



Biblio-Notes

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Notes from the Chair

In recent months, three shining lights of the literary world went out. George Plimpton, Walter J. Ong, and Edward Said all died within a few weeks of one another in August and September. Each in his own way, these three men made significant contributions to American (and world) letters.

Plimpton was, perhaps, best known for his "participatory journalism," in which he demonstrated the difficulty of various, often athletic, activities by trying and failing miserably at them himself. Yet, his most significant contribution to modern letters was largely unknown and unacknowledged by the general public. In 1953, Plimpton helped found and was appointed the first editor of *The Paris Review* and has served in that capacity (with a changing list of assistants) ever since. The main characteristic of *The Paris Review* has always been an undying passion for finding and publishing good literature. It was a characteristic that survived the vagaries of economic fortune as well as changes in literary fashion. Plimpton was always the engine that drove the journal's passion.

Edward Said was arguably the most significant American literary critic and theorist of the last 50 years. Although not native-born, I will claim him for America by virtue of a career spent at Columbia University. Said's great passion was to demonstrate the power of narrative to influence, for good or bad, the social, political, and psychological realms of human existence. His 1978 book *Orientalism*, which virtually inaugurated the post-colonial approach to literature, demonstrated the destructive and oppressive power of Europe's orientalist narrative over the inhabitants of the Middle East. A Palestinian by birth, Said was a tireless advocate of the Palestinian cause. As a humanist, however, he always recognized the commonality of Arabs and Jews in the Middle East. In later years, he saw the solution to the

Arab-Israeli conflict in a single, egalitarian, democratic nation, rather than separate Israeli and Palestinian states. His enemies, ironically, tried to portray him (to create a narrative of him, as it were) as a terrorist sympathizer. It was a fiction drawn out of thin air; Said lived a life of passionate compassion.

Walter J. Ong was an interesting figure in the world of literary scholarship: a Jesuit priest and postmodern theorist. His *Orality and Literacy* (1982) stands as one of the most influential theoretical works of the twentieth century. In this book, he showed that literacy was, for previously oral cultures, a technological innovation, and more so, an innovation that brought forth sweeping changes in the human psyche. He utilized a vast humanistic knowledge to sketch a history of the psychosocial transformations inherent in the adoption of writing as a means of communication.

Ong and Said were practitioners of complex postmodern methods, but each was able to illuminate dense theoretical abstractions with an engaging, lucid, and concrete writing style. They made real the concepts of a wide array of social theorists, from Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to Marshall McLuhan and Noam Chomsky. From the lives and works of these two, as well as Plimpton, I hope that we, as members of LES, can learn something about the enduring power and importance of literature in the lives of people throughout the world. I can only hope that LES serves as a similarly positive influence, even if only in the lives of its members.

Steven R. Harris
LES Chair, 2003-2004
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Steven-Harris@utk.edu



Early English Books Selection: Bridging the Gap

Librarians, academics, and publishers all working together to achieve a common goal sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? Yet, the University of Michigan's Text Creation Partnership (TCP) has done exactly that. Despite the perceived differences between these groups, in essence, our goal is the same. All of us (albeit with different motives) want to enhance the way learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom, and the TCP project has succeeded in drawing on the strengths of these approaches and using them to benefit that goal.

In July of 2003, the Early English Books Online - Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP) hosted a meeting on text selection for the database at the University of Michigan. The meeting was in part a follow up to the selection task force held in March of 2000, which developed the guidelines EEBO-TCP is currently using. Representatives from libraries and academic departments (ranging from English literature to Chinese art) in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K along with representatives from ProQuest Information and Learning came to talk about strategies for EEBO-TCP selection. In a series of formal sessions and informal discussions, participants talked about how EEBO-TCP is doing its selection currently; who its audience is; how EEBO-TCP could best serve that audience, and what directions the project should take in the future. The results of that meeting show exactly how the three worlds can coincide, and, when they do, the results are amazing.

With over 125,000 titles to choose from and a potential audience including both undergraduates and advanced scholars not only in the humanities but also in the sciences and other fields makes it difficult to develop a strategy that would satisfy everyone. For about two years though, EEBO-TCP staff have selected and put online nearly 4,000 titles. These titles represent a fairly broad distribution of titles; generally, everyone felt that the numbers of titles and categories currently

online were what they would expect to see, and that the project so far had done a good job of selection. Nevertheless, participants felt that a variety of approaches could also be used. First, there should be a systematic approach that ensures lesser-known authors are included. Additionally, there should be some effort to include topical selection. Others suggested that EEBO-TCP endeavor to have a core collection of texts picked by scholars and specialists in the field. In time, the staff will incorporate all of these suggestions.

By far, most believed that the main obstacle in getting others to use these resources was two-fold. First, researchers have to be aware of these resources and use them. When there are so many of these resources both commercial and freely available ones, one can become barraged with the sheer amount of available resources and miss some of the ones that might be the most helpful. Also, participants felt that it would take some time for researchers to become smart full-text and catalog searchers. The EEBO and EEBO-TCP databases contain thousands and thousands of works and when one does simple word searches, hundreds of hits (both relevant and irrelevant ones) appear. It will be some time before the academic community as a whole can process the large amount of information available to them.

Someone commented at the end of the meeting that EEBO's primary audience is the "teachers and researchers of the future." A conclusion that basically summarizes what the project is all about. As scholars in the humanities and elsewhere break down boundaries between disciplines, as the need for electronic resources increases, and as the need for cost sharing and cooperation between communities and institutions grows, EEBO-TCP is trying to meet the needs of a new generation. No single university would be able to mount a collection of 125,000 titles or even 25,000 texts; no commercial publisher would wish to see their product shared across universities and scholarly communities so that proofing and editing could be done; no individual scholar would have the resources to manage a database of such magnitude. Yet, together we can

do these things, and EEBO-TCP has created a database that will meet the needs of individual scholars who have and will continue to share their expertise; researchers in general will have one of the largest historic corpora at their fingertips which will be searchable at a level previously impossible; the community as a whole will maintain ownership of these valuable texts for sharing across platforms for any number of scholarly uses. It's even possible to see how resources such as EEBO-TCP are beginning to change research. The winner of the EEBO in undergraduate essay contest said that EEBO allowed her to do her research "with an ease and flexibility that would not have been possible without such a resource." That ease and flexibility both between electronic and print, between text and image, between libraries and scholars will one day revolutionize how we view the past and it is exciting to be at the frontier of this kind of work.

The task force included faculty members William Bowen (University of Toronto), Jennifer Danby (CUNY-Graduate Center), Robert Hatch (University of Florida), Arthur Kinney (University of Massachusetts), Ian Lancashire (University of Toronto), Steven Mullaney (University of Michigan), Hillary Nunn (University of Akron), Martin Powers (University of Michigan), Michael Schoenfeldt (University of Michigan), Tess Tavormina (Michigan State University). Libraries were also well represented by Stuart Dempster (Joint Information Systems Committee - UK), Jane Faulkner (University of California - Santa Barbara), Agnes Widder (Michigan State University), Perry Willett (Indiana University). The commercial publishing sector participants included Jo-Anne Hogan and Mary Sauer-Games, both from ProQuest Information and Learning, and finally, from the University of Michigan team William Gosling, Chris Powell, David Richtmyer, Mark Sandler, Matt Stoeffler, and John Price Wilkin attended in addition to Maria Bonn, Olivia Bottum, Marika Ismail, Rina Kor, Jennifer Keitzman, John Latta, Mona Logarbo, Shawn Martin, Paul Schaffner, members of the EEBO-TCP staff.

For further information about the selection task force or the EEBO-TCP

Project, please visit the website at <http://www.lib.umich.edu/eebo> or contact Shawn Martin at shawnmar@umich.edu

Shawn Martin
TCP Project Outreach Librarian
University Library
University of Michigan
shawnmar@umich.edu

My Life as a Humanities Librarian: The First Year

As of today, September 23, 2003, I am one year old. As a literature librarian, that is. I graduated from the University of British Columbia with my MLIS degree in April of 2002, and hung out my shingle as the University of Oregon's literature librarian just a few months after that. I'm officially responsible for English, American, Commonwealth, comparative, and French literatures, and unofficially responsible for various outposts of film, theatre, Spanish literature, and all things Canadian. The latter is because I'm an imported Canuck, and therefore the default subject specialist on Robertson Davies, back bacon, and sub-zero temperatures.

It's an interesting time to be an infant. I feel incredibly lucky to have stumbled into a job that suits my interests and background so precisely. I also sometimes feel extremely uncertain about my own abilities, the state of the profession, and the future of the humanities in general. The more I learn about my job and field, the more I encounter what I expect will be a career-long dilemma: the gains I make in competence and confidence are inevitably offset by a better understanding of the huge challenges facing us all.

This time last year I was a blithe spirit, confident that my BA in English Literature and MFA in Creative Writing, together with my newly minted MLIS, would make me the perfect subject specialist. In some ways, they have. I love my work, which helps me to recover quickly from the inevitable pratfalls and vertiginous moments of self-doubt. I'm interested in the field, and I

have a broad background knowledge of its central works, from *The Faerie Queene* to *The Color Purple*. I'm not only a reader but a writer, and this job gives me what every writer needs: a daily banquet of interesting questions and obscure tidbits, news of new works and reminders of old ones. It's a job that could keep me happy and well fed for many, many years to come.

It's also a trickier job than it seems. I figured this out the first time I tried my hand at collection development, a task that has not become any easier after a year of practice. Like many, if not most, academic libraries, our library is facing budget cuts. I follow in the footsteps of the estimable Richard Heinzkill, who stewarded the literature collections here at the University of Oregon for thirty-three years, and who built a broad, deep, and diverse research collection. I would like nothing better than to continue to collect at the level Richard did, but our budget no longer allows for this. Our relative and actual buying power has been cut steadily over the years, and I practice a very different kind of collection development from Richard's. I rely much more heavily on consortial holdings (we belong to a large book-lending consortium of research libraries in Washington and Oregon) when making order decisions, and must spend most of my budget just acquiring core items. Like many libraries, we're moving from an ownership model to an access one. In the short term, this may be a good strategy. In the long term, it means that we have a smaller, shallower circulating collection, and that publishers are selling fewer books. What does this mean for future scholarship, and for academic humanities collections overall? Well, it almost certainly means that more change is coming down the pike.

The future of literature librarianship, and of humanities librarianship generally, is perplexing to me. I cannot imagine a future in which literature collections are strictly self-serve, no matter what difficulties we face in funding and support. After only a year in the profession, it's clear to me that students and faculty can't possibly navigate all of these materials unaided, let alone negotiate with publishers and vendors, or maintain

collections for the future. That's what librarians do; that (among other things) is our particular expertise. If we were to disappear, the collections themselves would mean little, and would quickly degrade into even less. No matter how embattled our positions sometimes seem, I can't imagine our extinction.

I can, however, imagine the progressive dilution of subject specialist skills, as librarians are called upon to do more and more, cover more disciplines, provide more services to the general university body, and produce more on committees and task forces. Librarians have always been polymaths, but new technologies and dwindling institutional resources require every subject specialist to be more of a generalist than ever. I sit on Library committees on security and diversity, teach Web publishing classes, provide email and digital reference, keep faculty up to date on electronic alerting services and catalog alerts, market the reference department, and liaise with our general education program. Many of these duties are the direct result of changes in technology or in corporate culture: today's university library is a more user-friendly, gregarious, technologically complex entity than ever before. I approve of these changes, and I want to do everything in my power to draw users to the library. At the same time, I contemplate the immense depth and breadth of subject expertise in senior literature librarians in this country, and I wonder how I'll ever reproduce that in my career.

I don't know if my experience is representative of most new librarians in the field, but I suspect that at least some aspects of it are. I suspect that in mid-sized university libraries like my own, humanities librarianship is an embattled profession, and I see increasing evidence that humanist scholarship itself is embattled in this country. The MLA's Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing published an extensive article last year on the "chronic illness" (173) affecting scholarly publishing in literature, and this illness appears to be worsening rapidly. The superficial problems are not new: serials robbing from monographs, publishers' and researchers' needs at

loggerheads, more literature graduates than positions for them, and so on. The more fundamental problems—the causative problems—aren't new either, but they seem graver than ever in this tiring economy.

Appreciation for humanist enterprise seems to be declining in this country. Literature professors rarely garner huge research grants, as scientists do. A BA in English literature is rarely the stepping-stone to a prestigious, highly paid job, as a Bachelor's in accounting may be. These are not revelations, and neither is it a revelation that in tight financial times, humanities funding is often first to be cut. It's worth noting, however, that institutions that increasingly privilege their business or chemistry departments over music or literature are reflecting larger cultural values, and that these values seem increasingly distant from those of many literature scholars and librarians.

Like humanities librarians, the humanities will never disappear entirely, but I'm not entirely sure what future I see for any of us. After a year of literature librarianship, I expect that by the time I retire, research collections in the humanities will be very different creatures from the ones we inherited. Circulating collections in all but the richest libraries will likely be smaller and not as deep—this is a trend we're already seeing. We may not have print archives of many journals, as more and more users demand electronic, desktop-ready fulltext, and fewer and fewer libraries can afford to retain print as well. We may see fewer academic monographs published, as scholarly presses collapse and departments begin to consider linked article publication for promotion and tenure. My own department chair has suggested the possibility of libraries acting as academic presses, publishing or distributing scholars' work on demand. It's difficult to know exactly how any of these things will come to pass, but it's easy to say one thing: the times, they are a'changin'.

It's an interesting time to be one year old. A scary time in some ways, and an exciting time in others. One thing that seems very clear to me is that we one-year-olds—and two- and three- and four-year-

olds—need the support and guidance of our elders. I'm glad to have met a few of my regional colleagues, either by email or in person. I hope to meet many more. The more we talk about what we see happening around us, and about what we're doing, the better chance we have of keeping literature librarianship vital and relevant. I, for one, am planning to celebrate many more birthdays in this job.

Works Cited:

MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing. "The Future of Scholarly Publishing." *Profession* (2002): 172-86.

Karen Munro
University of Oregon
1299 Knight Library
Eugene, OR 97402
(541) 346-1897
kmunro@darkwing.uoregon.edu

Membership Forum and Reception

One hour of the Membership Forum at ALA Midwinter will be devoted to a discussion of the selection and collection management of genre fiction. The Membership Committee will lead the discussion based, in part, on two works: *Popular Culture and Acquisitions* by Allen Ellis (1992) and *Genre and Ethnic Collections: Collected Essays* edited by Milton T. Wolf and Murray S. Martin (1996).

Do you buy much popular fiction? Or perhaps lease it? Mysteries but not Romance? Science Fiction but not Thrillers? What informs your decisions? Are there special preservation or loss prevention needs for these kinds of publications? How helpful are your approval plans in acquiring this kind of material? Do these works fill a research function or more of a public relations purpose?

We look forward to learning what people are doing at their institutions, and to an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences about this topic. The

Membership Forum will be from 2-4 on Sunday, January 11 (location TBA). We hope many of you can join us.

The Membership Committee invites current and prospective LES members to a (no-host) reception immediately following the Membership Forum in San Diego. Please reserve Sunday, January 11 after 4pm for conversation and drinks with your colleagues. The exact time and location will be posted to LES-L as the conference approaches. We'll hope to see many of you there.

-The LES Membership Committee-

Your Views Wanted

This request for assistance arose from questions I had as I began liaison duties related to the English Department. I wondered what variations of the liaison structure exist to serve the same needs for the same department at other colleges or universities; I wondered if the librarians serving as bibliographers in one library, subject librarians in another, or liaisons in a third library, have a great deal of overlap in the activities they perform. To what degree do the activities overlap, and is there a relationship between the organizational model and the activities receiving the most attention? Another question I have is, would there be a pattern relating the size of the library to the particular organizational structure employed (bibliographer, subject librarian, liaison)?

These questions, along with a few others, drive this research project. The research I've done presents few answers, so I'm turning to a group of people who work with the same department I do, in an effort to find out more. Librarians who are members of the Literatures in English Section of the Association for College and Research Libraries seem to be a likely resource group to which I should turn.

I'm hoping you will fill out a survey to help me answer some of these questions. The attached survey is made of 10 questions, and should take no more than 10

minutes of your time. It is available online, you may print it out and mail it in, or if you prefer, please feel free to fill out this survey online, at

<http://www.lib.ecu.edu/Reference/Survey/EnglishSurvey.cfm>.

Wm. Joseph Thomas
Instruction/Reference Librarian
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858
(252) 328-2266
thomasw@mail.ecu.edu

Note from the editor: This request was sent to the LES chair and subsequently the executive committee for review before being considered for publication in this newsletter. If you are beginning a research project and would like some feedback on your methodology please do consider posting a note to LES-L, or, if your research is pertinent to LES members and involves participatory measures such as surveys, email the chair or the editor and ask about the possibility of putting a notice, similar to this one, in the newsletter. Brief notes on research in progress are also welcomed.

Change in LES Officers

Jeanne Pavy, recently elected vice chair of LES, notified the executive committee that due to a change in circumstances she would be unable to serve in that capacity. The executive board approached Jen Stevens, who had also been a candidate for that office, about serving in Jeanne's stead. Jen graciously agreed. Please note that this change in leadership took place quietly, peacefully, and with no hanging chads or political upheaval.

News from the Field

There has been a slight ruckus in Library Land lately over Archie McPhee's marketing of a librarian action figure. (see <http://www.mcphee.com/amusements/cur>

[rent/11247.html](#)). The model for the figure is a real life librarian, Nancy Pearl. The figure is dressed in a long skirt, sensible shoes, and a cardigan. She also has "shushing action." Accessories include a stack of random literature (the figure is holding Pearl's latest book, *Book Lust*), a "realistic" library card, bookmarks and a trading card. The faux Pearl retails for \$8.95. McPhee also sells action figures of Rose the Riveter, Albert Einstein, Jesus, Ben Franklin, Cleopatra, the Albino Bowler, and Pee Boy.

Other products trading on the librarian name and reputation lately include Bacardi ("Librarian by Day, Bacardi by Night") and Honda ("The automotive equivalent of a really hot librarian. Good-looking, yet intelligent. Fun, yet sophisticated")

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**Contributions welcome.** The editor especially encourages those who may not be able to travel to ALA meetings to contribute descriptions of new books of interest, essays on "My Life as a Humanities Librarian," "My Favorite Reference Tool" and "Personal and Institutional News." Deadlines for copy are roughly the end of September and the end of February of each year. Please contact the editor for the exact deadlines of specific issues.

Editor: Julie Still  
Paul Robeson Library  
Rutgers University  
300 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St. / P. O. Box 93990  
Camden, NJ 08101-3990  
856 225-6033 ext. 22  
[still@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:still@camden.rutgers.edu)

Assistant Editor: Katharine Dean  
Ohio State University Libraries  
Information Services Department  
Main Library, Room 126  
1858 Neil Ave.  
Columbus, OH 43210  
614 688-5861  
[dean.202@osu.edu](mailto:dean.202@osu.edu)

Chair, 2003-2004: Steven Harris  
John C. Hodges Library  
1015 Volunteer Blvd.  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Knoxville, TN 37996-1000  
865 974-8693  
[harris@aztec.lib.utk.edu](mailto:harris@aztec.lib.utk.edu)

Vice Chair, 2003-2004: Jen Stevens  
P.O. Box 645610  
Washington State University  
Pullman WA 99164-3200  
Phone: (509) 335-5961  
Fax: (509) 335-1889  
E-mail: [stevensj@wsu.edu](mailto:stevensj@wsu.edu)

LES web site: [www.ala.org/acrl/les](http://www.ala.org/acrl/les)

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