I approach the subject of interlibrary loans of rare materials with considerable misgivings, since I come from that ivory tower of institutions prohibited from lending anything to anyone. The Huntington Library, just outside Los Angeles in San Marino, is a “private, free research library, art gallery, museum, and botanical garden, containing objects of artistic, historic, scientific or literary interest.”

These words come from the indenture of 8 February 1926, in which Henry Huntington outlined the responsibilities and goals of the institution which bears his name. In the portion of the indenture titled “The Nature of the Huntington,” the document continues, “The Library shall be for reference and research only, without any circulation or withdrawal privileges, for the use and benefit of all qualified persons.” This has been quite unambiguously interpreted to mean that under no circumstances can we lend any object from our collection to any institution or individual, for any reason. We regularly receive impassioned pleas from museum directors and curators from all corners of the world requesting the loan of objects unavailable elsewhere, objects crucial to their undertaking.

Alas, we have no choice but to decline to participate, citing the above indenture. There are many times we regret this restriction of our ability to participate in worthwhile projects, and we have no doubt received criticism in the community for what must appear to be short-sighted and antischolarly views. We are, after all, among the minority of rare book and manuscript libraries with such policies. We must decline, for instance, to lend drawings to a show which brings together all the identified drawings by a particular artist, and we supply instead a color photograph.

We do not send materials out of the institution for any reason: we do all our

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own conservation, paper repair and binding, photographic and other reproduction. At one point the wrought-iron gates at the south boundary of the Huntington were in need of some repair. The trustees ruled that these art objects could not be removed from the property, and the blacksmiths were obliged to set up a temporary forge and smithy’s shop on the grounds, where all necessary work was carried out. This is, I concede, an extreme example, yet it shows the dedication with which our trustees and overseers approach their responsibility to maintain the institution according to Henry Huntington’s wishes.

Without a doubt the greatest virtue of our policy of not participating in any form of loan arrangement is that all Huntington Library materials are available at one time in one place. This can be said of few institutions containing scholarly material of any kind. This exclusion of loans also makes our curatorial work load that much easier—we are not saddled with the enormous amount of work that loans inevitably generate. The institution’s collections are substantial by any definition. Our rare book collection consists of roughly 350,000 volumes, our manuscripts number in the millions of pieces, our reference collection includes some 304,000 volumes, our art division has a significant collection of English decorative arts, silver and paintings as well as 13,000 drawings, and our botanical division manages over 200 acres of botanical material, 130 of which are open to the public on six days of the week. Our collection of historic photographs numbers roughly 250,000 prints and negatives, as does our holding of historic prints and ephemeral items. Our collections are constantly in demand by the nearly 1,700 readers we have at the Huntington every year, averaging about 70 each day. Visitors to the public areas of the institution can easily top 3,000 on a fine summer day.

Because we are a large, important, and recognized rare and reference book collection, we receive interlibrary loan requests from other libraries around the country. These requests are in addition to the considerable number of photograph requests received as a part of daily curatorial correspondence. In fact, the greatest part of our rare book correspondence at present contains requests for some sort of photographic copying.

We received a total of 236 ILL requests during the past two years, from large and small libraries across the country. It is sometimes difficult to fathom why the Huntington was selected for an ILL request. Often it can be shown that our institutional symbol appeared first in the NUC, in C.E. Dornbusch’s history of Civil War regimental accounts, or in some similarly standard reference work or bibliography. It is perhaps worth noting here that of the loan requests we received between 30 June 1986 and 1 July 1988, we did not even own a full 15 percent of the books, nor could we find any obvious reference source where we were listed as having a copy.

We treat ILL requests as seriously as photographic orders received in corre-
spondece: a member of our Photographic Department handles all these requests in an expeditious manner. But since we are unable to lend, we are obliged to explore alternatives. Most ILL requests we receive simply ask to borrow our materials; the librarians at the borrowing institution seldom ask for an alternative form of reproduction if the original cannot be lent. Our curators examine every volume requested on an ILL form to determine whether the volume can be safely copied, even if the ILL form does not indicate that another medium would be acceptable. We have on file roughly 8,500 photostats of our rarer materials, which can be photocopied easily and without damage. We no longer have the capabilities of making photostats, and frequently find these older copies far superior to any photocopy we can make today. We supply estimates for shorter works, or, if the work is longer or multivolume, we ask whether the patron would like an estimate.

We do consider copying the original text, but only if it can be copied safely. We are becoming increasingly concerned about the handling damage caused by photocopying rare and reference materials, and are exploring the advantages and disadvantages of the so-called "90-degree" copiers.

As in most institutions, every rare book offered for photocopying must be approved by a curator; I consider myself a tough taskmaster, feeling strongly that it is my obligation to preserve our materials for future scholars. Of the 236 ILL requests we received during the past two years, I find we rejected seventy, or a full 30 percent. I suspect this number may well be typical of such systems; in any case, these books were either too tightly bound, too fragile, too large, or were perhaps in too fine condition and would suffer from the copying.

An alternative would be to send a positive microfilm made from a negative already on file, or a copyflo print-out from that negative. Although we offered it in sixty-one cases, this was not a popular alternative. We sent out only five ILL microfilms and two copyflo print-outs during the past two years. I suspect that many institutions would feel that the curatorial responsibility to assist a borrower ends there: an alternative to supplying the original has been offered. But because our specialized collections are noncirculating, we make every effort to assist the ILL requester. In the unusual situation where we are dealing with a unique object not in any way available in facsimile, we will prepare a negative microfilm or photocopy. This will become the permanent Huntington file copy from which all future reproduction requests will be filled. We will then offer the patron a positive microfilm made from this negative, or copyflo print-out.

Not everyone seems to be interested in paying for a photocopy of a rare book, feeling, presumably, that ILL is not supposed to cost much of anything. We offered estimates to sixty-one patrons from whom we never heard a reply; fourteen more did not reply to our offer to prepare an estimate. It is hard to know how great is the need of an ILL borrower. During the past five years I have not re-
received a single follow-up letter or inquiry from the disappointed patron or librarian whose request we have been unable to fill.

When we receive requests by mail for copies of fragile or tightly-bound materials, we make every effort to locate another copy. Thus, the standard bibliographies are consulted and locations are noted. NUC, STC, Wing, Goff, ISTC, Adams, RLIN, OCLC, ESTC, published institutional catalogues, and more specific subject bibliographies are examined, and the locations of other copies are reported to the patron. We will also check the availability of a facsimile in a microfilm series such as that issued by University Microfilms of Wing and STC titles. If it seems appropriate we will do a description and physical examination of a book in our care, compare bibliographical points or passages of text with other copies or against a checklist, and transcribe as much text as necessary for the patron’s needs to be satisfied. This is the way we define our jobs as curators and bibliographers at the Huntington Library.

I trust it is clear, then, that although we are not permitted to lend materials belonging to the Huntington Library, we do make every effort either to provide patrons with copies of the texts they require, or indicate to them alternative institutions. Our staff is undeniably small. Our Rare Book Department curatorial staff, for instance, numbers 4.5: the curator, the associate curator for early printed books, the assistant curator for historical photographs, the assistant curator for prints and ephemera, and a part-time secretary. With this staff we reply to literally thousands of letters of inquiry each year, with what appears to be an appropriate degree of accuracy and helpfulness. It appears safe to say that the vast majority of questions asked about rare books in our collection are satisfactorily answered by mail. Curators at the Huntington have no objection to doing detailed collation work, comparing variant printings, or answering complicated questionnaires. But most inquiries are textual in nature, and the patron needs to see a copy of a text otherwise unavailable. Perhaps no more than one or two correspondents each year indicate a need for physical comparison of multiple copies of a text; to these scholars we send materials concerning our grant program for visiting scholars, pointing out that similar materials are also available locally at UCLA, the William Andrews Clark Library, and other nearby collections. It has been possible in the past for our institution to receive books from other local collections for comparison purposes, an arrangement which has resolved some of the difficulties of local examination of multiple copies.

To summarize, then, we received 236 interlibrary loan requests during the past two years which were disposed of in the following manner: we sent out 53 photocopies, 5 microfilms, and 2 copyflo print-outs; we declined to permit the copying of 70 books as too fragile; we sent estimates but received no reply in 61 cases; in 14 cases we asked if patrons would like an estimate but we received no reply; and in 31 cases we did not own the books requested.
We feel strongly that in the vast majority of cases the preparation of copies and facsimiles is a viable way to make rare materials available to scholars unable to view the original. As long ago as 1791 Thomas Jefferson wrote to Ebenezer Hazard, “Time and accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices.... The lost cannot be recovered; but let us save what remains: not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use, in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.” (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 19:287).

Speaking in a purely hypothetical manner, I wonder if the mechanics of interlibrary loans for rare materials are workable. First and foremost, I have seen too many different individual methods and standards for packing books to hope that any agreement could be reached. Mailing bags, for instance, are dangerously weak, unprotecting, and water-absorbent. I have seen rare books shipped by dealers whose packing constituted a virtual work of art, and dealers who feel that a piece of newspaper, wrapping paper and string are perfectly adequate protection for valuable books. I have seen curators transporting rare books loose in boxes without any packing, and those who insist on wrapping every volume in tissue paper, kraft paper, waterproof paper, and bubble wrap sealed with plastic tape. I have received books that have been hopelessly damaged in the mails, and one volume appeared to have been snagged with a meathook which had gashed nearly half the volume. I have received books totally water-sodden, and have received mangled packages eaten by postal machines, or with the rubber-stamped notation, “Found at the bottom of a supposedly empty container.” My tendency, then, is to mistrust most standardized forms of packing and shipping.

Nor can we see or control how a book is to be used at another institution. We provide a wide variety of specially built cradles and supports for rare books used in the Special Reading Room of the Huntington, without which we would not allow the books to be used. We have no assurance that other institutions will supervise closely readers using Huntington materials, nor that our materials will not be photographed, photocopied, or otherwise reproduced for convenience.

The fundamental difficulty, as I see it, is that there will be as many opinions about proper packing and handling of rare materials as there are curators of rare books and manuscripts. The overwhelming range of viewpoints is unlikely to be brought into one clearly defined and consistent standard for the loan of rare materials, which would be adopted and adhered to by a significant number of American research libraries.
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