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Libraries and Canon-Formation
The Case of English in the Collections of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, Lisbon University

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Libraries and Canon-Formation: The Case of English in the Collections of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, Lisbon University
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Abstract: The project for researching the role played by libraries in canon-formation (namely through their policies regarding the creation, organization, preservation, and utilization of the collections) will be presented and discussed. We selected the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, Lisbon University, a modern academic library, created in 1859, by royal decree of D. Pedro V, following his canonical choice. Actually, the two contemporary rulers of new Britannia—Prince Albert, his cousin, and Queen Victoria—held this king in high consideration for his outstanding contribution to Portuguese modernisation. Representing various fields of study, the collections were decisive to canon-formation in the Faculty of Humanities. Thus, we have been trying to answer the following questions: who has been creating, organizing, preserving, and utilizing the collections, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards? When, where and how? Presently, we are studying the collections in English, namely the works belonging or referring to the long nineteenth century. Richard Garnett’s “The International Library of Famous Literature” (London, 1899) is our first case-study. The anthology determined the Western literary, cultural and visual canon at the turning of the century, as evidenced by comparing it to the Portuguese and Spanish editions, published at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Libraries, Canon-Formation, Selection/Deselection, Inclusion/Exclusion, English

Our research programme started with the idea of searching for the role that may have been played by the English collections of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Lisbon, in the process of establishing a Portuguese Blakean canon, if there is one to be found. The two specialists in literary and cultural studies, working in the English Department, who first conceived the idea, soon realized that the research team had to include a specialist in library and information science [LIS] as well; hence the head librarian was invited to join us. As an innovative multidisciplinary team (both nationally and internationally, as far as we know) constituted by scholars and librarians, we were now prepared to enlarge the scope of the project, searching for the role that has been played by the collections in the process of establishing a Portuguese canon of English, in general, at the University of Lisbon.

By English collections, we mean all materials (from the seventeenth century to the present day and in the original language or in translation) that were used, or not used, in this Faculty, in different areas of study: language-teaching and linguistics, literary and cultural studies, history and history of art, history of ideas and philosophy, to name but some of the most representative. The fact that we give as much importance to their not being used, as to their being used, results from the fact that canon-formation consists, basically, in a process of choice, i.e. of inclusion, but also, and as much important or more, of exclusion, in this case from public access. The
importance of the role played by libraries in such a process of choice, which implies and simultaneously determines certain political contexts, is hinted at by Liviu Papadima: “Raising immaterial or even material walls—libraries, museums, theaters, concert halls—, canons, past and present as well, are a matter of choice: value per square meter.” (Papadima 2011, 9).

Being developed at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology, the mission of which “consists in continuously promoting the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge in Portugal”), the programme was only made possible through a cooperative agreement established between this research Centre and the Library of the Faculty of Humanities. Moreover, a systematic bilateral cooperation with the British Library was also implemented, due to the fact that our first case study was The International Library of Famous Literature, an anthology published in London in 1899, and generally considered of the utmost international cultural relevance, which was edited by Richard Garnett, Keeper of Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum from 1851 to 1899. Such cooperation was indispensable for the development of the research since many of the documents essential for our study are kept in the British Library, and were thus made available to our consultation there.2

The first aim of this research programme consists in pondering library and information problems in a much needed, original, critical-theoretical framing, as Gloria Leckie and John Buschman state: “Critical theorists give us an array of perspectives or approaches to the very concerns that we have in LIS and help us to think about/examine those issues in new ways.” (Leckie 2010, XIII). The so-called critical theorists whose diverse works are examined in this volume are Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, among many others.3

Indeed, like Leckie and Buschman, we strongly believe that librarians must be trained to recognize the necessity for approaching their professional practice with efficient theoretical and critical instruments, which will prove to be essential to deal with contemporary library and information issues in a much better way: “(...) a quintessentially social field, interested (in one way or another) in how society, people, institutions (including but not limited to libraries), government and information technologies work, and the interactions among them.” (Leckie 2010, XIII). The conception of this kind of critical-theoretical training leads to the necessity of an extended reflection and debate, involving librarians, their associations and the Academy. Thus, the study cycles and curricula of LIS courses have to be evaluated, accredited and adapted to ensure, not only that they align by the same quality standards, but also that they all will equip future librarians with the much needed theoretical and critical instruments, as well as with the indispensable technical skills, understood in a multidisciplinary logic, essential to address the increasingly complex challenges faced by librarians in a context of permanent social, political and technological change.

Trained in “a quintessentially social field [LIS]” (to use Leckie and Buschman’s words quoted above), the modern librarian will develop a productive social consciousness, becoming particularly aware of the decisive economic, political, cultural, and educational roles played by libraries, as information centres, in society:

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2 The initial conclusions drawn from the research relating to this first case study will be the object of future publication. The anthology was acquired through donation made by the British Council in Lisbon at the beginning of the 1950’s and was immediately incorporated in the Library collections.

Concerning the fact that Richard Garnett distinguished himself both as a librarian and a scholar, being possible to describe him as a kind of Victorian Sage, see Harris 1998, and McRimmon 1989.

3 In relation to these critical theorists, see Christensen 2010, 15–28; Hussey 2010, 41–51 and Olsson 2010, 63–74.
Furthermore, LIS is also very interested in the betterment of society, from the development of national information policies, to the provision of user-friendly and equitable access to information, the inclusion of diverse and/or marginalized clienteles, the support of citizen lifelong learning, the nurturing of the library in the community, and many other proactive areas of research and practice. (Leckie 2010, XIII).

In fact, when seeking information, users are very much determined by different social mechanisms that have not yet been fully researched, although these mechanisms work as information filters conditioning the amount and the kind of materials that can be accessed, studied and published. The centrality of “critical-theoretical perspectives” (as formulated by Leckie and Buschman) for the analysis of such social mechanisms, in terms of library and information studies, is well detailed by the two theorists: ‘(…) an act of information seeking might be viewed as an individual and isolated event, but a critical framework allows us to see how information seeking is part of a larger milieu that has many social dimensions in play, such as ideologies, hegemony, socioeconomic forces (“cognitive capitalism”), spatial practices, and so forth.’ (Leckie 2010, XIII).

Moreover, these “critical-theoretical perspectives” will allow librarians to form a better idea of the crucial effects produced, in their field of action, by the radical changes that have been occurring all through the world, at least since the turn of the twentieth to the twenty first century, as explained by Leckie and Buschman too: ‘(…) critical-theoretical perspectives help us to understand how large scale changes in society, such as globalization and permutations of capitalist production affect what might seem to be routine and local practices, such as collections development or the purchase of catalogue records (…).’ (Leckie 2010, XIII).

A second objective of our research programme, which has already been successfully achieved, was the implementation of resource sharing through a cooperative protocol between our academic library of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, and the municipal library Dr. Renato Araújo, in São João da Madeira, a still prosperous industrial city in northern Portugal, in spite of the present financial and economic crisis. Although these are two very different categories of libraries, cooperation has proven indispensable to our research, and may be considered a kind of application of the concept of resource sharing.

In Evans’ and Saponaro’s view, resource sharing is still a very difficult task to put into practice. Out of the three reasons they give for this, we will emphasize the following two. The first concerns the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, meanings ascribed to the word “cooperation”: “(…) the concept of cooperation is subject to many varying interpretations, even among the library staff—public service staff see it as more access, selection officers have both positive and negative views, and, often, top administrators see it as a way to save money.” (Evans 2005, 352). The second reason relates to the difficulties generated by the different characteristics of the libraries involved in the cooperation project: “(…) multitype or multysize library efforts are unlikely to succeed because of the libraries’ different goals and what each library can contribute to a true cooperative venture.” (Evans 2005, 352)

Finally, we intend to contribute to the much needed contemporary reconsideration of the concept of canon, which has become even more urgent after the radical worldwide changes of the first decade of the new century, as implied in the following question addressed by the participants in the international conference ‘National Literatures in the Age of Globalization: The Issue of the Canon’, held in Bucharest, at the end of 2008: “What is the impact of recent

4 The other reason why, according to Evans and Saponaro, resource sharing is still a very difficult task to put into practice is as follows: “(…) status and budgets are still major issues, if there is a chance that cooperating might have a negative impact on size.” (Evans 2005, 352). However, they also recognize that a new instrument (which has become more and more available during this last decade) has appeared which facilitates resource sharing: “(…) technology is making it increasingly easy to share collections, even with multitype consortia.” (Idem, Ibidem)
changes—in terms of (cultural) politics, literary production, and distribution, the status and mission of academic institutions etc.—on the structure and orientation of literary studies, reconsidering both their past and their future prospects?” (Papadima 2011, 10). It should be added that the et cetera in this question cannot but include the impact, on canon-formation, of the tremendous changes that have also been occurring in the field of library and information science.

In our view, the relations between the processes of canon-formation and of the formation, configuration, conservation and use of library collections are mutually determining, and must be systematically studied. Both processes are indeed relative to the circumstances of time and space conditioning their development, and produce corpora (library collections and a national literary canon, for example) which condition the process of the historical construction of texts, readers and contexts. Thus, most productive is the comparative study of the pair of concepts inclusion and exclusion, in the case of canon-formation, with the pair selection and deselection, in that of the creation of library collections.

In relation to modern academic libraries, they have to be conceived as much more than mere spaces where books and other printed and multimedia resources are stored for being read, borrowed from or accessed by its users. They have to be represented as spaces for very well organized team work involving, although in different ways, teachers, researchers and librarians, but also specialists in various subjects, students and other community members, in general. These teams will have to establish a policy for the development of the collections, and their concomitant analysis, i.e. they will have to establish a policy for choosing, selecting and deselecting, the materials to be included into and excluded from those collections. Such a policy will be strongly conditioned by economic, political, social and cultural factors, as well as determinant in the processes of canon-formation generated in these academic libraries.

The main purpose of academic libraries, or indeed of libraries of any other type, consists in “the transfer of information and the development of knowledge”, in Evans and Saponaro’s words, a process managed by the librarians and the communities with which they interact, and comprising a relevant number of different actions, namely the interpretation of readers’ needs defined by the same essayists as follows: “Users often need assistance to describe their needs in a manner that leads to locating and retrieving the desired information” (Evans 2005, 6–7).

The successful accomplishment of this task implies the continuous analysis of the collections, making it possible to answer questions such as: when did the materials enter the collections, acquired by whom, where, how and why? In the case of donations, who were their previous owners, who were their readers before and after they entered the collections? Are there any marks of use to be found in the books and other written materials? Those were indeed the very same questions that have guided our research strategy from the start, and the ones to which we must be able to give the answers that will constitute the results of our study of the role played by the English collections of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, in the process of establishing a Portuguese canon of English at the University of Lisbon.

Since no similar investigation on this subject had ever been undertaken and, consequently, no published bibliography was available for consultation, which, again, reinforces the innovative character of your research, it was obvious, particularly for the head librarian whose background is in History, that no systematic research or consistent results could be possibly achieved without recurring to archival resources, despite and regardless of the information contained in the books themselves or in other relevant sources of information, namely local, national and foreign library, and antiquarian booksellers catalogues. Thus, the Library Archive should also become, for this

5 Concerning the notions of “representations of space or conceived space”, see Leckie 2010, 227.
6 In relation to the process of selection in academic libraries, consider the following analysis in Evans 2005, 14: “Academic libraries select materials in subject areas for educational and research purposes, with selection done by several different methods: faculty only, joint faculty/library committees, librarians only, or subject specialists.”
very same reason, the primary source of information. The first challenge to our research strategy was that the Library Archive, although it exists, was not yet organized, as it tends to happen, unfortunately, in many libraries, since the treatment of this type of documentation is not considered a priority and it is sometimes perceived, by Librarians, as not being part of the library “core business” despite the importance played by these primary information resources in the research process in general and, particularly, in this kind of studies.

In fact, archives, although they were not mentioned by Liviu Papadima (Papadima 2011, 9) as relevant for canon-formation, should be valorized and understood, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Archives: “as authentic evidence of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as a reflection of the evolution of societies” (International Council on Archives 2010, 1), along with libraries, museums and other cultural institutions. They should therefore be assumed as of: “vital necessity (...) for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions.” (International Council on Archives 2010, 1). In order to fulfill those purposes, “public administrators and decision-makers, owners or holders of public or private archives, and archivists and other information specialists” (International Council on Archives 2010, 1) should cooperate and take the responsibility in making sure that “archives are managed and preserved in ways that ensure their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability.” (International Council on Archives 2010, 1). Unfortunately, such a level of commitment and excellence has not yet been achieved by our Faculty where the position for a corporate archivist remains vacant and no consistent archive policy has been adopted and implemented so far.

These are some of the reasons that explain, for instance, the inexistence of an inventory of the library archive, adding some unexpected difficulties to the research process. Fortunately, after a laborious prospecting in the archive storage room, we were successful in finding the Library register books covering a period from 1879 (the first register book that has ever existed) to 2001,8 which contained very relevant information concerning the constitution and development of the Library collections, namely the titles purchased or donated, their dates, prices, names of the donors and/or suppliers. This would enable us, we first thought, to trace the evolution of the collections in English dating back to the Library of Curso Superior de Letras, a School of Higher Education in the Humanities, founded in 1859, by King D. Pedro V (1837–1861), predecessor of the modern Faculty of Humanities, formally established by the Republican regime in 1911, which was specialized in history, literature and philosophy, and was created with the specific and important mission of collecting “(...) all Portuguese classics as well as all books and memories that could be useful to the study of the national language, history and literature”.9

The initial immersion in the library archive put in evidence an existing gap in the collections for the period between 1858 and 1878, which immediately led the research team to consider the necessity of undertaking additional research, for that same period, in the Portuguese National Library Archive and in the Portuguese National Archives so far with interesting, although not completely satisfying, results. Such evidence did not prevent us from proceeding with our research for the period after 1879, being aware, though, that any conclu-

8 After 2001 the registration of books and other types of documents in the library started to be done electronically using the acquisition module of the library management software.


D. Pedro V strongly believed that Portugal was an old country in an urgent need for a radical process of modernization, having in view the educational, scientific and cultural institutions, namely the libraries. On the very day that followed this King’s early death, Queen Victoria, who was married to his cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, wrote to her uncle, the Belgian king Leopold I, a letter where she lamented the loss of the brilliant Portuguese king, who had envisioned a better future for his country: “It is an almost incredible event! A terrible calamity for Portugal and a real European loss!”, as quoted in Leitão 2011, 121.
sions regarding the origins of the collections in English might, obviously and necessarily, be subject to changes in consequence of the ongoing research process in the national library and archives.

Preliminary results of our archival research allowed us, not only to date the incorporation of the first books in English in the collections of the Library of Curso Superior de Letras, between June 1881 and June 1883, but also to identify the nine initial titles related to India’s ancient culture and civilization, acquired by purchase, probably under a proposal of Professor Guilherme de Vasconcelos Abreu, who had introduced the study of the Sanskrit Language and Literature in the curriculum of this School of Higher Education, in 1877, and whose personal library, specialized in the same subjects, ended up being acquired by purchase and incorporated in the Library of Curso Superior de Letras after his death, in 1906.

The extension of the research held in the library archive in subsequent years enabled us to identify the forty three oldest and/or rarest books in English, published between 1685 and 1799, acquired by the Library through purchases, major donations and small gifts, between 1911 and the 1950’s, covering a relatively wide range of subjects, including Literature, History, Geography and Religion, and not necessarily related to Britain. The existence, in many of the copies, of a profusion of marginalia, marks of use and information about former owners brought to the discussion, inside the research team, the importance of making those same marks and information available to future researchers.

By initiative and suggestion of the librarian responsible for the Department of Acquisitions and Collections Management of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities, a member of the research team herself, those marks of use and possession ought to be included in the bibliographic record and be accessible to all users/investigators through the University of Lisbon Union Catalogue, which represents a totally innovative approach to the treatment of marginalia by our Library, in particular, and by the Portuguese libraries, in general, regardless of their type. However, the inclusion of such information could not jeopardize compliance by the library of the national and international standards for the production of bibliographic records and thus put into question their quality.

Information about the quantity, type of notes and the number of pages where they appear has been made available, for the first time, in each record, in order to fulfill the needs of those investigators interested in book and reading history, following and improving some of the best practices and recommendations referred to in the works of Rosenthal, Stoddard, Saenger, Barker and Jackson. As far as we know, no one in Portugal, not even in other European countries, provides information about marginal notes in such a complete way. In a not so distant future, we expect to be able to provide direct access to the digitised contents of marginalia, through the library online catalogue.

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11 UNIMARC field 316 (Notes related to the copy in hand), has been used for this purpose. See IFLA 2008, 420–425. For a practical example, see image 1.
A first result of our research program consisted in making available and known to users, through the Library online catalogue, dozens of bibliographic references to books in English existing in the collections of the Library of the Faculty of Humanities which, until then, had remained “incognito” in the Library storage rooms. Furthermore, we have concluded, from the ongoing process of reconstructing the history/memory of the collections, that the establishment of a Portuguese canon of English has mainly been the result from academics choices -- acquisition of books proposed by them or incorporation of their private libraries through donation or purchase. On the contrary, we strongly believe that these choices have to be made by very well organized teams involving, although in different ways, academics, researchers and librarians, along with specialists in various subjects, students and other community members.
REFERENCES


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