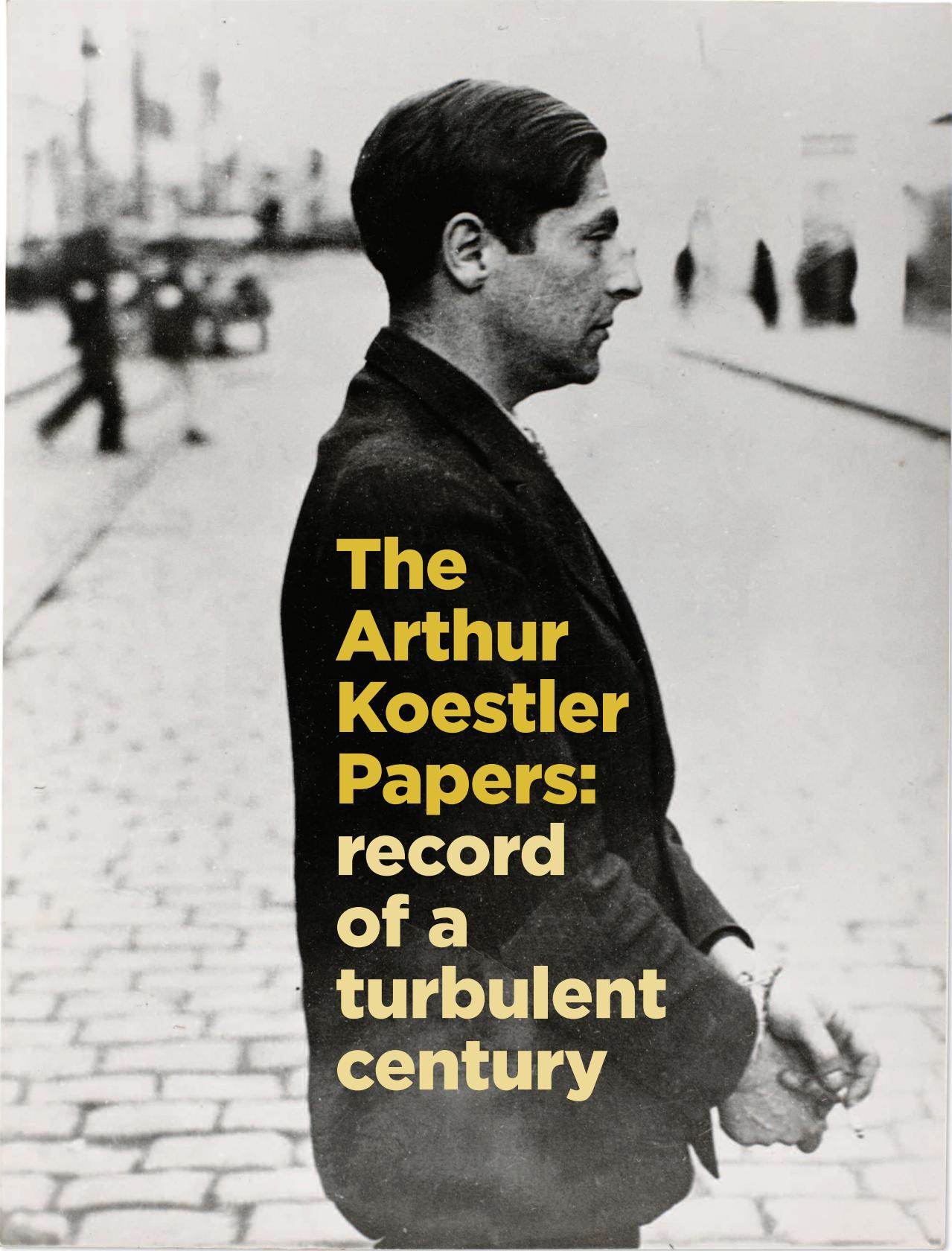
The Library has fully reopened and is full of the energy and enthusiasm of staff and students once again.

Come and join us !

Lady Caplan,
President, Friends of Edinburgh University Library



Two girls sit on a tyre in an Edinburgh street. Photograph © Estate of Robert Blomfield



The Arthur Koestler Papers: record of a turbulent century

The surprising story of how Edinburgh University Library came to acquire the Arthur Koestler papers is fitting for a man who entertained such varied – and at times contradictory – interests and beliefs.

One of the most astute and influential political commentators of twentieth-century Europe, Arthur

Koestler (1905–1983) was born in Budapest, Hungary, to a Jewish family. On becoming a correspondent in Weimar Berlin, he joined the Communist party of Germany, toured the Soviet Union, and reported on the Spanish Civil War, where he narrowly survived his time on death row after being arrested as a spy. In 1938, Stalin's

Opposite. Koestler under arrest in Spain (1937). Arthur Koestler Papers, Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh

Below. Koestler at work in the *Graf Zeppelin* on its flight to the North Pole – a world-first in 1931. Arthur Koestler Papers

brutal show trials of former Soviet leaders led Koestler to leave the Communist party, and set him on the path to becoming the strident anti-Communist propagandist for which he is best remembered today.

Not one to swim with the prevailing current, Koestler turned his energies from the mid-1950s away from politics to science and fringe psychology; most notably, he was curious about paranormal approaches to the mind's mysteries, and the possible existence of telepathy and extrasensory perception. It is thanks to his later, controversial researches that Edinburgh now holds Koestler's archive.

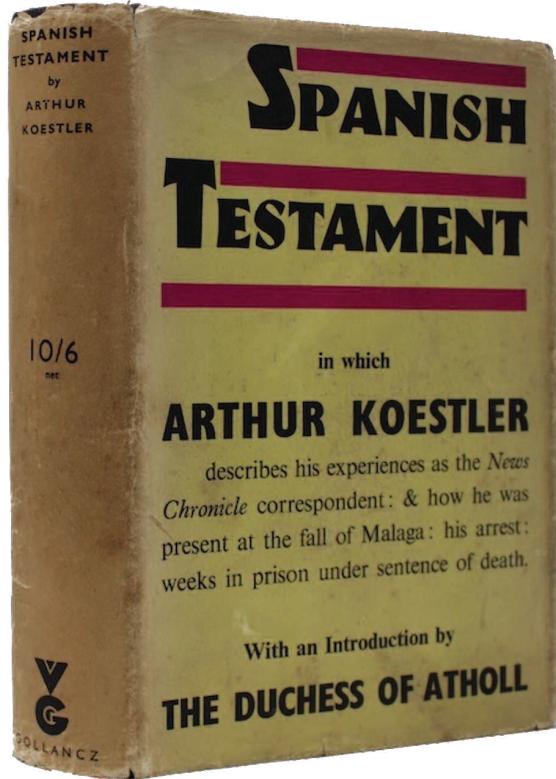
When he died in 1983, Koestler bequeathed most of his considerable estate to establish a university chair in parapsychology. This was a characteristically troublesome decision, since parapsychology is considered a pseudoscience by mainstream scientists, and had not thus far received funding in a university setting. Fortunately for EUL, Edinburgh's John Beloff –

professor of psychology and a parapsychologist – had known Koestler, and oversaw the establishment of Edinburgh's Koestler Parapsychology Unit in 1985. With this came Koestler's papers and his library, now housed at the Centre for Research Collections.

Record of a turbulent century

The 172 boxes of Koestler's archive present a record not only of an active and controversial life, but also of key events in the political and intellectual history of a turbulent century. The remarkable range in Koestler's interests and commitments is reflected in the variety of the archive's holdings. His early journalism is represented in material that includes his thrilling reports sent from onboard the airship, the *Graf Zeppelin*, on its flight to the North Pole – a world-first in 1931. Among Koestler's diaries is a series of fragile volumes





Left. Front cover of the first edition of *Spanish Testament* (1937). Arthur Koestler Papers, SC4775

Right. Koestler in uniform in the Aliens Pioneer Corps (1941). Arthur Koestler Papers, MS2455.2.93

Below. Letter from George Orwell to Arthur Koestler, regarding the draft of their manifesto for a new League for the Rights of Man. Arthur Koestler Papers, MS2345.2.17



recording the fateful years of 1939 to 1941, which span his internment in France as an 'enemy alien' on Germany's invasion of Poland, his flight across France from fascism, and his escape to Britain and subsequent imprisonment in Pentonville prison.

Koestler's propagandist writing is well-represented

too: there are drafts of the anti-Nazi plays he wrote for the British Ministry of Information, and the later anti-Communist speeches he produced for the founding conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950. Several boxes of papers relate to the causes he championed, including the National Campaign for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, and the Fund for Intellectual Freedom, which he set up to support refugee writers who had escaped totalitarian regimes.

The great value of the Koestler papers for researchers into the political and scientific thought of twentieth-century Europe can be illustrated with reference to just a few of his correspondents. A compelling series of letters between George Orwell, Bertrand Russell and Koestler in 1946 outlines their (unrealised) plans to found a new League for the Rights of Man, and is accompanied by their draft manifesto warning against the growing dangers of totalitarianism for western Europe. There are letters, also, from André Malraux, France's Minister for Information, and later cultural affairs minister; and from Jean-Paul Sartre – Koestler's sometime friend, with whom he dramatically fell out over post-war politics. Koestler also drew censure from scientific communities, over his later writings on speculative science and philosophy, such as *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967). Nonetheless, his scientific correspondents are as striking as the political thinkers in his archive; there are letters from Werner Heisenberg, the German physicist and pioneer in quantum mechanics, and from Timothy Leary, the American psychologist known for advocating psychedelic drugs to 'expand consciousness'.

27b, CANONBURY SQUARE,
ISLINGTON,
LONDON, N.1.

11th February 1946

Dear Arthur,

I sent a copy of the draft, which is herewith, to Michael Foot, who suggests only two alterations. One: at the bottom of page one, he thinks that the use of the words "the Masses" suggests that the signatories have nothing to do with these people, and that it would be better to say "great numbers of people" or words to that effect. Secondly, on page two, he thinks (I had made this suggestion to him myself) that it would be better to delete the suggestion about becoming victims of aggression. I am seeing Russell to-morrow, and will let you know what he says.

Yours,

George

Arthur Koestler Esq.,
Bwlch-Ocyn,
Blaenau-festiniog,
North Wales.



Reading invisible ink

Surveyed as a whole, the Koestler papers evoke a striking impression of a person who consistently put his thoughts and convictions into action. At times this meant physical action, as when Koestler lived briefly in a Jewish pioneer settlement in 1920s Palestine, or when he joined the British army's 'Aliens' Pioneer Corps in 1941. Most typically though, as a talented propagandist, this meant writing.

One of the great pleasures in using the archive is in seeing the hand behind the propagandist, watching the mechanisms at work. The act of digging into the material stuff of Koestler's processes – turning over the diaries, letters, manifestoes and discarded drafts, much of which he drew on to dramatize the effects of totalitarian mind control – is a valuable reminder of the processes by which curation produces knowledge.

Koestler was, after all, particularly concerned to show his readers the workings of propaganda and censorship in the Soviet Union, after his defection from the Communist party. Like his friend Orwell, Koestler was hyper-sensitive to the ways in which totalitarian regimes craft their own narratives to better control their subjects. Particularly troubling for him was how the Stalinist impulse to curate the documentary evidence of history led to attempts to curate people's very minds – to sort through and expurgate what didn't fit with the party line, and to leave only what promotes it. In our current moment, when the murderous

invasion of a sovereign state has been labelled a 'special military operation', and numerous alleged war crimes are dismissed by the aggressor, Koestler's insights into the insidious workings of propaganda are as important today as ever.

Koestler's shrewd analysis of irrationalism in the political field can seem odd when considered alongside his more outlandish attraction to anti-rational theories of the mind. He once wrote in his diary that he believed in 'something beyond the human brain, beyond the range of frequencies visible to the ear; a message written in invisible ink, of which fragments become visible when [one is] listening to music, standing on a mountain, praying, reading poetry, being in love, contemplating a beautiful math solution.' This might feel rather far from archival work, which means being steeped in the material, but research can also mean looking out for invisible ink. This could entail becoming aware of conspicuous gaps in the record, or making a serendipitous discovery. The exceptional importance of the Koestler Papers is borne out by the enduring relevance of their warnings about psychological warfare, and their promotion of intellectual and political freedom.

Annabel Williams

Teaching Fellow in English, Durham University
Library Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Edinburgh (2020–21)

New artist's books acquired for the University

The Centre for Research Collections has become the first institution in Britain to collect the work of the unique French book artist Diane de Bournazel.

Diane creates what she describes as 'Poetry without word' – intricate book forms filled with densely-packed images, meditating on the universals of the cosmos, the natural world, of childhood and human relationships. Each one is unique, creating a dream-like world which draws in the eye and mind. She uses drawing, painting, paper cutting and collage, in different types of paper, to make volumes in organic shapes, and tunnel books. Her imagery is her own, but carries echoes of many artistic and book-illustration traditions, from medieval manuscripts, traditional engraved and etched illustration and folk art, to the twentieth-century modernists.

For the Centre for Research Collections Diane's

work represents the very best of modern artistic book making, which will be used for teaching, research, and exhibition, finding a very natural place beside collections items from other periods of history and in other formats. These books also add a new facet to the growing collection of artists' books at the Edinburgh College of Art library and the CRC, and will be on display to classes this semester.

'de Bournazel's work is equally timeless and contemporary,' says Daryl Green, Head of Special Collections and Deputy Head of the Centre for Research Collections, 'these books are in direct communication with medieval manuscripts and the Arts and Crafts books found throughout Edinburgh's collections. But their execution, their themes and their meditations reflect a modern sensibility and melancholy which makes them electrifying.'





The Centre for Research Collections has purchased five of Diane's books, and plans to continue the relationship into the future. They came through the book dealer Justin Croft, who says:

Diane de Bournazel's books are admired wherever I show them and I'm so pleased that the University of Edinburgh has chosen to acquire such a significant group of her recent works. Judging by the conversations they have started, these are books which provoke a remarkable response among book lovers of all types. In my experience they appeal as much to sophisticated bibliophiles and collectors as they do to book lovers entirely new to the concept of 'rare' and

collectible books. They make us think again about the book as an artefact and an idea, and they expand the capabilities of the codex in an incredibly sophisticated way (never losing sight of what makes a book a book). While they are almost entirely without words they present complex and inspiring narratives, inspiring multiple interpretations. Their appeal is instant, but they reward repeated 'readings' as their graphic secrets reveal themselves in changing relationships to each other as the pages are turned: forwards, backwards and when viewed from different angles and in changing light.

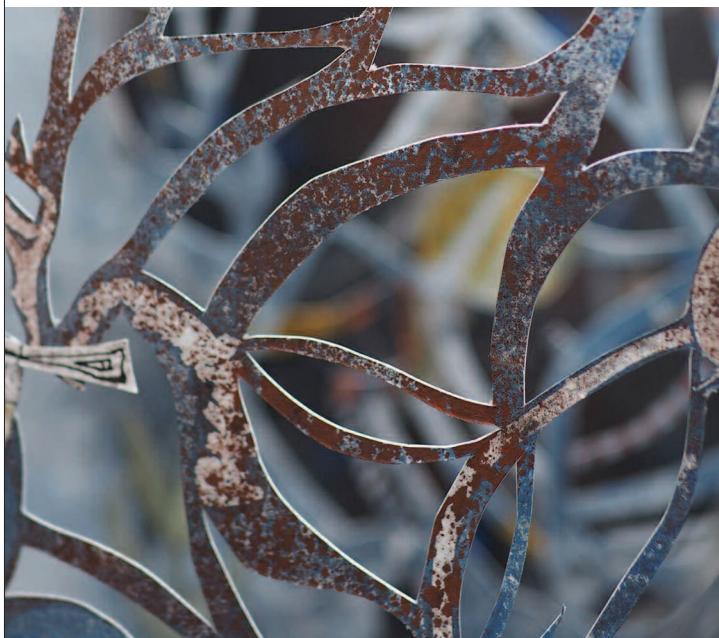
Diane de Bournazel herself comments:

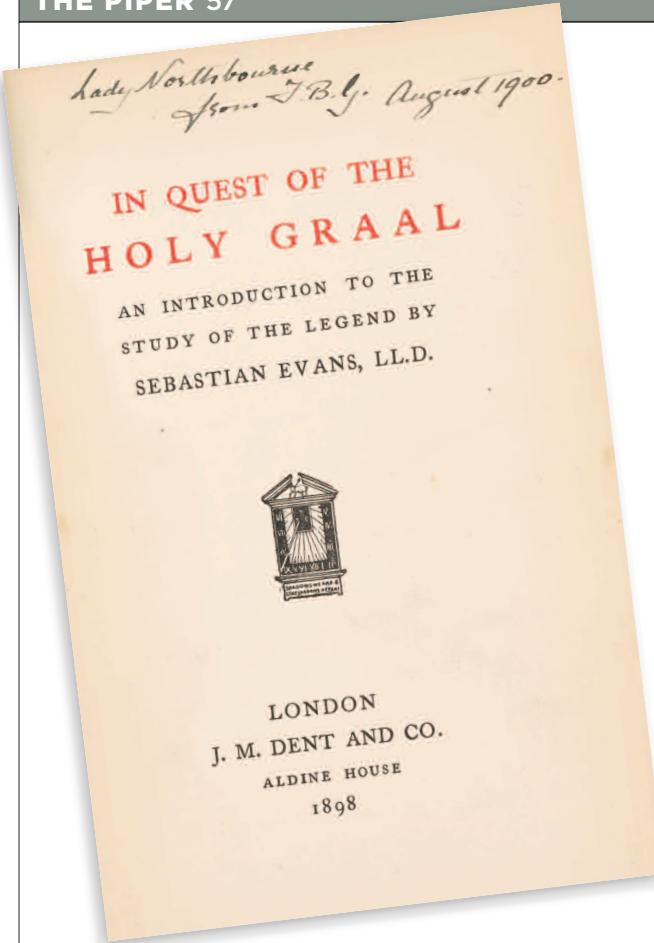
*Je fais des livres d'images
De la joie à l'effroi
La vie silencieuse*

*(I make books of pictures,
from joy to dread,
the silent life)*

The Centre for Research Collections houses the University of Edinburgh's Heritage Collections, located within Edinburgh University Library in George Square. The collections, including Diane de Bournazel's artist's books, may be consulted there by members of the public, with an appointment. For more information see: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/cultural-heritage-collections/crc>

Diane de Bournazel's webpage:
<https://www.dianedebournazel.org/>





The David Laing Book Collecting Prize

The David Laing Book Collecting Prize is for the most enthusiastic student collector. Students are invited to submit an essay about their collection. There is a prize of £500 offered in honour of David Laing (1793–1878), the distinguished antiquarian, collector and librarian who bequeathed his collection of manuscripts and other materials to the University in 1878. An allowance of £250 is also offered to choose a book for the Special Collections which is selected with Special Collections staff.

The Friends have now become involved in the award of the David Laing Prize and have purchased the 2021 winner: *Sebastian Evans: In quest of the Holy Graal, an introduction to the study of legend* (London: J.M. Dent, 1898)

Events 2022

Tuesday 1 September

George Mackay Brown and his papers' Dr Linden Bicket, Lecturer in Literature and Religion, School of Divinity, in conversation with Joyce, Lady Caplan, President of the Friends of EUL. Details to be announced.

Back issues of *The Piper*

For anyone interested, back issues of *The Piper* from 2008 may be found at:
<https://friendsofeul.wordpress.com/the-piper>



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