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## Notes from the chair: Collaborations

"Collaboration" is a favorite word these days. There is only so much a single individual can do. Big projects require many people, many ideas and many talents. Different perspectives, too.

Big organizations like ALA and even its division, ACRL sometimes seem to have more people, ideas, talents and perspectives than they know what to do with. "LES," as some of us like to say, is more. Smaller, more specialized, we can perhaps be a little swifter of foot in seeking out commonalities with other groups and finding opportunities for collaboration.

We have collaborated with the MLA through the MLAIB Discussion Group to help make the MLA International Bibliography a more useful tool for our patrons. Although it is a general ACRL discussion group and not technically a part of LES, many of our members also belong to it, as well as members from WESS and other sections for whom the MLAIB is an essential reference tool. This also gives us a chance to interact with people from other specialized ACRL sections.

Another opportunity we have to collaborate is the upcoming 2003 ACRL convention. You are already being bombarded by information about this, so for now I would only encourage you to come forward and take the lead in organizing a panel, workshop, etc. We will organize something as a section, but this does not prevent other individuals from also trying their luck if they have ideas they think need to be presented.

The deadline for proposals for contributed papers, workshops, or panel sessions is May 31.

The Early English Books Online Text Partnership exemplifies another kind of collaboration -- one among librarians, their institutions, and a company, in this case, Proquest. The goal of this collaboration is to provide searchable SGML texts for page. LES members have also participated in this project.

As individuals working in our separate institutions, we also collaborate in the teaching process. This brings me once again to our upcoming program, "Teaching Literary Research," featuring librarians William Wortman, Helene Williams, and James Bracken together with English faculty member James Harner, all of whom teach literary research at their own institutions. Planned as a panel discussion instead of a series of four papers, it promises to be a lively and spontaneous session.

Another potential avenue is to collaborate with teaching faculty and propose panel sessions and papers for presentation at Modern Language Association of America's annual convention. Looking through the Spring MLA newsletter, largely devoted to calls for papers, I noticed a number of sessions that could have used a librarian's perspective. For example, there is a division devoted to Methods of Literary Research, which is sponsoring two sessions this year, and a Committee on Information Technology. I would encourage librarians who like to write to keep an eye on the MLA newsletter and consider proposing a paper, or even a panel in the future.

The LES Planning Committee is working on our next strategic plan, and the Committee Chair, Charlotte Droll, is busy soliciting your ideas about what we, as a section should be doing. I strongly urge you to bring her your ideas. Once we have our priorities set, however, I would like to suggest that we look around and see if someone else--another group within ACRL or outside of it, can help us accomplish our goals and in the process, accomplish their own. In this way the collaborating tradition goes on.

Kristine J. Anderson, Chair, ACRL-LES

## Competition and Cooperation in the Digital Age

Lawrence Lessig argues in his book *The Future of Ideas: the Fate of the Commons in the Connected World* (New York: Random House, 2001) that the concept of public domain is eroding in the face of such legislation as the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998. Lessig will argue for its repeal in the case of *Eldred v. Ashcroft* before the Supreme Court later this year.

The inability of libraries to cooperate assists in this erosion. Instead of pooling our resources to digitize public domain materials and thereby keeping them freely available, we pay commercial publishers to license them as part of restricted collections. In many cases, we pay more to acquire or license these materials than it would cost us to digitize these materials collectively.

Librarians, particularly academic librarians, are extremely competitive. This competitive urge starts with the emphasis put on athletic competition among universities, but it extends far beyond this. Libraries compete for grant funding, ARL rankings, and for the ultimate intangible of "reputation." However, this competitive urge gets in the way of our willingness to work together, even within consortia supposedly dedicated to

cooperation. We pay a high price for this non-cooperation.

I have learned the difficulty of getting libraries to cooperate, in my work on the Wright American Fiction project <<http://www.lettrs.indiana.edu/web/wright2>>. This is the first cooperative digital project of the CIC (Committee on Institutional Cooperation, i.e., the Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago). It has proved a continuous struggle to achieve and maintain the level of support necessary for this project. However, we have created an important resource through collaboration, and in the process, I hope, learned to trust each other a little more. No single CIC library could have undertaken this project on its own. One of my goals for this project is to demonstrate the value of cooperation, and I hope this lesson will extend to other projects within the CIC, and ultimately to other consortia.

To give a concrete example of the cost of non-cooperation: *Harper's Weekly*, from 1857-1912, has been digitized and is available from HarpWeek for about \$85,000, plus an additional annual maintenance fee. It would cost an estimated \$500,000 to \$600,000 to digitize the page images for this same period and have the text typed and encoded.<sup>1</sup> Of course, in addition to digitizing the page images and full-text, HarpWeek is indexing the articles, illustrations and advertisements at a deep level. This added indexing is extremely expensive, and it is an open question whether its benefits are worth the costs. (I happen to think they are not.) This question will remain unanswered, because it is unlikely that libraries will ever band together to create a rival product, even though 20 libraries, each paying only \$30,000, could get the job done, with the resulting collection freely available. HarpWeek reports that almost 500 U.S. academic and public libraries have acquired some portion of their publication.

I do not mean to single out HarpWeek. The situation is no different among the other 4 or 5 publishers in this field. I also do not mean to demonize publishers, for I

believe that there are opportunities for librarians and publishers to work as partners. We are in danger of letting our public domain materials slip behind walls of restricted collections, and I would like to suggest a number of actions that librarians can take in response to this situation.

First, we need to insist upon our rights. We cannot let publishers bluff us into giving up our right to freely copy works in the public domain. Of course, we should respect fully the legitimate rights of copyright holders, and let our university legal counsels look into the copyright implications of any digitization project that we undertake.

Second, we need to let publishers know our requirements for the collections they are creating. We need to take many factors into account before agreeing to acquire collections, but we tend to ignore some of the technical specifications in the process. For instance, when we purchase collections that are hosted by the publisher, what happens if the company goes bankrupt? Even if we can receive a copy of the data, what do we know about the technical specifications and formats? Our ability to support these collections should the company go out of business depends upon the standards followed in their creation. The Digital Library Federation, Research Libraries Group and other organizations, are publishing guidelines and standards for digital collections. We need to be sure that the collections we purchase meet the same standards and specifications as those we create.

Third, we need to find opportunities to work with publishers as partners in these ventures. We have the collections, and tremendous expertise in selection and standards, and years of close collaboration with researchers and students. Learning to cooperate with publishers will seem, at first, as unnatural as cooperating with each other, yet publishers can provide much needed financial resources, and expertise in high-volume production and schedules. Ventures such as the Early English Book

Online/Text Creation Partnership (EEBO/TCP) should serve as models for ways in which librarians and publishers can work together. Both Bell & Howell and the university partners are taking risks in EEBO/TCP, and the project would never have happened without the participation of either partner.

Finally, we need to push publishers to do more than just digitize collections of public domain materials. We need to explore innovative ideas about keeping primary texts freely available while allowing (for a fee) publishers to combine them with their licensed biographical, bibliographical and critical resources.

The best way to get the attention of publishers is to demonstrate that we can work together and digitize important collections for ourselves. Bibliographers need to become much more active in the creation of digital libraries, if we hope to create digital libraries of lasting value. What if we used the same collection funds we spend on commercial electronic texts, to create a pool of funds for digital projects that would benefit all? This kind of cooperation can occur most readily within consortia, and with concerted effort we can preserve free access to our literary, historical and cultural heritage.

Perry Willett, Indiana University

## **Lyle Wright is My Hero: An Appreciation of Traditional Bibliography**

Lyle H. Wright began working at the Huntington Library in 1923, before he was 20 years old, and worked there, interrupted by World War II, until his retirement in 1966.<sup>ii</sup> He is best known for his 3-volume bibliography, *American Fiction 1774-1900*, where he listed over 11,000 works of fiction, while inventorying the holdings of 20 libraries. He wrote of the process of compiling his bibliography:<sup>iii</sup>

During my search, I have brought to light many novels and tales that had dropped completely out of sight. Literary historians will say, I am sure, that some of these titles were better forgotten, but that is a bibliographical impossibility.

He published the first volume of the bibliography in 1939, revised in 1948; the second volume in 1955, revised in 1965; and the final volume in 1966. His bibliography continues to stand as the definitive list of American fiction through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Wright was just one of many bibliographers of this generation: Charles Evans, Ralph Shaw, Richard Shoemaker, Joseph Sabin, Alfred Pollard, G. R. Redgrave, Donald Wing. These eponymous authors have left us their comprehensive national bibliographies, completed without online catalogs, RLIN, OCLC, ProCite, even many printed library catalogs. They worked in a more genteel time, yet these publications required exacting toil lasting decades, and in at least Wright's case, grueling cross-country travel. Their work has defined ideal collections to which libraries and bibliophiles continue to aspire.

As a confession, I was never a fan of 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature. Perhaps due to the impenetrable dialects authors sought to imitate, I never enjoyed them as I did novels of the same period from England, France, Germany or Russia. I first became acquainted with Wright's bibliography at my first job, at SUNY-Binghamton. We had the microfilm set of *American Fiction*, and had just loaded the MARC records into our online catalog. These records are somewhat deficient, because they do not record the "unit" number of the microfilm as published by Research Publications. Without knowing that "Series I" from the MARC record corresponds to microfilm units 1-4, and "Series II" to units 5-12, this set will be difficult to use. I helped many students looking for titles listed in our online

catalog, and Wright's name became lodged in my consciousness as I muttered it beneath my breath.

Several years ago, as I was looking at the online Making of America collection, I realized that fiction was excluded. I noticed the years of the collection, 1850-1877, and a little bell rang in my head. Perhaps if the MARC records had been more useful, I never would have become acquainted with Wright.

In the process of creating the online Wright American Fiction 1851-1875 <<http://www.letts.indiana.edu/web/w/wright2>> over the past three years, I have lived daily with Wright's bibliography and the novels it describes, and I can say that I love this collection. These are difficult novels to love, many of them. They reveal a depth of small-mindedness, intolerance, bigotry and hatred by almost all authors that is difficult to fathom. However, I love these novels because they describe a momentous period in American history, and in the process reveal profound truths about this country and about us. These works give accounts, fictional yet authentically personal, of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Gold Rush and westward expansion, and issues of race, nationality, religion, and rural and urban life. In addition, they provide an important context for writers whose works we continue to read: Twain, Stowe, Hawthorne, Alcott, Melville, and Howells, among others. Along the way, there have been some delightful discoveries, such as Wesley Bradshaw's sensational novels of female spies in the Civil War.<sup>iv</sup>

The bibliographic work of Wright and his peers continues to retain its relevance and importance. Created during a golden age of bibliography, these remarkable comprehensive lists allowed the scholars and students of their time to identify works and locate them at particular libraries, an extremely important achievement prior to online catalogs. Later, microfilm publishers wisely based their collections of microfilmed reproductions on these bibliographies, and this technology allowed libraries to acquire rare or even unique works and

collections, giving scholars access to reproductions of works otherwise unavailable to them. Now, as we enter the third wave of collection building using digital technology, these bibliographies still describe the collections we desire, and provide discriminating bibliographic information about the editions that will form the basis of digital libraries. Bell and Howell has transformed Pollard and Redgrave and Wing into Early English Books Online, and Newsbank/Readex has announced its intention to digitize Evans. I find myself consulting these bibliographies increasingly more, particularly in conjunction with thinking about digital collections. The new technologies of digital libraries allow us to achieve virtual ideal collections drawn from many libraries. These bibliographies only grow in value, as we turn to them to realize these ideals.

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<sup>i</sup> Estimated based on one volume digitized by the University of Michigan. See <<http://www.umdl.umich.edu/stats/coll-size.html>> for information.

<sup>ii</sup> For biographical details about Wright, see his obituary: Roger Stoddard, "Lyle Henry Wright," *American Antiquary Society. Proceedings*. 90:2 (1980), 312-315.

<sup>iii</sup> Lyle H. Wright, "A Few Observations on American Fiction, 1851-1875." *American Antiquarian Society. Proceedings*. n.s. 65:1 (1955): 75.

<sup>iv</sup> For more on the popular literature of this period, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina P, 2001).

Perry Willett, Indiana University

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## Why is LES important to You? Planning the Section's Future

How would you answer the following questions?

What is most valuable to you about LES?  
What would you like to see changed?  
What topics would you like to see discussed?

These questions were the focus of discussion at the LES General Membership meeting at ALA Midwinter in New Orleans. The highlights were shared with the larger group and are available at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/les/genmem0102.html>. That discussion provided a great start to two projects that will shape the Section's future. The first is a reexamination of LES's Strategic Plan, adopted in 1996 and now six years old. You can read the existing Plan at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/les/plan.html>. The second project is preparation for future LES programs at ALA Annual Conferences and potential participation at the ACRL 11<sup>th</sup> National Conference in 2003. The theme for the ACRL conference is "Learning to Make a Difference".

We very much need and appreciate your input on both these projects, and we want to make it easy for you to provide it. You may respond in one of four ways:

- complete a web form at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/les/questions.html>
- reply to the posting on the LES-L electronic discussion list
- send an email to Charlotte Droll, chair of the LES Planning Committee, at [charlotte.droll@wright.edu](mailto:charlotte.droll@wright.edu)
- drop a note via regular mail to Charlotte Droll at Dunbar Library, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435-0001

Kristine Anderson, Chair, LES-ACRL

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## MagillOnLiterature and MagillOnAuthors

*MagillOnLiterature* delivers on what is promised in the Salem Press catalog. Those familiar with Magill titles will find few content surprises. Basic plots, main character analyses, and reviews appear in full text. The database offers information found in *Masterplots*, *Masterplots II*, *Cyclopedia of World Authors*, *Cyclopedia of Literary Characters*, *Magill's Literary Annuals*, and *Magill Book Reviews*. Updates are planned quarterly or as new print editions of each of the thirty-one print reference sets, which comprise the contents, are scheduled. Searching is done on the EBSCOHost platform. EBSCO is the marketing partner for this database and the newer biographical database, *MagillOnAuthors*.

*MagillOnAuthors* is a biographical service offering the content of such other Magill series as *Critical Surveys*, *Magill's Choice*, and *World Philosophers and Their Works*. The database has about 3,000 articles with about twenty percent having illustrations. Entries are substantial (about 2000 words) and provide good introductory biographical information. However, content is limited. A search on Homer yields two results: one, from *Critical Survey of Short Fiction, Second Revised Edition, 2002*, listing his genre as "Short Fiction," and the second from *Magill's Choice: Notable Poets, 1998*, where he is listed as "Poet." One wonders why this is not clarified for the readers who will be largely high school and beginning college students and users in public libraries. The links for genre and definitions of such terms as *story line* could prove useful as learning tools for novice readers of literary criticism, but they are not offered consistently.

*MagillOnAuthors* is intentionally limited and is most useful if searched with *MagillOnLiterature*. A search on *Homer and Greek* or *Homer and Odyssey* yields resources ranging from plots to major

characters. Searching for concepts and limiting to just the "poet" of the *Iliad* requires use of the guided (advanced) search options. Because *MagillOnLiterature* includes *Magill's Literary Annual*, which reviews books on all subjects, a search for *women and stereotypes* results not only in analyses of fiction by Margaret Atwood and Anita Loos but reviews of such titles as *Political Woman* and *Popcorn Venus*.

As a literary research tool, *MagillOnLiterature* is much stronger in some areas than others. A search for *medieval*, for example, results in 68 hits, while *renaissance* finds 138 items, *romanticism* 193, *modernism* 134, but *realism or naturalism* yields over 500 results.

Comparing the Magill databases with Gale's *Literature Resource Center* finds both are good tools offering different resources aimed at fulfilling different needs. Because *Literature Resource Center* provides the full text of such sources as *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, which includes extensive bibliographies, it is a more scholarly tool. However, for many users, the Magill explications will be more valued. Searches in the Magill's databases are easier to perform, and the internal links do not seem difficult to understand for most readers. The results and the additional resources do not overlap.

*Literature Resource Center* has been extensively reviewed elsewhere as having a too busy screen with the advanced search option difficult to locate for some. Even experienced searchers seem to have some problems with interpreting the Gale results. However, it takes an average of twenty minutes to familiarize a user with Magill's basic search screens. *MagillOnLiterature* and *MagillOnAuthors* are welcome tools especially for institutions with limited reference budgets and space.

Marie Cimino Spina, LaGuardia  
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## LES meeting schedule for Annual

### **Saturday, June 15**

9:30a - 11:00a Executive Committee I  
 2:00p - 4:00p Program - Teaching  
 Literacy Research: Challenges in a  
 Changing Environment  
 4:00p - ? Member Gathering (At a  
 restaurant/bar to be determined. The  
 Section budget doesn't stretch so far as  
 to provide refreshments, please be  
 prepared to buy your own - in the  
 company of your literature colleagues.)

### **Sunday, June 16**

9:30a - 11:00a Literary Reference  
 Discussion Group  
 11:30a - 12:30p Nineteenth Century  
 Materials Discussion Group  
 2:00p - 4:00p General Membership

### **Monday, June 17**

8:30a - 11:00a All Committees  
 11:30a - 12:30p Executive Comm. II

Also of potential interest - the MLA  
 International Bibliography in  
 Academic Libraries Discussion Group  
 convenes on Saturday morning from  
 9:30a-12:30p.

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