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Random Ramblings--The Primary Advantage of Literary Scholarship

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investments in new products and services such as Scopus and SciVerse have proven successful revenue drivers. The past 15 years the revenue remains solid and there are no major signs of disruption in this area.

Now let's look at the Operating margin. The entire **RELX Group** in 2015 has an operating margin of 30.5% which is outstanding. Behind these numbers is the STM business which in 2000 had an operating margin of 36.4%. There is no evidence that this level of operating margin has changed. For years, the **Elsevier** STM business has been a large contributor to the adjusted operating profit for the group. In 2010 **Elsevier's** contribution was 46%, and by 2015 the contribution was 42% which is still a significant number. Based on the numbers it appears that **Elsevier** has not suffered a margin collapse and that their publishing model is still strong, stable, and a major contributor to the profitability of the **RELX Group**.

What about the impact of the researcher boycott in 2012? Has there been a major decline in manuscripts submitted? Once again, even though there were over 10,000 researchers who signed up to boycott **Elsevier**, there is little evidence that that effort hurt **Elsevier's** publication program. In 2010 before the boycott, **Elsevier** published 200,000 articles in some 1,500 journals and after the boycott by 2015 they received a record breaking 1.3 million manuscripts of which they published 400,000 articles in 2,500 journals. From the publication output it does not appear that the boycott had any material impact on **Elsevier**. When you consider that 70% of the manuscripts are rejected, it is easy to understand why 10,000 researchers have had little impact. The number of titles continues to grow each year. By 2015 **Elsevier** published 170 OA journals which are totally author pay titles which produces a minuscule amount of revenue but does show that they are willing to experiment.

Elsevier continues to process a record-breaking number of manuscripts each year working with over 18,000 editors. So there appears to be no disruption to **Elsevier's** publication program from the researcher community. Their revenue from the site license program, sales of Science Direct, Scopus, and SciVerse remain strong with almost 100% renewal rates despite the frequent name calling and calls for a change in business practice from the library community. The past 15 years **Elsevier** has weathered the storm of negative public opinion and overcome the researcher boycott. **Elsevier** continues to be the dominant STM publisher in the library marketplace. At this point in time, the prepaid subscription model is alive and well at **Elsevier** and the other top 10 STM publishers.

While OA publishing has gained, a strong following in the library community and produced a growing number of titles, there is still a strong and viable market for the traditional publishing model with its strong peer review process. Most libraries still support **Elsevier** and other STM publishers partly perhaps because the faculty demand access to this material. **Elsevier** and other top STM publishers are not taking the future for granted and have an active acquisitions program to acquire companies operating in this new marketplace. The past 15 years of weathering the OA storm is no indication of how the next 15 years will play out. For now, **Elsevier** is still making money the old-fashioned way, managing a stable of 2,500 journals publishing 400,000 papers a year, and enjoying an operating margin in excess of 30.5%. 🦈

Random Ramblings — The Primary Advantage of Literary Scholarship

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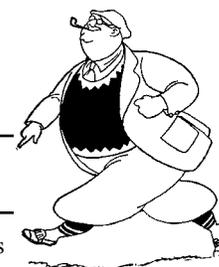
I remember well the morning discussion group when one of the participants started making fun of medieval peasants who believed in angels. He said: "How could anyone be so stupid to accept the existence of any such entities with so little proof?" Maybe I was in a querulous mood that morning, but this statement rubbed me the wrong way. I turned to him to ask: "Do you believe in quarks?" He replied: "Certainly, because they are backed by scientific findings." My next question was: "But do you have any personal evidence that they exist?" He said: "No, I'm not a scientist and don't have access to the laboratories that would provide proof." I countered: "Then you're just like the medieval peasants because you believe your authority figures in the same way that they believed theirs."

I recount this story to introduce my main point that literary studies have the advantage of having the primary scholarly resource available so that, in many cases, anyone can have direct access to the "evidence" to test the research and possibly argue a different point of view. This general statement, of course, has many limitations including issues about the authenticity and accuracy of the text. In addition, the correctness of any textual interpretation may draw upon additional knowledge from outside resources.

The Text as the Key Primary Evidence

The first issue is the establishment of a definitive text. The problem is most pressing for texts created before the invention of printing. For mythic authors like Homer, the accepted versions were most likely created by consensus long after the author was dead. In a more contentious area, the same is true for the *Bible* since Biblical scholars agree that the first definitive texts were created long after the presumed authors were dead. The copying of texts also introduced variants either through mistakes or through conscious attempts to amend the text in the next copy. For example, scholars believe that many references to Athens in *Homer* were added by pro-Athenian scribes centuries after writing down the first text. One of the fundamental tasks of literary scholars before the age of printing is thus to establish the definitive "critical edition" that almost always includes variant readings and critical notes. This text then usually becomes the one used for future editions of the text and as the base document for translations and modernizations. Even when only one manuscript survives, researchers may still argue about obvious errors of language and about whether the text represents correctly the original thoughts of the author.

Post printing press texts also present difficulties. Typographical errors may corrupt the author's original manuscript. Authors may revise their works for later editions. Posthumous texts depend upon the skill of the editor in working with draft versions. To gain additional insights, scholars may study revisions to the author's manuscript before initial publication though the digital age may destroy this scholarly specialty. The issues above usually rise to a level of research importance only for the most studied authors such as **Shakespeare**, **Balzac**, **Goethe**, and **Tolstoy**. For writers of the last few centuries whose works justified only one edition, the key text is the one published version where researchers seldom attempt any deep textual analysis.

Value Added Expertise About the Text

The first level where literary scholars can add value is to explicate the definitive text as defined above. Serious research normally attempts to discuss the text within the framework of the time in which it was written. Especially if it is an older "classic" work, the meanings of the words may have changed since the author's time, may be unfamiliar local variations of the standard language, or may be intentionally de-

formed by the author. The text may also speak about events, people, places, organizations, etc. where a footnote would help the average reader understand the context. For long and complex works, a list of characters with a brief description may help the reader remember who they are.

A second level is to put the concepts within the framework of the culture of the author or of the time or place in which the work takes place. This process faces the difficulty that modern readers don't always read older works with the same mindset that the author and contemporary readers would. To give three examples, modern readers often consider Dido as a heroine and Aeneas as an ungrateful cad in **Vergil's** *Aeneid* when the intended message was that duty should triumph over love. In the early part of **Milton's** *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the hero, a trait that he loses later in this epic poem that many readers don't complete. Finally, I heard a speaker claim that today's high school students often consider **Coleridge's** *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to be about preserving the environment, a concept that would be foreign to its original intended readers. On the other hand, requiring readers to understand the original meaning of the text may be a useless concept if the words themselves interpreted through contemporary eyes find a different new meaning even if the insight is historically inaccurate. In fact, this may be one of the strengths of great literature and occurs much more often in our reading that most of us would acknowledge.

The third level for literary research is making explicit concepts in the text that are not readily apparent but that can be justified by a textual analysis without recourse to outside sources. A vocabulary analysis and resulting Wordle chart provide graphic evidence of the author's key concerns and focus. The literary researcher may examine, for example, why a novel set in 1916 in Europe does not include any references to World War I. In other words, a good literary critic will discover points that enrich the text but that have been overlooked by readers and other critics.

Value Added from External Knowledge Applicable to the Text

Knowledge of the author's other works and similar works is one of the key ways that a literary researcher can increase the understanding of the text(s). For prolific authors like **Shakespeare** or **Balzac**, deep familiarity with the entire literary production can be daunting; but many authors of all periods have a restricted number of texts. In fact, many literary researchers study the entire literary production of even a prolific author in general or in relation to specific topics. Studying related works is even more difficult. A speaker at a recent **Charleston Conference** gave figures on the 18th century English novel with the comment that it would take several lifetimes to read them all. As a more current example, no one could ever hope to read all romance novels to write a study of the genre.

Another strategy is to examine the life of the author for clues to the meaning of the texts. Overall, this literary approach has fallen out of favor though it can still produce useful results. Its success, however, requires access to primary or secondary sources. In some cases, the author may have written an autobiography or kept a diary that will shed insight on the works though many authors have been shown to be less than perfect critics of their own literary production.

The last strategy is to place the text within its cultural context. By definition, researchers will bring their differing points of view to their results. Beyond generalities, perspectives on the culture of any age or place vary enormously even within restricted areas such as the nobility in 19th century England or the working class in post-industrial America.

Other Considerations

My overly broad comments above have focused on the study of texts by an individual author, but many other possibilities exist for literary research. Among others, the literary researcher can compare and contrast individual texts for similarities or differences, look at an entire genre during certain time periods or in a specific locality, or study themes narrowly or broadly. The success of this type of research depends in part on the identification of the authors and text to include in the study since a comprehensive review of all possibilities is seldom possible. The ability to choose may also lead to a conscious or unconscious bias in selecting those texts that support the researcher's point of view.

What Does This All Mean?

To return to my original point, the text is the key primary source for literary research; and the text in almost all cases is available to all. I don't have to take on faith interpretations based on the text since the text is almost always available for my review. I won't need millions of dollars of scientific equipment, the ability to manipulate large data sets, or trust that the author has accurately reported survey results. I agree that I may not have access to the non-textual components of the research such as the biographical and cultural insights that support the interpretation. I may also be duped by a "dishonest" selection of textual examples, but I can read the texts myself if I suspect this is the case. In this way, the reader of the text can confront the "expert" in a way that is seldom possible in other disciplines. Even high school students may have valid insights about the text that contradict the "experts," especially if the work portrays their age group.

The second point that has more importance for scholarly communication is that a reasonably intelligent person with average critical and writing skills can become the world's expert on a literary subject. I accomplished this for my doctoral work by picking an obscure literary genre, dialogues of the dead, as my dissertation topic. Enough famous authors had written on the topic to make it respectable, but a restricted corpus and minimal prior critical attention allowed me to complete my dissertation in thirteen months yet come up with new knowledge. The number of competent authors who have not yet attracted serious critical attention offers almost endless possibilities for students, faculty, and independent scholars. The same is true for comparative studies and thematic

Collection Management Matters — A Requiem for the Reference Collection

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For the most part, I have single handedly embarked on the weeding of our collection, since the librarians show no interest in this and the faculty cannot be compelled to do it unless there is urgent accreditation issue at stake. The process has been going on for the past five years and I hope to reach the end before I retire. I had completed the Ns and started on the first row of Ps, when an errand took me to the reference collection and I noticed some dusty ancient of days' bibliographies in the Z section. The bibliographies had not increased much since 1997, when I took over collection development, because they were never requested. Unable to resist the temptation, I started adding obsolete titles to my cart and pretty soon I was off and running on a full-court press reference weeding project.

At first, I thought I would get through quickly by just stealthily pulling off the most egregious volumes, but there were many more than I estimated. My presence in the reference area became more obvious, so I decided to inform the Reference staff about my project in their area. I thought one or two of them, who I knew to be folks that loathed tossing things out, might put up of fuss, but no, they cheered me on and wished me well! The Head of Reference said most of the stuff could go because the students very seldom used it and another reference librarian said she hardly ever pointed anybody to the Reference Collection.

studies. The issue, however, is whether these literary studies, whether journal articles or monographs, have enough research or commercial appeal to be published in traditional outlets. Self-publishing and open access publishing offer alternative outlets though these works may not count for much for faculty in the quest for tenure, promotion, and merit raises.

To return to our medieval peasants, they may have believed in angels and miracles on faith, but they had much more direct evidence of their immediate environment than we do. We today are the people of faith, especially in science and technology, and must trust that our experts are giving us an accurate view of the world and the universe since we can't directly test much of what they have to say. ❧

I could not help but think back to my training in library school in the late seventies and how I spent semesters in classes that taught how to select the correct reference book: "Reference and Information for the Social Sciences," "Reference and Information for the Humanities," etc. Nowadays, there are so many reference eBooks from **Gale**, **Oxford**, **Cambridge** and other publishers, as well as online providers such as **Credo**, that students need not stir from their carrels to find what they need.

Although I had noticed that the department had dramatically downsized its "Ready Reference" collection, the lack of use came as quite a surprise to me because over the years, I had updated and built up the reference collection. Many expensive multi-volume sets had been purchased, which I soon discovered were not getting enough use to merit their high price tags. Newer editions of titles had been added, but they appeared to be as useless as the older editions.

With the approval of the reference librarians, I decided to take a more serious look at the collection and weed with a heavier hand. After I finished going through the collection for the first round, I went through the entire collection a second time. In addition to the superseded editions problem and books in poor condition, I found duplicate editions, which could be sent to our other campus. I also found books that had no business being in reference and should have been cataloged for circulation. One major discovery was books that had been overlooked in our most recent inventory, including the entire oversize atlas collection!

There was quite a number of books that were more than ten years old. These were pulled to see if newer editions were available. Many of them were not in print, so we went to Amazon to see if there were newer titles in the subject area that could replace them. Other books were still in print after fifteen or more than twenty years. Some titles were in questionable condition, but the cost of replacing them with one in mint condition was not a viable option.

In addition to updating the collection and getting rid of shelf-sitters, damaged and obsolete books, another objective of weeding the reference section was to create more floor space for student use. At the same time that I was combing through the reference section, the Head of Cataloging was weeding Eric

microfiche in the adjacent Microforms area. After the reference books are shifted and the microfiche cabinets removed, we should be able to claim more floor space in that area. This will provide us with expansion of our computer pods or a small area designated for Makerspace projects. The shifting of the Reference collection will also make it more accessible to the disabled, because now we can bring books down from the very top and the bottom.

One obvious question that arose is how much of the print reference collection needs replacing? I have told the librarians that unless they specifically request a title, I am done with expensive multi-volume sets. Our online maps database did not get much usage, so I am replacing a limited quantity of oversize general atlases. Last year I had asked the Senior Library Assistant in Acquisitions to go through the Reference Section to pull superseded editions of standing orders, but when I got more hands on, I realized that several standing order titles have information that can be found in our databases.

There is no doubt that the importance of the print Reference Collection is on a decline. In addition to the availability of titles in electronic format, the spaces that house the collection are needed to provide computer or technology access for the students. The downsizing of print book budgets, which parallels with the increases in electronic resources budget, often means that libraries cannot afford to spend money on expensive multi-volume sets that receive little use or annuals, and other reference works that do not have relevance for their current patrons. The demand for increased functionality of libraries, within their same square footage, has meant that we have to scrutinize our space allocation to maximize our services. Some libraries are shelving the circulating and the reference books together to gain more floor space for new services. The Reference Section as we use to know it is passing into library history. They will continue to be downsized and discarded, as libraries continue to transform to meet the challenges of providing meaningful and viable services to their stakeholders and communities. ❧