

BIBLIO-NOTES

NEWSLETTER OF THE ACRL ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUP NUMBER 21 WINTER, 1993

Meeting Information ALA Midwinter Meeting Denver 1993

The general meeting for the Discussion Group at the ALA Midwinter Meeting is Sunday, January 24, 1993 9:30-12:30 a.m.

Place: To be announced.

Agenda:

1. New officer elections
2. Discussion Topic and Panel for Annual Conference 1994
3. Discussion Topic and Panel for Annual Conference 1995
4. Discussion of desirability of becoming a Section
5. Discussion of the quality of author bibliographies (John Van Hook, Discussion Leader)
6. Discussion of the *MLA Bibliography* on CD-ROM: SilverPlatter vs Wilson (Scott Stebelman, Discussion Leader)
7. Discussion of MLA on EPIC "First-Search"

8. Updating of mailing list (Candace Benefiel)

9. Reports from other groups

10. Other business

Note from the Chair: I don't really believe we'll have time to discuss all of the above topics. We will probably have to table some items until June 1993 or January 1994.

Other Meetings

The planning committees for the 1994 and 1995 meetings will meet on Sunday, January 24 from 4:00-5:30. Rooms to be announced; all interested parties are welcome.

1992-1993 Officers

Chair: William Gargan, Brooklyn College

Vice Chair/Chair Elect: William Baker

Secretary: Michaelyn Burnette, Berkeley

Members-at-Large: Nancy Buchanan, Texas A&M; Tim Shipe, University of Iowa; John Van Hook, University of Florida.

Minutes

1992 Annual Meeting

San Francisco

The ACRL English and American Literature Discussion Group met on June 29, 1992. The meeting began at 2 p.m. and was chaired by Candace Benefiel. Thirty-five people attended.

I. Panel on Popular Culture and Libraries:

1. Douglas Highsmith, Chair, ACRL Popular Culture and Libraries Discussion Group, described the formation of the group, which serves as a forum to share information and research and also to enhance and increase awareness of popular culture in libraries. He also talked about the pop culture collection at Cal State Fullerton which is typical of most collections in its lack of acquisition funds and its problems of preservation, bibliographic control, access, and security. The collection was founded in the early seventies at the behest of faculty members and is housed in special collections. Much of the collection is the result of a gift from a collector. Retrospective collecting is very expensive because libraries are competing with collectors. The best pop culture collections are in the hands of collectors and thus are not widely available for scholarly use. Scholars need to use directories of pop culture collections to find these private collections.

2. Barbara Moran, Professor, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, spoke of an aesthetic conservatism in academic libraries which results in a resistance to collecting pop culture in academic libraries. Especially in times of stringent budgets, librarians tend to collect what the elite culture terms the "very best" titles. As Lawrence Levine points out in Highbrow/Lowbrow, this chasm between high and low culture is a development of the twentieth century. While librarians often read mysteries, few collect them for academic libraries. Even fewer collect romance novels or westerns or subscribe to True Confessions or The National Enquirer. Management of pop culture collections is not often taught in library schools. Moran called on librarians to collect actively so this material will be available for the scholars of tomorrow. Librarians need to include rather than exclude. Potential problems: (1) the vast quantity of pop culture means that no one library can collect it all and that libraries will have to cooperate. (2) The material is often hard to handle since it is not in standard formats, and is ephemeral, and presents special preservation challenges. (3) Much of the material is not cataloged, creating problems in locating it for scholars.

3. Donald Ault, Professor of English, University of Florida, discussed his fascination with pop culture and

the difficulties he has had in gaining acceptance of pop culture as a research area and of his worries about the disappearance of much of the material. Libraries need to acquire before it is out of print and expensive.

II. Business Meeting:

1. New officers are William Baker, Vice-Chair/Chair Elect; Michaelyn Burnette, Secretary; Timothy Shipe, Nancy Buchanan, John Van Hook, Members at Large.

2. In her guise as editor of Biblio-Notes, Benefiel urged members to send articles.

3. Elaine Franco reported on the meeting of the ACRL/MLA Scope and Overlap Committee which now involves about 40 librarians and may continue for several years. A preliminary report will be presented to the MLA Bibliography Advisory Committee this fall.

4. John Van Hook suggested that the ACRL/MLA committee should broaden its scope and look at the way that the MLAIB is indexed. Several members agreed that the dialog between librarians and MLA should continue and expressed the hope that MLA will listen to our suggestions for improving the MLAIB.

5. John Van Hook distributed information to stimulate discussion at Midwinter on the quality of recent author bibliographies.

6. Benefiel will send a mailing to all members to solicit email and FAX addresses.

7. A brief discussion about the merits of MLAIB on Wilson and on SilverPlatter brought agreement that the topic needs further attention at Midwinter.

8. Gargan spoke briefly about the New Orleans program and solicited ideas for speakers.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20.

Respectfully submitted,
Michaelyn Burnette
Secretary

SCOTT STEBELMAN

Until 1992 the MLA International Bibliography (MLAIB) on compact disk was available only through the H. W. Wilson Company. That year SilverPlatter brought out its own product, which covered the same years as Wilson but provided new search features. Below are some of the differences.

THESAURUS

As with the ERIC and PsycLit databases, the Silver-Platter MLAIB has its own thesaurus. This significantly enhances citation retrieval, the searcher no longer having to guess what synonyms capture a concept. Take the subject of Shakespeare, for example. Students interested in the staging of Shakespeare's plays can search the word "staging" in the thesaurus. When the highlight falls on the desired word, the student can then select "Term Details" from the menu below, which indicates all of the broader, narrower, and related terms for "staging." By moving the highlight to any of these terms, and pressing <enter>, each term is captured, searched, linked by the Boolean operator "or" with other selected synonyms, and the combined hits posted in a final set. In addition, any of these highlighted terms can be "term detailed," thus increasing the number of descriptors and potentially the number of citations retrieved. When finished all the "staging" synonyms can then be linked through the Boolean operator "and" with Shakespeare citations.

One significant impediment to this process is the highlight default: instead of resting on the select function, it rests on term details. Since the natural choice at this stage of the search is to select synonymous terms, the searcher has to tab back and forth between functions (while moving the side arrow to the desired term); this slows down the process and, although a challenge to one's motor skills, is annoying. SilverPlatter needs to re-think this in its next software revision.

For those of us who are reference librarians, the thesaurus provides an added dividend of identifying authors of specific works. A case in point: to learn who wrote *The Recruiting Officer*, a student need only press the thesaurus function key, type the play's title, and Farquhar's name will appear on the screen.

Another very useful feature is the "explode" command. Instead of highlighting, then selecting, all the narrower synonyms for "staging," the searcher can simply type "explode staging" and all the synonyms will be searched simultaneously. This is especially helpful for broad terms which subsume many narrower terms. "Lyric

poetry" and "animal imagery" are examples of this. In many cases searchers may want to limit their focus to a specific national literature, such as "American Literature" or "English Literature." "English Literature" has no narrower terms, "American Literature" has three, but "Spanish American Literature" has 25. Exploding a term often will retrieve substantially more citations than if the single term is entered by itself. Below are some examples of the different postings one can get (hyphens between words indicate they are being searched as bound descriptors):

```
#1: 1085 SPANISH-AMERICAN-LITERATURE
#2: 13581 explode SPANISH-AMERICAN-LITERATURE
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#1: 117 COMMONWEALTH-LITERATURE
#2: 5330 explode COMMONWEALTH-LITERATURE
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#1: 87 ANIMAL-IMAGERY
#2: 145 explode ANIMAL-IMAGERY
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One drawback to exploding—it is sometimes unreliable. For example, when I tried to explode "flowers," I received the message: "Term has no narrower terms in Thesaurus." Consulting the Thesaurus shows this to be untrue.

PERIOD SEARCHING

Searching the CD by historical period is more difficult than it was with DIALOG's online edition. This problem originates from MLA's decision in 1981, with the advent of the electronic database, to cease assigning descriptor codes to citations. "Descriptor codes" enabled searchers to limit to a specific literary period, such as Middle English Literature or American Literature, 1870-1900. After 1981 MLA tagged most of its entries with century descriptors; this works fine if your research naturally limits itself to a century, such as Eighteenth Century English Literature. However, if you want to limit your research to the Romantic Period, you have to enter both the words "Romantic Period" (as a descriptor) and 1800-1899 if you want to retrieve everything that is relevant. In the process you will retrieve unwanted citations on Victorian literature. The Renaissance is even more problematical: it covers two centuries, and many citations cover very narrow periods within that time. For example, here is a Renaissance study that would not have been captured by limiting

the search to 1500-1599, 1600-1699, or 1500-1699:

TI TITLE: Jews and Devils: Anti-Semitic Stereotypes of Late Medieval and Renaissance England
AU AUTHOR(S): Felsenstein,-Frank
SO SOURCE (BIBLIOGRAPHIC CITATION): Literature and Theology: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Theory and Criticism, Glasgow GL2 8QQ, Scotland (L&T). 1990 Mar., 4:1, 15-28.
IS International Standard Numbers: ISSN 0269-1205
LA LANGUAGE: English
PT PUBLICATION TYPE: journal-article
PY PUBLICATION YEAR: 1990
DE DESCRIPTORS: English-literature; 1100-1699; treatment of Jews-; as devil-; relationship to Christianity-; English-society
UD UPDATE CODE: 9001
AN ACCESSION NUMBER: 90-1-198

Given the imprecision of period searching, the best strategy is to use natural language, when possible, with century descriptors. For the above search, it would be important to add the words "Renaissance," "Elizabethan," "Jacobean," "Tudor," "Stuart," and "Caroline Literature."

DESCRIPTOR SUBFIELDS

Most searches conducted by students are fairly simple—articles are wanted on a specific writer or a specific literary work. However, sometimes the writer or work can be so popular that limiting to what MLA calls "descriptor subfields" can be useful. Take the case of Whitman. If someone wanted to research Whitman's influence on other writers, and entered "Whitman" as a descriptor, they would get 731 postings.* They could add the word "influence" to the search strategy, but the computer (in most systems) cannot distinguish the direction of semantic relationships—that is, the computer cannot distinguish between studies of Whitman's influence on other writers, and other writers' influence on Whitman. By using the subfield codes LIF and LSO that direction can be designated. The problem with the Silver Platter documentation, both in print and on terminal help screens, is that there are no explanations of what these terms mean, nor are there any examples of how they might be used. I had to consult DIALOG's old documentation (better than Silver Platter but also inadequate) for examples, and experiment with different searches to see what patterns might emerge.

A few other subfields are also useful. Searching "evil" as a descriptor yields 362 citations; limiting these to the "theme" subfield (LTH) drops them down to 305. Genre studies are very important in literary research, but if you typed "novel" as a descriptor, you would get 57,364 references. This is because novel appears as a descriptor alongside individual novelists. To limit studies to the novel

as a genre, you would type: NOVEL in GEN. That drops the number down to 4790 (still unmanageable, but far better than the former number). Again, subfields are superfluous for most searches, but they are useful to have when needed.

COMPARING SILVERPLATTER SEARCHES WITH THOSE ON OTHER DATABASES

Online access to MLAIB is available through WILSONLINE, EPIC, and FIRSTSEARCH. To compare online access with compact disk access, several searches were executed on FirstSearch. Here are the results of citations that were limited to the year 1987:

	<u>WILSON</u>	<u>SILVER- PLATTER</u>	<u>FIRST- SEARCH</u>
King Lear	41	41	41
Coleridge	52	52	52
Melville	85	85	85
Deconstructionism	84	86	86
Lyric Poetry	35	45	45

With the exceptions of "deconstructionism" and "lyric poetry," citation retrieval is identical. An examination was made of the "lyric poetry" citations, to determine why Silver Platter included 10 references omitted by Wilson. There appeared to be no commonality among those references.

It is instructive to add a third variable, JOURNAL, to the comparison, as well as a different index—Humanities Index. The abbreviations below represent: SS (Silver Platter); WI (Wilson); FS (FirstSearch); HI (Humanities Index).

	WI	SP	FS	HI
Studies in Romanticism	13	13	13	45
New Literary History	39	39	39	37
Shakespeare Quarterly	28	27	27	84
PMLA	24	24	24	25
Philological Quarterly	28	28	28	42
Modern Philology	25	25	25	78
Speculum	10	10	10	269
ELH	40	40	40	40
Michigan Quarterly Review	13	13	13	108
JEGP	16	16	16	174
Early American Literature	20	20	20	34
Research in African Literatures	26	26	26	101

Between Silver Platter and Wilson only one citation difference occurs—with Shakespeare Quarterly. The discrepancy between Humanities Index citations and those of the MLAIB can generally be accounted for by book reviews: MLAIB does not index them. However, using

CATCHING UP WITH THE TIMES . . .

The ACRL English and American Literature Discussion Group is trying to update its mailing list. We hope to make the new membership directory available at the 1993 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans. You can help by filling out the following information and returning this sheet to:

**Candace R. Benefiel
Reference Division
Sterling C. Evans Library
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-5000**

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

FAX:

E-Mail:

Please remove my name from the mailing list.

Philological Quarterly and Early American Literature as samples, there were citations to these journals found in MLAIB not found in HI, and vice versa.

COMPARISON OF THE SILVER PLATTER CD WITH THAT OF H. W. WILSON

The number of citations retrieved testing each variable (i.e., journal and subject) were nearly identical for both databases. There are several features available in the Silver Platter version that are absent in the Wilson product. Already mentioned, and by far the most salient, is the thesaurus. By cross-referencing terms, by creating hierarchical relationships among them, and by allowing users to mark, capture, and explode terms, Silver Platter has streamlined searching of this database. Unlike Wilson, which has three search modes, Silver Platter has only one; this simplicity—being able to conduct both basic and very advanced searches without switching modes—I find attractive.

The Silver Platter and Wilson CDs are updated quarterly. Annual subscriptions are available from both vendors for \$1495.00.

** The compact disks reviewed in this essay covered 1981-June 1992.*

Proposed Midwinter Discussion on Our Future Status as a Group

Bigger meeting rooms, for more elaborate programs. Money for speakers, and the chance to reach and influence a wider spectrum of librarians.

These are some of the benefits we would reap by deciding to upgrade our status within ACRL, from a Discussion Group to a full-fledged Section, a move that's been under discussion in the steering committee since our crowded Popular Culture meeting last June. On the negative side of the equation, according to Kathleen Bourdun of the Association's Chicago headquarters, is the increase in paperwork, bureaucracy, and committee work that would accompany such a move.

We would like the group to discuss our alternatives at Midwinter, to start defining our sense of what we collectively want to put into—and get out of—our meetings in the coming years. Do people feel that the issues we all deal with—from electronic publishing and shrinking budgets to the changing definitions of what it means to carry out humanities research—can best be addressed in isolation or in some wider forum? And ultimately, do we

see ourselves as commenting on the way libraries respond to these developments, or as somehow helping to lead that response?

There are no a priori answers to such questions, since they go to the heart of how we wish to see our role within the profession, the degree of our involvement, and our future as a group. The last Discussion Group to make this transition, the Women's Studies Section, deliberated the change for over a year. All we'd like to in Denver is to get the discussion started.

So please think about the issue and come to join the debates. To initiate the discussion early, please write Candace Benefiel at Biblio-Notes or else e-mail William Gargan (Bitnet: wxgbc@cunyvm) or John Van Hook (Bitnet: vanhook @ nervm, Internet vanhook @ nervm.nerdc.ufl.edu).

--John Van Hook

Midwinter Meeting Discussion Topic: The Quality of Recent Author Bibliographies

Those of you who were present at San Antonio's Midwinter session may recall William Baker's motion that we discuss the quality of recent reference bibliographies on literary figures, in hopes of agreeing on criteria that we could eventually recommend to acquisitions editors at reference-book publishers. John Van Hook offered to moderate the anticipated half-hour discussion, which has had to be rescheduled for Midwinter, 1993.

To help us all keep our comments concrete, please take a few minutes before then to look over some of the following examples, which have been proposed by Baker and by William Gargan. Excerpts from reviews (often ones written by one or another of these two gentlemen) have been included with each citation.

Fulmer, Constance. *George Eliot: A Reference Guide*. G.K. Hall, 1977.

More questionable is the value of the annotations, not only because some items remain unannotated (and the principle of exclusion is difficult to discern), but that the annotations are so brief that they give only the haziest notion of the materials handled and the critical approach. One might quarrel with the adequacy of the subject indexing, where a single entry might cover several subjects.

Pangallo, Karen. *George Eliot: A Reference Guide, 1972-1987*. G.K. Hall, 1989.

Indexes are not so useful as one would expect. A better arrangement for the project would have been chronological organization by subject. The annotations,

provided only for documents written in English, are brief.

Goodman, Michael. *William S. Burroughs: A Reference Guide*. Garland, 1990.

The new material, along with the description of manuscript collections, should prove most useful to scholars. As a basic guide, the bibliography is serviceable. The citation style is inconsistent. The book is further marred by poor proofreading. Such criticisms cast doubt on a reference work's reliability. . . .

Larson, Kelli. *Ernest Hemingway: A Reference Guide, 1974-1989*. G.K. Hall, 1990.

Cites not only books and articles directly related to H but also more general studies containing significant material on the author. The chronological arrangement allows for an interesting overview of H criticism year by year. However, it also necessitates a detailed index with multiple access points, something absent here. There are no headings for women, existentialism, love or death.

Barber, John. *Richard Brauigan: An Annotated Bibliography*. McFarland, 1990.

The critical bibliography is shamelessly padded, containing references to tertiary sources ranging from the Academic American Encyclopedia to Who's Who. Even some dustjacket blurbs are listed under "Reviews."

Some factors for us all to consider might include:

- how adequate is the subject indexing provided?
- how comprehensive is the coverage? How selective?

On what principles?

- how useful and thoughtful are the annotations?
- how well chosen and important is the topic?

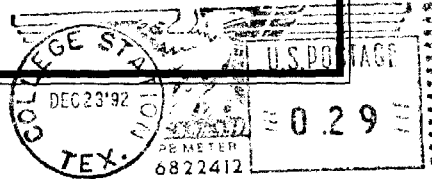
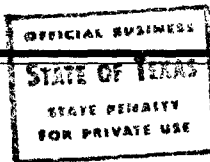
And *el grande*,

- are such compilations made redundant by electronic versions of the MLA Bibliography?

If any of you have candidates you'd like to add to this list, as either good or bad examples of the genre, please send them to:

John Van Hook
Library West, University of Florida
Gainesville 32611
904-392-4919
[Vanhook @ nervm.nerdc.ufl.edu]

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