



Biblio-Notes

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Notes from the Chair

"The future is now!" Is that not one of most ridiculous clichés the advertising world has ever given us? Aside from its logical absurdity (the present is now—the future is yet to be), it is a phrase that promises the utopian attainment of all our unfulfilled desires. All those things we hope to one day accomplish, made real today! But it is a hollow promise and one that robs the future of its real potential.

The future is *not* now, but LES has lots of plans to make the future as pleasant and interesting as possible, once it becomes the present. Your LES officers and committee members are busily developing ways to share information, improve our knowledge base, and entertain our minds.

One of these projects is to create an "idea hopper," a mechanism to share ideas about programs, publishing projects, and other section activities. Because many ideas are put forth during LES meetings, with no practical way to preserve or revisit those ideas in the *future*, the idea hopper would establish a permanent and accessible place to store such thoughts. Dan Coffey is working on this project, developing a LES blog as the possible mechanism for an idea hopper.

Another future-looking plan is the creation of a LES New Members Discussion Group. Karen Munro has been the spearhead of this project. The group hopes to make the orientation process into LES and literature librarianship in general more fruitful for section members. Literature librarians old and new are encouraged to attend the first meeting of the group at ALA Annual: 4:30pm, Sunday, June 27. There will also be a reception for new members 15 minutes before the Membership Forum: 2-4pm, Sunday, June 27.

The LES program in Orlando promises to be an interesting event. *Cuban Voices, English Words: Language and Identity in Cuban-American Literature* will feature a panel of

authors. Carolina Hospital, Gustavo Perez-Firmat, Delia Poey, and Virgil Suarez will discuss their bi-cultural writing experiences. As part of this Cuban-American program, LES will also host a book talk of Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* during the Membership Forum. Watch the LES discussion list for further details about this book talk.

Finally, to look into the distant future, a few LES members are investigating the possibility of holding a conference or symposium in the United Kingdom, much as WESS hosted a meeting in Paris this year. A LES meeting in Britain would likely have to wait until 2008. One idea is to hold it in conjunction with the London Book Fair. If you would like to work on planning such an event, or even if you think you might like to attend, please contact any of your LES officers. Pencil Spring of 2008 into your calendar! We will make LES an organization that is *ahead of its time*.

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Popular Fiction Collections in North American Libraries

Lest my title mislead you, I should say up front that this is not an attempt to identify all collections of popular fiction in North American libraries. Rather it's a very modest attempt to convey some information that came to light during the ALA mid-winter conference in San Diego with some "value-added" in the form of a survey of members through LES-L and a bit of Web searching.

The topic of the LES Membership Forum last January was the management of popular fiction collections in academic

libraries. The phrase, "popular fiction," is obviously ambiguous, but for the purposes of this article I'm referring to fiction by authors that are not commonly studied academically and consequently not widely collected by academic libraries. A lot of this fiction falls into categories or genres that are also somewhat ambiguous, including adventure stories, fantasy, historical fiction, magic realism, mysteries, romance novels, science fiction (hereafter referred to as "sci fi"), war stories, and westerns. Since children's and young adult literature are whole other subjects, I'm limiting this article to adult literature.

Eleven members responded to my survey, but modest as the results are they may be of interest to LES members in their collection development duties. On the one hand, awareness of some of these collections may be useful sometime in assisting a user. On the other hand, it may suggest areas of possible development for your own library such as establishing a leisure reading collection or commencing a new area of collecting on a more permanent basis.

The survey shows that a number of academic libraries acquire popular fiction to meet their users' demand for leisure reading. Four libraries that use the McNaughton Plan include Johns Hopkins, Texas Tech, U. of Southern California, and Villanova. The McNaughton Plan allows libraries to lease books periodically (usually every two weeks) with an option to buy rather than return them; it is widely popular with public libraries, which can lease a dozen copies of a bestseller to meet temporary demand. Two other libraries that have set up impermanent popular collections are Carleton (especially mysteries and sci fi) and U. of Wisconsin-Madison.

A number of other libraries have popular fiction in their regular circulating collections, as opposed to a separate and impermanent collection. Duke collects sci fi and "graphic novels" and it was noted that U. of North Carolina-Chapel Hill collects mystery/detective novels. Harvard collects sci fi and general popular fiction, but sends them directly to off-site, climate-controlled storage, where they're available for recall for circulation. Notre

Dame collects Catholic authors and Catholic fiction (neither of which are particularly easy to define) and twentieth-century Irish fiction for circulation. The U. of Illinois has "shelves of nineteenth-century three-decker novels," which presumably include titles by minor as well as major authors.

I'm describing special collections separately for several reasons: they may be longer-lived than circulating materials, they may be more comprehensively or at least systematically collected than circulating collections, and obviously they don't circulate so our users can't rely on interlibrary loan to access them. Seven libraries indicate having a special collection of science fiction; they are Bowling Green, Eastern New Mexico U., Michigan State U., New York Public Library, Temple U., Toronto Public Library (including fantasy and magic realism), and U. of Texas-Austin (twentieth century). Duke has special collections of girls' fiction, gay/lesbian pulp fiction, and comic books. Notre Dame recently acquired the Loeber Collection of Irish Fiction that begins in the eighteenth century but is primarily nineteenth-century.

SUNY-Buffalo has the Kelly Paperback and Pulp Fiction Collection, U. of Arizona has the Women Mystery Writers Collection, Cornell has Gay Men's Fiction, Bowling Green collects mysteries and detective fiction, and U. of Virginia has Popular American Fiction, 1752-1950. The 60,000-volume William Charvat Collection of American Fiction at Ohio State U. is well known. Finally, I presume we can regard the Library of Congress as the library of record for American pop fiction, including pulp fiction.

As you can see, this has been less a summary than a simple listing of the responses to the survey plus information I found on the internet. I drew a couple of conclusions from this superficial endeavor. One is that, as many suspected, pop fiction is not being systematically or comprehensively collected by research libraries; it is very hit and miss and in some cases intended only for temporary use and imminent disposal. Another conclusion is that mysteries and sci fi are more collected than other genres. This suggests some

likely areas of collection development if any LES members are in the position of embarking on a new special collection. The genre of historical fiction occurs to me as a potential source of research not only into pop culture but also into cultural interpretations of the past.

Finally, the question of whether libraries are collecting or overlooking popular fiction as an important record of our culture warrants a more extensive and detailed survey and discussion. Some issues that neither the mid-winter discussion nor my survey fully explored include “whether we buy some genres but not others, how we make selection decisions, whether popular fiction needs special preservation or loss prevention handling, if our approval plans are useful in acquiring this kind of material,” to quote the Membership Committee’s handout describing the mid-winter Forum. Anyone looking for a topic for research and publication?

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A Library Student’s First Visit to the NYPL Humanities and Social Sciences Library

I’m a third quarter MSLIS student at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA. I’ve spent years whiling away afternoons in libraries as a kid and later as a college student. The cozy confines, the quiet of the stacks, the nooks and crannies are perfect for settling in, for reading or studying or hiding out. The library has always been the perfect escape, at once comforting and intriguing in its mustiness. In short, I’ve always loved libraries, their peace and quiet, their way of siphoning my scattered thoughts into whichever project I needed to concentrate. The library has always been a familiar, comfortable place.

Or so I thought until a recent trip to the Humanities and Social Sciences Library

of the New York Public Library (referred to locally as the “Main Branch”). In Manhattan for the weekend, I was quickly recruited by an author friend to show him around, to navigate the inner workings of a research library (a prospect he found intimidating), and to help kick start a project he’d been long avoiding. Outside the library, at the cross section of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Streets, all about, scattered to and fro, was a nice cross section of urban humanity, performers and their audience, hotdog vendors, people chatting away on cell phones, enjoying the unseasonable warmth. The library as meeting point, I thought.

In contrast, the grandiosity of the library’s edifice itself is something to behold. Imposing, looming, its scale is simply out of whack with most libraries as we all know them. I’m not sure what I had expected. Something less colossal, perhaps. After stumbling about in the foyer for a few moments, my companion and I helped ourselves to a somewhat intricate foldout map of the interior. Randomly selecting a direction, we lit out down a long hallway like a couple of tourists. Eventually, through regular fact-checking against our map, we came to the Map Room, closed off by a rather intricate door. We entered, silently, then had absolutely no idea what to do next. I tiptoed around, feigned interest in a map of Istanbul lying open, and attempted to not appear like the interloper I felt like. We stayed just long enough to lend the appearance that we hadn’t wandered in by mistake, then quickly departed for the U.S. History room.

Okay. This room actually resembled a library as I know them. I directed my companion to the online catalog and then the reference desk, where his queries (concerning WWII) were met with rapt, helpful attention by the resident librarians. I was beginning to feel a bit emboldened. This initial feeling of confidence wouldn’t linger very long, however.

I had been in a non-lending library before, and as I climbed the marble stairs and peeked into the public catalog room, it was clear that this was a system with which I was not familiar. Sure, I could peruse the online catalog, select the documents I

wanted, but then what? There was absolutely nothing intuitive about just how, exactly, one managed to get their hands on the desired texts. Everyone else seemed to know what they were doing. We staggered about, like seafarers in rough water, trying to eavesdrop, to spy, to discern what everybody else was doing. I watched with curiosity as other patrons furiously filled out the small white document request forms, then queued up to submit them to a clerk. There were several lines, all of which seemed to serve their own purpose. Which line went where, and for what, was a complete mystery. As was which people behind the counters were librarians and which were staff. After getting in the wrong (long) line a few times, we finally stumbled over to the correct employee. The clerk examined our forms, explained all the mistakes we had made, corrected them, then rolled up the slips, placed them in a canister and in turn into a pneumatic tube, at which point the canister was transported to some mysterious place, presumably to the stacks. This system was fascinating, unfamiliar and completely intimidating. We stood there like a couple of idiots, having no idea what happened next.

Apparently, our confusion was palpable, since the clerk pointed us in the direction of an adjacent antechamber, which in turn opened up into the main reading room. How, once in this locale, we received our books was anybody's guess, so eventually we enlisted the assistance of a nearby security guard. Another first. Having no way to determine who the librarians were, the security staff became our most dependable allies in our quest for research materials. The guard was polite, patient, and helpful (though would still frisk us again later on the way out). He ushered us towards one half of the vast reading room, which resembled the deli counter of a bustling grocery.

My rudimentary handle on the system's workings led me, after a nice interlude of panic and self doubt, to realize it was now time to wait our turn at the book deli. A gigantic tote board flashed numbers on and off, while all around us people glanced feverishly from their slips of paper to the board and back again. Plastic cartons of

books were arriving behind the counter via dumbwaiter, and the staff busily filled the orders. Patrons whose numbers had been called approached the counter with trepidation, nervously collecting their books. Finally, it was our turn. Of the three texts requested, two had arrived. Figuring this, under the circumstances, to be an acceptable return, we snatched them up and made our way to a far-off table in the airplane hangar-sized reading room.

Success! Unfortunately, after the rigorous ordeal of the aforementioned process, our strength for, or interest in, conducting research was, to put it mildly, waning. We flipped absentmindedly through the books for a bit, took some notes, and decided to return at a later date.

Moving on, we viewed a wonderful exhibit on Art Deco book bindings and peered into the ultra-mysterious special collections rooms (where the archivists wore white gloves and you needed serious credentials and an appointment!).

The afternoon had been overwhelming. I realized that I would need much longer than a day to take all of this in. I left the library feeling somewhat inadequate and uninformed. Is it normal for a library student to be slightly boggled by this enormous library? I don't know. But I want to go back and figure this place out. Sounds like a good field trip.

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Postcolonial Journals

I recently helped a graduate student in comparative literature to find journals that might publish an article she'd written on Zadie Smith's White Teeth and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. We quickly ran into several difficulties: not only is there no monolithic term for "postcolonial" literature (Commonwealth, post-colonial, African, comparative, new, Australian, and many other terms will all turn up items in the field), but the definition of postcolonialism is itself so broad and fluid that finding a single, authoritative directory of these journals seemed

impossible. This is a developing field of criticism, so there's the added possibility that the newest journals may not have made it into our directories yet. Finally, many journals that publish postcolonial criticism do not identify themselves explicitly as "postcolonial journals," but simply as journals of English-language literature.

Faced with this somewhat daunting task, I sent out a call for help on the LES discussion list. The response was immediate, thorough, and very helpful. Here's a summary of our colleagues' suggestions.

The **MLA Directory of Periodicals** permits searching for journals by keywords in title, scope note, and subject (depending on your interface.) The Directory of Periodicals lists publication and scope information for print and electronic periodicals concerned with language or literature. My library no longer subscribes to the print version of the Directory, but there's an online version embedded within the MLAIB. Searching this directory for "postcolonial*" as a Periodical Subject returned 35 hits, and subject tracing from these items leads to more. Sadly, the periodical subject headings in these records aren't hyperlinked, and there are some quirks in this platform's searching. My search did not, for instance, retrieve an item record for *Kunapipi*, a self-identified journal of postcolonial literature, because the subject headings applied to it are simply, "English literature; New literatures in English; Literature: English language."

Searching in MLAIB for postcolonial literature, and adding keywords to focus on the student's area of interest, helps to identify journals that publish criticism in the field, even if they don't explicitly identify themselves as having a postcolonial interest.

A **journals-only keyword search** in our own library's catalog for "postcolonial*" may catch further titles, though only those we own. Expanding this search to WorldCat catches a wider range of titles, and also provides holdings information for a sense of how popular and authoritative a journal may be.

The Year's Work in English Studies, print or online version, summarizes the most important critical writings of the year in a wide range of literatures. Chapter XVII, "New Literatures," summarizes work in African, Australian, Canadian, Caribbean, Indian, and New Zealand. Key journals are named, and important articles in other journals are also cited.

The Journal of Commonwealth Literature publishes an annual bibliography issue, similar to the *Year's Work* in layout and scope. The countries covered vary somewhat from year to year, as do the categories included in each section. Bibliographies (which include smaller, foreign, and lesser-indexed journals) are included in most cases.

James Harner's Literary Research Guide provides guidance on finding useful bibliographies of postcolonial literature, particularly in the "Other Literatures in English" section. The Journal of Commonwealth Literature's "Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature" is listed at 4375 (4th edition), for instance. Sections in this edition are devoted to scholarly journals in the field, to bibliographic works, and to periodicals in various commonwealth literatures.

The **Institute of Postcolonial Studies** maintains an online links directory here: <http://www.ipcs.org.au/links.html>. It includes a section for journals and e-journals, including several that aren't indexed in the MLA Directory of Periodicals.

Several **databases**, such as Dialog files (436 Wilson Humanities Abstracts; 439 ISI Arts and Humanities Search), permit searching for keyword variations on "postcolonial*" in title, descriptor, or identifier fields.

Thanks to William Baker, Dan Coffey, Kris Ecklund, Jane Faulkner, Linda George, Jim Harner, Steve Harris, Rob Melton, John Novak, Geoffrey Ross, and Tim Shipe for their contributions, and to Laura Fuderer for suggesting this article.

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Getting Started

I began shopping for a new career in the fall of 2001 as it became clear that the travel industry would never be the same after September 11th. Prior to that I had been fairly successful as a salesperson. I enjoyed the interaction with the public and the industry and I did indeed take advantage of the travel benefits that people always ask me about. Though I survived several rounds of layoffs and cutbacks I could see that, if I wanted to move forward in my life and my career, I would certainly have to change fields. I decided I would like to work at a college and I began searching employment listings for translatable skills. It was in this manner that I discovered librarianship. The reference interview is not unlike what I do everyday. A common statement heard daily by travel agents across the country is, "We want to go somewhere warm, in the winter". A salesperson must obviously qualify this statement in many ways. I was therefore intrigued with library science. Once enrolled, I noted that there was a strong sense of urgency among my peers to find employment in some capacity at a library of any sort. Initially I did not feel this pressure. My search for employment was immediately enhanced by my new Drexel email address and I began interviewing before classes actually began.

My first two interviews were for a limited service position in an interlibrary loan department and for a reference librarian internship. Admittedly, I went to the first interview with very little knowledge about what ILL even was. In both interviews I was asked about my decision to enter librarianship, about my plans for the future of my education and my career, and basically given a crash course in interlibrary loan procedures and in reference librarianship. My skills seemed to fit both positions, I was careful to be cordial and eloquent, I noted the names of my interviewers, and wrote them thank you letters. I never heard back. I had no idea of how fierce the competition would be at this point.

After my second interview I began to understand that there were certain skills I would need, even as a library science

student, before I could hope to be a valid candidate. I had not yet completed my first quarter of study. I left there knowing I would likely not be offered the job, but yet I was pleased to note that the classes I was taking were going to be valuable. Those classes were action research, online searching, and systems analysis. The reality of the magnitude of the competition I was facing began to be clear.

As part of that endeavor, I have tried to take classes that will teach skills described in multiple job postings because I want to get an education that will be applicable in whatever area of librarianship I ultimately choose. I met with Drexel's placement coordinator to improve my resume and to get help finding places to send it, and I have begun a campaign, if you will, to contact potential employers whether or not they have a stated position available.

While much of my job search is probably not all that unique, a few concerns have entered my mind during this process. First, as a full time student I occasionally ask myself if I am working through the program too quickly. Will I miss a chance to do something interesting along the way if I am too busy? Secondly, how important is experience prior to graduation? I have had several other interviews since the first two and each time I have been asked why I would like to enter a particular aspect of librarianship over the others. So far, I have found this question to be the most difficult to answer because I do not have scale for comparison. How does one rate the pleasure of answering reference questions against the challenges of collection development when one has done neither? How does a person without experience decide between a law library and a public library system? This is a real concern for me because I feel very limited with my current profession. I do not want to make the wrong choice early in my search. I want to like my new career as much as possible.

Overall, in spite of my lack of success in the job hunt to date, I find it inspiring to think that with every class I take I become a more qualified candidate for hire. I also appreciate the interviews because they really are helpful, and I like that librarians are part of such a close community. In a strange way I also appreciate the

rejections. They show me that librarians really take their profession seriously and they really do hold the patron's needs as a priority when hiring someone. That alone ought to ensure a newly hired employee that their library will be a viable tool for the patrons for a long time. Hiring someone is not a simple task and I am sure it must be difficult to choose just one person out of the many excellent applicants when we all express such enthusiasm and have such a definite need.

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[Note: The editor has received email from readers wanting to see articles by library school students or those entering the job market. Two articles in this issue were written by students. Please let the editor know if you would like to see items on a particular subject.]

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LES web site: www.ala.org/acrl/les

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