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Literary Reference into the New Century

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Chapter 8
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Reference services for English and American literature have reached a critical phase. In the past, literary scholars learned how to use library resources and relevant research methods as graduate students, and their mastery of these print indexes and bibliographies served them throughout their careers. Now, however, as literary studies have expanded with the broadening of the recognized canon of authors and have developed a more interdisciplinary bent as scholars seek historical materials and cultural artifacts to attempt to place literature in the context of its times, scholars are faced with more complex and varied sources and research methodologies. The increasing dominance of electronic resources in today's libraries also has added yet another dimension to the tasks facing the scholar. The crucial link between researchers and unfamiliar resources and technologies is the reference librarian.

The Nature of Literary Research

What exactly is literary research, and how does it affect the provision of reference services in academic libraries? Harrison T. Meserole pointed out the difficulty of adequately characterizing current practices by calling literary research "an art with many canvases" (p.72) and also pointed out that what is important is not "the nature of literary research but . . . its natures, for literary research is a multifarious undertaking, and we who practice it are an acquisitive lot who do not hesitate to range widely afield, demolishing traditional disciplinary barriers as we course in search of ways and means to add to our knowledge and competence" (p.69).[1]

The nature of literary research shapes the nature of literary reference. As reference librarians seek to assist literary researchers in obtaining information and sources, the librarians are forced, along with the scholars, to leave the safe confines of what was for so long the traditional, textual arena of literary research and move into an increasing array of multidisciplinary resources. Meserole aptly described an essential part of the literary scholarship process: "In our drive to understand all there is to understand about each . . . poem, play, or fiction, we seek out every scrap of information about the text itself, the author of the text, the facts of its publication, dissemination, printing history, reception, and the context that surround each of these inquiries."[2] Part of the broadening scope of literary research is driven by a rising sense of social and multicultural consciousness, what Eric Carpenter described as "Another factor in the trend toward new, interdisciplinary modes of inquiry [caused by] the emergence of new social movements in the 1960s and early 1970s," such as the civil rights, women's, and gay liberation movements.[3]

The relationship between new technology and the changes in scholarly information needs has been summarized by Marianne I. Gaunt:

> New technology, while facilitating new research methodologies, is making the task of those responsible for collecting the results of that research and the tools for continued research more challenging. It is not just the

sheer volume of materials, the qualitative distinctions among them, and the ever-increasing costs with which bibliographers must contend, but the choices in format and access to be made as well: print vs. microprint (fiche/film/card), film, video, optical disc, online (interactive) communication, CD-ROM (single-station vs. LAN), machine readable datafile. Since a single work may be available in any or all formats, the choice to be made can be difficult.[4]

This multiplicity of approaches and the growing complexity of means of access to information directly influence the provision of reference services to the literary scholar, whether on professorial, graduate, or undergraduate levels. Although the well-known technophobia of older liberal arts faculty is gradually being replaced with an acceptance of the new methods of information access, many faculty are still reluctant to use electronic resources. The training they received during their student days also may not have covered some of the methods and sources used for locating primary materials and those at one time more properly considered within the realm of the historian, the sociologist, or the psychologist.

On the other hand, undergraduates, even with their increasing familiarity with the Internet and ease with electronic materials, still need extensive assistance in learning the proper use of bibliographic indexes and databases. Even more significant is the need to teach undergraduates to evaluate sources of information, to determine appropriate avenues of research, and to use resources effectively. Undergraduates must not become so enamored of electronic sources that they are unwilling to use print materials. Reference librarians, as well, must maintain their knowledge of print resources so that they will be able to identify the best sources and instruct patrons in their use. This is especially important when electronic databases cover only twenty or thirty years, but their print counterparts go back fifty to one hundred years.

In the field of literature, one deals with an ever-expanding body of works and accompanying criticism. In the sciences, for the most part, new material, even though built on the advances of the past,

replaces earlier theories. In literature, texts from many centuries and cultures continue to be studied even as newer voices are added to the cumulative voice of human literary expression; and although schools of criticism shift and change, older analyses may well yet be legitimate sources for scholarly research. In this atmosphere of expansion and change, the reference librarian also must be willing to move comfortably through both traditional sources for literary scholarship and new areas of inquiry and their associated resources.

The Canon Debate

Over the past twenty years, much debate has centered on the revision or opening of the literary canon, and this war has been one of several significant changes in literary study to affect reference services. Although the academic literary world agrees that the canon is being revised and expanded, there seems to be little consensus on what the canon consists of or in what way it is being changed.

Definition of the Literary Canon

What exactly is meant by the term *literary canon*? Richard Heinzkill said it "consists of 'the' classics. They are called classics because of their literary quality, their timelessness, their universality."[5] But of what do "the" classics consist? In *The Art of Literary Research*, Richard D. Altick and John J. Fenstermaker asserted that the canon is "the list of authors and works in a nation's literary heritage—always unstable, but more so at certain times than at others—that are deemed most significant and most deserving of sustained, intensive study."[6] Our familiarity with the works in the canon, according to James Hulbert, helps us "to define other writers and relationships and to define what sort of readers and writers we are: sharers of certain cultural experiences, enjoying or aspiring to certain educational, social, literary, or critical status."[7] Henry Louis Gates Jr., more personally, called the canon "the commonplace book of our shared culture, in which we have written down the texts and titles we want to remember, that had some special meaning for us."[8] Keith C. Odom, more concretely, simply equated the British component of the canon with the table of contents in the various editions of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.*[9]

Many commentators have posited that appearance in the standard anthologies used in survey courses constitutes admission to the canon. Similar criteria might be the tables of contents of *American Literary Scholarship* and *The Year's Work in English Studies.*

Canon Formation and the Opening of the Canon

Canon formation and revision have been increasingly important in the dialogue of literary scholars as chronicled in the journal literature. "Discussions of canons," wrote Earl Miner, "even in the necessary plural, are often conducted with a sacral hush befitting the great masterpieces being weighed and our importance in conducting the rites."[10] Revising or expanding the canon raises some significant questions about the study of literature and recording of literary history. In 1986, David S. Reynolds pointed out:

> Rewriting our literary history . . . and revising our class-
> room anthologies accordingly raises several key ques-
> tions: what is our literary canon? Who exactly are the
> major writers? If we include hitherto neglected authors,
> what is our basis for doing so? Do we include them for
> literary, for historical, or for political reasons? How do
> we know we haven't neglected still other writers? Is there
> any way of accommodating the findings of both the theo-
> rists and the new literary historians? In the final analy-
> sis, we are faced with the old, alluring question: what is
> literature?[11]

Reynolds's actual question was, How is the canon formed? Until relatively recently, the question was not considered of great importance because the canon was, well, the canon. As Heinzkill put it: "In all innocence one might think that the canon . . . just happens, something like the formation of cream, the best comes naturally to the top. . . . We are now told that it is the keepers of society's high culture who have determined the literature worth studying from generation to generation."[12] These keepers and their criteria have changed dramatically in recent years. The current debate about the canon began as a result

of the social and political movements of the 1950s and 1960s, which saw the beginnings of demands for empowerment and inclusion of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, as well as the rise of the feminist movement. As women and these various minorities asserted their worth in society, the issue also arose of recognizing the merits of members of these groups in a cultural context. They demanded to be viewed not as the occasional oddity of a woman who produced literature of enduring worth (as opposed to ephemeral popular fiction) or an African American whose work could not only appeal to a circumscribed segment of the population but also stand as work of value within the entire context of literature.

The culmination of the debate, although certainly not its conclusion, may have already been published. Isobel M. Findlay considered the 1992 Modern Language Association (MLA) publication *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Studies* as registering a shift in focus:

> read apocalyptically by formalists and literary histori-
> ans, this reconstitution has been seen as the dangerous
> politicizing of literary studies and the academy, or even
> as the end of Western civilization; read approvingly by
> feminists, poststructuralists and Marxists, it is seen as
> a belated gesture of inclusion and liberation. What there-
> fore becomes dramatically clear is the way that such
> rhetoric and polarization attest to the continuing politi-
> cal importance of the canon, its role in the construction
> of social subjects and terms we live by—nation, class,
> gender, ethnicity.[13]

In their introduction to *Redrawing the Boundaries*, Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn described the basis of the debate on canonicity: "Where twenty-five or thirty years ago the profession was organized almost everywhere around the close reading of a stable, determinate set of masterworks, literary studies are now being reorganized in many institutions around an open series of inquiries about what constitutes literary interest in the first place."[14] Literary scholars, accord-

ing to Greenblatt and Gunn, are confronted not by "a unified field at all but diverse historical projects and critical idioms that are not organized around a single center but originate from a variety of sources, some of which lie outside the realm of literary study altogether and intersect one another often at strange angles."[15]

There is, of course, some opposition to an enlarged canon, as Elizabeth Brown-Guillory observed in recounting an anecdote concerning a speaker at the 1987 MLA convention who asserted the need to retain the traditional canon and rejected all the works by women and minorities as "inferior literature."[16] Nevertheless, most who support the traditional canon have been known to admit that some change is necessary. Paisley Livingston said that among these supporters "It is also possible to recognize that some work that was previously canonical was overestimated and should now be removed from the collection."[17] One sign of this shift readily apparent to librarians can be noted in the revised 1996 edition of *Masterplots*. As the publisher's note states: "The definition of what constitutes a literary classic or masterwork shifts over time," and, accordingly, 425 new titles were added to the new edition while almost 1,000 in the 1976 set were dropped as being "today rarely addressed in schools or recognized critically."[18] Such a radical difference in what is perceived as being important to students signifies a major shift in the canon.

One group of scholars, according to Reynolds, "demand a complete revision of the American canon through the study of marginal or forgotten literature." These scholars are responding to the establishment of the canon, said Reynolds, "by critics who were blinded by various kinds of prejudice that can be eliminated only by total immersion in the unfamiliar. Popular literature, women's literature, newspaper writings, book reviews, literature by ethnic minorities" are among the untraditional writings of interest to those "calling for wholly reconceptualized literary histories."[19] Although this reasoning may seem extreme, it exemplifies the viewpoint that has made popular culture a legitimate field of study in recent decades and also has contributed to the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of literary research.

The nature of the changes in the canon can be described primarily as the growing inclusion of minority literatures, meaning works by

women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians, reflecting a similar inclusion in society at large. Within academia as well, the face of the university alters with its changing student body. Greenblatt and Gunn pointed out that, as a result of the increasing diversity of students, "teachers of literature have found that the traditional humanistic curriculum seems less representative. This perception . . . has also forced into the open long-neglected questions about the assumptions on which that curriculum was based, the process by which it was created, the public constituencies it was perceived to address, and the intellectual and heuristic purposes it was intended to fulfill."[20] This change in what is being taught was summarized as opening up the canon by Reed Way Dasenbrock: "The established canon of English and American literature as received and taught has been seen to be a very partial representation, biased toward men from privileged classes and races. Advocates of literature by women and by marginalized social and economic groups have pressed to open up the canon, to move toward a more expansive, pluralistic view of literature with room for all sectors of society."[21]

Another aspect of the discussions of canon transformation is the establishment of multiple canons. To some extent, this has always been the norm, as canons of national literature have long been accepted. However, within the realm of literature in English (including the subset of world literature translated into English), should there be one canon or many? The view that there should be an overall canon for literature in English was summarized by Heinzkill: "On the national level we see pressure to expand what each nation regards as its canon. And as these national canons expand, new names will undoubtedly be included in the canon of literature written in English. Already some are being introduced to these other national literatures through the study of feminist literature and minority authors. From there it is only a short step to wanting to investigate these authors in their own tradition. We should, therefore, be preparing for the study of worldwide English literature."[22] Others, seeing in this establishment of a supercanon for all literature in English a continuance of the old canon, argue for a canon for each national literature or an array of canons: ones for African American literature, Hispanic literature, gay litera-

ture, etc. Nils Erik Enkvist postulated that "All bodies of text which satisfy certain definite criteria are in fact potential canons, and canons can form a hierarchy of major canons and subcanons. There can be canons of black literature or gay drama just as well as there have been canons of Elizabethan plays or of nineteenth-century novels or of the Great Writers and Great Books."[23]

Effects of Canon Transformation on the Teaching of Literature

The effects of the transformation of the canon resonate throughout literary scholarship, from the studies of distinguished professors to papers by freshmen and sophomores in survey courses. The criticism generated by the professors becomes source material for students on all levels, but although the higher-level scholars are building on an extensive basis of training in the established canonical writers and adding to their repertoire when they explore the works of newer or lesser-known writers, students usually lack a perspective in their views of literary history. Heinzkill explained how time can become an enemy of canon transformation: "There is just so much time in the school calendar and therefore what texts should be used takes on a great significance."[24] Marjorie Perloff pointed out that because "The class that reads Chopin's *Awakening* will not, in all likelihood, have time for Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* . . . we should be under no illusion that we have replaced a 'closed' and narrow canon with an 'open' and flexible one."[25] When professors cannot "teach the new literature in addition to the old canon," wrote Dasenbrock, "something has to give, substitutions have to be made, in the classroom the canon inexorably closes down."[26]

At one time, it was thought that a well-educated person should have studied all subjects, read everything of importance that had been written. If one concedes, as one must, that great literature did not end with Homer or Shakespeare or Faulkner and is not limited to that which is written by citizens of a particular country or members of a certain race or sex, the entire field of literature has passed beyond the scope of the individual. This development can lead only to greater specialization within literary scholarship or the gradual elimination from the canon of writers once considered significant. Should current trends continue,

as seems likely, there will be a sustained interest in works by minorities and women, in lesser-known writers and literatures. The canon, as Heinzkill has observed, will never again be as stable as it has been in the past, and canonical changes will occur much more rapidly.[27]

Canons and Reference Services

Given all of the above, what are the effects of this expansion and opening of the canon, at whatever rate it is taking place, on academic literary reference? Obviously, as new or different writers begin to be taught in college English classes, an upsurge of students will seek criticism of these writers, many of whom may not be covered extensively in the literature. For example, if students search the *MLA International Bibliography* for analyses of T. Coraghessan Boyle's "Greasy Lake," they will find only eleven articles on Boyle, including one in Spanish and one in German. One article is an interview with Boyle, and only one addresses the story in question directly. No explanation by a librarian that there will certainly be more Boyle criticism in the future will assuage the students' anxiety. After all, the assignment is due tomorrow. The librarian must therefore be prepared to find other (if perhaps not as scholarly) resources such as book reviews, newspaper and magazine articles, and analyses in reference works such as *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and *Masterplots*. This phenomenon is certainly not new but will become increasingly familiar as more new writers are taught. Librarians will not only need to become familiar with new reference tools dealing with the new authors and previously neglected literatures but also must actively participate in producing these tools and making sure publishers are aware of the need for reference tools that reflect the new styles of teaching and the writers covered.

The Nature of Reference Collections, Resources, and Services

The literary reference collection, whether functioning on its own or as part of a more varied reference collection, is composed of an extensive body of secondary and tertiary materials on a range of literature-related topics: The appropriate tools for the literary reference collection are discussed at length in Scott Stebelman's "Building Literary Reference Collections."[28] In addition, bibliographies that may aid the librar-

ian in selecting or evaluating a literary reference collection also are available. For decades, librarians have relied on the various editions of *Guide to Reference Books,* which still provides a firm listing of materials useful for literary reference.[29] Walford's *Guide to Reference Material,* another massive work covering reference material in all disciplines, also should be kept in mind as a basic bibliography of literary reference materials.[30] More focused in scope, Ron Blazek's *Humanities: A Selective Guide to Information Sources* also may have value as a selection tool for literary reference collections.[31]

Two recent bibliographies of reference works for English studies will provide the most detailed coverage and undoubtedly will serve as valuable tools in developing the literary reference collection. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated Listing of Reference Sources in English Literary Study* provides annotated entries on 1,207 works (mentioning another 1,331 within the annotations), most of which are suitable for inclusion in reference collections.[32] Michael J. Marcuse's *Reference Guide for English Studies,* though older, is an excellent source for retrospective reference materials and includes helpful sections on history and the performing arts as well as other fields ancillary to the study of literature.[33] Of course, every literary reference collection should be tailored to the needs and research interests current in the institution; and in developing the literary reference collection, it may be helpful to relegate some of the less frequently used titles to the circulating stacks.

As literary research becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, the demands on literary reference librarians also grow so that a librarian not only must have specialized knowledge of the field as a whole but also must be a generalist at ease with sources in a number of more-or-less related fields. Because the profession has long expected reference librarians to be able to field questions across the entire spectrum of human knowledge, perhaps it is not too much to ask that a librarian specializing in literary reference be conversant with finding guides and other reference materials needed by literary scholars in such fields as history, cultural and gender studies, psychology, philosophy, and religion. Other fields used by literary scholars to establish contexts for their studies doubtless will suggest themselves to even the slightly experienced librarian.

Heinzkill has ably demonstrated the effects of the expansion of the canon on collection development, and many of his comments are also of interest to the librarian dealing with a literary reference collection. Anthologies, as he has noted, are an important force in determining canonicity.[34] If space in the reference collection allows, anthologies may serve as an important addition to more traditional reference tools. Other less traditional resources also might include reference tools dealing with using manuscript materials, cultural artifacts, and popular literature.

Services for undergraduates center on providing ease of access to standard reference works, indexes, and texts; and as the canon changes, reference librarians should be alert to what is being taught and add works dealing with new writers and literatures to their collections. Undergraduates have a tendency to place too much reliance on what they can find electronically and often need assistance with understanding print resources that may be either more authoritative or more appropriate to their research. Bibliographic instruction for the undergraduate student of literature becomes even more important as the variety and complexity of resources increase. Undergraduates will continue to require instruction in the basics of both library use and literary research, with continued assistance in more sophisticated resources as the level of their studies becomes more demanding.

Graduate students will need even more assistance in their research as they seek to make comprehensive searches for materials related to their thesis and dissertation topics. As more bibliographic and full-text resources become available electronically, librarians are challenged to keep graduate students (as well as faculty) up to date with these developments. Librarians can perhaps best offer assistance in a one-on-one instructional setting. This approach can be especially useful not only to beginning graduate students, but also to those with specific research problems or topics.

Literary Reference and Electronic Resources

In looking at possible changes in library services for literary researchers in the coming years, it seems clear that an important trend is the

increasing flexibility of research options. As faculty move farther afield from the traditional canon, they will need more assistance in locating materials such as manuscript collections and cultural artifacts. The literature reference librarian's skills with OCLC and RLN will allow efficient assistance with these research needs. Many research libraries have long provided their users with some form of OCLC access. With more than thirty-six million bibliographic records, the database's value as a bibliographic research resource is unparalleled. Combining this massive database with a search engine, such as WorldCat, makes it friendly even to the casual user and therefore even more important as a research tool. Because users not only are able to search by author, title, subject, ISBN/ISSN, and publisher but also can limit the results by language or year, a researcher can easily determine, for example, whether any editions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* were published in Chinese prior to 1850. As more libraries create cataloging records for manuscript and archival materials, which might otherwise be difficult or impossible to locate, the value of WorldCat increases. It is especially useful for faculty and graduate students working on descriptive bibliographies. As the canon expands, a source such as WorldCat makes it easier to trace the various editions of primary works by the new authors and their availability.

Ironically, many faculty are left behind by their students who are usually more adept at using electronic resources. The variety of these resources available to literary researchers has increased over the past decade in degrees reference librarians of the 1970s and early 1980s would have thought unimaginable, and the number of types of these tools will clearly proliferate in the foreseeable future. Such resources as online public access catalogs, CD-ROMs, and full-text journals and books on the World Wide Web, in addition to numerous other literary Web sites, make literary research more flexible as levels of access increase and also make the duties of librarians more challenging and exciting.

The electronic versions of the *MLA International Bibliography* (*MLAIB*) as with almost any electronic database, offer obvious advantages over the print equivalent, the main one being the ability to search decades of citations at once. This is especially important for librarians whose primary patrons are undergraduates who often lack the patience

to go through the traditional *MLAIB* year by year. If a patron who needs to use *MLAIB* shows some reluctance about its CD-ROM or Web versions, demonstrating the alternative may create more enthusiasm for the electronic resource.

Any librarian who frequently uses an electronic database must be thoroughly familiar with its limitations and eccentricities. If a patron researching British satire of the 1930s, for example, does not believe that searching by literary decade is impossible, retrieve an *MLAIB* citation to a work about Evelyn Waugh to show that centuries, not decades, are employed as descriptors. Because the flexibility of the electronic *MLAIB* is limited by the absence of abstracts, the librarian must learn tricks to get around this deficiency, such as learning what types of searches are best limited to the descriptor field and which ones are best performed in the entire record. Obviously, such a tool would be much more helpful to researchers if it had abstracts or at least more—and more specific—descriptors. It is up to the librarian to show users how to work around such limitations. General periodical indexes such as Gale Group's *Expanded Academic Index* and H. W. Wilson's *General Periodical Index*, which includes *Humanities Index*, offer options not available through the *MLAIB* because of the availability of abstracts. Learning to use *Humanities Index* and *MLAIB* to complement each other is a useful skill. One slight problem with such resources, especially for undergraduates, is the inclusion of book reviews. All academic librarians are familiar with the confusion created when students go to *Library Journal, Publishers Weekly, Newsweek, The New York Times Book Review*, and similar sources expecting to find articles on their subjects only to discover, instead, reviews of books on these subjects. A similar problem occurs in *MLAIB* with the inclusion of dissertations. Librarians learn to recognize the patrons for whom knowing how to exclude reviews and dissertations from search results is essential.

Graduate and faculty patrons may not have such problems, but they may have additional needs, such as learning how to use electronic resources to create a bibliography, and may need to be instructed in such skills as copying and pasting bibliographic records. Because many patrons on any level will not take the time to discover how easily the

information they retrieve from electronic tools can be manipulated, this skill also must be imparted along with the usual retrieval techniques. Moreover, many patrons must be introduced to such mundane matters as being at ease with using a mouse, learning about function keys, and becoming familiar with screen displays.

Experienced librarians are very familiar with the looks of disappointment—or worse—when undergraduates learn that an electronic periodical index provides citations only, not the full text of the resources. But with the increasing number of resources such as *JSTOR, Search, InfoTrac SearchBank*, Ebsco, Ovid, *Project MUSE*, etc., providing full-text access over the Internet, this matter becomes less of a concern. Such tools make any type of research easier and allow libraries of any size to provide access to materials beyond the limitations of their budgets. As such sources grow, patrons will still experience some dissatisfaction, as with not understanding why the full text of every issue of every periodical ever published is not available or why some databases offer full text from some periodical titles, but not all. Librarians develop a sense for knowing when to explain such limitations before the disappointment develops.

Even if a library does not subscribe to one of the full-text indexing services, some individual periodicals, such as *Studies in Bibliography* (etext.lib.virginia.edu/bsuva/sb/), are available free over the Internet. A librarian specializing in English and American literature can easily determine what titles are available. Keeping up with the growth in availability requires a more determined effort. Patrons also can use such relatively inexpensive Web services as *Northern Light* (www.northernlight.com/), the *Electric Library* (www.elibrary.com/), and *UnCover* (uncweb.carl.org/) to have access to full-text periodicals.

In addition to periodical sources, a number of Web tools provide access to the full text of novels, plays, poems, short stories, and essays. As the canon grows to include more works by women and minorities that may not be available in all libraries, this access is doubly significant. These full-text sources can range from subscription services such as *LION* to free collections of public domain texts from *Project Gutenberg* (promo.net/pg/), *Bartleby* (www.bartleby.com/), the *University of Toronto English Library* (www.library.utoronto.ca/www/utel/

index.html), and many sites devoted to specific writers. The number of critical or reference works available on the Web, as with *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, is bound to increase. Web concordances to the works of writers ranging from Shakespeare to Eliot, created by energetic scholars, also will grow. Reviews of Web sites in such sources as *Choice*, articles in places such as *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times*, and sites such as the *Digital Librarian* (www.servtech.com/~mvail/new.html) and *Yahoo!* (www.yahoo.com/new/) offering weekly or daily summaries of new sites are among the ways of keeping up with new literary sites.

For the most part, such electronic tools are not replacements for traditional print sources but are highly useful as supplements to them. Librarians should therefore explain the circumstances in which they can be helpful when introducing individual researchers to them or performing instruction for classes. For example, electronic concordances allow quicker—and certainly easier—searching than their print counterparts. Web sites assembling several editions of a writer's works, as with the *Jane Austen Information Page* (www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/janeinfo.html), help create a new method of comparing texts. As with so many Internet literary sources, such sites are especially helpful to the patrons of libraries with resources limited by space or budget.

However, these sources also can present some dilemmas for literary researchers and the librarians who advise them. Did the graduate student creating a concordance to the works of a major poet cover all the poetry, and were the most reliable editions used? Should a librarian refer a patron to such a site without being able to determine its reliability? If the sources and methodology used are not explained by the creator of the site, can its reliability be easily determined? Even subscription services may not indicate which editions are the bases of the full texts they offer.

Hovering over any library are the technical glitches that can strike any online catalog, CD-ROM database (whether stand-alone or networked), or Internet access at any time. One of the more important tasks of the librarian specializing in English and American literature is that of developing a system for dealing with the inaccessibility of electronic resources, whether for minutes, hours, or days. Just as such

librarians know how to approach research from several angles, they must help their patrons understand that there is rarely only one way to carry out a research project. Patrons who rely exclusively on electronic resources are placing their research at great risk. Librarians can show them the foolhardiness of searching the Web to find the birth and death dates for a writer when that information can be found more quickly in a print reference source. Likewise, librarians should recognize that for the student working at home, such a site may be the only available source.

Helping patrons understand the usefulness of both print and electronic sources will obviously continue to be considerably important for some time. For all the technological advances of recent years, it is not an exaggeration to say that libraries of the early 2000s are in the Model T era of electronic information possibilities. More and more resources now only in print form will become available in some type of electronic format and will be accessible more quickly and possibly even more cheaply. More libraries, as with the University of Virginia's *Electronic Text Center* (etext.lib.virginia.edu/), will make their special collections available on the Web. Scholars having to travel hundreds of miles to examine manuscripts, letters, and photographs could become a thing of the past. If the increasing number of these advances makes more and more demands upon librarians, they also will make the librarians who master them more and more central to the research process.

Librarians cannot be overly zealous in keeping faculty aware of new reference services and sources. Buying the *World Shakespeare Bibliography on CD-ROM* without informing the professors specializing in Shakespeare does not lead to heavy use of the product. Faculty who assume their libraries will have few research tools related to the new areas of the canon should be shown otherwise. The more faculty are kept up to date, the more aware their students are of the available resources. Librarians can schedule open houses, workshops, and other demonstrations of both new and long-established tools. Showing small groups how a CD-ROM such as *DiscLit* offers searching capabilities far beyond the Twayne author series from which it is drawn not only constitutes instruction and publicity for library resources but also is good public relations.

Librarians should be vigilant in communicating with faculty, students, and administrators about their collections and research tools, even when apathy is the common attitude. All methods of advertising library services, from user guides to Web sites, are important. Stimulating the enthusiasm of even one faculty member is bound to have positive results. As more institutions require their faculty to create Web sites for courses and ask graduate students to put their theses and dissertations on the Web, indifference to electronic information in all its formats should decline dramatically.

Conclusion

Although many libraries have a literature specialist in their corps of reference librarians, few, if any, libraries are fortunate enough to have such a specialist always available. As a result, general reference librarians from many subject backgrounds will be called upon to deal with literary questions they may have difficulty comprehending. Part of this difficulty can be alleviated through ongoing training of reference staff and the concept of baseline competencies that has been gaining momentum in academic libraries.[35]

Librarians must convey their electronic expertise to their colleagues. Not all librarians approach their use of electronic sources in the same way. Sharing their knowledge through everything from in-house training to national workshops is necessary to keep the profession strong. Librarians should be thankful that technological advances make their work, more than ever before, part of an ongoing educational process.

All librarianship is in a time of change, as has been true for the past twenty years and will doubtless be true for the next twenty, and literary reference librarianship is no exception. Tools and resources may change, the nature of the information sought may vary, but the key to access will remain the reference librarian, whether in person or via e-mail. Literary reference librarians exist because library users are not, and should not be expected to be, aware of the vast resources available to them in up-to-date research libraries. Adding another dimension with electronic resources, which may eventually put the contents of the world's libraries in the hands of every user, does not lessen

the need for expert assistance in locating and using resources. If anything, the reference librarian becomes a more necessary part of the research process. In addition to helping the experienced researcher, with the expansion of library resources and services, the need for bibliographic instruction grows. An article in *Perspectives: Newsletter of the American Historical Association* recommended that graduate students in history should, if possible, take library school courses to enhance their knowledge of library research methodologies and sources.[36] If this is true for historians, and it certainly appears to be good advice, how much more so should it be for literary scholars? Literary scholarship has a closer relationship with the library and its resources than any other field in academia, and librarians must be cognizant of that fact and prepared to offer scholars the assistance they are best qualified to give. In this time of interdisciplinary research, the transformation of the canon, and the explosion of electronic resources, the versatile, well-informed reference librarian can be the literary scholar's greatest resource.

Notes

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