

# Digitizing the Archives of Anthony Hecht:

## Enhancing Accessibility and Interactivity with One of America's "Middle Generation" Poets

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8/30/2024

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### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Anthony Hecht (1923–2004) was a distinguished American poet known for his formal lyricism and exploration of often dark, tragic themes. Born in New York City to an upper middle-class secular Jewish family, Hecht began his study of poetry at Bard College in the late-1930s with high hopes for a long career in academia.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, these aspirations were quickly interrupted by World War II and his conscription into the U.S. infantry. Despite enduring moments of boredom and depression during his first two years of stateside service, Hecht was eventually sent to the European Front where he faced intense fighting in France, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. While this combat lasted only four months, the violence he witnessed – particularly in relation to the Holocaust – came to have a profound impact on him and his understanding of human suffering.<sup>3</sup> Following the war, these traumatic encounters would deeply influence his career as a poet, leading to the creation of works like "More Light! More Light!" and "The Book of Yolek," two historical poems that grapple with real war atrocities.

Alongside Hecht's engagement with historical trauma and suffering, his poetry emerged within a specific literary tradition defined by America's "Middle Generation," a group of predominantly male poets who wrote in university settings during the post-World War II era. In addition to a preoccupation with war themes, these poets were largely

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: The topic for this paper was largely inspired by my thesis for the Master's of Western Literature at KU Leuven (see Moose, "Towards a Re-Reading"). While references to that project appear throughout the essay, all external sources and academic contributions are fully and appropriately cited.

<sup>2</sup> Hoy, *Anthony Hecht in Conversation with Philip Hoy*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Most critics are aware of Hecht's participation in the liberation of Flossenbürg concentration camp, one of the few wartime experiences Hecht actively discussed. According to Hecht, the horror he witnessed at this camp was "the greatest trauma of the war" for him and something that would leave him "shrieking" in the night for years. See Moose, "Towards A Re-Reading" (pages 1-2), for more information on Hecht's wartime experiences.

identified and grouped together based upon the unique space they occupied between “the daunting high modernists and the more vocal Beat, Black Mountain, and New York School poets.”<sup>4</sup> Like other poets of his generation – such as Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, and Howard Nemerov – this “in-between” position allowed Hecht to carve out a distinct place for himself in the American literary scene and blend formal precision with confessional themes. This synthesis is perhaps most evident in his Pulitzer Prize winning publication *The Hard Hours* (1967), a volume of poetry that solidified Hecht's reputation as a significant voice in the mid-20th-century. Following the publication of *The Hard Hours*, Hecht continued to write award winning poetry, teach at a variety of prestigious schools including The University of Rochester and Georgetown University, and even serve as the United States Poet Laureate from 1982 to 1984. His contributions have left a lasting mark on American poetry, and much is still to be learned from his work.

In recent years, Hecht's career has received new attention from academics such as Jonathan Post and David Yezzi. In search of deeper insights from the poet's life, these scholars have republished selections of his correspondence, engaged with unpublished drafts of his poetry, and searched for previously unanalyzed events surrounding his biography.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, much of this scholarship has only been possible because of the Anthony Hecht Papers Collection at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. According to the archive's website – which is located in the university's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library – the collection provides access to a variety of crucial documents from Hecht's life including:

- correspondence (1895-2005)
- drafts of poetry and prose writings (1951-2004)
- personal files (1894-2005)
- academic files (1945-2000)
- printed material (1941-2005)
- subject files (1951-2005)
- small group of audio-visual materials (1964-2004)
- photographs (circa 1880s-2002)
- scrapbooks (1951-1998)
- artwork (1960-1996)<sup>6</sup>

Post and Yezzi's close examination of these materials has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of Hecht's career to emerge and has even revealed hidden subtleties often overlooked in traditional criticism. This includes critical engagement with Hecht's physical letters themselves (Figure 1), which are particularly rich in detail. Nevertheless, while these scholars have shed valuable light on Hecht's life, they have

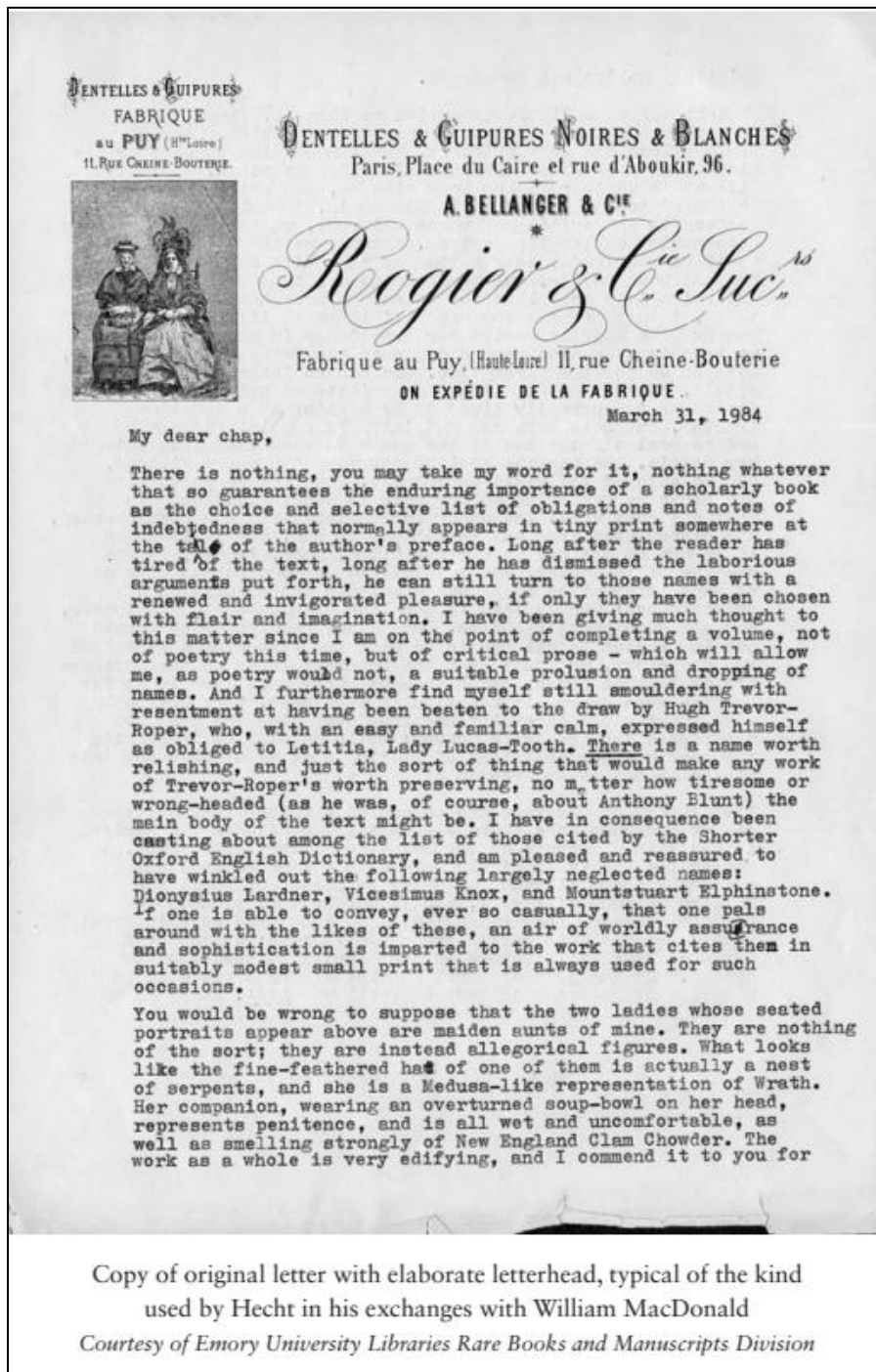
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<sup>4</sup> Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> See Yezzi (*Late Romance*) and Post (*A Thickness of Particulars*) for two in-depth studies on Hecht's life and career.

<sup>6</sup> “Anthony Hecht Papers.”

Figure One<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Image taken from *The Selected Letters of Anthony Hecht*, edited by Jonathan Post (245). Hecht, along with other Middle Generation writers, was among some of the last American academic poets to actively engage in a culture of physical letter-writing. The image above showcases the playful exchanges he had with another Middle Generation poet, William MacDonald. As the image demonstrates, these poets would send each other messages on rare letterheads for fun, trying to outdo the other in terms of rareness. This dimension of Hecht studies (with the exception of this example) is accessible only to those with physical access to the poet's archives, highlighting one way digitization can broaden understanding of the poet's career and relationships with other writers.

tended to paint a very specific image of him as a war poet – a characterization that, while accurate, only captures one dimension of a complex writer. As a result, very specific letters, photos, and personal files have been highlighted at the exclusion of others. Considering Hecht's archived materials are currently unavailable for digital analysis, it is challenging for other critics to offer alternative perspectives on his work without physically traveling to Emory University.

In recognizing the potential benefits of digital access to the Anthony Hecht Papers Collection, this essay outlines a strategy for the digitization of Hecht's archived materials, especially as it relates to his personal correspondence and poetry. Given that Emory University has already advanced a Digital Library Program set on organizing the university's digital collections, attention will be given to some of the existing practices already in place. This includes a closer look at the policies, workflows, standards, and frameworks put in place by the university and how they can be potentially applied to Hecht-related materials. At the same time, considering the Digital Library Program primarily outlines steps for materials that have already undergone some level of digitization, this section will also highlight concrete steps that can be taken in digitizing the documents *themselves* (i.e., their initial transformation from material to digital objects via scanning, photography, and more).

Following the proposal of a digitization plan for Hecht's archived materials, this essay further examines how digitizing Hecht's work can enrich the study of Middle Generation writers more generally. By utilizing the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), this section demonstrates how Hecht's (hypothetical) digital archive could be linked with the works of his contemporaries whose archives are also being digitized at this time. This will include a close look at specific considerations that must be taken into account when utilizing IIIF, as well as possible outcomes or insights that can be derived from such an approach.

The inspiration for this essay comes from my own interest in reading Hecht outside of the war-oriented frameworks defined by Post and Yezzi, a subject I explored extensively in my MA thesis last year. The availability of Hecht's unpublished poetry, collected letters, drafts, and photographs would have significantly enriched my research. At the same time, this essay also acknowledges that external factors beyond Emory's control, such as copyright restrictions (as the poet only died in 2004) and private, legal conditions imposed by the Hecht estate may pose challenges to the digitization of Hecht's archives. Despite these obstacles, the essay assumes that developing a theoretical framework for digitization can still lay the groundwork for future efforts, potentially leading to a more open and interactive archive. By addressing these challenges proactively, we can pave the way for greater scholarly access and preservation of Hecht's literary legacy.

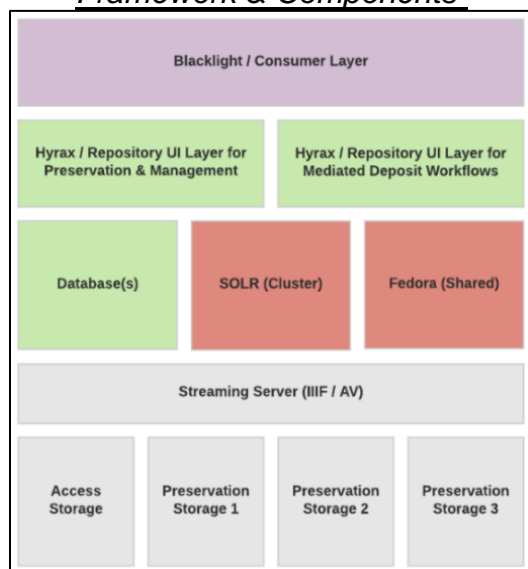
# Digitizing the Archives of Anthony Hecht

## Overview: Digitization Efforts at Emory University

The initiative to create an organized digital archive for literary and historical artifacts at Emory University began in 2014 under the leadership of Yolanda Cooper, the university's head librarian. As Hankinson et al. observe, prior to this effort, Emory had "built a number of homegrown repositories, each of which filled the very specific and unique needs of the content and departments stewarded by the libraries."<sup>8</sup> This made it particularly difficult for university scholars and administrators to link digital material across the various collections associated with the university. After securing necessary funding and sponsorships, Cooper and her team launched a two-year "Discovery Phase" aimed at creating a strong foundation for a more coordinated digital library. This period involved setting key objectives, defining a specific mission statement, identifying diverse user and shareholder profiles, and establishing rigorous standards for digital preservation. The progress and outcomes surrounding these efforts were then carefully documented on a university wiki page to serve both as a tool for user engagement and as a historical record.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Discovery Phase, the team entered a "Technical Design Phase" focused on the actual organization and migration of digitized materials. Key decisions in this phase primarily revolved around the adoption of Samvera (formerly Hydra), a highly

*Figure Two: Planned Samvera Framework & Components<sup>8</sup>*



adaptable framework used for building digital repositories. As an open-source solution, Samvera can importantly work with a variety of community-driven components, including Hyrax for content management, Fedora for digital object storage, SOLR for searching and indexing, and Blacklight for the user interface (Figure 2). These components are a few of many different options available within the Samvera community but ones specifically implemented by Emory's digitization team based upon insights gleaned during the Discovery Phase. By systematically integrating Emory's sporadic, pre-existing repositories within this technical framework, the team has increased coherence and clear communication across its diverse range of digital collections.

<sup>8</sup> "The Oxford Common File Layout," 5.

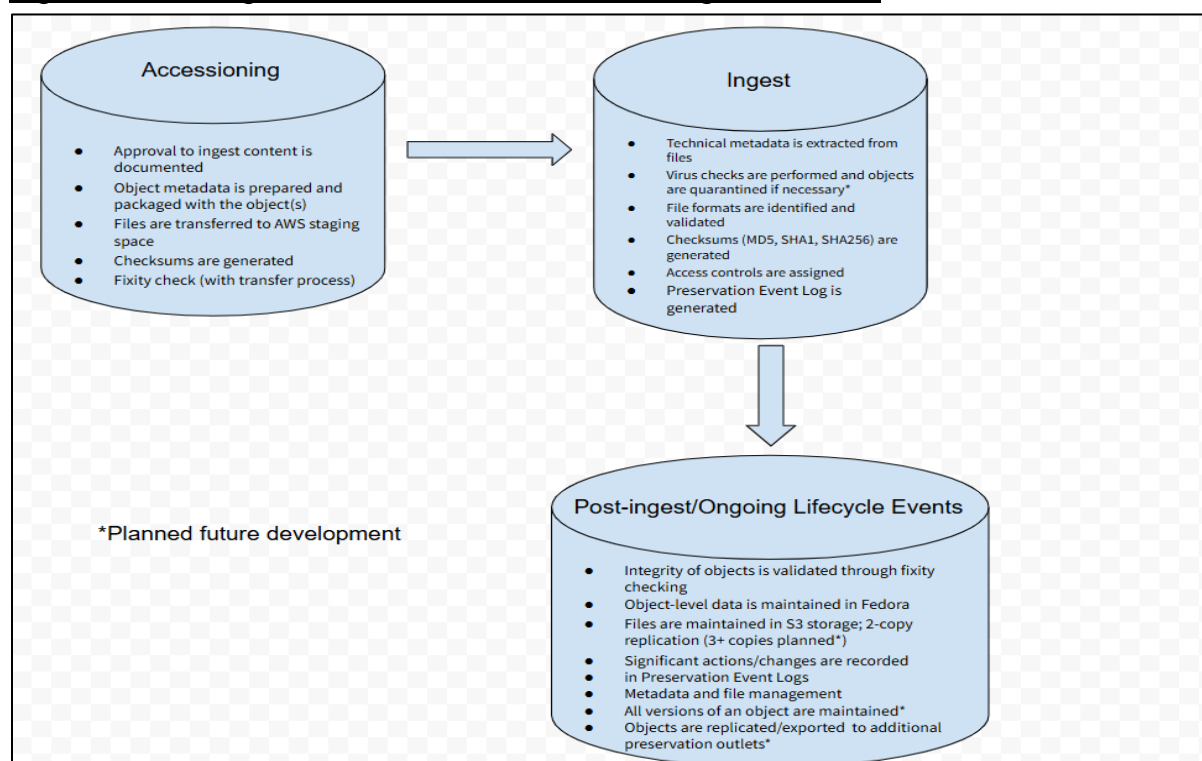
<sup>9</sup> See Emory University Libraries, "Digital Library Program & Policy Documentation."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Taken from section titled *Technical Design Phase (2018)*. The colors represent three different layers: 1.) User layer for discovery and delivery of repository assets (Purple), 2.) Internal Layer for support and data organization (Green and Red), and 3.) Preservation Layer for storage (Grey).

While Samvera has played a crucial role in the success of Emory’s digital archive, it is just one part of an advanced digitization program that also includes well-defined workflows for digital preservation and processing. Figure 3, for instance, illustrates key tasks that university archivists must undertake when integrating digital material into their Samvera repository, including rigorous quality assurance checks during Accessioning and Ingest and the implementation of clear safety protocols to ensure files are securely backed by the Post-Ingest phase. In alignment with these efforts, Emory has also developed its own descriptive metadata standards known as Emory Core.<sup>11</sup> Closely related to the widely-used Dublin Core Metadata Standards (DCMS), Emory Core has specifically adapted metadata standards to meet the unique requirements for the university's digital and administrative needs. Alongside these standards, Emory has policies for a variety of other metadata categories including:

- Technical Metadata
- Administrative Metadata for repository-specific workflows
- Structural Metadata for repository object structures
- (Copy)Rights Metadata for digital objects stored in the repository<sup>12</sup>

*Figure Three: Digital Preservation and Processing Workflow<sup>13</sup>*



<sup>11</sup> “Core Metadata.”

<sup>12</sup> Bullet points directly taken from Emory University Libraries, "Digital Library Program & Policy Documentation." See section titled "Metadata" for more specifics.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Engagement with Emory Core and the other standards used for each of these metadata categories is essential for the organization of Emory's digital library and should therefore be considered in the digitization of Hecht's archive.

## **Digitizing Hecht's Archive: Key Considerations**

### *Resources*

Emory's adherence to the digital workflows, frameworks, and technical standards developed through its Digital Library Program has played a key role in creating a unified and sustainable digital archive. Nevertheless, while it is essential that the digitization of Hecht's archives aligns with the established policies and structures surrounding digital maintenance, the archive must first undergo digitization efforts *itself*.<sup>14</sup> Although the university does not provide a detailed program outlining the specific methods and tools used – such as specific camera brands, scanners, or photography practices – its Digitization and Digital Curation team offers advanced resources for support throughout the digitization process. These resources encompass a wide range of media, including texts, manuscripts, photographs, art, three-dimensional objects, and audiovisual material, making them well-suited for the diverse nature of Hecht-related materials.<sup>15</sup> Utilizing the specialized tools and expertise offered by this team would ensure that the digitization of Hecht's archive is executed with high quality results, preserving both the integrity and accessibility of each item.

### *Prioritizing Specific Material*

In terms of its size, the Anthony Hecht Papers Collection is relatively large with 107.97 linear feet of various materials.<sup>16</sup> Depending on Emory's budget and capacity to digitize the entire collection, prioritization of certain documents may be necessary. Given the recent focus by Yezzi and Post on selected letters and poems from this archive, these items should perhaps be considered first for digitization. Doing so would not only enable readers to verify the scholars' insights but also to form their own interpretations, particularly regarding key letters and poems that have been previously overlooked in critical analysis. Moreover, prioritizing these text-based materials might streamline the digitization process and reduce the need for frequent shifts in methodology. This, however, still remains a considerable task, as 80 of the 198 boxes contain Hecht's correspondence, while 35 boxes contain Hecht's personal writings.

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<sup>14</sup> By "digitization itself," I refer to the initial transformation of material objects into digital ones. This isn't to undermine the role the Digital Library Program plays in the digitization process, just that this program is generally designed for archived materials that already have digital counterparts (though to varying degrees). After Hecht's materials have been digitized, they can be integrated into the university's Samvera repository and follow the steps outlined in the Digital Library Program.

<sup>15</sup> "Access and Resource Services."

<sup>16</sup> "Anthony Hecht Papers." The 107.97 linear feet of material is stored in "198 boxes; 3 oversized papers folders (OP); 1 extra oversized papers folder (XOP); and 2 AV Masters."

### *Assessment*

After establishing a clear timeline for the digitization of Hecht's literary artefacts – including internal transportation from the university's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library to the Digitization and Digital Curation team – the first step in the digitization process would be to assess the physical condition of Hecht's correspondence and poetry. For fragile or deteriorating pieces of paper, photography might be the preferred method for digitization as it minimizes the archivists' physical contact with the material while simultaneously providing high-quality results. Conversely, if the items are in relatively good condition, a high-quality scanner can be both effective and more time-efficient. Alongside these conditions, other factors must also be considered, such as the level of color intensity or the complexity of details in each item. For Hecht's correspondence, photography may be required to fully capture the more complex artwork displayed on the letterhead of some of Hecht's letters.<sup>17</sup> In other cases where it is just handwritten notes or type-text, archivists may have less colors to consider and therefore spend more time on the general visibility of the messages being conveyed.

### *Scanning*

Assuming that all of the letters and poems in the Hecht archives are unbound, a flatbed scanner can be used to capture images with minimal risk of damage to the materials. According to the "Digitisation of Manuscripts Checklist," *Zeutschel* is a reputable brand known for its high-resolution capabilities, though other scanners acquired by Emory's Digitization and Digital Curation team should be utilized first.<sup>18</sup> Scanning can be done relatively quickly, which is beneficial considering the numbers of individual items that would need to be digitized – nevertheless, it still requires meticulous preparation. This includes creating neutral backgrounds/surroundings for clarity when capturing the image and calibrating the scanner settings to ensure that the most accurate color reproductions, the sharpest focuses, and the best lightings are found. As mentioned in class, maintaining consistency across all of the scans is very important, and FADGI standards can be used to help ensure images closely represent the original materials.<sup>19</sup> Once scanned, the files can then be saved in TIFF format for archival purposes and securely stored in Emory's three main preservation storage units to safeguard against data loss.

### *Photography*

For more delicate or intricate letters and poems in the Hecht Collection, a high-resolution digital camera may be preferred. While this process is relatively tedious, it often produces "qualitatively superior images" that captures nuances that are more easily missed in

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<sup>17</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>18</sup> Korthagen et al., "Digitization of Manuscripts Checklist," 18.

<sup>19</sup> In terms of scanning, FADGI can particularly help ensure the images are of high quality by providing guidelines for color accuracy, resolution, and overall image fidelity. Metamorfoze standards could be used as well, especially considering their emphasis on paper heritage (See Truyen and Vandermeulen, *Digital Cultural Heritage: Photography* for more information on this).



scanning.<sup>20</sup> As noted in class, each photograph must be carefully composed to not only display the messages and images being conveyed, but to also faithfully highlight the conditions and subtleties of the materials used. This involves careful attention to color, lighting, and focus – which is also essential in scanning – as well as further attention in managing shutter speed, exposure, depth of field, and more.<sup>21</sup> Adhering to FADGI standards can help ensure consistency is met across digitization efforts, but the photographer's skill and expertise will also play a critical role in achieving the best results. Fortunately, the two-dimensional nature of Hecht's letters and poems means that this process should not be too difficult or excessively time-consuming.

### *Metadata Management and Integration with Samvera*

As Hecht's correspondence and poetry are digitized, metadata must be collected in line with the metadata standards discussed above. For descriptive metadata, this includes close compliance with the Emory Core standards. In general, this process should involve detailed cataloging of each item's unique attributes, including titles, dates, administrative and organizational information, and more. To ensure systematic recording of this data, a standardized data entry format, such as Excel, must also be implemented. Once the metadata is organized and recorded, the digitized materials can then be integrated into Emory's Samvera-based repository. This integration necessitates strict adherence to the workflows established by the Digital Library Program and the utilization of components like Hyrax, Fedora, SOLR, and Blacklight to create both an organized structure for the digital items and a user-friendly interface. By following these practices, Emory's digital library will not only achieve long-term preservation but also enhance how researchers, administrators, and the public engage with Hecht's newly designed digital archive.

## Connecting Hecht with Other Middle Generation Poets

Digitizing the Anthony Hecht Papers Collection offers many advantages to Emory University and its broader community. By converting Hecht's materials into a digital format, researchers gain enhanced access to the poet's collection, which can lead to new insights and shared linkages between his work and other resources within Emory's expanding digital library. Beyond the university, this digital format can also open up new opportunities for comparing and analyzing Hecht's materials with the digital archives of Middle Generation writers located in other institutions. This includes figures like Randall Jarrell, whose letters and poetry are currently being digitized at UNC Greensboro.<sup>22</sup> Analyzing the similarities and differences between the digital archives of Hecht and Jarrell could offer fresh insights into both writers' careers. To explore this potential, this section

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<sup>20</sup> Korthagen et al., 21.

<sup>21</sup> Truyen and Vandermeulen, *Digital Cultural Heritage: Camera Based Digitisation*

<sup>22</sup> "Randall Jarrell Papers."

will examine how the digitization of Hecht's work can be combined with frameworks like IIIF.

## **IIIF: Practical Considerations**

### *Foundational Steps*

To effectively utilize IIIF in linking digitized materials from the Anthony Hecht Papers with other collections, a few complex but foundational steps must be followed. First, it is important to ensure that Emory's standards align with IIIF standards, especially relating to metadata and image quality measures. Given Emory's established practices – particularly the decision to save images as TIFF files, which are compatible with IIIF's imaging requirements, and the decision to create detailed metadata for a variety of different categories – the university's existing standards should be well-suited to support these efforts. Next, archivists must confirm that Emory's image server is also IIIF compatible. This is an essential step as the image server will act as the foundation for delivering high-quality images to IIIF-compatible viewers.<sup>23</sup> Without IIIF compatibility in the image server, Emory University will be unable to link the Hecht archives with other digital collections.

Once the server's compatibility is confirmed, archivists can then proceed with establishing APIs. This involves setting up the initial Authentication or Image API that “returns an image in response to a standard HTTP or HTTPS request.”<sup>24</sup> In terms of IIIF image viewers, this API will help ensure that the system can deliver viewable images as requested. Following this, a Presentation API will need to be created, along with the JSON manifest that is generated through it. This manifest is a structured file that describes the metadata associated with the digital objects.<sup>25</sup> For IIIF, these manifests can be linked together, enabling viewers to analyze multiple digital objects side by side. These linked objects can come from different universities, allowing for the discovery of new insights. Of course, a suitable IIIF viewer is necessary for this functionality.

After the Image and Presentation APIs are established, attention can turn to IIIF-compliant image viewers. These viewers are designed to interpret the JSON manifests produced by the Presentation API, enabling users to interact with digital objects from different collections at the same time. A good example of a IIIF viewer is Mirado, but it is not the only viewer. As discussed in class, once the IIIF framework is developed, multiple

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<sup>23</sup> See Truyen and Vandermeulen, *Digital Cultural Heritage: IIIF, OCR* (slide 5) for a more in-depth diagram detailing the IIIF process. This image demonstrates the importance of the image server, as well as APIs.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See slide number 22 for quote.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

viewers can be utilized by different universities or collections.<sup>26</sup> Considering the IIIF process requires a great deal of standardization, this interoperability is a nice flexibility.

### *Collaborative Engagement*

If Emory University is to achieve a successful integration of Hecht's archives with those of other universities through IIIF, all participating institutions must adhere to the established standards and steps discussed above. At the same time, this endeavor will also involve close attention to the different administrative needs of each university. This includes determining mutually agreed-upon timelines, as well as aligning on shared objectives for the use of IIIF and the linkage of the collections. If universities approach the project with different ideas in mind, it will only lead to miscommunication and disorganized results. While this can be difficult, this collaborative effort also presents an opportunity for universities to work closely together. By working together, institutions can not only advance the quality and reach of their digital resources, but also foster stronger academic partnerships.

### *Possible Outcomes*

Curating a digital resource for Middle Generation writers using IIIF can support a range of themes and conversations. In the context of Hecht studies, this could mean linking Hecht-related material with additional letters not currently located in his archive, historical documents mentioned or referred to in his correspondence, and important reviews or critiques of his poetry.<sup>27</sup> In general, this approach would offer critics a more comprehensive view of Hecht's work and help demonstrate the array of Hecht related materials still existing outside of the archive. For scholars interested in broader insights into poets including but extending beyond Hecht, an IIIF-based resource could also be designed to integrate digital materials from various writers of the Middle Generation era. While this might decrease direct attention on Hecht himself, it would simultaneously facilitate the identification of shared themes, stylistic differences, linguistic choices, and other literary decisions he work shares with other writers, making comparative analysis more accessible.

### *Other Methodologies?*

Although IIIF offers a powerful tool for enhancing Hecht studies, it is important to note that this is not the only available approach allowed by digitization. The digital humanities has provided a rich array of methodologies, each with its own strengths and potential contributions to the field. This might include advanced network analysis of Hecht's correspondence, digital analysis of linguistic patterns in his poetry, geographic mapping of literary references, and more. Choosing IIIF over these alternatives doesn't imply it is

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<sup>26</sup> Truyen and Vandermeulen, *Digital Cultural Heritage: IIIF, OCR* (Slide 22)

<sup>27</sup> This assumes that all of these other items are digitized in IIIF capable digital archives.

superior; however, this essay suggests that implementing it now can help serve as a foundational step in digital analysis of Hecht's archives that could encourage the adoption of other methods in the future. By embracing IIIF, the scope of Hecht studies can be expanded.

## Conclusion

This essay has examined the ongoing digitization efforts at Emory University and proposed how Hecht's collection—particularly his correspondence and poetry—can be integrated into these initiatives. The analysis considered the university's Samvera framework, Emory Core metadata standards, available digitization resources (such as the Digitization and Digital Curation team), and workflows, and developed concrete steps for the initial digitization of Hecht-related material. In addressing the benefits of digitizing Hecht's archives, this essay has also demonstrated that digitizing Hecht's work can facilitate new interpretations and deeper insights into his poetry, while also uncovering previously unrecognized connections between the poet and his Middle Generation contemporaries through engagement with IIIF. Although challenges related to copyright and legal restrictions may still arise, advancing this digitization plan can help lay a solid foundation for future scholarship and ensure that Hecht's rich and complex legacy is explored and appreciated in innovative and meaningful ways.

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