



CHAPTER 9

Collaboration in Translation:

REVITALIZING AND RECONNECTING WITH A UNIQUE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COLLECTION

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Introduction

When the rich research materials that would become the Rodolfo Usigli Archive¹ came to Miami University, by all accounts their state was not particularly unusual for collections of authors' papers. Dozens of boxes of materials—manuscripts, typescripts, books, and memorabilia mingled together, scarcely labeled, stacked with little regard for chronology, content, or conservation status—came to Miami University libraries' loading docks from a musty garage in central Mexico. With only a partial inventory (photocopied and annotated by the seller) as a guide, this collection would have presented a substantial challenge for any processing librarian. However, Miami's special collection's staff faced an issue that made all the other challenges seem minor: no one on the staff could read or speak Spanish.

From the moment of its acquisition, the Usigli Archive has demanded collaboration between special collections librarians and other members of Miami

University's faculty and staff. The language of the majority of the materials, the supplemental paperwork, the secondary literature, future researchers, and the previous owners all presented a roadblock to creating access to the collection.

In 1995, Dr. Ramón Layera, a professor in Miami University's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, facilitated the procurement of the collection from the Usigli family. Without Dr. Layera's thorough knowledge of Mexico's culture, language, and legal system, and his willingness to work hand-in-hand with library staff, the collection would not have come to Miami University. The library's offer to purchase the materials produced the first faculty and librarian collaboration.

It has only been through complete and sustained cooperation and collaboration that the collection has begun to reach its full potential. The history of the collection provides a good overview of how this collaboration or, more accurately, these collaborations have shaped and improved access to and use of the Usigli Archive. This chapter addresses the ways collaboration between special collections and the Spanish and Portuguese library liaison has improved the collection's organization; how this enhanced, accessible organizational system has created more opportunities for scholarship; and how the relationship between the collection, special collections staff, and the liaison librarian has had a positive effect on the way faculty and students interact with Usigli materials.

Under some circumstances—namely, those of Miami University's special collections librarians upon the acquisition of the Usigli Archive—this level of collaboration has proved not just beneficial, but essential to creating and promoting a functional, accessible collection. As Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel suggest, a more thoroughly described collection is a more valuable collection.² In the case of the Usigli Archive, collaborating with a liaison librarian—someone who has specialized knowledge not only of her subject areas, but also of the needs and expectations of the departments and fields she serves—greatly increased this value, and created even greater opportunities for outreach and faculty collaboration as the use of the collection increased.

Institutional Background

Miami University

Miami University is a mid-sized, doctoral public university in Southwestern Ohio with three campuses. It is primarily residential, with around sixteen thousand undergraduates and twenty-five hundred graduate students on the main campus in Oxford, Ohio. The Oxford campus also hosts four libraries: the Business Engineering Science and Technology Library, the Amos Music Library, the Wertz Art and Architecture Library, and King Library. The last of these is the university's main library, which in addition to housing the major-

ity of Miami University library's general materials and staff, also contains the Walter Havighurst Special Collections and University Archives.

While Miami University's special collections' location in the main library would seem to indicate frequent collaboration with other library departments; such collaboration is infrequent. The department's location on the third floor, removed from the offices of the public services staff and popular first-floor access points like the reference and circulation desks, has contributed to its isolation. Past collaborations with members of Miami University's faculty have been frequent and fruitful, but the intra-library collaboration described in this case study was one of the first for Miami University's special collections.

The Rodolfo Usigli Archive and Early Collaborations

Miami University Libraries purchased the Rodolfo Usigli Archive in 1995. The collection includes a wealth of materials in a variety of formats: Rodolfo Usigli's personal papers and correspondence; his manuscript and typescript drafts of plays, poetry, prose, and translations; photographs; and a selection of ephemera and promotional materials related to the performance of his works. Processing all thirty-seven linear feet of the collection began immediately, with the hope that within a few years the collection would be rehoused, described, and fully accessible to users.

Without Professor Layera's subject expertise in Mexican theater, his mastery of the Spanish language, and his connections with the Usigli family, the materials might never have come to Miami University. Yet Dr. Layera was not familiar with manuscript processing standards. The labor and expertise of a special collections librarian was required to give the collection the attention it deserved.

Lack of language proficiency did not prevent the enthusiastic and eager staff from working with this unique collection. In fact, the lack of Spanish proficiency frequently guided the use of the collection, early on, by focusing more on outreach and instruction—two areas that definitely invite collaboration, especially with faculty members—than on thorough and detailed description. These efforts were primarily directed by then head of special collections, Marty Miller, and Ramón Layera, who would remain deeply invested in the collection's development throughout his tenure at Miami University. In 1996, less than a year after the collection first came to the university, the efforts of these early (and largely informal) collaborations came to fruition: Miami University held a grant-funded international symposium to formally establish the Usigli Archive as part of the Walter Havighurst Special Collections. This also happened to coincide with Miami University's Year of Celebration of Latin American Culture. Members of the Usigli family and scholars from Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States gathered to present research papers

on Mexican theater, and special collections hosted the first exhibit featuring the Usigli materials. The Department of Theater performed Ramón Layera's translation of Usigli's play, *El Gesticulador* (*The Impostor*).

Following the excitement of the symposium, the level of collaboration diminished, as did work with and on the materials in the collection. Little effort was made to make the collection accessible—this was in large part due to the language barrier—and other, more manageable projects took priority. Years later, in 2001, the head of special collections, Janet Stuckey, utilized the collection for instruction to classes in Mexican theater in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and in introductory sessions to graduate students in the Department of Theater. Based on available special collections instruction statistics, these efforts did not necessarily involve collaboration with the liaison librarian. International researchers still came to use the collection, though their visits became less frequent with time. Ramón Layera also continued to use the collection, and the research he conducted served as the basis for his book, *Rodolfo Usigli: itinerario del intelectual y artista dramático*.³ Well over a dozen books and several articles were published by Layera and other scholars utilizing the Usigli Archive.

In 2005, the centennial of Usigli's birth provided the perfect opportunity to increase the visibility and improve the organization of the collection. The libraries made a concerted effort to work with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Department of Theater, and the Latin American studies program to improve access, and entered into partnerships with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, the Centro de Investigación Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (CITRU), and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) to host a second international symposium of scholarship on Mexican theater and Usigli's works. At this juncture, the collaborations that would eventually reshape the collection's organization, use, and usefulness began in earnest.

Project Scope

New Collaborations

Ten years after its acquisition by Miami University, the Usigli Archive lacked clear, consistent organization. This hindered use and collaborations. Soon after Katie Gibson assumed responsibilities as liaison to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and Latin American studies, Stuckey discussed with Gibson the possibility of collaborating on projects related to the collection. Principal among these projects was to increase access; the method to do this required creating a descriptive finding aid from the short, box-level inventories that were the main means of accessing the collection.

No schedule was set for this initial special collections/liaison librarian collaboration. Gibson grew into her position and took on additional liaison responsibilities; in the intervening time, Stuckey retired. With changing staff and shifting responsibilities within special collections, the focus of the liaison-department partnership also changed. The Usigli Archive again seemed poised to be placed on the back burner. Yet the flexible and informal nature of this collaboration allowed for an organic adaptability. Its lack of specific, rigid timelines and goals made it more functional than it might have been otherwise; so work was done when it could be done. Colleagues worked together to help when and how they could, acting independently in this shared goal: to create access to the collection.

Organizing the Collection

Creating access started with tackling the collection's organization, which had proved challenging from the moment of the collection's acquisition. Although the collection had arrived with a partial inventory that served as an initial guide, this document was hand-written in Spanish by the previous owner and offered little in the way of description. Before partnering with Gibson, special collections librarians had formed a more formal partnership with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese to assist with arranging, organizing, and processing the collection. A series of undergraduate scholars from the department, under the supervision of special collections librarians, were responsible for physically processing and organizing the collection, including rehousing materials in archival folders and boxes. Graduate students from the department also began the process of creating new inventories for the materials based on their new organization. Each year, one student (funded through the Department of Spanish and Portuguese) worked in special collections on the Usigli Archive.

Over several years, graduate students from the Spanish and Portuguese department created a thorough inventory and organized the collection into correspondence, manuscript drafts, photographs, and objects. While this process revealed many hidden treasures in the collection, such as correspondence with George Bernard Shaw and an original Diego Rivera print, reliance on a graduate students proved problematic. Students were fluent in the language, but there were inconsistencies in the quality of processing, attention to detail, and adherence to standards. As students came and went, there was a need to retrain, leading to interruptions in workflows. Furthermore, changing responsibilities and staffing within the department meant students and staff were unable to fully devote their time and attention to the collection.

Fortunately for special collections and the Usigli Archive, establishing the collaboration with Gibson on the project changed the opportunity dramat-

ically. Gibson contributed her knowledge of the context and content of the collection, and with Dr. Layera, helped identify sections of the collection most likely be of interest to researchers. Graduate students could then strategically target different parts of the collection to inventory and describe. Working closely with the students, special collections staff, and the inventories themselves allowed Gibson to become deeply knowledgeable of the collection. Over the next two years, Gibson committed ten hours per week to the organization project. She created finding aids, checked the accuracy of existing finding aids, and coordinated work with the graduate student. Gibson provided continuity for the project despite the turnover of graduate students, leading to the completion of the initial inventories and the creation of four finding aids made accessible online.

Once initial inventories were completed, Gibson's and special collections' responsibilities shifted to outreach. The targeted finding aids encouraged an upsurge in use and gave Miami University libraries a compelling reason to invest in the collection; a part-time, dedicated, staff member fluent in Spanish was hired to process the remaining collection and to bring existing inventories up to finding aid standards. This created an opportunity for the liaison librarian and special collections staff to take on a wider range of collaborations. With a usable set of finding aids available online to researchers and scholars increasing the collection's visibility, new projects quickly emerged.

Scholarship

After organizing and processing the collection, the next project was to bring wider attention to the collection and to highlight a particular correspondence. Layera joined the collaboration team for this project. Special collections staff, Gibson, and Dr. Layera chose to highlight the correspondence between Rodolfo Usigli and George Bernard Shaw, with the goal of publishing a book on the topic. Gibson and Layera worked together to translate the correspondence; they also used their subject expertise to research the historical context in which the relationship between Shaw and Usigli developed. Special collections staff provided support by obtaining copyright permissions, scanning documents, and facilitating printing of the work. The result was a commemorative book published by the libraries with images of letters, photographs, and other documents from the collection detailing the relationship between these two men. The book, which would not have been possible without this collaboration, serves as a gateway to the collection, showcasing Usigli's connection to the larger world of theater through his relationship with Shaw.

The increased visibility from finding aids and book reviews in academic journals brought the collection the attention of international scholars.⁴ Once again, the collaboration between special collections staff and the liaison librar-

ian facilitated communication with researchers from Spain and Mexico. Special collections forwarded research questions in Spanish to the liaison librarian who then worked with the department to answer them. With the liaison librarian acting as primary contact, the collection was accessible to an international audience of researchers.

Instruction

At a primarily undergraduate institution, perhaps the most beneficial development of a collaboration between special collections librarians and liaison librarians is the impact on the undergraduate research experience. The Usigli Archive has seen use in a variety of humanities classrooms—principally in courses related to history, theater, literature, and the Spanish language. Although special collections librarians and liaison libraries can take very different approaches to instruction, working together, they can foster information literacy skills and the skills necessary to work with rare books and manuscripts, and a resulting “broader introduction to communication and critical thinking.”⁵

One class identified for collaboration is an upper-level undergraduate and graduate Latin American theater class. Kimberly Tully, then curator of special collections, included an introduction to handling rare materials by a special collections librarian. Gibson then provided an overview to materials on display from the Usigli Archive, putting them into the context of the themes and content in the course. Students were then able to interact with the materials under the guidance of the special collections librarian. Students compared typescript drafts of plays to the final texts, examined photographs of sets and costumes from the play’s premiere, and struggled to read Usigli’s hand-written drafts, notes, and letters. Gibson discussed the plays, their content, and their reception. Tully presented the use of primary source materials in research and showed how to search and find materials in special collections and archives. Both the liaison librarian and a special collections librarian were available for consultation. The students’ learning experience was enriched because both perspectives were represented in the room.

Other instruction opportunities coming from their partnership have been much more serendipitous. Gibson, in conversation with a faculty member, mentioned the Diego Rivera print in the Usigli Archive. The print was a remnant of Usigli’s work in the theater section at the Department of Fine Arts, and as translator of André Breton’s surrealist manifesto for the 1938 Surrealist week in Mexico City. It was used to promote the event around the city. The professor worked with Gibson and Tully to arrange for her Mexican history class to visit the library to make use of the Usigli Archive.

Outreach

With nearly a five-year gap between the current and former head of special collections, the fate of the Usigli Archive fell to Gibson and special collections curators and staff. With the hiring of William Modrow, their new head of special collections, staff stressed the importance of the collection, and the department's history promoting its use. Together, the Modrow and Gibson sought new uses for the collection and reestablished contacts with researchers.

The results were quick and encouraging. Faculty scheduled class sessions with the materials, and interest in collaborations with institutions in Mexico were received with enthusiasm. Furthermore, the Spanish and Portuguese department's administration supported, with resources, reestablishing the connections between the libraries, their department, the Usigli family, and the institutions in Mexico. This resulted in an increase in scholarly resource and new relationships among the libraries and other departments on campus. None of this would have been possible without the foundational collaborative work among Layera, Gibson, and the special collections staff.

Conclusion

A large number of faculty, library staff, and librarians have participated in the work of this collaboration. It has shifted and evolved to fit staff time, meet the instructional needs of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and has expanded to include new and ongoing initiatives. No one person in the group would have been able to accomplish these goals without the others.

Impact

The benefits of successful collaboration are well-documented. When liaison librarians work with special collections librarians, instruction sessions improve.⁶ Students gain access to primary source material, which requires a broader set of skills to access and critical thinking skills to analyze.⁷ Liaison librarians make use of their department connections to increase the number of classes using a collection, and their subject background can provide a richer experience for students.⁸ However, when centered on a newly-acquired collection of materials, the benefits of a successful collaboration extend beyond the instruction experience. From the initial processing, Gibson was able to support special collections with background and language knowledge. A long-term working relationship between library staff and faculty has provided stability through a time of transition in the department.

Special collections was not the only beneficiary of this partnership. The liaison librarian increased her knowledge and experience working with special

collections and manuscript materials. This expansion of the liaison's research interests and projects has been a basis for greater collaboration with faculty in assigned liaison areas, and provided the source material for a project to develop new skills in digital humanities.

Lessons Learned

1. Identify unique collections.

Collaborations between special collections librarians and liaison librarians can be particularly fruitful when featuring a collection unique to a particular institution. Liaison librarians can bring their background knowledge to a unique and complex set of questions, and special collections librarians can gain from expanded insight into a unique collection.

2. Identify information gaps.

It is important for both parties to identify gaps in knowledge. Special collections librarians must consider what skills or specific knowledge would make processing a collection easier and in turn, make it more accessible for users. In this particular case, language comprehension was key, and recognizing that gap served as the impetus for collaboration. Liaison librarians might consider to facilitate faculty and student use special collections.

3. Be flexible and adapt to changing needs.

Two deans and university librarians, three heads of special collections, two curators of special collections, several faculty members, and many student workers have participated in directing and describing the Usigli Archive, which facilitated the outreach efforts described in this chapter. Being open to changing priorities of each partner in the collaboration and adaptable to accommodate these shifts will allow a productive collaboration to continue. Rigid and formal partnerships often end when one part of the group is no longer able to contribute at the same level.

4. Document your work.

When collaborations form, one should never assume the relationship will be stable over the long term. Even a stable collaboration can be subject to transitions in staff or responsibilities. Documenting work procedures, roles, and responsibilities of project team members from the outset facilitates a smooth transition and long term sustainability.

Due to all these changes, the available documentation included a mixture of electronic and print resources, so identifying the most recent update was not possible. The extensive documentation was fragmented. For example, a

list of classes making use of the collection did not include dates. Instruction dates were tracked in an instruction statistics database no longer in use. This left new staff to guess when classes made use of the collection and which of the graduate students completed which projects. The process of gathering instruction statistics from two databases listing course numbers, university course listings describing course content, and other informal records documenting project work, taught the importance of clear and consistent documentation. To be useful, documentation should be clearly delineated by year, task, person responsible, steps taken to complete the task, and completion date.

5. **Be strategic.**

When collaborating, it is easy to feed off mutual enthusiasm for a project, but it is important to remember to be strategic in selecting projects. It is not possible to do it all. Target work toward projects supportive of both the liaison and special collection department's goals. In the context of working in an academic library, Gibson, and her collaborative partners prioritized the uses of the collection to support undergraduate teaching and learning. Larger-scale collaborations will come in time.

Next Steps

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

After Layera's retirement, the libraries worked with another faculty member in the Spanish and Portuguese department, using the Usigli Archive primarily with instruction to her Latin American theater courses. After hearing from the Usigli family and possible partners in Mexico, Modrow, the liaison librarian, the chair, and a faculty member in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese are developing and expanding the Usigli collaboration. Initial plans involve a joint grant application to support a collaboration with scholars in Mexico, and possibly with institutions with which the libraries have collaborated in the past. This project will be on a much larger scale than any previous collaborations (such as the symposiums in 1997 and 2005), but the hope is to draw on lessons learned from earlier work. The shared goal is to increase international access to the collections.

DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

Another ongoing project is the development of a digital project featuring items in the George Bernard Shaw and Rodolfo Usigli correspondence. The goal is to situate the materials in their historical, literary, and political context in order

to examine the relationships between these artifacts and Usigli's memoir of meeting Shaw, written decades later. Although originally intended as an exercise in learning digital humanities tools and methodologies, the project will further extend the awareness of the collection.

Notes

1. "Rodolfo Usigli Archive," Miami University Libraries, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://spec.lib.miamioh.edu/home/usigli/>.
2. Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel, "Uncovering Impact: The Influence of Archives on Student Learning," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 39, no 5 (2013): 414–22, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2013.03.017.
3. Ramón Layera, *Rodolfo Usigli: itinerario del intelectual y artista dramático*, (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, CITRU, 2011).
4. Michel Pharand, Shaw's Mexican Disciple [Review of *You Have Nothing to Learn from Me: A Literary Relationship Between George Bernard Shaw and Rodolfo Usigli*]. *Shaw*, 32, no 1 (2012), 190–193. <http://doi.org/10.5325/shaw.32.1.0190>.
5. Todd Samuelson and Cait Coker, "Mind the Gap: Integrating Special Collections Teaching," *Portal: Libraries & the Academy* 14, no 1 (2014): 56, doi:10.1353/pla.2013.0041.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Michelle Visser, "Inviting the Rabble: Changing Approaches to Public Service and Access in Special Collections," *Public Services Quarterly* 1, no 4 (October 2003): 29–41.

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