Discovering the “Kitchen Debate”

UNUSUAL RESEARCH BRINGS HISTORY ALIVE

In 1959 Richard Nixon and Nikita Kruschev sat down to talk in the model kitchen of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. The Exhibition presented its visitors with an array of objects representing U.S. inventiveness—including a gold-anodized geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller—all in the interest of promoting intercultural understanding. But amid the polished cars, pleasure boats, voting machines and bottles of Pepsi-Cola, the conversation between the U.S. President and Soviet Union Premier escalated into a heated debate. Andrina Tran’s prize-winning paper uses declassified government documents, contemporaneous travel guides, and a myriad other sources to uncover the context and ramifications of the “Kitchen Debate.”

Her paper won a 2006 Library Prize for Undergraduate Research, which is awarded annually to students whose research projects demonstrate use of Library collections and exemplify advanced information literacy and research skills. Delving into multiple accounts and analyses, her paper brings the Cold War context of the “Kitchen Debate” vividly to life.
“Incunabula”—Latin for “swaddling clothes”—are all forms of printing in the century of Johann Gutenberg. Berkeley’s libraries have more than 400 of these works—easily double that number if we extend the term to include the printing done in Korea, China, and Japan by the year 1500. The glories of great libraries are the infant forms of new knowledge in every field. At Berkeley, chemists can find the first printing of the periodic table of the elements by Dimitry Mendeleyev in his Russian textbook of 1870. Physicists can find the German article of 1928 that gave Ernest O. Lawrence his Eureka moment to imagine the cyclotron. Serious students of California, here, begin with the transcribed creation stories by native peoples and the earliest maps by Europeans, showing California as an island.

Looked at in this way, it is fitting that “Google” and “Yahoo”—once the shouts in children’s play—should punctuate every conversation today about the future of libraries. UC libraries have joined an elite partnership with Google, on the second anniversary of its precocious work to digitize collections. Google is the infant that takes our minds to first principles.

Nothing is more fundamental—and more difficult to provide—than access to our 10 million books. In the American tradition, libraries are supposed to be open to all, allowing everyone’s talent and curiosity to grow. But no research library on a single campus can allow everyone through the door, at any time they choose to study. Libraries assist from the moment a research question is formulated to the hunt for the last fact. But we have had no way to expose everything in our collections that might be important. This is what digitizing millions of books will accomplish. In a few years, the internet search engines will have helped us to open the full text of our books that are out of copyright and make all of the print collections “discoverable” by indexing every significant word.

A peek at what our collections will look like is available at the Google partnership that we formed this summer: www.books.google.com and the Open Content Alliance we joined in 2005: www.openlibrary.org.

Our millions of books are not going to languish on the shelves once they have been captured as bits. We expect that our volumes will be found, borrowed, and read in growing numbers. I will return to the pages of “Fiat Lux” (aptly titled for this subject!) to tell you how our infant enterprise is growing.

Thomas C. Leonard
Kenneth and Dorothy Hill University Librarian
Admiring a library in a Kyoto temple was where Isabel Stirling first conceived of this book. Surrounded by a collection that testified to its owner's energy and dedication to Buddhism, she became fascinated with the singular person who had collected them. It was time, she decided, for this woman's story to be told.

Stirling's *Zen Pioneer: The Life and Works of Ruth Fuller Sasaki*, published this fall, is a nuanced and compelling portrait of a woman whose decades of work in the U.S. and Japan encouraged the transmission of Zen to the West. Sasaki is the only Westerner—and the only woman—ever to be made a priest of a Daitoku-ji temple, the head temple complex for the Rinzai sect's Daitokuji school. Three of her own writings, which radiate force, clarity, and warmth, are included in *Zen Pioneer*.

Scholarship and libraries were one thread that linked Ruth Fuller Sasaki and her biographer. When Stirling first saw Sasaki's impressive library in Kyoto, she was working as science librarian at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Since 1999, she has served as associate university librarian for public services at UC Berkeley. For the past several years, she has squeezed in her research and writing amid her busy professional career. Aiding Stirling's research and understanding was her own longtime practice of Rinzai Zen.

*Zen Pioneer* is a story of culture and counterculture, of friendship, rivalries, and generosity, all infused with devotion to Buddhist teachings and tradition. Stirling's narration folds in fascinating details from the day-to-day activities of Sasaki in Japan as she mentored visiting Americans, worked on translations and her Zen practice, and threw legendary dinner parties that converted several Japanese roshis to Western food. Many individuals who helped usher Zen to the West appear in these pages, from Sasaki's son-in-law Alan Watts to the scholar D.T. Suzuki, who gave Sasaki her first meditation instruction.

Despite her many accomplishments, she is rarely referred to in books about Buddhism and its arrival in the West. “Although Sasaki was not a feminist,” Stirling says, “part of her story is about the male predominance. She coordinated, introduced people, networked, and facilitated—rather than taking the limelight herself.”

It is especially fitting that Berkeley librarian Stirling has published an account of this landmark figure in American Buddhism, since it was a library that first drew the two women together. As actor Peter Coyote commented, “The story of this remarkable, contradictory, woman—wealthy, autocratic, cultivated, and undeviatingly dedicated to the propagation of Buddhism in the West—is overdue. Ruth Fuller Sasaki could not have found a better translator for her life’s efforts than Isabel Stirling.” — Peter Coyote
This year marks a decade of Lunch Poems, the popular noontime readings in the Morrison Library. Hosting poets who span a wide range of styles and cultures, the series testifies to the Library’s importance as a cultural center for students, faculty, and the wider community.

This fall’s kick-off reading brought together faculty and staff from across the university to read a favorite poem. Professors from statistics and Slavic languages read their own translations of poems by Rabindranath Tagore and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, first treating the audience to the sounds of the original Bengali and Urdu. Words from Langston Hughes and Marge Piercy, a Handel libretto, and Korean poet Ko Un filled the room, each with their own unique eloquence.

Readers movingly described the talismanic quality of the poem they shared in the context of their own lives and concerns.

The readings through the rest of the year feature poets all the way from Iraq to right down the street in El Cerrito. Coordinator Kristen Sbrogna comments that the series’ popularity affirms how alive poetry is on the campus and in Berkeley. “When you’re here in Morrison listening to the poems, sitting on a couch between a current student and an alumna from ’48, you get the sense that poetry is, and will continue to be, a vital aspect of our consciousness.”

The title for the series was borrowed from Frank O’Hara, whose 1964 Lunch Poems presented an informal image of the poet, improvising his poems while sitting in Times Square during his lunch hour. Berkeley’s free, accessible readings adapted this cheerful notion that poetry could be as natural and pleasurable a part of the day as a meal. The series is under the direction of Professor Robert Hass.

For those far from campus, a handsome anthology published last year by UC Press offers a window onto the readings. The Face of Poetry collects poems by and photographic portraits of 46 writers, together with an audio CD of selected Lunch Poems readings. The revelatory black-and-white portraits are by celebrated photographer Margaretta K. Mitchell, who attended readings in preparation for the studio sessions with the poets. Edited by Zack Rogow, the book includes his illuminating introductions to each poet. The heart of the book is the poems, a wide-ranging array which manifests the diversity that has distinguished
the series from the beginning. Robert Hass’s
foreword quotes Walt Whitman: “the greatest
lessons of Nature through the universe are
perhaps the lessons of variety and freedom.”

Easy access to the Lunch Poems readings
from one’s own computer is only a click away.
By logging on to Berkeley’s page at itunes.
berkeley.edu, you can listen to over twenty
readings from the series, along with courses
and lectures. Berkeley’s offerings on Google
Video (video.google.com/ucberkeley), just
launched this fall, give viewers around the
world access to a range of courses and events.
The kick-off Lunch Poems reading from
September, which was hosted by University
Librarian Tom Leonard, had received 600 hits
within a few weeks.

The Lunch Poems Reading Series was
generously supported for seven years by Mrs.
William “Rocky” Main (’49), as well as by several
campus units and departments. Main was a
longtime Library friend and poetry lover whose
anthology Hail to California (2005) collects poems
about the University from alumni spanning
several decades. Rocky recently passed away, and
the Lunch Poems series is seeking continued
funding from a number of sources. Donations
may be made online at givetocal.berkeley.edu,
or by calling 510/642-9377, and will be most
gratefully received.

As smart and diverse a sampling of today’s American poetry as you’re apt
to find,” poet Steve Kowit said of this anthology of Lunch Poems readers.
Margaretta K. Mitchell’s photographic portraits reveal each poet’s spirit.

AND YET THE BOOKS
Czeslaw Milosz

And yet the books will be there on the shelves, separate beings,
That appeared once, still wet
As shining chestnuts under a tree in autumn,
And, touched, coddled, began to live
In spite of fires on the horizon, castles blown up,
Tribes on the march, planets in motion.
“We are,” they said, even as their pages
Were being torn out, or a buzzing flame
Licked away their letters. So much more durable
Than we are, whose frail warmth
Cools down with memory, disperses, perishes.
I imagine the earth when I am no more:
Nothing happens, no loss, it’s still a strange pageant,
Women’s dresses, dewy lilacs, a song in the valley.
Yet the books will be there on the shelves, well born,
Derived from people, but also from radiance, heights.

Milosz taught at Berkeley from 1960 until his death in 2004.
He won the Nobel Prize in 1980.

Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass.
Tran had been interested in the Kitchen Debate since high school, thanks to a visit to the National Archives and Records Administration in Laguna Nigel. There, her history class had explored selected records of the event. When she was assigned a research paper in Jennifer Burns’ history class, she immediately wanted to return to the topic. In the University Library’s vast collections, she was confronted by a much wider field of potential sources—together with the responsibility for her own selection and interpretation.

Tran’s first breakthrough was thanks to a Library web page on political science, one of the area pages developed by selectors to give researchers quick access to the best resources. A database she found there led her to a wide range of hitherto secret government documents on cultural initiatives. Now declassified, these documents enabled Tran to trace the changing meanings of cultural exchange, as the program’s emphasis varied over time from explicit propaganda to the cultivation of peace through understanding and contact between the two countries.

Journal articles and books, as well as letters traded between Nixon and Kruschev, Nixon’s memoirs, personal recollections of exhibition guides, cultural affairs officials, and congressmen were all part of Tran’s complex research process. She also consulted the exhibition pamphlet, which was meant for public consumption, and revealed yet another side to the fair’s purposes.

Tran even located a travel guide to Russia that was published the same year as the staging of the exhibition. Its presentation of the Soviet Union as a “land of mystery” in which Americans could be “good will ambassadors” helped illuminate the prevailing social feeling of the time. Along with sources such as Life magazine, Time, and contemporaneous newspaper accounts, the travel guide clarified the exhibit’s influence on ordinary men and women, not only the statesmen and politicians that historical analysis typically focuses on.
As Tran points out, the hope of softening the Cold War stand-off and of fostering understanding through contact between the two nations was bound to bear fruit on the individual more than the international level.

Sean McEnroe, the graduate student instructor for the course, comments that Tran’s “methods demonstrate sensitivity to the difficulties of understanding the relationship between the planning, staging, and public reception of this sort of political event… Andrina's composition is so skillful that it at times conceals the complexity of the underlying research, but a close reading of the footnotes tells the story of her work.”

In retrospect, Tran says that her experience working on this paper has had a big impact on how she now approaches research. Rather than expecting to unearth a particular storyline, she now lets the information that she discovers indicate directions she can then explore and integrate. “A deliberate strategy is often not as rewarding as allowing the sources to guide the development of my own, unanticipated interpretation.”

THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

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The Library adds an astounding amount of printed and electronic resources each year, including rare and unique materials. In order to continue to acquire, organize, and make accessible new information, the Library depends on the support of those who understand how important a world-class library is to the education of students who will one day shape our future. Your gift is crucial to the continued excellence of the University Library.

Library Associates receive complimentary copies of the quarterly newsletter as well as invitations to special occasions at the Library. For more information or to make a gift, contact us at (510) 642-9377 or give@library.berkeley.edu. Or visit our website at www.lib.berkeley.edu/give/
Exhibits & Events

**Image Illustration Vision View:**
*Hidden Treasures from the Fine Arts Collections*
Through January 2007
Bernice Layne Brown Gallery, Doe Library
The Fine Arts Collections housed across the UC Libraries are the most comprehensive west of the Mississippi. This exhibit features fourteen cases of original prints, scrolls, artists' books, archives, and other treasures from Berkeley libraries and the Berkeley Art Museum. From a 15th century Book of Hours to a monograph encased in a plastic pillow, a wide range of genres, periods and artists are represented.

**Lunch Poems**
*Under the Direction of Professor Robert Hass*
Morrison Library in Doe Library
First Thursdays, 12:10 to 12:50 pm

**Feb. 1, 2007: Dunya Mikhail**
Mikhail immigrated to the United States from Iraq in 1996 after encountering increasing harassment over her poetry and its reflections on war and exile. Mikhail’s *The War Works Hard* won PEN’s Award for Poetry in Translation and was selected as one of New York Public Library’s 25 best books of 2005.

**March 1: Myung Mi Kim**
Born in Seoul, Korea, Myung Mi Kim travels to the root of language, connecting speech and culture. Kim strips words to the bone, using fragments and white space to enhance her themes of dislocation and first language loss. She is the author of four books of poetry.

**April 5: Joanne Kyger**
Kyger’s works often echo her practice of Zen Buddhism and her ties to the 1950s rebel poets of Black Mountain, the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beat generation. Her latest collection is *About Now: Collected Poems*.

**May 3: Student Reading**
One of the year’s most lively events, the annual student reading features winners of the following prizes: Academy of American Poets, Cook, Rosenberg and Yang. It also includes students nominated by UC Berkeley’s creative writing faculty, Lunch Poems volunteers, and representatives from student publications.


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