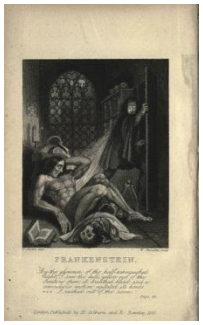
Stephen Brooks – Middle East Academic Libraries Symposium

When we speak of the humanities, we are usually considering those disciplines which facilitate and organise our reflection upon what it means to be human and a part of human society – and which are characterised by speculative, interpretive and critical analyses, rather than the strictly empirical approach and methodology that defines the sciences or even, to a lesser extent, the social sciences (with which the humanities share significant overlapping boundaries). These different areas of human understanding do not stand alone and separate, but provide one another with mutual justification and illumination, despite occasional attempts by vested interests to create false oppositions and perceived conflicts.



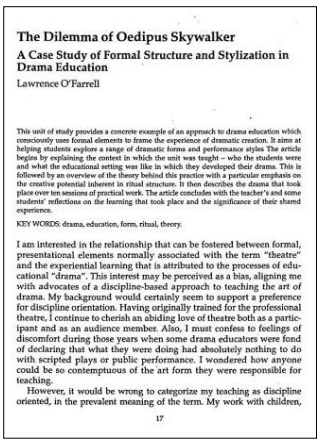
It was trepidation at the possibilities hinted at by major advances in scientific knowledge during the enlightenment, such as the discovery of galvanism, that prompted Mary Shelly to write *Frankenstein* – just as today the performance artist Stelarc explores what it means (or might mean in future) to be human through cybernetics and surgery; even going so far as to graft a real, human ear onto his arm. Elsewhere, the door swings in both directions as neuroscientists today use MRI technology in attempts to understand scientifically how the brain processes such abstract and fundamentally human notions as love or beauty.

Let us consider the following heartfelt quote:

> ‘The sciences are the “how,” and the humanities are the “why” — why are we here, why do we believe in the things we believe in? I don’t think you can have the “how” without the “why”.’

So, which great philosopher and Renaissance man said that? Step forward filmmaker, multi-platform franchise exploiter and creator of Star Wars, George Lucas. We may find this an amusing choice of champion for the humanities, yet this is a man who knows what he is talking about. We see him as someone who, together with Steven Spielberg, re-defined Hollywood in the 1970s as a massive engine of cultural commerce – in the process inventing the modern ‘tentpole’ feature film event and launching a thousand lunchboxes, t-shirts and toys – but he is not without credibility. George Lucas learnt his craft at the legendary University of Southern California film school – but previously had also studied anthropology and literature. His hugely successful movie cycle was founded upon a deliberate analysis of a wide variety of cultural influences (from the cinematic serials of the 1930s to the *jidaigeki* cinema of Japan) and their subsequent combination into a new whole. Tellingly, he consciously based his story writing on *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* – a study of the shared elements of global mythotypes by the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell.

Indeed, Lucas's own work is now the subject of a growing body of humanities scholarship in its own right, as evidenced by this journal article:



The Dilemma of Oedipus Skywalker

A Case Study of Formal Structure and Stylization in Drama Education

Lawrence O'Farrell

This unit of study provides a concrete example of an approach to drama education which consciously uses formal elements to frame the experience of dramatic creation. It aims at helping students explore a range of dramatic forms and performance styles The article begins by explaining the context in which the unit was taught – who the students were and what the educational setting was like in which they developed their drama. This is followed by an overview of the theory behind this practice with a particular emphasis on the creative potential inherent in ritual structure. It then describes the drama that took place over ten sessions of practical work. The article concludes with the teacher's and some students' reflections on the learning that took place and the significance of their shared experience.

KEY WORDS: drama, education, form, ritual, theory.

I am interested in the relationship that can be fostered between formal, presentational elements normally associated with the term "theatre" and the experiential learning that is attributed to the processes of educational "drama". This interest may be perceived as a bias, aligning me with advocates of a discipline-based approach to teaching the art of drama. My background would certainly seem to support a preference for discipline orientation. Having originally trained for the professional theatre, I continue to cherish an abiding love of theatre both as a participant and as an audience member. Also, I must confess to feelings of discomfort during those years when some drama educators were fond of declaring that what they were doing had absolutely nothing to do with scripted plays or public performance. I wondered how anyone could be so contemptuous of the art form they were responsible for teaching.

However, it would be wrong to categorize my teaching as discipline oriented, in the prevalent meaning of the term. My work with children,

17

Last year, George Lucas sold Lucasfilm and its intellectual properties to the Disney Corporation for more than $4 billion . So, should you ever find yourself searching an example of the profitable real-world application of the humanities, you need perhaps look no further than the creator of *Star Wars*. Given that he has pledged to donate the proceeds of that sale to a charitable foundation supporting education it might also be safe for us to assume the sincerity of George Lucas in making this statement about the humanities.

[SLIDE]

Returning from Hollywood, to the equally glamorous world of academia, we are all aware that the humanities have been studied since classical times and indeed many of the notions, techniques and even the vocabulary we still use can be traced back to sources such as the philosophical schools of ancient Greece and Rome (for instance, the very term 'academic' and our notion of 'the Academy' derives from Plato's school of the same name). The humanities as we know them today, however, are the product of centuries of evolution, from the Renaissance, when they began to become more distinct from the natural sciences, as more defined methodologies emerged for both, and progressing through the early modern period's growth in secular learning, accelerating through the Enlightenment and coalescing and codifying across the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Over time a robust set of practices has developed for the humanities; varying by specific discipline, but focusing on such things as close reading, the paramount significance of primary sources and differing schools of critical analysis or historiography. Significantly, each generation of researchers also locates itself within an expanding framework of existing scholarship. Even today, with many of the recent changes that have taken place (largely through technology) – many of these methods and certainly the goals to which they aspire remain fundamentally unchanged. What has shifted, in some instances at least, are the possibilities of scale, efficiency and focus.

It is worth pausing here to draw a distinction between the digitisation of resources for the humanities and *capital-D, capital-H* 'Digital Humanities'. The latter is already becoming commonly abbreviated as 'DH' by its adherents and practitioners (probably because 'Digital Humanities' takes up a substantial portion of 140 characters and – if you are going to find these people anywhere, it's certain to be on Twitter), but this is an important improvement

nonetheless, particularly in light of a regrettable period in our recent past, when some organisations insisted that these practices – even when applied to traditional humanities subjects – be referred to as ‘e-science’, such was the awe with which we regarded our lab-coat-wearing colleagues and their early adoption of all things technological.

Digital collections and digital resources do not themselves constitute the discipline of digital humanities, although they are to some extent its precursor and facilitator. They have, however, changed the way in which humanities scholars can and do work and, in doing so, have created the necessary environment in which digital humanities can come to fruition and – it is hoped – flourish.

To consider for a moment the advantages of digitised resources and collections (and as someone who has spent nearly 20 years building some of these, I’m taking pains to avoid calling them straightforward), we can be confident in making the claim that they are both many and relatively easy to identify. They bring content within reach of scholars around the globe, they make rare materials common, they allow for levels of enquiry and discovery beyond the capabilities of manual research (including the serendipitous) and they can allow a researcher to speak with a greater confidence in their authority and in the comprehensiveness of their work.

Does this simply mean that people need now work less hard in order to grow our understanding of the human condition? In the early 1990s I was conducting a survey of a single medieval English dialect and needed to locate every instance of certain words and word-forms within a 6,000 line poem. This is a task that I began manually, squinting in concentration and tracing my finger line-by-line along a print facsimile or my own personal microfilm copy. A personal breakthrough came with the discovery of ProQuest’s *English Poetry* collection (then on CD ROM) – which allowed me to conduct an automated search that took no more than an hour or two. Today the same search executes in mere seconds through the *Literature Online* database. So. Does this mean more time for playing soccer, walking the dog or flower arranging? Perhaps PhDs should be completed in less than two years?

No.

What this really represents is more time for analysis. More time for critical reading and thinking. More time to absorb the vast and growing body of scholarship that exists in almost every discipline. More time to ask additional, more detailed questions. In short: time better spent.

Even when using digital resources – and my own work on historical linguistics was a case in point – people using tools like Literature Online are still engaging in the same forms of research and exploring the same fundamental issues they always have; examining and illuminating aspects of the human experience, and seeking to interpret and understand what we produce as part of our culture and what that says about us.

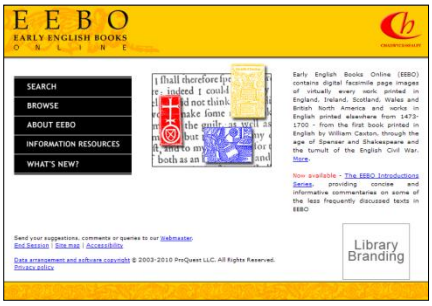
Digital Humanities builds upon digital resources refers more specifically to the application of new modes of analysis and study, and to new forms of project outputs, and often demonstrate significant differences in terms of size and power. The field's origins in 'humanities computing' will give some indication as to its concern with bringing computerised processing power to questions of interest to the humanist scholar. Having been an interested observer on the periphery of this activity for many years, it seems to me that a significant acceleration in interest and acceptance of Digital Humanities has taken place within the last two-to-three years. The change in terminology from 'humanities computing' reflects a re-positioning movement out of an *unfairly* perceived ghetto of computing science and an attempt to self-identify as more closely integrated with the humanities 'proper'. The approach is no longer an academic cul-de-sac for hobbyists and enthusiasts, but increasingly a legitimate methodology for addressing core humanities questions.

Digital Humanities does not rewrite the DNA of humanities scholarship nor does it change the fundamental interests and objectives of people working the field. What it does is to allow them to ask questions that previously could not be answered (at least using the levels of resource and effort that can traditionally be brought to bear on such matters) and to discover new avenues of enquiry. The analysis of large amounts of source material or the identification of patterns in any sized corpus can now be achieved using computational techniques. Other forms of 'DH' allow for the unique and illuminating organisation and display of information by researchers and students – or the creation of resources which can then be utilised by others. Look closely, however, at pretty much any example of this movement – for want of a better word – and one thing that you will almost always find is collaboration. It seems that one way in which Digital Humanities does differ significantly from, at least the stereotype, of its analogue precursor is in abandoning the cliché of the lonely, isolated researcher. The *Trading Consequences* project, for instance – which examines centuries of global trade and commerce in key commodities – brings together the Universities of Edinburgh and St. Andrews in Scotland with Canada's York University in the creation of a new resource (a database of historical transactions) and its utilisation in the production of original research. The network tools at the disposal of the DH practitioner and the scale of the projects undertaken facilitate and necessitate team-based work, which often involves a strong component of interdisciplinary co-operation, such as between the departments of history and computing science. I have attended many presentations of projects in which the participants have been anxious to stress the benefits of

working with people from completely different fields, the lessons they can learn from one another and the assumptions that are often usefully challenged through doing so.

Given that my own attempts a research career ended around the same time I first saw something called the World Wide Web and I have spent many subsequent years with ProQuest, I should perhaps move onto something I am far better qualified to discuss and address how we at ProQuest feel we fit into this landscape of humanities research and the work of scholars using both traditional and emerging techniques.

Many of you will be aware that this year sees the 75th anniversary of ProQuest, tracing back through its antecedent organisations to University Microfilms International. One of the very first projects that our founder Eugene Power began was the preservation and widening of access to important books from collections such as the British Library – an endeavour that after, seven continuous decades of seeking out and photographing rare volumes, is now better known as *Early English Books Online*.



In the intervening years (although, as you might imagine, it's rather more inclined towards the last decade or two) ProQuest has built an impressive portfolio of digital tools for humanities scholarship. Not just in the form of large primary source collections, such as *Periodicals Archive Online, Digital National Security Archive* or *History Vault*, but also through research environments like *Literature Online*, current peer-reviewed journals in *ProQuest Central*, monographs – the gold standard research output of the humanities – from ebrary and EBL and essential finding aids such as the *MLA Bibliography*, *Art Bibliographies Modern* and the *International Index to Music Periodicals*.

It is worth nothing that this paper refers specifically to the provision of important content for students and researchers, in the humanities. Elsewhere, ProQuest brings significant efforts to bear on enhancing discovery and workflow for those same people and colleagues also work hard to help to meet the content needs of scholars in other fields; including areas such as current science, medicine, business studies and economics.

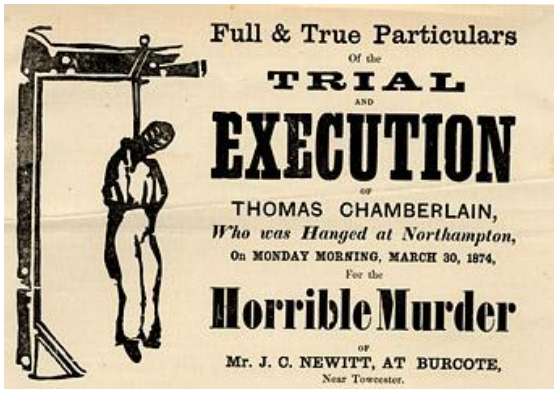
Focussing then, on the humanities – and at primary sources in particular – the research collections that we have developed demonstrate many types of original source: manuscript documents and printed materials, consumer

publications vs. the language of officialdom, content set down for the record or that which was intended to be fleeting and ephemeral.

Some of our most recent collections have taken us into such diverse territory as the realms of fashion, design and women's history via the *Vogue Archive* or have opened a window into the daily grind of life for soldiers on the front line, with its ever-present mix of boredom and danger through the archive of *Trench Journals and Unit Magazines of the First World War (1914-1919)*.

How then does ProQuest develop its portfolio for the humanities? First and foremost, it is imperative that we engage directly with the research community, in order to gauge their needs. In addition to individual contact with students and members of faculty, ProQuest actively surveys its users and solicits their opinions. Our publishing teams attend and participate in scholarly conferences and strive to maintain an up-to-date understanding of the contemporary research experience and landscape. One-to-one interviews, online surveys, feedback forms and focus groups all play their part. We regularly invite researchers from a range of subjects and institutional types to come and address us as a group and to tell us about their day-to-day working lives. But we also learn a great deal from a group who are far closer to researchers than we are who are exposed to their goals and concerns and whose very job it is to monitor and fulfil those needs – our library customers. We gain an enormous amount of useful information from this group of people who are ideally positioned to spot emergent trends in researcher needs, often before they can be seen by isolated practitioners or small, contained groups.

Both faculty and library are also crucial to ProQuest in helping us to test specific ideas – whether by providing validation of our assumptions and inferences or through refuting and correcting them. As well as concepts developed from our analysis of researcher needs, this can sometimes involve ideas brought to us by third parties who have projects in which they would like ProQuest to participate. We then need to assess and to determine whether or not to develop them further.



Hence, therefore, such innovative collections as the JISC-funded digitisation of the *John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera* – produced with Oxford University's Bodleian Library (where the physical collection resides) – or the *Queen Victoria's Journals* project – again involving the Bodleian but this time sourced and proposed by the Royal

Archives at Windsor Castle. One of our oldest digitised resources for humanities scholars – the *Periodicals Index Online* database of humanities journal articles – was originally proposed by Harvard University Library as a joint project to create a finding aid to their journal content. Some twenty years later it is going strong and has grown vastly beyond that original remit, to catalogue more than 20 million individual articles. To this day, ProQuest still pays for staff at the library to help identify and source additional titles for indexing.

All of which speaks to one key characteristic of how ProQuest develops new resources – regardless of where the ideas originate – namely the significant role played in our business by partnerships.

Global publishing brands – including organisations such as The Economist Intelligence Unit, Condé Nast and The New York Times – all look to ProQuest to take their content and to create from it resources suited to the needs and preferences of the worldwide academic community. They are joined by private collections such as that of The 7th Marquess of Salisbury – custodian of the Elizabethan *Cecil Papers* – and curatorial organisations like the Imperial War Museum and the British Library (which is both one of our first partners, courtesy of Eugene Powers' visionary microfilming project, and one of our most recent; having just contributed content to the *Trench Journals* collection). Likewise, governments and governmental bodies, including The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the House of Commons Library and the National Archives entrust their content to ProQuest, whilst from the US we deliver global access to collections such as *Legislative Insights* and the *Congressional Suite*.

For many years, a key group of development partners for ProQuest's dissertations digitisation programme has also been those same universities and libraries who are our customers. We are now extending that partnership model in exciting new directions through ProQuest's *Video Preservation and Discovery* service – a fascinating project which looks to help institutions open the archives of their own film and video content to wider usage and which runs the gamut from digitisation, through transcription and metadata creation to distribution.

Finally, ProQuest is always interested in participating in new and innovative models of collaboration, such as the Text Creation Partnership. An independent project, to which ProQuest contributes funding, and which creates detailed, re-keyed SGML versions of selected texts from Early English Books Online, 'TCP' (as it is known) is run primarily by the Universities of Michigan and Oxford and the initiative is driven by the library community itself.

One recent and very major project, which sees ProQuest come full circle – joining our past to our future – is the *Early European Books* project. Built to meet a stated user need for more digitised rare books, this project is continental in scale and involves collaborative relationships with many of Europe's greatest libraries, such as

Paris's Bibliotheque Nationale de France, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze in Florence and the Wellcome Trust in London.

Early European Books builds on *Early English Books Online* – not just in starting to tackle the c.95% of pre-1600 European printed books that are not addressed by the earlier project, but in pushing the bounds of digitisation, through capturing every aspect of the original volume that we can. Echoing those early days of UMI, we have digital preservation workshops in each of our partner libraries – only now they are using the latest, often customised, equipment to generate high resolution colour images of everything from the printed text to spines, fly leaves, clasps and page edges. This in itself is an approach that reflects changes in the academic landscape – with significant growth in interest in the history of printing and in the book as a physical artefact.

As we continue into the future, we strongly anticipate working closely with many more Digital Humanities projects – both through facilitating their use of our unique and powerful corpora and by expressing our support for (and intention to collaborate with) project proposals and funding bids. Already we have contributed content and knowledge to endeavours such as *Connected Histories*, *Trading Consequences*, *NINES* (a nineteenth century studies portal) and the *Early Modern OCR Project*. One of our customers is already developing plans to use the *Vogue Archive* to conduct advanced analyses of colour in photographs and interest is building about the opportunities afforded by the *Trench Journals* collection for text mining and analysis.

Many of these projects directly involve librarians and the library, who are increasingly playing a key role in Digital Humanities – creating bridges with vendors such as ProQuest, monitoring best practices and guiding researchers towards the tools and methodologies that best suit them.

Socrates spoke of how the unexamined life is not worthy of being lived by a human being and much of what the humanities attempt to do is a continual progression towards the better understanding of humanity as a whole and the societies and cultures that we construct. Far from sinking into irrelevance, these disciplines are as important today as they have ever been and it ProQuest's very real desire to be part of the humanities' future even as we help others to shed light on humanity's past.