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Oregon Trails--Book Collecting for Fun, Not Profit

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Alemu, Getaneh and Brett Stevens. *An Emergent Theory of Digital Library Metadata: Enrich then Filter*. Chandos Information Professional Series. Kidlington, UK: Chandos Publishing, 2015. 9780081003855. 122 pages. \$78.95.

Reviewed by **Mary Jo Zeter** (Latin American and Caribbean Studies Bibliographer, Michigan State University Libraries)
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Few in the library world would argue with the assertion that new technologies and changing user expectations have called into question the place of libraries and librarians in today's information ecosystem. We are more than a little familiar with the many surveys and studies showing that most information seekers turn to internet search engines, and we are equally aware of the burgeoning number of digital information resources that we are called upon to organize and describe. In *An Emergent Theory of Digital Library Metadata: Enrich then Filter*, authors **Alemu** and **Stevens** offer a framework to guide 21st century practitioners and developers that is built upon four principles: Metadata Enriching, Linking, Openness and Filtering. In a nutshell, the theory stipulates a mixed metadata approach in which standards-based metadata (expert-created) is enriched with socially-constructed metadata (user-created) in a continuous process, then filtered for users at the point of delivery through a personalized, contextual interface. The principles of Linked Data and openly accessible metadata that can be shared and reused are fundamental to the enriching and filtering processes that are called for.

A thorough review of existing standards-based metadata and discussion of the emergence of socially-constructed (user-created) metadata approaches takes up nearly the first half of the book, but is justified given the mixed metadata approach at the heart of the authors' proposition. Briefly outlining the development of current metadata approaches, be-

ginning with modern cataloging standards (e.g., AACR, MARC format, FRBR, and RDA), the authors go on to focus on underlying principles, which are rooted in the need to achieve maximum efficiencies. The limitations of these standards and of others developed specifically to describe digital information objects, such as Encoded Archival Description (EAD), Dublin Core, and Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) are discussed in detail, and while acknowledging the benefits of standards-based, expert-created metadata, the authors contend that it fails to adequately represent the diversity of views and perspectives of potential users. Additionally, the imperative to "enrich" expert-created metadata with metadata created by users is not only a practical response to the rapidly increasing amount of digital information, argue the authors, it is necessary in order to fully optimize the potential of Linked Data. In short, Web 2.0 technologies that encourage users to be active participants rather than mere viewers or consumers of information point the way forward, yet expert-created metadata would continue to fulfill important functions.

An early assertion that the book is "informed by 4 years of in-depth interviews with metadata practitioners, researchers and academics," (p. xi) is puzzling; later it is made clear that the interviews are drawn from previous research (pp. 45-46). In fact, the theory presented in the book is the subject of **Alemu's** Portsmouth University Ph.D. dissertation, *A Theory of Digital Library Metadata: The Emergence of Enriching and Filtering* (2014), which is based on an analysis of 57 in-depth interviews with library and information professionals and users. **Alemu** (now Cataloging and Metadata Librarian at *Southampton Solent University*, UK) and **Stevens** (Principal Lecturer, *School of Creative Technologies, Portsmouth University*, UK), along with two of **Stevens'** Portsmouth colleagues, also co-authored the article, "Toward an Emerging Principle of Linking Socially-Constructed Metadata" (*Journal of Library Metadata*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014), which presents an analysis of interview results as well. The book by **Alemu** and **Stevens**, however, provides a much more extensive treatment of the subject, especially with respect to the development and principles of standards-based vs. socially-constructed metadata. Anyone interested in a thorough, well-documented and yet highly readable text responding to the challenges of discovery and findability of library resources is advised to read this book. 🌲

Oregon Trails — Book Collecting for Fun, not Profit

Column Editor: **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Retired, Eugene, OR 97404) <oskibear70@gmail.com>

"Of the making of books there is no end." Nor is there an end to book collections. But, it is not the end that I am thinking about but rather the beginning of a book collection and how to go about creating one.

Notice that I say "book collections" and not "collecting books." Merely collecting books can easily devolve into hoarding. There is no prize for dying with the most books. Quality beats quantity in this instance but quantity, too, counts as one's collection grows and another shelf has to be added for the next acquisition.

If you have read any of the many works on book collecting you know that it is ill-advised to have profit as the *raison d'être* for your hobby. If I could find a buyer for my four major author collections, I would scarcely get half of what I paid. But I am not about to part with my sanctuary of writing that I return to again and again, finding something new each time.

To be sure, some books gain in value, but buying books as investments is a subject entirely removed from what I

want to talk about. If you are interested, there are books on collecting that can provide you with enough information to either encourage or, more likely, dissuade you from taking that route. You might be better off playing the stock market if it's monetary riches you are after.

If not for profit, why collect books? The simple answer is because I like books. I am not just a bibliophile, I have what one of my daughters when eight or nine years old called the book disease after seeing the library of a man who regularly donated books to the **Stanford University Libraries**. He was a psychiatrist and keenly aware of the truth of her observation when I told him about it. He would have also understood **William McFee's** comment, writing in the introduction to his own bibliography (*A Bibliography of the Writings of William McFee* by **James T. Babb**, 1931) that "the reader [of the bibliography] ... is probably a collector and therefore a suitable subject for a psycho-pathologist..."

The word bibliophile has connotations of wealth,

private press books, fine printing and binding, fore edge painting, incunables, etc. In short, one thinks of rare books when one thinks of bibliophiles and collecting. As an impecunious collector, my goals are modest and the rare acquisition of a scarce but affordable book is pure serendipity. But such a purchase is really only satisfying within the context of the collection.

I would also differentiate between building a library and building a collection recognizing that a library is a collection but a collection is not necessarily a library but can also be part of a library. My personal library contains at least a dozen discrete collections and a good many other books that reflect my literary tastes and subject interests but not to a degree that compels me to seek out like titles or authors. I have neither the time nor the money, nor the space, nor the inclination in doing so although winning a multimillion dollar lottery might persuade me otherwise.

What are the essentials to building a book collection? One need not be wealthy but some disposable income is required. Part of the challenge of collecting on a shoestring is reducing

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one's desiderata list without going bankrupt. One must eat, after all, and pay the landlord.

A book collector will need bookshelves. I remember my first shelves when my library was modest and reflected the subjects I was taking in college. They were unvarnished boards supported by cinder blocks. Such shelves have a certain charm but lack elbow room. Ideal are the ceiling to wall built-in bookshelves, an unfulfilled dream of mine. Somewhere in between those two models lie my IKEA bookcases and with a couple of those you can easily house a decent author collection.

You will also need time, interest, and knowledge. Of these, interest and knowledge are the most important. It sounds obvious but unless you are really interested in a subject or an author, you are unlikely to go far as a collector. Knowledge follows interest and grows as one digs deeper into the chosen subject, be it author or a broader interest. Author bibliographies and checklists are important sources of information for the collector. Good ones help authenticate first and subsequent editions and identify points, that is variant bindings, just jackets, typos, and other things that differentiate between editions, printing, and issues.

Although I have a couple of shelves of books about books, my collections, as such, include a half dozen writers, its own scope, limitations, challenges, and potential depth. My **Morley** collection contains 90 items. I have two printed bibliographies to guide me and I annotate them, in pencil, as I acquire an item. In each book I note (in pencil) the appropriate bibliography. **Morley** can be expensive, however, so I often have to be content with good reading copies instead of first editions. I can also afford first editions of reprints and first printings of paperbacks, a strategy that I also apply to my **Steinbeck**, **McFee**, and **Wright Morris** collections.

One way to build a collection on a shoe string is to find a new author that you admire and begin buying first editions as published.

Protect the dust jackets with Mylar covers and do not clip the price from the book jacket. Read each book but don't remove the book jacket until you are finished with it. Why collect a subject or author and not read the books? Why buy a toy and leave it in its box? And when you begin your fresh collection, be sure to write the author and express your admiration. You might get a letter in return and can add that to the books. And while you are at it, ask if you can send the books to the writer, with return postage included, and have them inscribed, not just signed. You have more than doubled the value of the first editions. To quote **McFee's Bibliography** introduction again, writing about book reviews: "But when one has welcomed a new writer of undoubted quality, and his next book turns out to be mere sawdust and painted cloth, the mood of the reviewer [substitute collector] is gloomy indeed. He feels that he has been let down." But **McFee** doesn't add that the next book and others that follow might be competent or compelling works and in the end you will have a collection to treasure.

Back in the early 1970s, I read the early works of **Cormac McCarthy**, a so-called Southern Writer at the time and variously compared with **Faulkner**. I admired **McCarthy's** first two books, *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*, and was able to acquire, at a secondhand bookstore, first editions, dust jackets and all, of each. They weren't signed but today I could sell them and buy some of the pricey **Morley** items that I covet. But I lost interest in him somehow and sold them to another bookseller who also admired **McCarthy**. As most collectors and booksellers will tell you, it's the one that got away that haunts you the most but you get over it. Or do you?

In 1961 a friend sent me a quotation from a book and writer I had never heard of. The quote goes, "Be master of yourself. The world is not an oyster to be opened, but a quicksand to be passed. If you have wings you can fly over it, if not you may quite possibly be sucked in." The book was *Casuals of the Sea: The Voyage of a Soul* and the author was **William McFee**. I was smitten by those words and later, when I had my own copy of

the book, it became a treasured possession and a book that I re-read as if discovering it for the first time. At the time, I didn't know who **Christopher Morley** was and didn't note that my **Modern Library** copy contained an introduction by **Morley**, the person responsible for getting **McFee** published in this country. I now own 50 **McFee** items including eight editions and printings of *Casuals*... and I have at least two more to track down. One of my **Morley** books contains an essay by **McFee** and *Casuals*..., the **Modern Library** editions, contain the **Morley** introduction. The two collections share a bookcase and the books themselves reflect a friendship between two men, one a writer from his college days and earlier, the other, **McFee**, a ship's engineer who read and wrote letters during his free time and, happily, decided to write about some of his impressions of life at sea using the letter form. His first book is thus titled *Letters From an Ocean Tramp* (1908). I have the first edition, first issue, but my favorite copy is the 1928 **Cassell's Pocket Library** edition, a bit worn but bought from **Brian Teviotdale**, proprietor of **Belle Books**, Hay-on-Wye, Wales. He was of the opinion that one should buy books to read and not hold out for first editions. The book he sold me now has an association with **Brian**, his store (although he handed me the book and accepted payment for it in another store), my time in Hay-on-Wye, and reading the book during my train journey back to my home base. This is not what is known in the trade as an association copy but it works for me and reinforces my compulsion to collect books.

I came to collect **Morley** and **McFee** as if by chance despite the connection between the two. What drew me to each was something in their books that speaks to me. Then, in the course of my collecting and information about each man, I found that they became good friends, one living in Connecticut, the other in Long Island, and both close by to New York City, the literary hub they each radiated from. Kindred spirits. Would that I could have broken bread with them. Instead, I have their books. 🌻

Booklover — Journey

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Retired, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC 29425)
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There is a nice chill in the evening air. The sun is rising just a bit later and setting just a bit earlier. Those long days of summer are once again behind us. Fall is just around the corner. Time for that last summer read; it's going to be a journey through the library stacks.

Reading works by a playwright is something I've never done. I contemplated this challenge while I perused the stacks at the main branch of the **Charleston County Library**, my **Nobel Laureate** list in hand. The stacks are fewer as the book world moves to a digital format thus my journey to the "Os" and the works of **Eugene O'Neill** is a short one.

The **Nobel Prize** was awarded to **Eugene O'Neill** in 1936 "for the power, honesty, and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy." The choice of *Long Day's*

Journey into Night was an obvious one. Written between 1941-1942 and published in 1956, it is considered his major work. The treat is the discovery of *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* edited by **Travis Bogard** and **Jackson R. Bryer**. This large volume was divided into eight parts: "Beginnings, 1901-1906; Apprenticeship, 1917-1920; Certainties, 1920-1926; Carlotta, 1926-1928; Voyager, 1928-1931; Laureate, 1931-1936; Heights, 1936-1945; and Ending, 1945-1952." Letters from the time **O'Neill** won the **Nobel Prize** — what an opportunity for a peek behind the curtain into the very personal world of a laureate.

The small paperback version of *Long Day's Journey into Night* that I checked out details the copyright as an unpublished work in 1955 by his

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