

Vanderbilt Holdings

Collections and collectibles

A Small Matter

The Heard Library's Pascal Pia Collection includes miniature books with a mysterious past. By PAUL KINGSBURY, BA'80

IN A MASSIVE, WAREHOUSE-LIKE brick building in a quiet, old residential neighborhood near campus, some of the oldest and most delicate items from the Jean and Alexander Heard Library's collections are carefully stored. On the second floor of the Library Annex stands row upon row of 7-foot-tall, collapsible compact shelving units, and deep inside one of these long rows of book-laden shelving, a group of 51 crisp and fresh-looking beige-colored boxes, the size of hefty hardcover novels, rests on three shelves at eye level.

Each beige box opens to reveal a tiny book nestled in a shallow, cutaway compartment inside. Most of these miniature books are smaller than the palm of a hand, some not much bigger than a thumb. Of these 51 miniature books, 34 share a certain resemblance, with delicate hand-tied string bindings, colorful fibrous paper covers decorated with often-playful typography, and pages sporting arty ragged edges. Each book contains a brief bit of French verse or prose, and is imprinted with the mysterious initials "pab."

Who was "pab," and why does Vanderbilt have these miniature books? Answering these questions turns out to be rather like opening a series of Chinese boxes.

Though the miniature books are stored at

the Heard Library Annex, their keepers are the staff of Vanderbilt's W.T. Bandy Center for Baudelaire and Modern French Studies. To examine the miniature books, this is where one comes. The Bandy Center can be found on the top floor of the University's Central Library in a spacious, well-lit reading room formerly occupied by the art book collection. The Center has been in this location since the spring of 2000, but its association with Van-

books by and about him. Bandy's extensive personal collection of books and materials on Baudelaire formed the basis for the Center; today the Bandy Center is one of the most important sites for Baudelaire study in the world.

Since the Bandy Center began in 1968 in Furman Hall, it has grown steadily, and now encompasses not only works related to Baudelaire but also other collections on modern French literature. These include the Gilbert Sigaux Collection on modern French theatre, the Morris Wachs Collection with its emphasis on 18th-century French literature, and the Pascal Pia Collection, which—aside from its preoccupation with avant-garde art, literature and culture—proves difficult to categorize at all. It is this collection that contains the miniature books.

The Pia Collection, which numbers about 20,000 titles, was a personal collection assembled

by French journalist and literary critic Pascal Pia between 1945 and his death in 1979. A close friend of several leading figures in 20th-century French literature, including Albert Camus and André Malraux, Pia was also

a leading journalist of the French Resistance during World War II. When Pia died, late Vanderbilt French professor Claude Pichois—who knew Pia—arranged with Pia's widow for Vanderbilt to purchase the collection, which arrived on campus in 1982.

Pia's extremely diverse collection, which



derbilt goes back to 1968 when it was founded by its namesake, the late William T. Bandy, who earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Vanderbilt and his Ph.D. at Peabody before spending most of his career as a professor of French at the University of Wisconsin. Bandy was an expert on 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire and an avid collector of

