

Some Problems in the Bibliographical Organization of Belles-Lettres and Related Secondary Works

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THE CURRENT EFFORTS of Professors Lewis Sawin and Charles Nilon of the University of Colorado to launch an "integrated bibliography" of English studies are, or should be, of great interest not only to researchers but also to catalogers and reference librarians who specialize in literature.¹ The effect of such a bibliography would be to simplify searches by bringing together (and organizing for retrievability) citations of all the items now listed in the innumerable bibliographies, large and small, which a student of English must scan in order to compile an exhaustive bibliography. It is possible that such a work would some day render superfluous certain reference tools now considered indispensable. Eventually, too, similar projects might be undertaken for French studies, German studies, and the like; or, in view of the overlapping of disciplines, the integrated bibliography could be expanded to include *all* languages and literatures. It is also conceivable that a tool might be created which would yield copies of desired documents and not merely the citations of them.

Be all that as it may, students of literature must now (and surely will, for some time to come) consult a variety of aids—bibliographies, catalogs, and classification schemes. Their work, rendered diffi-

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cult enough by the sheer number of aids to be consulted, is further complicated (but, in compensation, perhaps to some extent facilitated) by the great variation in the ways these aids to bibliographical control organize the materials which they assemble. My purpose here is to describe, in general terms, this existing structural variation and to indulge in a few speculations regarding it.

FIRST, A GENERAL LOOK

A major effort is to group literature—whether books or citations—so as to facilitate surveys of whole bodies of material. Common groupings are by language, nationality, period, literary form, authorship, intent, and importance. Reference aids vary not only in their chief emphases but also in how many groupings they employ and in how they relate their various groupings; for example, one reference aid may group first by language, then by nationality, then by form, period, importance, authorship, title, edition, and so on, whereas another may be similar except that it ignores nationality and divides by period before it divides by form. At one point or another on the road to specificity, systems concentrate upon authorship, even though they may scatter authors' works by language,

¹ This bibliography was the subject of several sessions of the Second Conference on Bibliography held at Pennsylvania State University, Nov. 29–Dec. 1, 1962; see *Antiquarian Bookman*, XXX (Dec. 17, 1962) 2275–81.

period, form, or even subject. The arrangement of an author's works (*i.e.*, those that are collocated) may simply be alphabetical or chronological; or it may follow some other pattern, *e.g.*, works, selected works, and individual works; fiction, poetry, and drama; early works and later; or major works and minor. Translations may present problems: the usual practice, at least in scholarly schemes, is to scatter them among their originals, but in some instances translations are placed with the literatures of the languages of translation. Anthologies drawing upon the works of various authors present problems comparable to those offered by works of individuals—along with problems of their own, *e.g.*, whether to alphabetize by editor or by title.

The usual way of handling secondary works seems to be to create a kind of shadow classification to accompany the pattern formed by the literature itself—this despite the existence of schemes which exile biography and bibliography to such Siberias as 016, 928, and Z. It is most apparent where individual authors are concerned, least apparent (and least important) where general topics are concerned, *i.e.*, topics too wide in their application to be juxtaposed with particular belles-lettres. Secondary works of the first kind are usually divided into those dealing with individual works, those dealing with groups of an author's works, and those dealing with his works as a whole or nearly so—the distinction between the second and third classes being less usual than the distinction between the first and the others. Secondary works related to an author's works as a whole may in turn be divided according to emphasis or intent, *e.g.*, commentaries, concordances, criticisms, biographies, bibliographies, and studies of aspects (*e.g.*, meter). Where works dealing with several authors are placed is likely to depend upon the scheme used in group-

ing the literature itself, *e.g.*, in a scheme grouping by period, general studies of Victorian fiction are more likely to be placed near studies of Victorian poetry than near studies of Edwardian and Georgian fiction; but in a scheme grouping by form, they are more likely to be placed near studies of fiction of whatever period than near studies of other categories of Victorian literature. The ways in which secondary works are grouped if they cover topics other than particular authors, forms, and periods, are innumerable; such points of emphasis as theme, character type, influence, relationship to other pursuits, and research method are among those seldom regarded in groupings of secondary works about individual authors (other than such as Goethe and Shakespeare) but are quite usual in groupings of works dealing with whole literatures, periods, or forms—or with literature as a whole. A complicating factor is the tendency to group many works on literature with works on language and for works on literature to overlap in content with ostensibly philological studies. A variety of patterns may thus emerge which will be tremendously interesting to the student of classification, but which to the inexperienced researcher will be bewildering.

A FEW PROBLEMS

The next several paragraphs enumerate a few of the problems which turn up when one studies in some detail the currently available bibliographies, printed catalogs, and classification schedules.

1. *Languages and nationalities.* Non-classical authors some or all of whose works were written in Latin and/or in Greek present a problem, as do modern authors (*e.g.*, Beckett) who have written in more than one language, with or without changing nationality. Because of a general preference for language, certain national literatures become lost or obscured. Seldom is Irish literature (ex-

cept in lists confined to it) allowed to claim Shaw, Wilde, and George Moore—or even Yeats, Colum, and James Stephens. This example suggests the ambiguities created by political history, particularly those stemming from such complex and often unstable groupings as unions, colonial empires, and confederations. A comparable but less common problem stems from changing views of language, *e.g.*, those concerning the possible relationships between Finno-Ugric and Turkic. A somewhat different problem is created by a growing tendency to disregard in secondary works national or even linguistic distinctions. An anthology may further complicate by introducing a second or third nationality but not presenting enough national or linguistic variety to justify a “general” label.

2. *Forms.* An obvious problem is how far to go with distinctions among literary forms—whether, for example, to have one class for prose fiction or to have separate classes for novel, short story, proto-novel, etc. A second problem stems from the fact that some works are difficult to place, *e.g.*, reveries, sketches, prose epistles, many “mystical” productions, and collections of epigrams; to place these in nonfiction prose is to revise rather than to remove the difficulty, as some nonfiction prose forms, *e.g.*, the familiar essay, are forms in their own right and it seems a pity to lose these specimens in forests of related growths. One compromise would be to isolate major categories and to lump the rest into “other prose.” Hybrids, whether they are really so by origin or merely seem so, also create difficulties (novels in verse, poetry not written in lines, “non-dramatic” dialogues), as do mixtures, *e.g.*, prose fictions with passages in verse or in dramatic form. Some literatures distant in time or space (and some very recent writings) present us with groupings that can only with difficulty be pigeonholed into the categories ordinarily referred to. Some

schemes treat as if they were coordinate, categories which are not mutually exclusive; “satire,” for example, is scarcely coordinate with “poetry” and “prose fiction,” even though the historical and pragmatic justification for the distinction brought out may outweigh the difficulty experienced by bibliographers and library patrons in placing many items which are on the borderlines, if we may call them that, between satire and other categories. Collections, whether of the works of one author or of the works of many, create problems, at least in schemes featuring major division by form; to relegate such works to a “general” class may be acceptable if authorship is plural but is likely to mystify if authorship is singular—Milton’s complete works with generalia, his poetry with poetry, his prose with prose, etc.

3. *Periods.* One difficulty is that periods are not always readily separable, *i.e.*, careers and trends so overlap as to create such no-man’s-lands as (in English literature) 1790-1800, 1825-1840, and 1890-1910. Dead intervals are few; so are sudden transformations. Many authors are therefore difficult to place. Others seem to belong in periods according to style, tone, or other factors besides chronological position. Thus Lowell and Whitman were, for much of their careers, contemporaries; but the former seems to belong with the first half of the nineteenth century, the latter with the second. Moreover, some authors (*e.g.*, Hardy) experience more than one flowering or for some other reason identify themselves with more than one period. Furthermore, periods (unless we limit them arbitrarily by turns of centuries) vary from literature to literature; hence those consulting bibliographies may find, as they move from one literature to another, that searches for particular authors become troublesome. Then, too, an organization widely accepted may not continue to be accepted; hence those consulting older

bibliographies are likely to find, in the changes that come with new interpretations, complications which compilers could not have foreseen. Secondary works involve a multiplication of such problems because of the frequency with which they survey more than one period: unless lavish cross references are provided such items may be virtually lost through relegation to "generalialia." Secondary works also create problems in that they often refer to subperiods, *e.g.*, a work may refer to the nineteenth century as a whole, or to half of it, or to only a decade; period schemes (if they are to analyze deeply) thus need to bring out not only period A and period B but also subperiods A1 and A2, and subsubperiods A1a, A1b, A1c, A2a, and A2b, and the divisions of B.

4. *Authorship.* One problem is the effect upon position in sequence of choice of entry: should Clemens be listed under C or under T? But such stumbling blocks as names create (foreign, religious, assumed, and changing) are not so serious as they might seem; they result rather in stubbed toes than in tumbles, and cross-references can eliminate most of the toe-stubbing. Of more serious consequence is the problem—at least in single-entry listings—of unknown or uncertain authorship. Joint authorship is also a problem in that an author's works may be grouped together whether unaided efforts or no—or may be divided into groups: single and joint. A real danger is that one of a group of authors may not be noted. Secondary authors—editors, translators, etc.—are a problem in that they, like joint authors, are readily lost in other than multi-entry systems and may be lost even in them. Nonalphabetic arrangements (*e.g.*, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats) are of value in so far as they help one survey literature meaningfully arranged, but they are of questionable value in searching.

5. *Title.* Many problems associated with titles have to do with the various

titles under which single texts appear. An attractive solution would be to accept (or compose) one title for each text and to class under it all presentations, whatever titles they may individually bear. An incidental merit to this solution is that it would simplify the placement of secondary works dealing with individual works in that such works would readily file (or shelve) next to all single presentations of the works with which they deal. But this solution, appealing though it may be to one's sense of order, creates two problems: accepted titles may not be acceptable, let alone occur, to all; and searches for single works known by the titles they bear are greatly complicated, even with cross references galore, by the scattering of title-page titles in arrangements of standard or constructed titles. Incidentally, titles *may* be arranged other than alphabetically, *e.g.*, chronologically or according to scales of value; but here the fact would seem to be overwhelming that even among devotees of Trollope, fewer know his chronology (and even fewer are agreed as to just where his success lay) than know the Roman alphabet. Complete and selected works are, it seems to be generally agreed, best placed separately from individual works; yet even this seemingly clear issue is fogged by little, but nagging, problems of filing. And when we try—if we try—to separate complete from selected works we come upon the fact that they are not always easy to separate; besides, collections said to be complete may turn out to be far from complete—yet if they were once thought to be complete it will hardly do to place them among selected works.

6. *Publication and related problems.* No matter in what forms works of individuals are presented, one may wish to bring out facts regarding their composition and/or publication—as by listing in order of composition or by listing according to type of publication (*e.g.*, collocating works first appearing in partic-

ular periodicals). One may also wish to establish such categories as extant manuscripts, works circulated in manuscript, works privately printed, works published by particular publishers, and the like. These patterns may or may not be combined with others, to produce complex and perhaps quite meaningful schemes.

7. *Subjects of belles-lettres.* Subject classification of literature may smell of the shanty; subject indexing may suggest lace but perhaps not of a kind to flaunt. Scholarly groupings of literature as a whole—or particular literatures as wholes—are unlikely to make subjects their primary approaches; but special studies do so regularly; and certain groups of writers—especially if, like historians, naturalists, and theologians, they are generally relegated to service wings—are more likely to be looked upon in the subjective mode, so to speak, than not. Fiction, poetry, and drama less often experience the subject approach, partly because subject is an aspect in which scholars are seldom deeply interested and partly because the subjects of literature are often extremely difficult to define, and, I should add, perhaps because of the strangely disenchanting glare which subject labels have a way of giving off (imagine *Macbeth* under “ambition,” *Wuthering Heights* under “sibling rivalry”; and what is the subject of *The Waste Land*?). Theme appears to be a different matter, although just why may not be obvious. *Hamlet* has as one theme “revenge.” This one can accept, but even here one would prefer “revenge *play*”—which leads us to another matter. A topic of great interest generally neglected by the major bibliographies and indexes—and virtually ignored by classification schedules—is the matter of literary traditions which more or less permanently relate certain subjects to certain forms, e.g., picaresque romance, allegory of mystical union, detective story, family chronicle, imaginary voyage, Utopian romance, historical novel, and revenge play. Speci-

mens of such “genres” do not, of course, always yield the truth about themselves to brief inquiries; least of all, I suspect, do some of those of most potential interest to advanced students, e.g., accounts of mystical union veiled as fairy tales. Collections, surprising enough, often class by subject with no difficulty; why collections of individual works should class more easily than do individual works may puzzle, at least until one realizes that the subject classification of a collection is usually made in deference to the decision of the collector. If, thus, a collection of poems is said to be about dreams it will go under “dreams,” even if most of the poems are on night, death, the infinite, fairyland, love, or whatever.

8. *Primary or secondary?* Some works create a difficulty in that one must decide whether they are to be looked upon as literary specimens or as works which throw light upon literary specimens. One's decisions may drastically affect the positions of such works in classified arrangements. Letters and journals should not, however, create many problems. In nearly all instances one can safely decide not upon the basis of literary quality but upon the basis of known intent, considering letters and journals secondary unless known to be addressed to the reading public. Memoirs are more difficult in that in single-entry systems, e.g., shelf arrangements, placing with the writer, or with the subject, may determine even whether an item goes with one literature or another. Most systems would probably place Maurois' *Ariel* with Shelley, but what if its author's *Oeuvres complètes* should appear? Or what if one should decide that *Ariel* is more significant as representative of a stage in its author's development than as an account of its subject? The practical solution must surely be one which can be applied in *all* instances; better to adhere to an announced policy (and thus, if need be, to do less than justice to particular works) than to set up an equitable

but unpredictable system productive of endless decision making.

9. *Approaches and emphases in secondary works.* Here the problems are two: to distinguish particular approaches and emphases, and to place the works which are characterized by them. Enumerating categories is not difficult. There are criticisms, commentaries, concordances, and so on; or, more narrowly, explications, appreciations, evaluations, studies of influence, studies of aspects, and so on. The problem is to decide which categories particular works represent. Many—perhaps most—may class easily. But whether a particular work is *primarily* an explication or an evaluation may not be obvious; in fact, a “reading” or a “study” of a literary text may do just about everything a secondary work is capable of doing. An extreme solution is to lump all secondary works about each author together, but it would seem that some sort of classification should be attempted if major authors are involved and *must* be attempted in dealing with entire periods, national literatures, or forms. Here, to mention but one puzzle, is the problem of distinguishing among theory, history, and criticism. The old distinction “What is literature? What literature is there? Is *this* literature?” is easy to quote but not always easy to apply. Still, one would appreciate more, rather than fewer, efforts to distinguish types of secondary works. Especially helpful would be distinctions according to emphasis—imagery, meter, vocabulary, characterization, critical reception, and the like. That individual items stress what they stress may be obvious from titles and/or annotations; the problem is to arrange items so as to satisfy the demands of students who need to find specific approaches quickly and of those who do not, as the orthodox may, study individual authors and their efforts but rather study particular aspects in the works of many authors (and who thus

need to be directed not only to essays on, *e.g.*, meter in general and to essays on, *e.g.*, Robert Frost but also to essays on the meter of—among others—Robert Frost), *i.e.*, who need a kind of indexing that points not only to general applications but also to applications in the works of particular writers. Studies of relationships among a few authors impose a special problem when the emphasis upon the authors is approximately equal, and when cross references and added entries are not made; decisions must be made which may seem, however carefully they were made, capricious.

10. *What to include.* Two questions arise. (1) Should history, theology, description, folklore, and so on, of literary value be included in the literature? In universal schemes, such will probably fall elsewhere; in schemes devoted to literature they may or may not be included—and if they are, perhaps placed with individual authors and titles and/or segregated among “ancillae.” The quantity of a particular literature and traditions regarding the study of it cause, in some instances, variations; the canons of classical and medieval literature, for example, include categories—histories, scientific treatises, etc.—that are seldom included in modern literatures, or, at any rate, in their cores. (2) Should secondary works on “background”—history, social structure, and the like—be included? Similar choices seem to be offered. In schemes devoted to literature, the difficulty would seem to be that one must stop somewhere (but where?); for to convert every subject bibliography into a universal bibliography would scarcely be the best way to satisfy the needs of scholarship. There seems, incidentally, to be a tendency toward a perfect negative correlation between the importance of a national literature (*i.e.*, to the traditions of Anglo-American reading) and the extent to which social history, etc., are in-

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cially to those who reside in rural areas or in places where the library is small. Although universities and colleges which are primarily tuition-supported institutions have obligations chiefly to their own faculties and student bodies, they should guide the individual correspondent to sources of information or materials in his own local, regional, or academic library. Three factors may determine or alter the reference service given in answering mail requests: (1) restrictions on services as defined in library policy, (2) the materials called for may not be in the collection, (3) the library may not have the necessary staff to give extensive aid. In no case should they deter the librarian from making an *appropriate* referral as provided in the Code for Handling of Reference Inquiries Received by Mail.

To fulfill the objectives of the code the reference librarian must, within the framework of his own institution's policies, extend the scope of his services to encompass reference questions by mail, as well as those inquiries made in person

or by telephone. Communication to the individual is important regardless of whether he comes in person to the library or writes for information. A correspondent seeking reference information or materials on a subject should receive a direct answer to his question or be given one or more constructive suggestions leading to a source or sources of information. Many libraries in the United States may lack the holdings, the staff, and the facilities to give this service, but the reference librarians in these institutions should know the sources of information and should have sufficient knowledge of regional and institutional resources to make the types of referrals recommended in the code. Reference library service by mail is one form of cooperative reference library work. It should be considered in the surveys of regional area studies of libraries, in studies of systems of library cooperation to meet reference and research needs, and in the identification of responsibility of service in systems of libraries which cross political and institutional boundaries. ■■

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cluded in the "background" as recorded in bibliographies of literature.

A few further comments (some of which have been anticipated) are offered for whatever they may be worth:

1. Despite the obvious but superficial convenience of having literature and related works accessible on open shelves, the future would seem to lie rather with filing than with shelving—chiefly for the simple (and often cited) reason that whereas a book may stand at but one

point, entries for it may appear at many, but also because of the fact that whereas a display of an actual collection is seldom complete (books may be in use, may be segregated because of size or value, etc.) even a simple shelf list provides an authoritative, if superficial, statement of the contents of a collection.

2. The weaknesses of one scheme may be matched by corresponding strengths in another. Despite the obvious inefficiency of duplication of indexing and