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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81r8x1mw>

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Publication Date

2023-12-14

DOI

10.26379/1597

Peer reviewed

The Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy at UC Riverside: Pasts, Presents, and Futures

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Introduction

The Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy was one of the first collections of speculative fiction works to be cultivated by a university library. It has a long and dynamic history and has been a cornerstone for the establishment of science fiction as a literary genre worthy of academic study. In this article, we will detail the history of the collection, briefly summarize some of the main collecting areas and strengths of the collection, discuss several recent acquisitions and curatorial efforts, and describe some recent projects as we work to develop the collection for the 21st century.

History of Eaton Collection

Any discussion of the history of the Eaton Collection must start with a look at the collection's namesake. Dr. J. Lloyd Eaton (1902-1968) was a doctor specializing in lung disease who practiced in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. He was a lifelong science fiction fan, collector, and critic active in the Bay Area science fiction scene. Eaton retired in 1960, passed away in 1968, and his personal library, which included a number of rare items, was purchased by UC Riverside from his estate.

In the late 1960s, science fiction was just beginning to emerge as a literary genre; it was still a fairly niche field, but was gaining in popularity. The New Wave was just beginning to hit its stride as an influential and literary force within the genre. However, among academic circles, it was not yet seen as worthy of serious intellectual engagement. Donald G. Wilson, the University Librarian at that time, saw potential in Eaton's library where others did not and made the acquisition possible.

The Eaton Collection that exists today would not have been possible without the efforts of its first curator, George Slusser (1939-2014), who devoted and risked his career to building the collection and establishing the field of science fiction studies. Slusser was hired by UC Riverside in 1979 as a professor of comparative literature and held that position until 2004. Professor Slusser became aware of Eaton's personal collection which had remained in the library basement since its purchase 11 years before. In a 2014 interview, Slusser recounts an agreement made between him and then University Librarian Eleanor Montague who "accepted to fund a conference on SF in 1979; if it was successful, she would consider bringing the collection out of

obscurity and building it” (Slusser 2014). The first Eaton Conference was a resounding success and he took on a second position as Curator of the Eaton Collection.

Over the next twenty five years, Slusser worked tirelessly, with the support of the library and his graduate students, to develop and expand the collection; despite opposition and hostility from colleagues outside the library. Several large and important additions were made during Slusser’s curatorship including one donation of 30,000 mint condition paperbacks and sizable donation of pulp magazines. He also worked to ensure that the Eaton Collection had international and multilingual aspects and would give his graduate students money to purchase books on travels abroad (Slusser 2014).

Slusser was an instrumental figure in the development of science fiction studies as an academic area of inquiry. Between his role as curator, the success of the Eaton Conference, and the graduate students he mentored, he belongs in the same conversation as such figures as James Gunn and Darko Suvin for blazing a trail that many have followed. In many ways, the Speculative Fiction & Cultures of Science program (<https://sfcs.ucr.edu/>) at UC Riverside is a testament to Slusser’s legacy.

George Slusser retired in 2005 and the library created the Jay Kay and Doris Klein Science Fiction Librarian position in 2014. This position serves as the primary curator for the Eaton Collection and is responsible for its development, stewardship, and promotion. JJ Jacobsen was hired as the first Klein librarian in fall 2016 and filled this role until 2019. Special Collections Processing Archivist Andrew Lippert has been filling in as an interim SF&F subject specialist until a search for a new Klein Librarian can be completed.

Contents of Collection

The Eaton Collection represents a vast scope of genres within the field of speculative fiction, with particular strengths in authors’ papers, published materials, and fandom. Other collecting areas include organizational papers, art, photographs, pulp magazines, comics, graphic novels, film, and video. The oldest materials in the collection are from the 19th century and pertain to Eaton’s original collection of 7,500 books. In total, the collection has more than 200,000 cataloged items, including many complete runs of pulp magazines, fanzines, comics/anime/manga, and collectibles like cards, posters, pins, and figurines.

Authors’ papers often include a variety of materials documenting the writing process such as notes, sketches, outlines, drafts, edited manuscripts, galley proofs, etc, in addition to supplementary material like correspondence and fandom activities. Similar to the authors’ papers, the collection also contains papers from prominent editors, sf scholars, and creatives in the fields of film and television (e.g. Jesús Salvador Treviño). Other notable figures represented in the Eaton include Poul and Karen Anderson, Nalo Hopkinson, John Jennings, Anne McCaffrey, Jody Scott, Greg Benford, Gardner Dozois, and many more.

Fandom materials cover a broad range of activities, including (but not limited to) fanzines, fan fiction, fan group documentation, convention materials, anime, manga, and

collectibles. The Collection of Fanzines contains over 68,000 zines from the 20th century which were collected by prominent fans like Bruce Pelz, Fred Patten, and Richard Brown. Some fans, like Bruce Pelz and Fred Patten, have also donated separate collections of their personal materials which can include correspondence, convention programs, fliers, articles, and much more.

The Eaton Collection has grown quite a bit since the initial acquisition of Dr. Eaton's personal library. We continue to seek out complimentary additions to enhance the research value of the collection and continue its legacy as a world-class, comprehensive research collection of speculative fiction materials. To this end we have had a number of wonderful donations and targeted purchases of materials in recent years.

- In 2019, the papers of Poul and Karen Anderson were donated to the Eaton Collection by their daughter, Astrid Anderson Bear. The Anderson papers document both their work as authors and their active involvement and participation in fandom; including fanzines, the Society for Creative Anachronism, and more.
- The Lew Shiner papers are a recent donation from the spring of 2021 that captures the work of one of the early cyberpunk authors. Shiner also branched out to other speculative and non-speculative genres including fantasy, literary fiction, historical fiction, and more.
- We recently purchased two small batches of materials related to the author Philip K. Dick. These are the "Anne R. Dick collection on Philip K. Dick" and the "Joan Simpson collection on Philip K. Dick." Both collections include letters written by Philip K. Dick from the 1970s.
- The Eaton Collection had previously received donations from authors Jerry Pournelle and Ben Bova. We are happy to say that further donations by their family members have expanded upon and enriched their collections with significant additions.
- Printed materials have always been a strength of the Eaton Collection and we continue to acquire published works to ensure the collection stays current and representative of modern speculative fiction. One area we have placed some emphasis on is the burgeoning area of graphic novels. This format has seen an increase in works by or about LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC peoples. As we strive to diversify the collection and make it more inclusive and representative, we have made it a point to purchase these kinds of materials.
- Just as the Eaton Collection has collected significant movements within speculative fiction in the past, we actively work to ensure the inclusion of Afrofuturism and Black speculative fictions in the archives. We are proud to work with professors and creators Nalo Hopkinson (formerly at UCR) and John Jennings, who continue to be guiding partners in this effort.

Recent Projects, Outreach, And Future Directions

Supporting scholarly research has been a focus and goal of the Eaton Collection since its creation. A recent example is an article published by the authors for the latest issue of the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* on the validity of archiving and researching Yaoi/Boys' Love manga and slash fanfiction, two unique subcultures represented within the Eaton that expand and deepen our understanding of the field (Enriquez and Lippert 2021). Even as the Eaton Collection offers vast opportunities for scholarly research, it also offers unique advantages for outreach, teaching, and community building. Through these avenues, we strive to build connections with faculty members, students, researchers, and fans across the field of speculative fiction and its intersections with other traditional and innovative areas of study.

For example, in 2020 we collaborated with a professor in the department of Psychology to support undergraduate student research into the real-world science that inspires (or oftentimes conflicts with) science fiction tropes in literature (one example is memory manipulation). We curated and scanned a collection of short stories from the Eaton Collection for students to analyze remotely during the pandemic closure. In 2021, we developed a curriculum with a postdoctoral researcher in the department of Physics and Astronomy to teach K-12 students about scholarly research into extraterrestrial life through programs such as SETI. We used scans of pulp magazine covers from the Eaton Collection to show students how extraterrestrial life has been imagined throughout the years and how that imagination was influenced by concurrent social, political, or technological realities such as the Cold War or rovers on Mars. Other outreach efforts have taken the form of curated show-and-tell workshops based on themes such as Indigenous Futurisms, Afrofuturism, astronomy, and representations of Black characters in comic books. Prior to the 2020 pandemic, a presentation and pop-up exhibit on Chinese sci-fi was developed, as well as a presentation and pop-up manga cafe to highlight the Indigenous comic books and Japanese manga collections. While these events were unfortunately cancelled, we continue to look for unique ways to highlight the Eaton Collection and make it relevant for diverse audiences.

Exhibitions are also a core component of our outreach strategy for the Eaton Collection. During the last few years we have used materials from the collection for several notable exhibits and displays. In 2018, Mark Glassy, a UCR alumnus and avid collector of all things science fiction, guest curated an exhibit to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's foundational work *Frankenstein*. Dr. Glassy included items and art from his own personal collection as well some of his own artwork. In 2019 we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Eaton Collection with an exhibit of fifty notable works from the collection, such as *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser and the anthology *Dark Matter: a Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* edited by Sheree Thomas, for their roles in influencing the trajectory of speculative fictions. The exhibit was titled "50X50: Celebrating the Eaton Collection's 50th Anniversary." Looking ahead, the Special Collections & University Archives department has a full exhibit schedule for the next two years with an Eaton Collection related exhibit planned for the fall of 2022.

Working from home this past year has given us time to work on another long-term project: updating and enhancing the descriptive information and metadata for the digitized photographs from the Jay Kay Klein Collection photographs and papers on science fiction fandom. Jay Kay Klein (1931-2012) was an avid science fiction fan who photographed and documented many of the early science fiction and fantasy conventions and events in the United States, such as Pittcon and Tricon. These photographs give researchers a vivid glimpse into mid-century fandom culture and highlight the key figures in the field, as well as demonstrate emerging practices that would continue to evolve in today's modern fandom community, such as cosplay. This initial batch of nearly 6000 images, just a portion of the approximately 60,000 photographs in Klein's collection, was first digitized in 2017. The metadata updates were gathered from a combination of individual research using convention programs and other primary sources, as well as fan created sources and crowd-sourced feedback from the fandom community itself. A new "comment" feature was added to the Calisphere website during the initial launch of the collection in order to gather community feedback and, most importantly, corrections for mislabeled or misattributed names, locations, and titles. Several efforts were made to update the metadata in the past, but this year the staffing and conditions were conducive for a full scale update project. We are happy to say the updated metadata went live on September 20, 2021 and the digitized photographs are available on Calisphere (<https://calisphere.org/collections/26943/>).

Social media is another avenue we are exploring to connect with new audiences and share the Eaton Collection in more dynamic ways. Currently, we have a Twitter account and Facebook account specifically for the collection (@EatonVerse), though we also share content from the collection across the general library's social media accounts. Posts typically highlight interesting finds in the collection (such as artwork from a fanzine or a photograph of the first US anime fan club), share special announcements (like the publication of new metadata for the Klein collection), or give reminders of upcoming events. Social media provides a unique way for us to engage with the community and give glimpses into new acquisitions or areas of the collection. The casual nature and ease of social media allows us to document and share new discoveries as we find them, which complement our more formal presentations like exhibitions or events. In addition to participating in social media, we also anticipate participating in local fandom events in the future. Tabling or presenting at local conventions and other events support our goal to develop a holistic approach to outreach that values fans, scholarly audiences, and anyone in between. These approaches will allow us to interact directly with fans and potential researchers and provide opportunities to promote specialized areas of the collection. A significant advantage to this is being able to provide access for audiences that may not normally visit the university. While we recognize that conventions are a major part of the fandom community, we also aim to participate in fandom spaces outside of conventions, such as bookstores or clubs. For example, at the time of this publication, we are collaborating with a local science fiction bookstore to promote and share the Eaton Collection through a virtual interview and presentation. Community

engagement, along with teaching, social media, exhibitions, and other forms of outreach, provide a solid foundation for the care and stewardship of this important collection.

Conclusion

From rather humble beginnings, the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy has continued to grow and serve as a leading research collection for the fields of speculative fiction. We hope to further build on the legacies of Dr. Eaton and Professor Slusser as we continue to shape the collection to reflect the ever evolving landscape of speculative fiction. Much as it was under Slusser, teaching and outreach will continue to be a point of emphasis for the collection. We look forward to what the future will bring and believe the Eaton Collection will continue to serve as a valuable resource for current and future researchers and fans.

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