On Campus

Glasses Menagerie

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Tennessee Williams said that he wrote because he found life “unsatisfactory” — a persistent malaise that had its productive side. After the success of his 1944 play *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams spent the next thirty-eight years trying to escape his demons with dramas, drink, and drugs. He wrote almost every day, and when Columbia’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library purchased the contents of the late playwright’s Key West home in 1994, the bounty was rich indeed: boxes and boxes of his correspondence, memoirs, and manuscripts.

Under curator Jennifer Lee ’76LS, the library acquired additional materials in 2013. These included a draft of Williams’s memoir, a stash of typescripts, and letters from, among others, Paul Bowles, Lillian Gish, and Laurence Olivier. Scholars who wish to view the collection usually request documents related to Williams’s oeuvre, but

should they ask to see the contents of box 76 they would find a tooth, a button declaring “The Mariachis Are Here,” a bead key chain, and — no minor accessory — a pair of the playwright’s reading glasses.

Guide to school abbreviations

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