

# A Venture in Reclassification

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THE PROBLEM of classification seems to be of perennial interest. Because it illustrates a fundamental activity of the mind and forms the basis of scientific thinking, there is no reason why speculation about it should languish. Since 1938 new editions of basic works on the subject have appeared, by Melvil Dewey,<sup>1</sup> Margaret Mann,<sup>2</sup> and William S. Merrill,<sup>3</sup> and the Library of Congress has continued to expand its schedules. Current library literature still weighs the pros and cons of reclassification, the merits of different methods, and the experiences of those who have shifted from one scheme to another. Some outstanding libraries have submitted to the throes of reclassification, and others, I dare say, are sorry they started the process. Large institutions have turned to the Library of Congress system and have drawn smaller libraries in their wake. The George Avery Bunting Library of Washington College was inclined to pull the other way, and its struggle ended in a compromise.

During 1939 and 1940 the liberal arts ideal was undergoing restatement on this campus preparatory to adopting the divisional plan of curriculum organization. Our present postwar planning committee is again giving it consideration. Once

more the humanities are kindling into life, at least in the spirit. Even four years ago we were attempting to break down the barriers between subjects and to achieve some form and wholeness in the sum of our offerings.

In the spring of 1940, just previous to moving into a new building, William M. Randall and J. Periam Danton made a study of the book collection. It was proposed to bring the library into closer relationship with the students, the faculty, and the teaching program; to support the curriculum in more than a passive way with a collection of books; to interpret our literature with active devices, illuminating, as it were, the neglected corners of the shelves, filling the gaps through good book selection, and making the books more approachable to the student and the extracurricular reader.

In the fall of 1940 the writer, assuming the duties of librarian, initiated a program of reorganization based on certain passages in the survey report. If the library were to exemplify the ideas expressed by Dr. Randall, it behooved us to get its intellectual contents in order, to gather the scattered atoms of the past into some unity. If the book collection were to reflect ideals of humane cultivation, it would be necessary to broaden the basis of classification. A simple, intelligible arrangement of subjects should be provided for the patrons who used the stacks. As Mark Van Doren wrote:

The search must be for a narrow formula—wisely narrow of course; or, if the word is not outworn, creatively narrow. The only

<sup>1</sup>Dewey, Melvil. *Decimal Classification and Relative Index*. 14th ed. rev. and enl. Forest Press, 1942.

<sup>2</sup>Mann, Margaret. *Introduction to Cataloging and the Classification of Books*. 2nd ed. A.L.A., 1943.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, William S. *Code for Classifiers*. 2d ed. A.L.A., 1939.

classification of studies [books] that is capable of interesting the mind is a simple classification, under a few heads. . . . And these had better be the right ones or the liberal arts will take their revenge.<sup>4</sup>

Good classification is, in this sense, of more than intrinsic value; it serves as an instrument of direction. Something so fundamental was involved that we were tempted to take the necessary steps at once.

#### *Classification at Washington College*

For years Library of Congress numbers had been faithfully accepted. Among our fifteen thousand titles no revision had been made to improve the location of a book. Nor had preferable numbers been employed when available in the schedules. Related items were dispersed and subject matter was spread thin upon the extensive rack of the L.C. scheme. Psychology had become hydra-headed, appearing in five classes. Unnatural cleavages had developed among T (technology), Q (science), H (sociology), and G (geography).

Fiction, biography, and travel had wandered over the collection, in thorough agreement with L.C. practice. The chronological treatment of English and American literature proved confusing. The dichotomy between philology and literature in the L.C. schedules, while important to recognize, resulted in islands of foreign language books appearing at opposite ends of section P (language and literature). Individual books needed correction, such as Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, which had been placed in R (medicine).

J. R. Gullledge,<sup>5</sup> seconded by Karl T. Jacobsen,<sup>6</sup> of Luther College, testified that these developments caused no inconvenience

in some small libraries. But they were awkward here. Anomalies tend to disappear in a large library serving advanced scholars; there it is possible to split hairs to advantage, to classify infinitesimals, and to lose small items in a multitude. Classification is done according to a design which is irrelevant to the requirements of the small college. Pointillism in the distribution of a million books may even make pictures, but the same scale or screen applied to a small collection suggests a half-tone under high magnification; forms fail to take shape and one sees only unrelated dots.

#### *Minute Classification*

Years ago Charles A. Cutter challenged the defenders of broad classification for maintaining that books became separated in a minute scheme.<sup>7</sup> In practice they do. It is seldom possible to concentrate the essence of a book into one exclusive subject. The closer the subdivisions, the more chance for difference in judgment and for similarity in various parts of the schedules, as has been indicated in the case of psychology. Division does not proceed in a straight line. Subjects have a way of crossing and re-crossing, which means that alternatives become possible.

Perhaps it would give the game away to express at this moment a preference for the Dewey decimal scheme. L.C., the Colon system, and the Brussels classification probably answer the purposes for which they were intended, but they are not for the small library which houses few books of such specialized type as to warrant classification beyond a subdivision of the third order. They do, however, suggest compromise because they represent hybrids in themselves. Since L.C. is a cross between expansive classification and D.C., it

<sup>4</sup> Van Doren, Mark. *Liberal Education*. Holt, 1943, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Gullledge, J. R. "L.C. vs. D.C. for College Libraries." *Library Journal* 49:1026-27, December 1924.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobsen, Karl T. "The Reorganization of the Library of a Small College." *Library Quarterly* 4: 234-43, April 1934.

<sup>7</sup> Cutter, Charles A. "Close Classification." *The Library and Its Contents*. Wilson, 1925, p. 203-12.

only remains to give D.C. a little more edge to secure the desired correction. A few public library notions applied to classification would help to counteract the amorphous tendencies exhibited in some college book collections and restore the perspective recommended by Henry B. Van Hoesen.<sup>8</sup> Such considerations preclude the final standardization of cataloging procedures to fit all situations. Intangible forces are at work in every library which demand individual treatment; it is properly so and good to recognize them and respond accordingly.

The L.C. schedules contain approximately 6500 pages, with a quarter of a million divisions—far too much cloth for our cloak. We wanted to shrink it to the proportions of the Abridged Decimal Classification.<sup>9</sup> This does not always occur to librarians when confronted with the bulk of the L.C. scheme. Some of us regard the changing of an L.C. class number as heresy. To paraphrase O. G. Sonneck, of the Library of Congress, concerning a sensible approach to the L.C. music schedule: It is possible to telescope the scheme into a suitable instrument for any collection of any size, by canceling unnecessary subdivisions, by substituting subdivisions needed for special purposes, and by rearranging the sequence of certain entries.<sup>10</sup>

In this way complete reclassification may be avoided. It is still possible to retain the benefits enumerated by J. C. M. Hanson over twenty years ago: the numbers on the printed cards for suggestion, elastic notation, local subdivisions, expert service, and the support of the government.<sup>11</sup> The small library can thus reduce the bulk of the schedules, simplify notation, and individ-

ualize directions according to specific ends in view. Bringing out fewer classes is a mnemonic help, but this is not so important as the closer grouping of kindred books. At best college students learn few class numbers. They remember books by location and are bewildered when shifting has been done.

A preliminary inspection of the shelflist showed that our books were roughly divided as follows:

Class A— 200 titles	Class M— 100 titles
B— 750	N— 400
C— 400	P— 4200
D— 1300	Q— 1800
E— 700	R— 150
F— 500	S— 150
G— 200	T— 300
H— 1600	U V— 100
J— 600	Z— 300
K— 100	_____
L— 1100	15,000

On the basis of three titles to a subdivision, they would nicely fit into a schedule of five thousand places. Should our collection be doubled twice over, the average subclass would catch only twelve titles. It is hazardous to place an ultimate limit on expected growth. But the prospect seemed rather remote that a small college, 162 years old, would increase its library to a million or more volumes. The building will hold eighty thousand at the most. Our policy calls for a small well-chosen collection. "Perhaps the ideal library, after all," wrote Edmund Gosse, "is a small one, where the books are carefully selected and thoughtfully arranged in accordance with one central code of taste."<sup>12</sup> Something quite different from the Library of Congress, where not even the copyright limits selection.

The L.C. schedule A (general works) contains sixty-six subdivisions, more than can be profitably used in a small library.

<sup>12</sup> Gosse, Edmund. Quoted in Mosher, Thomas Bird. *Amphora*. 1926, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Van Hoesen, Henry B. "Perspective in Cataloging." *College and Research Libraries* 1: 330-35, September 1940.

<sup>9</sup> Dewey, Melvil. *Abridged Decimal Classification*. 6th ed. Forest Press, 1942.

<sup>10</sup> U. S. Library of Congress. *Classification: Music and Books on Music*. 1917, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Hanson, J. C. M. "Library of Congress Classification for Small Libraries." *Library Journal* 46: 151-54, February 1921.

The same is true of the other schedules. Moreover, the *Outline of the Library of Congress Classification, 1942*, and the synopses provided in the main schedules, can only serve as guides in the work of abridgment. They supply too few subdivisions, and the numbers given in blocks are not very helpful. As a first step, we accepted the twenty-one main classes, then chose subdivisions from the complete schedules, keeping watch on the book collection and the courses offered. Occasionally we could leave sections intact without change of notation.

### *Fiction, Biography, and Travel*

Under the aegis of rule 6 of the Merrill code,<sup>13</sup> we made decisions involving fiction, biography, and travel. Since L.C. uses the PQ-PT sections of national literatures to bring together works by or about an author regardless of form and places current fiction in PZ, this gave us a good chance to lump all fiction in the latter place. It was necessary to coax the cataloger to this practice in two stages. At first he would consent to shelve fiction only at the end of its literature section, creating for this purpose special numbers: PRZ (English fiction), PSZ (American fiction), etc. During this phase of conversion English novels were in three places; now they are in one. In shelving our fiction alphabetically by author without book number, long call numbers were dropped, such as PZ 3.G7876 Pr2, for Robert Graves' *Proceed, Sergeant Lamb*. Of course, it could have been done without using even a class number. At any rate, this popular section of books has been strengthened by the introduction of such characters as Mr. Woodhouse, the Reverend Septimus Harding, the Misses Matilda and Deborah Jenkyns, and the

<sup>13</sup> "Modify a rule of classification of books when necessary or desirable to meet special needs or types of service." In Merrill, W. S. *Code for Classifiers*. 1939, p. 2.

more lusty Moll Flanders, Tom Jones, and Becky Sharp. These persons of varied distinction improve upon acquaintance with Judge Honeywell, Mrs. Dalloway, and the George Apleys of Boston. Given a chance, they can hold their own beside Studs Lonigan, Ulysses, and the Joads.

Another new grouping was made of biography, taking the L.C. symbol CT 275 for individual works and CT 90 for collections, followed by two or three figures of the Cutter-Sanborn tables as needed. Few titles had found their way to this class, due to the L.C. policy of placing biography with subject. In general we left kings, presidents, and statesmen in history, and artists in art, but where personal interest predominated, we used CT. Julian Green's *Memories of Happy Days*, Siegfried Sassoon's *The Old Century*, and Edwin Way Teale's *Dune Boy* are now close neighbors. As Randolph Bourne has expressed it, they are among:

Those persons and things that inspire us to do our best, when we are in their presence, that call forth from us our latent and unsuspected personality, that nourish and support that personality—those are our friends. The reflection of their glow makes bright the darker and quieter hours when they are not with us. They are a true part of our widest self; we should hardly have a self without them.<sup>14</sup>

Although this move may be quite a concession to general readers, it has already demonstrated its usefulness to history and literature students as a store of memorable personal records.

Washington College also wanted a travel section for its own sake. Charles Brooks' *Thread of English Road*, Rockwell Kent's *Wilderness*, William H. Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia*, and the written thoughts of such richly endowed travelers as Hedin,

<sup>14</sup> Bourne, Randolph S. *Youth and Life*. Houghton, 1913, p. 151.

Keyserling, and La Farge are literary creations entitled to a particular place instead of being strewn about as collateral informers to other subjects. In L.C. such material goes into history as essential to the understanding of a country, if not in a special subject, as science. The classifier is given no real choice, but G (geography) looked possible to us. Reproduction of a portion of this schedule shows our simplification, achieved without drastic change of class numbers or loss of expansibility. Fifty pages of notation were reduced to one.

### G Geography

- G 73 Study and teaching
- G 115 General works. Bibliography
- G 160 World travels (To divide by country use L.C. Table I)
- G 161 United States (To divide by state use L.C. Table III)
  - G 161.A2 Alabama
  - G 163 South America
  - G 400 Air travel
  - G 500 Mountaineering
  - G 520 Ocean travel, sea life
  - G 575 Polar travel and exploration
  - G1000 Atlases, gazetteers
  - GA 1 Cartography
  - GB 50 Physical geography

Students of economic geography, foreign relations, and history are already using this section. Bibliography of geography was placed with subject, as proposed for small libraries by J. C. M. Hanson.<sup>15</sup>

Students of abnormal psychology had been using books on mental hygiene, psychiatry, and child psychology, which were in R (medicine), QP (physiology), LB (education), and HQ (child study). After arbitrarily reshelving them for class use several times, it seemed worth while to transfer some fifty or more titles permanently to BF (psychology), closing their former numbers. This decision was approved by the psychology department and the result has been satisfactory.

<sup>15</sup> Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

### Literature

In the next instance we were not prepared to go so far as one faculty member proposed: that all literature in English be shelved together alphabetically by author regardless of form or nationality. Perhaps, after all, it is simply a matter of choosing a system and adhering to it. John Cowper Powys reminds us that:

... the finest literature floats and drifts, as the wind blows, round the unlikeliest places. But the more cultured a human mind may be, the more serpentine will be its power of adjusting itself both to the ivory towers of the old-fashioned aesthetic responses and to the circus-tent sawdust of the new.<sup>16</sup>

The undergraduate, however, lacks this power as yet and appreciates our efforts to reach an orderly system. We decided to cling to the national divisions of literature, at least until some drastic change occurred in the curriculum or methods of teaching.

The chronological divisions in L.C. were another matter. The curricular presentation of literature, emphasizing form rather than period, made it desirable to separate poetry, drama, and essays within each country, as their exceptional forms merit. A schedule was drafted which closely follows L.C. connotation:

English Literature	
PR	1 General materials
	19 Encyclopedias and dictionaries
	30 Study and teaching
	80 History and criticism—general
	500 Poetry
	620 Drama
	821 Prose
	900 Oratory
	Literature
	1000 Collections—various authors
	1110 Collections—individual authors using various forms
	1170 Poetry
	1240 Drama

<sup>16</sup> Powys, John Cowper. *The Meaning of Culture*. Norton, 1929, p. 43.

1285	Prose
1320	Oratory
1340	Letters
1360	Essays

All subdivisions are not shown, but, as in travel, the schedule was reduced to one page. The revision caused considerable reprocessing, but the effect in the case of English poetry alone was worth the effort. Shorter notation also resulted in many cases, for example, PS 3525.I495K5 for Edna St. Vincent Millay's *The King's Henchman* became Ps 631.M6k. The problem of philology is to be solved arbitrarily by shelving books on the study of languages ahead of their respective literatures. For example, English philology (PE) will immediately precede English literature (PR). Although strict alphabetical sequence will be broken, kindred sections will come together rather than re-

main at opposite ends of the main class, a constant annoyance to students and professors.

Section T (technology) is not useful as a separate entity in our program. Most of it will be absorbed into related subjects in the sciences, industry, and production economics. Perhaps this offers the greatest affront to the orthodox. Applied mechanics is to be placed in physics, surveying in mathematics, sanitary engineering in medicine or city planning, railroads in transportation, and electrical engineering in physics. Periodicals and newspapers will be placed in a separate range of stacks by title.

Our present set of schedules with their geographical tables, seventy pages in all, promises to be adequate. Thus the huge and rambling classification of the Library of Congress has been reduced to reasonable dimensions for our purposes.

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## To Librarians of Colleges and Universities Engaged in Planning New Library Buildings

IN RESPONSE to a notice in a recent issue of the *Library Journal*, I find that some thirty-odd colleges and universities are thinking about new library buildings for postwar construction. The Committee on Buildings and Architecture of the A.C.R.L. is anxious to offer as much help as can be given within reason. Such help must necessarily be of a preliminary kind, because each librarian will presumably have an architect and a faculty committee. The committee would like to know what kind of help librarians would like to have.

*College and Research Libraries* has kindly allowed us space for the answering of specific questions and for the insertion of news and other helpful statements. If these questions can be sent to my office, I will try to see that they are answered by someone who knows—whether this be a librarian, an engineer, or an architect.

In the meanwhile, librarians may be interested in knowing that Julian P. Boyd, librarian of Princeton University, is at work forming a committee of librarians of universities planning new buildings. If his plans materialize, this committee should be of tremendous help during the next two years.

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braries, Iowa City*