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# Professor Gray and the Secret Life of Books

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# Professor Gray and the Secret Life of Books

WELCOME

GRAY'S VOYAGE

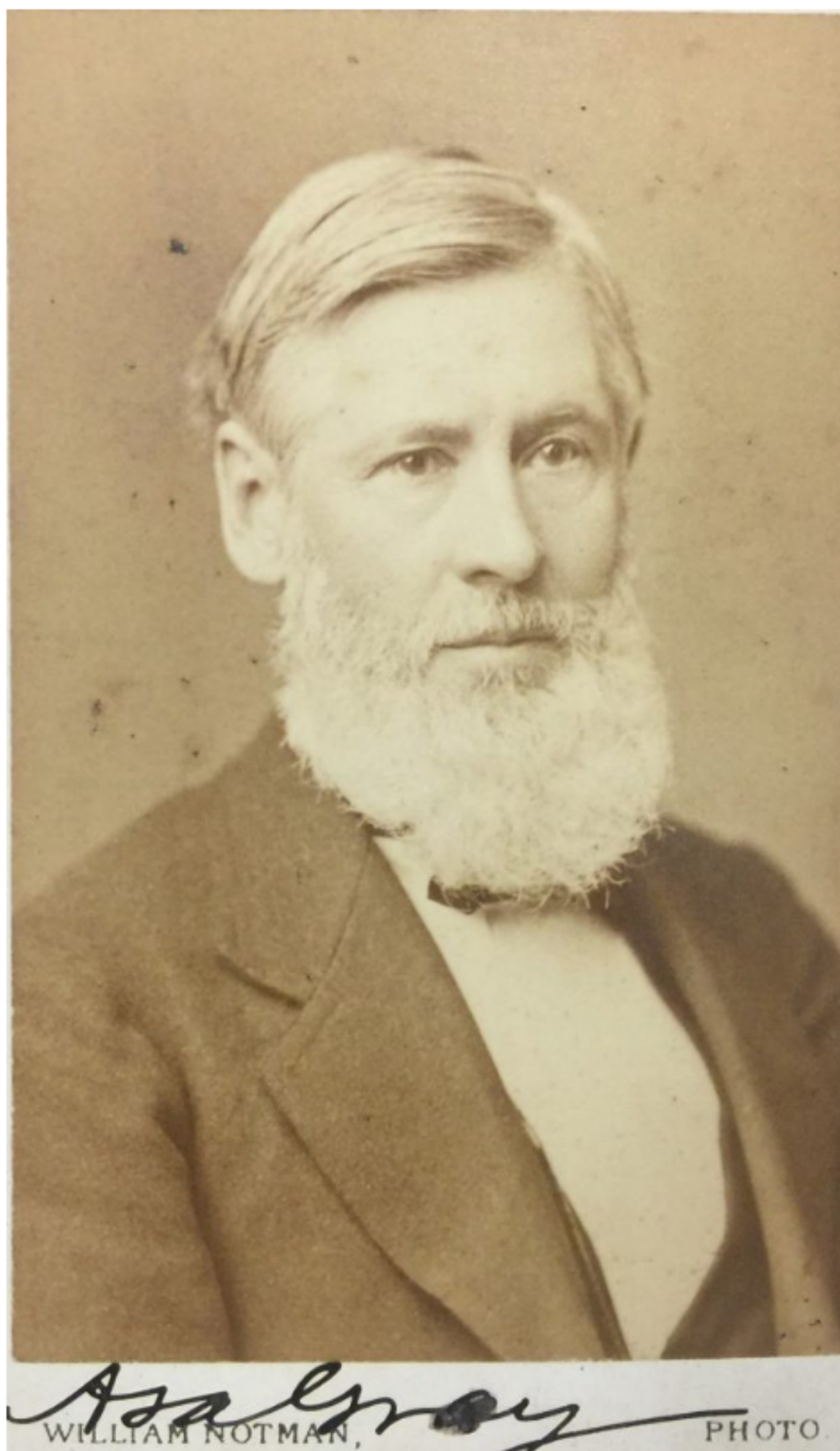
BOOKS' JOURNEY

LITERARY CABINET

ABOUT

WORKS CITED

## Welcome



Asa Gray collection, 1871-1885; 1844-1886, [U-M Special Collections](#).

This project showcases the European travels of [Asa Gray](#)—the first professor at the University of Michigan and the founder of the school’s library collection. Interactive maps and narrative text will transport readers to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the United States was still in its infancy and newly established states—such as Michigan—wished to found institutions of higher education. In addition to Gray’s journey, this website also highlights the books he and his literary agent purchased in Europe. The Board of Regents appropriated 5,000 dollars for Gray to spend on books while in Europe. Moreover, the selections of Gray and Putnam number approximately 3,400 volumes [1]. Readers can trace the lifecycle of these volumes, beginning in cities like Cambridge, London, Paris and Geneva and ending in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A virtual bookshelf further enables viewers to see a sample of works available in U-M’s Special Collections Library.

As Asa Gray’s biographer, A. Hunter Dupree, writes,

“Gray’s educational philosophy was fundamentally a simple desire for more and better science at all levels of schooling” and that Gray had made clear these convictions in his meetings with the U-M Regents [2]. Thus, the Board of Regent’s choice to hire Professor Gray underscores the attitudes of the University’s founders; to create a “modern” institution, the University of Michigan would have to do away with tradition in lieu of innovation.

To begin following in Gray’s footsteps, please click on [“Gray’s Voyage.”](#)

[1] Russell E. Bidlack, “The University of Michigan General Library, a History of its Beginnings, 1837-1852.” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1954), 120, 135.

[2] A. Hunter Dupree, *Asa Gray, 1810-1888*. (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 78.

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# Professor Gray and the Secret Life of Books

WELCOME GRAY'S VOYAGE BOOKS' JOURNEY LITERARY CABINET ABOUT WORKS CITED

## Asa Gray's European Voyage

**Asa Gray's European Voyage**

In 1838, Asa Gray was appointed the first professor of the University of Michigan. At this time, the University was transitioning from a secondary school in Detroit to an institution of higher education in the growing village of Ann Arbor. For this reason, the Board of Regents tasked Gray with collecting a foundational library while abroad in Europe. Gray, who wished to spend a year abroad for his own botanical research, willingly accepted this task [1].

In addition to his task of book acquisition, Gray was to visit the learning institutions of Europe and to generate a "report" about these findings [2]. Thus, university visits play a significant part of his

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In the winter of 1838, Professor Asa Gray left for his year abroad in Europe. While in Europe, he visited prestigious universities and introduced himself to the European scientific community. He also bought books per his arrangement with the University of Michigan: a year-long sabbatical in exchange for a collegiate library [1]. Moreover, this interactive feature puts Gray's thoughts and observations into a spatial context, enabling viewers to imagine themselves as European tourists in 1838-1839.

Clicking the image above launches a "Story Map" tracing Gray's movement throughout Europe.

[1] Russell E. Bidlack, "The University of Michigan General Library, a History of its Beginnings, 1837-1852." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1954), 119.

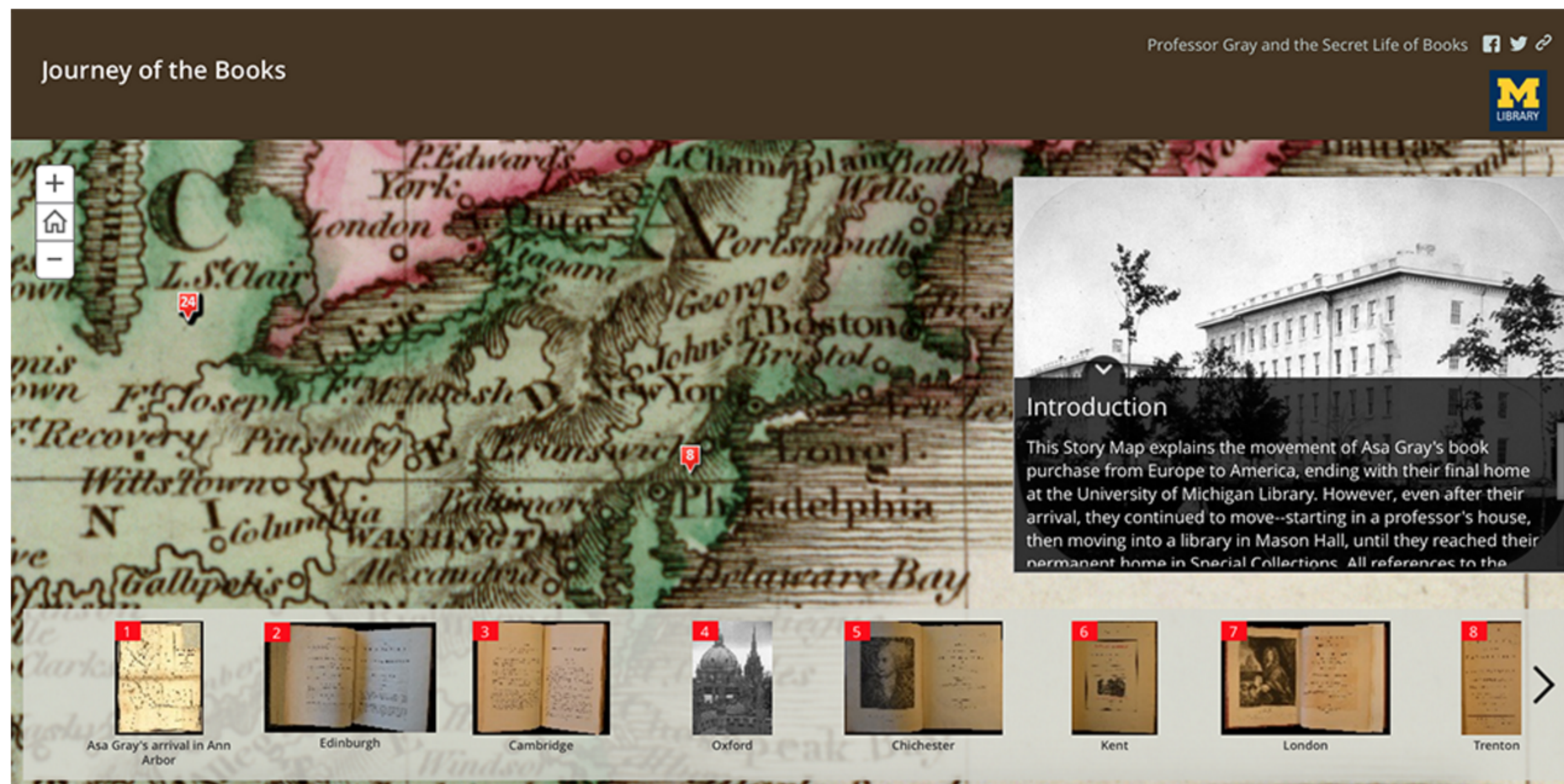
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# Professor Gray and the Secret Life of Books

## Journey of the Books



Like Professor Gray, his and George Palmer Putnam's book purchases also moved throughout Europe. While many—if not most—of these books were printed, published and sold in London, others came from locales such as Oxford and Paris. A few titles were even originally published in the United States. The image above links to a "Story Map" that traces the movement of books in the Gray Collection. However, this is only a sample of books that moved around the University of Michigan's campus after arriving in Ann Arbor. This map is especially useful in gauging how the University of Michigan's Library System has changed; whereas small departmental libraries once served the University, students now rely on a large, centralized library to find and use materials.

Click the image above to learn more about the "journey" of the U-M Library.

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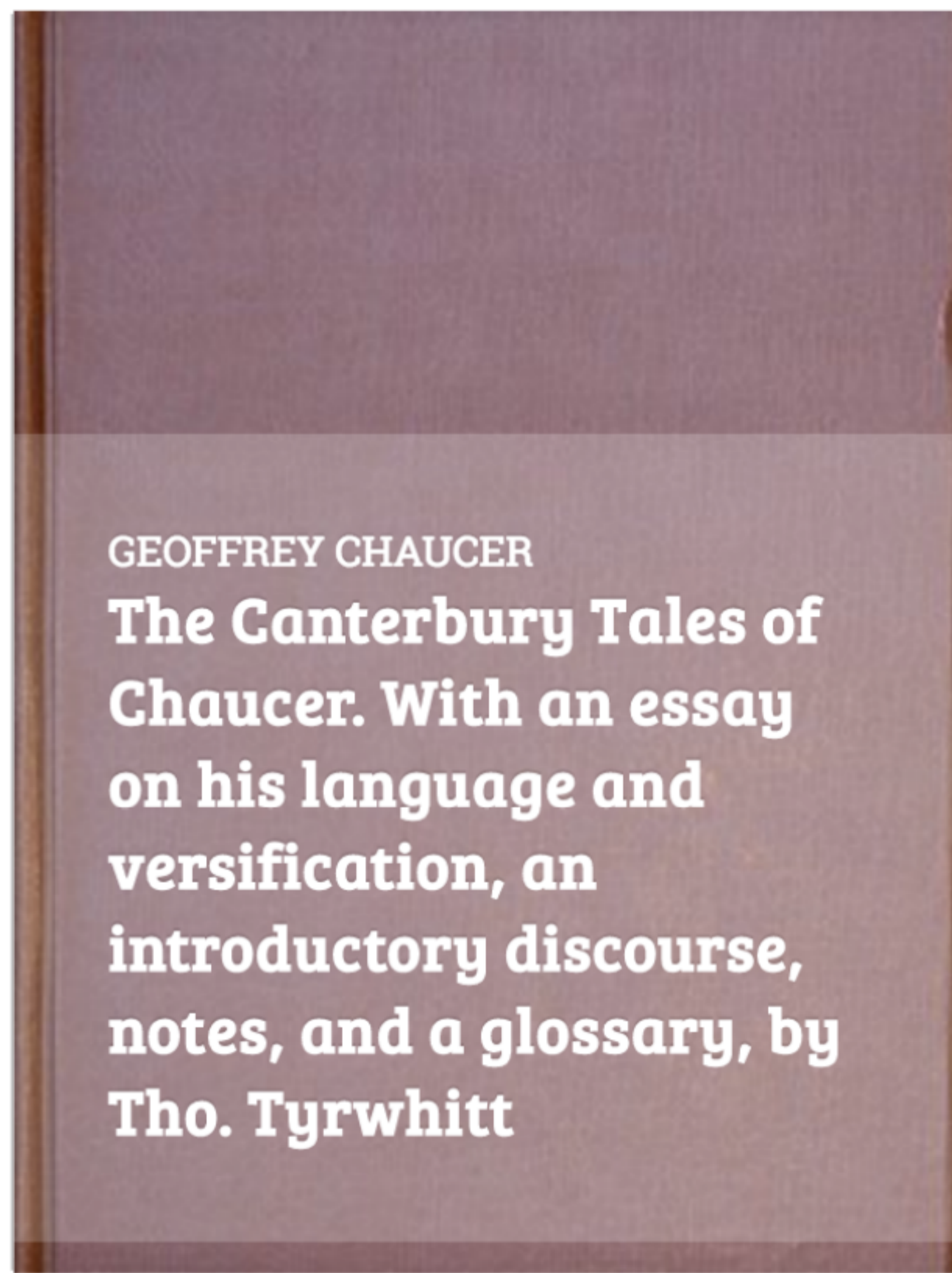


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## Asa Gray's Literary Cabinet

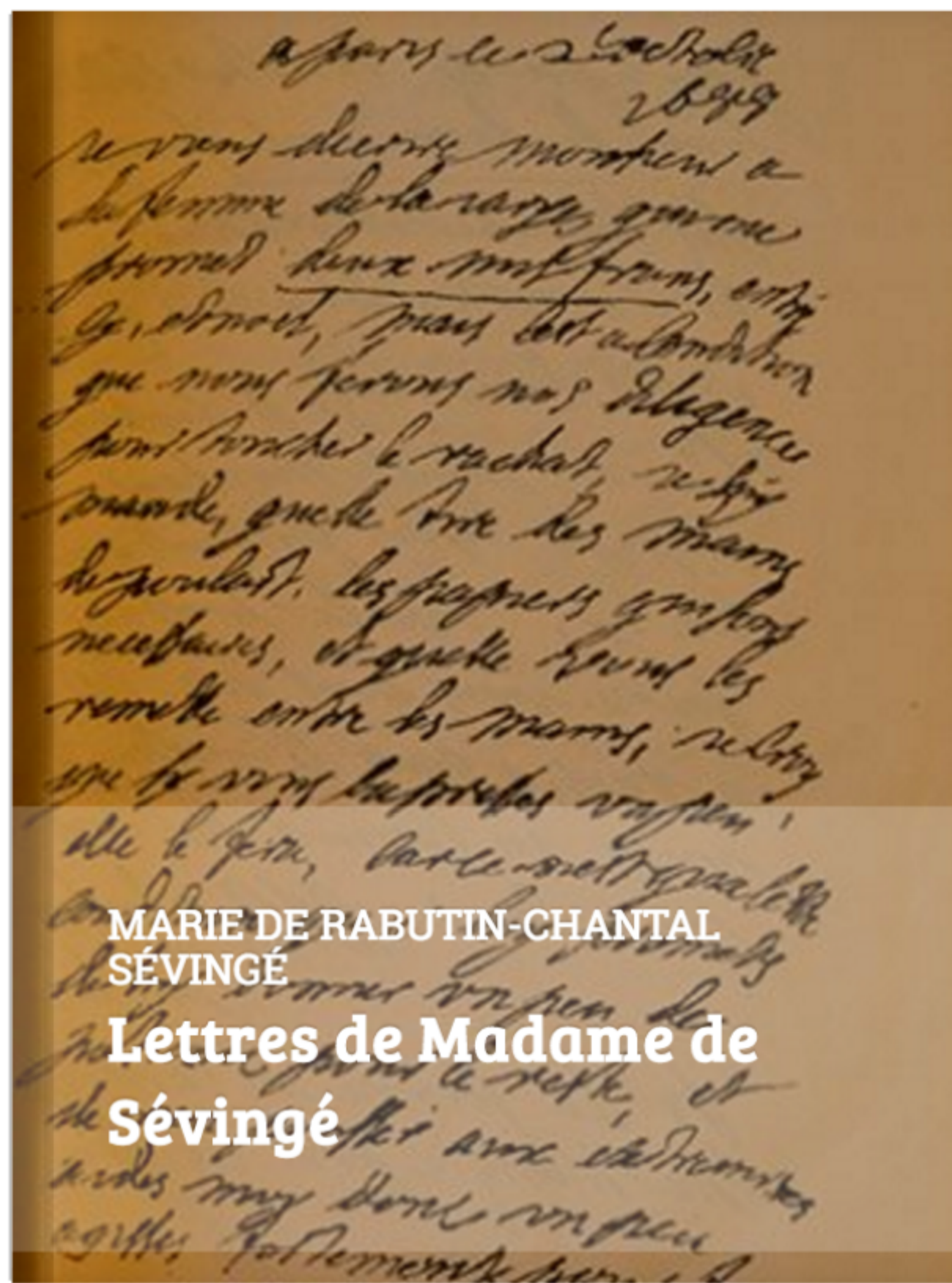
While abroad in Europe, Gray purchased approximately 125 titles (or 279 volumes) [1]. Below is a sample of this small collection, with each title representing a larger genre. Press "FLIP" to see an alternative image of the volume. Press "READ" to open the book and link to the University of Michigan Library Online Catalogue. From this catalogue record, you can access a digital form of the text or request to view the physical item in the Special Collections Library.

You may also access a complete, text-only list of Asa's Gray's purchase.



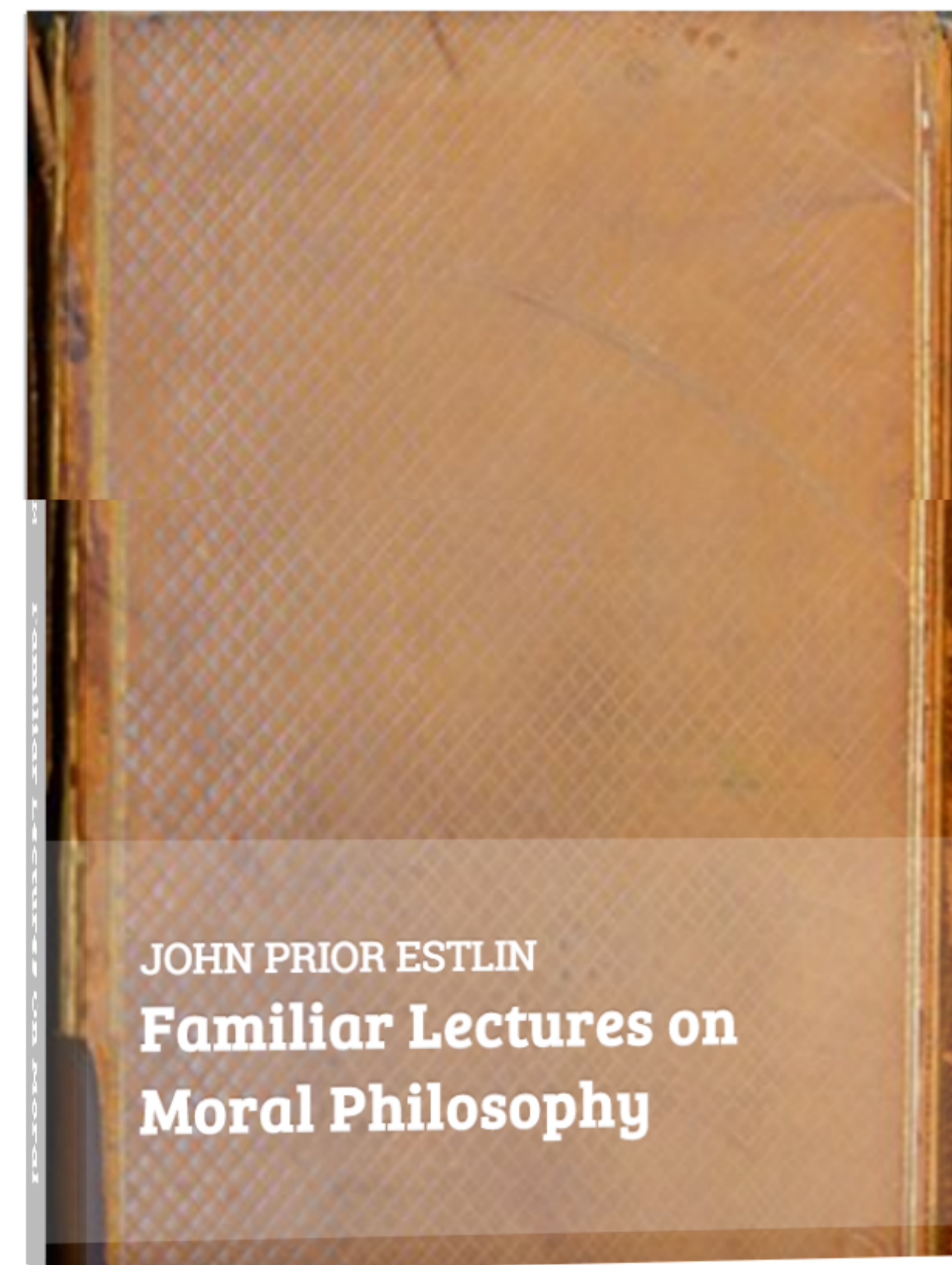
↻ FLIP

📖 READ



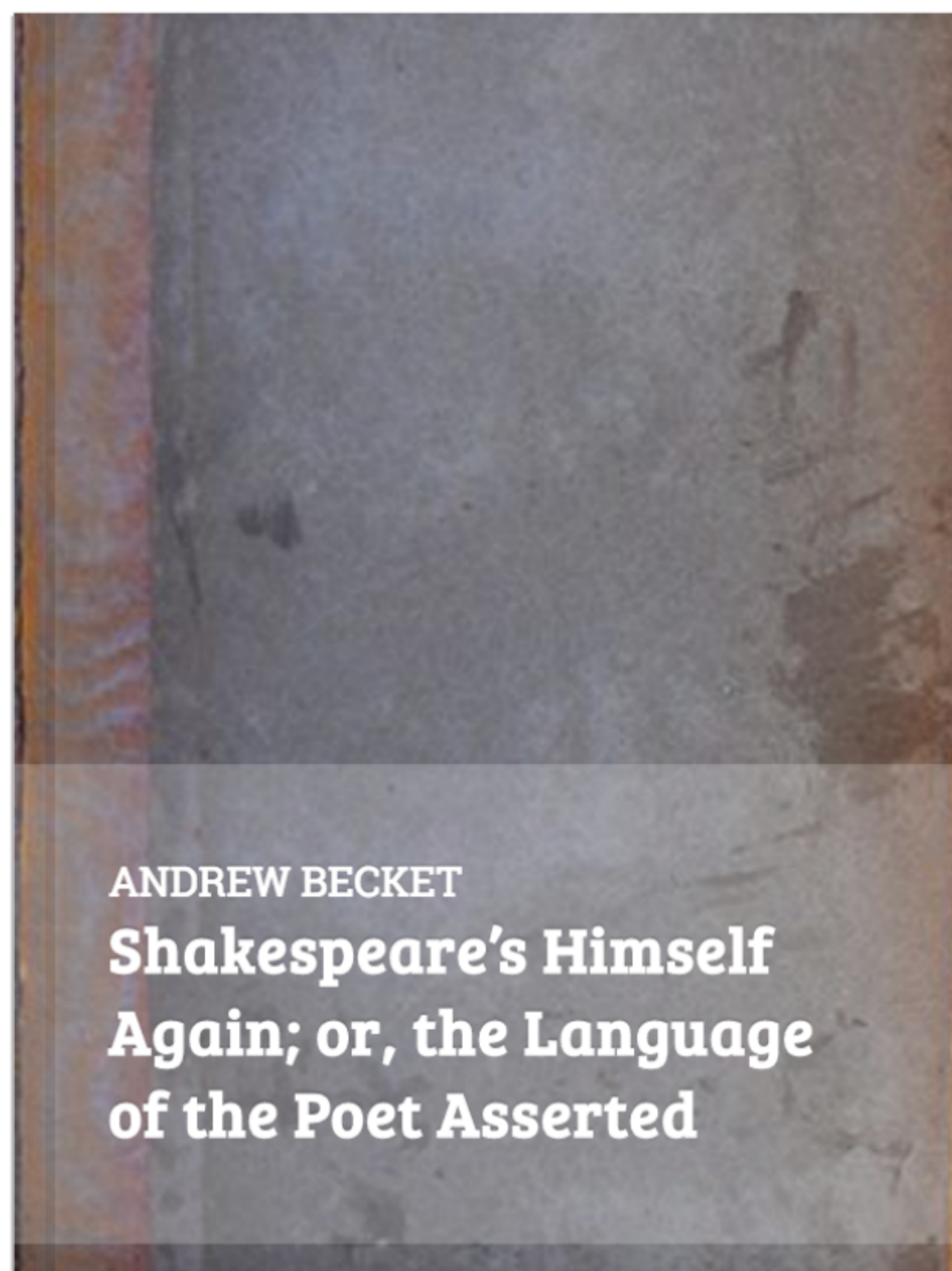
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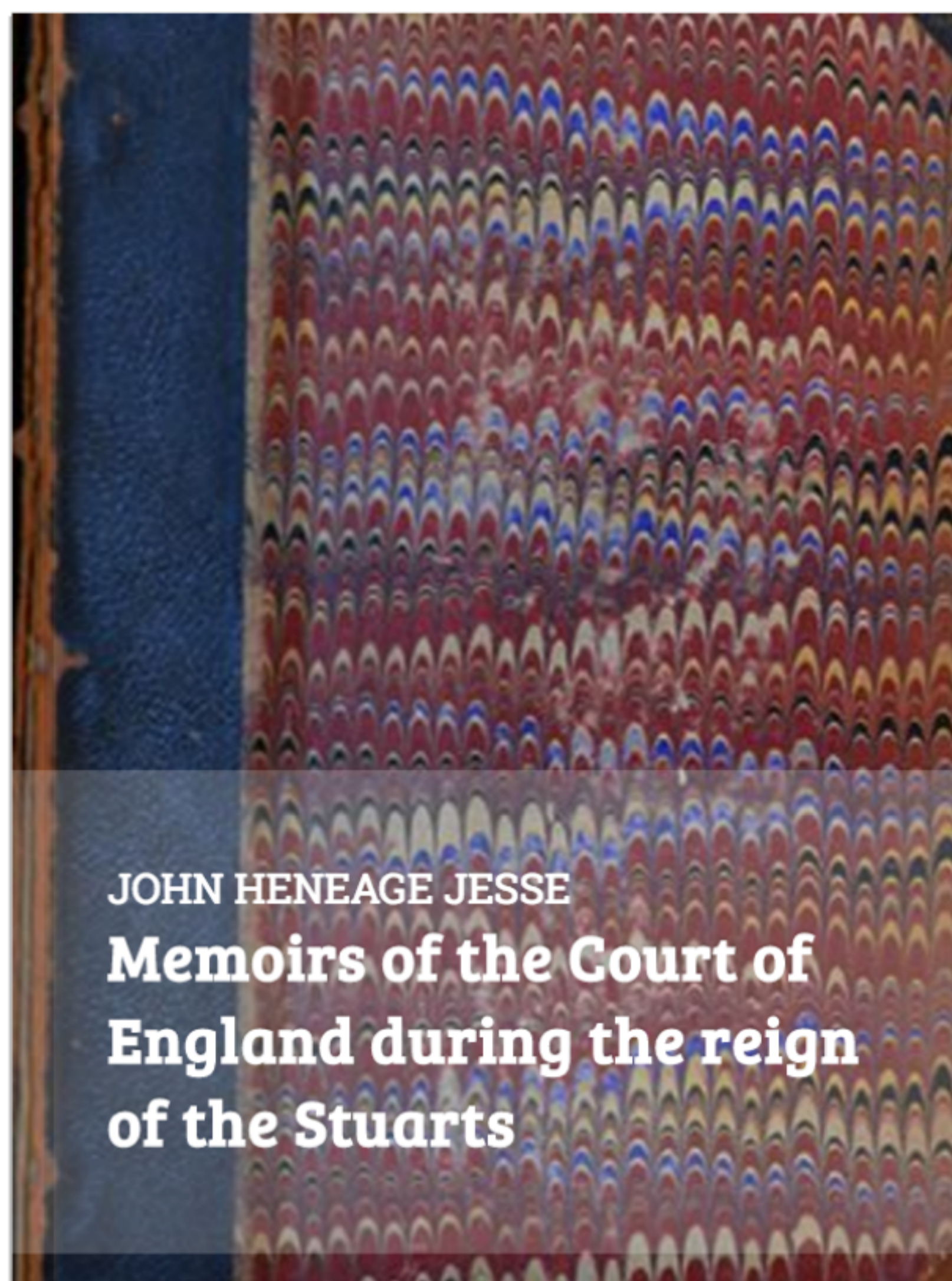
↻ FLIP

📖 READ



↻ FLIP

📖 READ



↻ FLIP

📖 READ



↻ FLIP

📖 READ

1 2 3 Next »

[1] Russell E. Bidlack, "The University of Michigan General Library, a History of its Beginnings, 1837-1852." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1954), 135, 321-599.

# Professor Gray and the Secret Life of Books

## About

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<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mls-asa-gray>.

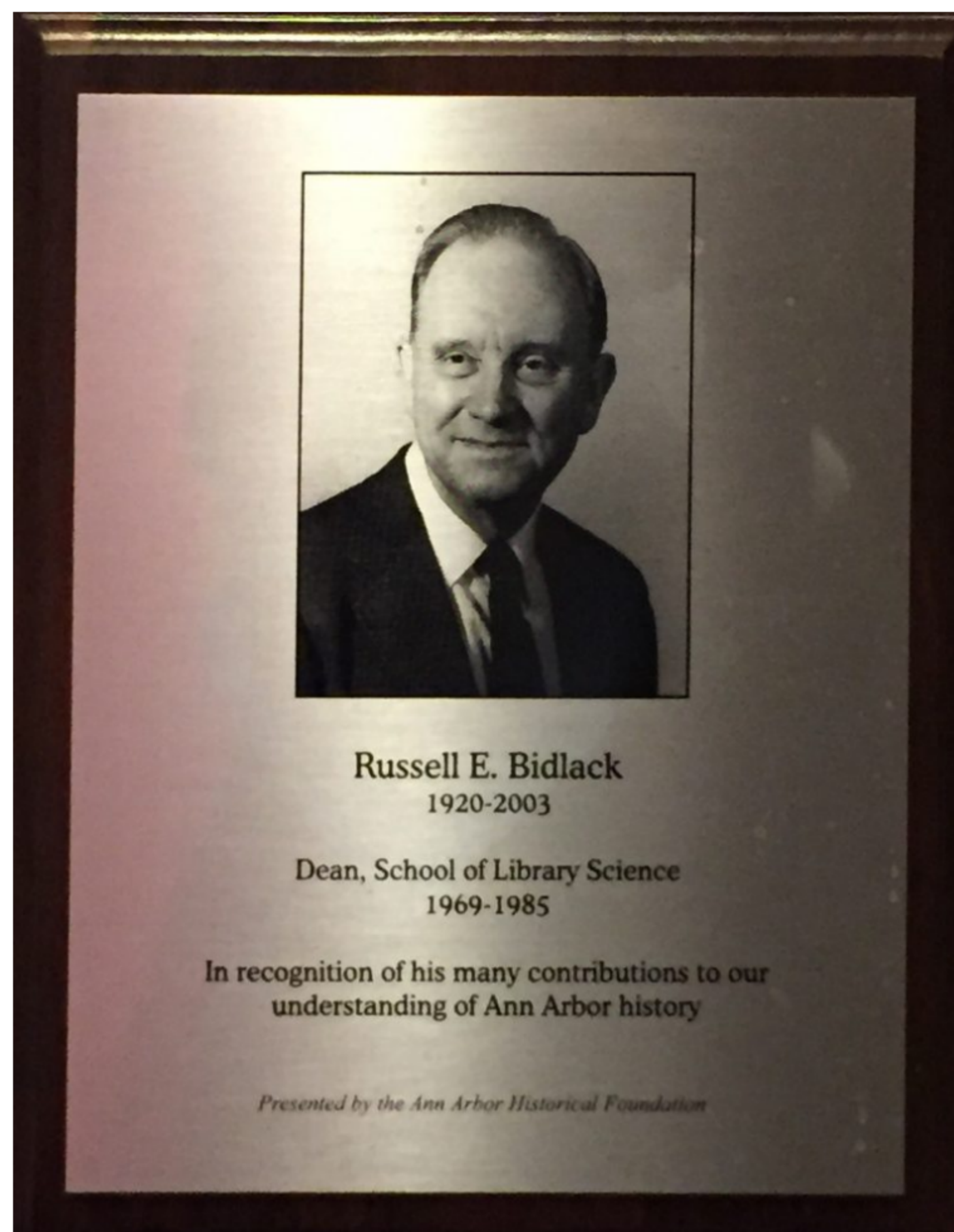
This research project was authored by Eric Morgel as part of the [Michigan Library Scholars](#) summer internship at the University of Michigan Library.

This project was made using a WordPress Template hosted by U-M College of Literature, Science and the Arts and features bookshelf and timeline plugins. The interactive maps were made using [Story Maps](#) by ArcGIS.

Evyn Kropf and Kate Hutchens of the [U-M Special Collections Library](#) provided assistance and mentorship throughout the completion of the project.

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The author wishes to dedicate this project to Russell E. Bidlack, without whose scholarship this project would not have been possible.



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Website background image: Gray, Asa. Letter from Asa Gray to Doctor Torrey, Lyons, Wednesday Evening, April 7, 1839 (edited photostat copy). Russell E. Bidlack Papers circa 1940s-2003. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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