The ABC of the KPA for the NSM LL(ex-TA) team…

For the past fifteen years, the Kolb-Proust Archive for Research has offered a unique collection composed of the books, periodicals, facsimiles and detailed research notes gathered by Philip Kolb during his lifelong scholarly work on the correspondence, life and works of Marcel Proust (1871-1922). This research collection is inseparable from the Proust holdings of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which are known in their own right as one of the finest institutional Proust collections outside of France.

Much work has been accomplished since the inception of the Kolb-Proust Archive. By committing to retain Kolb’s « Proustian laboratory » as a distinct physical collection after his death, while embracing new technologies as a mean to turn the scholar’s wealth of personal data and knowledge into a publicly accessible, living scholarly collection, the Library was able to build on Philip Kolb’s almost legendary reputation in the world of Proustian and turn-of-the-century French studies. The Kolb-Proust Archive has secured its own name recognition in the broad Proustian community, where it is treated as an equal partner by such entities as the Institut des Textes et Mansucrets Modernes (ITEM), a branch of the CNRS, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF). This recognition is evidenced by numerous citations in prominent scholarly works such as the Index to the published correspondence, a revised anthology of Proust letters which establishes the guiding principles for a new, digital edition of the correspondence, major biographies by French and American authors, exhibition catalogs, the new edition of the complete manuscript notebooks of the BNF by the ITEM-led team, as well as countless other works which draw on the resources of the Kolb-Proust Archive and the RBM Library. Our Library was also a major lender for the BNF’s landmark 1999-2000 exhibition on Marcel Proust and the Arts. The Proust colloquium scheduled for April 2010 comes ten years after the Proust 2000 Symposium which drew to our campus some of the leading Proust scholars from around the world. Upcoming 100th anniversaries are likely to generate additional interest in Proustian studies, if that is even possible.

The Kolb-Proust Archive was established as a part of the Modern Languages and Linguistics Library for historical reasons. It was Philip Kolb’s “home library”, and Tom Kilton, one of its founding members (with Doug Kibbee and Emile Talbot, among others), was Head of that unit at the time. The diversity and rarity of the materials in the Kolb-Proust Archive for Research, however, make it a Special Collection, with needs that differ from those of the “regular” collections found in the English and the MLL Library. It requires mediated access only by a

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1 Food for the number-crunchers: about 2,000 volumes, most of which have Special Collection status (15 bookcases), 40 Parisian newspapers on microfilm (5 microfilm cabinets), 40,000 index cards and 500 folders containing Kolb’s lifelong research record.

knowledgeable librarian (me). As such, it requires a closed room, separate from the general collections.

A case can be made for the Kolb-Proust Archive (and its Kolb-Proust Librarian) to become part of the Special Collections Division, as a hybrid special collection situated between the University Archives and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Until such an administrative and physical transfer can be made, the Kolb-Proust Archive for Research should stay in its current location, two floors above room 225, within reasonable proximity of the proposed home of the future Languages and Literature Library, so that the Kolb-Proust Librarian and French Subject Specialist can divide her time and presence between the two locations.

Caroline Szylowicz