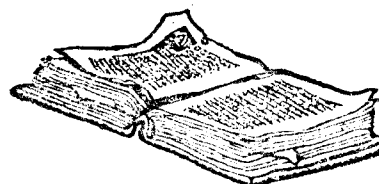


March 7, 2002

Charles Brown, Director  
Hennepin County Library  
12601 Ridgedale Drive  
Minnetonka, MN 55305



Director Brown,

Since you alone made the decision to destroy Hennepin County Library's current bibliographic database and authority file, both to be replaced by "standardized" records and terms derived from OCLC, AACR2, and Library of Congress subject headings, you alone should be able to answer a few simple questions:

1. Inasmuch as the conversion to strictly standard data and formats announced in your March 5th memo to HCL staff represents a colossal policy change with unarguably widespread impacts on HCL staff and users alike, and given the constant rhetoric about HCL being "customer-driven" and committed to team-based decision-making, why was this monumental issue not discussed with frontline staff and members of the public before making a decision?
2. Because of HCL's undisputed, significant influence upon cataloging practice locally, nationally, and worldwide, and the fact that its catalog and authority file have become professional models and benchmarks, do you intend to immediately create electronic "snapshot" versions of the catalog database and name/subject/series authority file for preservation and archiving (perhaps by an institution like the University of Illinois Archives at Urbana-Champaign)?
3. Did you watch Bill Moyers' excellent documentary, Trading Democracy, recently aired on Public Television? It doubtless triggered much interest among viewers regarding NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. Such viewers now would be able to identify relevant HCL resources, including government documents, by doing a subject search for NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT. Should they search under "NAFTA," they'd be referred to the "NORTH AMERICAN" form. In the upcoming, new HCL catalog, those searches will likely yield nothing. Why? Because the "standard" form devised by the Library of Congress, following AACR2, is: CANADA, TREATIES, ETC. 1992 OCT. 7. And the last time I looked, IC hadn't troubled to even specify "NAFTA" or "NORTH AMERICAN..." see-references to their utterly odd and unfamiliar descriptor.

Similarly, do you want to compel HCL users to search under such bizarre and arcane terms as ABNORMALITIES, HUMAN; INTERVERTEBRAL DISK DISPLACEMENT; CESTODA; METHYLPHENIDATE HYDROCHLORIDE; SILDENAFIL; and TRASTUZUMAB--instead of the far more expectable and likely-to-be-sought BIRTH DEFECTS; SLIPPED DISC; TAPEWORMS; RITALIN; VIAGRA; and HERCEPTIN? Do those "standard" IC terms really suggest a modern, user-friendly library?

4. Do you realize that the concomitant intent to begin accepting all Dewey call numbers found on OCIC records, even if they don't harmonize with the numbers that have been consistently employed at HCL for the same topics, will shortly produce split sequences on all library shelves, rendering browsing at once perilous and frustrating? (Such massive confusion and mish-mashing could be avoided by reclassing old Dewey-numbered material to new or later notations, but such reclassification, admittedly very labor-intensive and otherwise costly, is not apparently contemplated.)
5. Did you inadvertently omit a word in the statement that "bibliographic records will...have a more consistent look, using common punctuation and abbreviations"? Shouldn't it more accurately have been "using common, frequently incomprehensible punctuation and abbreviations"? How else to describe this "collation" for Nicholson Baker's Double Fold (2001)?:

xii, 370 p.; 4 p. of plates : col. ill.; 24 cm.

Wouldn't you agree that's a ~~user-alienating~~, bibliographic monstrosity? And wouldn't this prove much more understandable and helpful?:

370 p.

Illustrated with seven unpagged color plates, "Some pages from the New York World."

6. Are you aware that, despite HCL's advocacy and some unquestioned improvements, the "cataloging practices" you cite--especially applying subject headings to literary works, innovating topical descriptors in a timely fashion, "changing outdated terminology," and eliminating bias in subject thesauri--are not "increasingly becoming the norm throughout the library field"? Of the literally thousands of new-heading creations, modified IC forms, locally-crafted public notes, and changed or added cross references, only a small fraction have ultimately been adopted by the Library of Congress. I warmly recommend devoting a few moments to comparing the voluminous innovations and user-salutary changes reported in the now-defunct HCL Cataloging Bulletin over two and a half decades with LCSH. You'll find they've got a long way to go, baby. (Incidentally, something like 50% of the biased descriptors critiqued in my 1973 Prejudices and Antipathies have yet to be corrected by the Library of Congress. And such obviously needed "concepts" as MANAGEMENT FADS, CULTURE WARS, PSEUDOSCIENCE, NEOLIBERALISM, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, NATIVE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST, and MIDDLE PASSAGE (ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE) are still to be sanctified as bona fide subject headings by IC.)
7. Do you comprehend that placing "unique subject heading concepts" in "keyword searchable fields" is a transparently phony solution or compromise for retaining value-added HCL cataloging data? These "concepts"--like CORPORATE CAMPAIGNS and NEOLIBERALISM--should be subject-searchable. Ripping them from the overall syndetic structure first kills them (they'll never be assigned, even as keywords, again) and secondly denies catalog-searchers the immense benefits of explanatory notes and both "see" and "see also" references, the latter connecting searchers to other, potentially relevant sources. Okay, here's a just-minted Sandynista axiom: THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR RIGOROUS, CRITICAL SUBJECT CATALOGING AND INDEXING. Keywords

are often imprecise search-modes that produce much "garbage" and invariably miss material that doesn't happen to sport the magic keyword. Good subject cataloging captures all pertinent material without "garbage."

8. Do you recognize that government documents, mentioned in your memo, have (at least selectively) been cataloged at HCL? The cataloging only stopped when the Southdale reference librarian who handled Gov Docs part time was no longer allowed to catalog them. I pointedly, more than three years ago, requested that some or all of the nearly \$100,000-per-year Novelist royalties be employed to secure sufficient staff to recommence govdoc cataloging and also to correct and enhance older bib-records for, e.g., musicals, operas, and fiction. My request was summarily dismissed by Sharon Charles and Eluzabeth Feinberg, Sharon declaring that "the intention is to shrink Cataloging, not expand it."

Gov docs and Websites should be subject to the same careful, user-oriented attention that books, magazines, CDs, and videos have received. The ostensible plan to make a wholesale dump, for instance, of MARCIVE government document records into the HCL bibliographic database, presumably without constructive cataloger-review, is plainly irresponsible.

9. Won't you agree that ~~it's~~ a bit disingenuous to speak of HCL cataloging staff continuing to "enhance imported records," for instance "including...subject and genre headings," when in fact the only permissibly-assigned headings must now be totally consonant with ICSE? To get particular, catalogers will NO LONGER be permitted to assign such genre headings as COZY MYSTERY STORIES, FEMINIST MYSTERY STORIES, HARDBOILED FICTION, SOLVE-IT-YOURSELF MYSTERY STORIES, MEDIEVAL MYSTERY STORIES, ROAD NOVELS, and COOKBOOK NOVELS because they're not IC-sanctioned and within the next few months will be obliterated from the Authority File. True, already, pre-2002 cataloged titles will still be "accessible" by means of the re-tagged "keywords," but most users will be accustomed to making subject searches for these materials--and, in any event, after September 2002 (if not sooner) no new titles will be assigned such headings since they won't be available on the Authority File. Access to scores of literary genres (and much, much more) will effectively vanish. Are you looking forward to that certainty?

~~I believe you have been~~ poorly advised. And HCL staff and users will suffer for it.

Regrettably,

David Berman  
Former HCL Head Cataloger

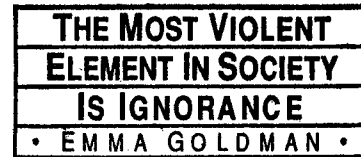
4400 Morningside Road  
Edina, MN 55416

cc: R. P. Johnson, Deputy County  
Administrator  
M. Opat, Chair, Hennepin County  
Board of Commissioners

952-925-5738

March 8, 2002

Charles Brown, Director  
Hennepin County Library  
12601 Ridgedale Drive  
Minnetonka, MN 55305



Director Brown,

Here are a few more queries unintentionally omitted from yesterday's letter concerning the lately-announced destruction of HCL's catalog and authority file:

10. Are you ethically and professionally comfortable with purveying inaccurate and misleading information through the catalog, which staff and users alike regard as a trustworthy reference source? Because that's exactly what's going to happen as soon as "author authorities" (that may also function as subject headings) "contain death dates only if such a date is needed to distinguish one author from another." HCL catalogers have systematically added death dates as quickly as possible in order that no person whose name appears in the catalog as an author or subject mistakenly appears to be still alive when in fact they are not. Not closing dates is both sloppy, unhelpful cataloging and intellectually dishonest. Yes, the Library of Congress--for unfathomable reasons--does keep dates open even when they know better, but this sorry, bibliographically lazy practice is hardly worth imitating.

For many years, IC-following libraries have included catalog entries not only for

Sadat, Anwar, 1918-

but also for

Sadat, Anwar, 1918- --Assassination.

(The latter form unmistakably suggests that the Egyptian leader actually assassinated in 1981 somehow did not die.) Shortly, the "new" HCL catalog, with IC/OCIC name authorities overlaid, will be littered with such foolish and incorrect entries.

11. Have you been able to read these two recent cataloging-scene overviews by me?:

+ "Jackdaws Strut in Peacock's Feathers: the Sham of 'Standard' Cataloging," Librarians At Liberty, v. 5, nos. 1/2 (June 1998), p. 1, 4-21, reprinted in Alternative Library Literature, 1998/1999 (McFarland, 2000), p. 317-335.

+ "Good Luck, Folks! Finding Material on 'Those People' (and Their Concerns) in Library Catalogs," MultiCultural Review, v. 9, no. 2 (June 2000), p. 26-28, 48-52.

Together, they establish--with manifold examples, including HCL/IC comparison records--that cataloging strictly based on "standard" rules and tools without intelligent, critical departures and alternatives often constitutes a barrier to accessing a library's resources rather than enhancing and simplifying access.

The only conceivable, rational, and acceptable purpose of cataloging is to serve the catalogers' information desk colleagues and the public. It is not to mindlessly follow rules and protocols that may, indeed, be dysfunctional.

At present, HCL uses a heading for BUTCH AND FEMME (LESBIANISM) and another for BEARS (GAY MEN). IC does not. After the database and authority overlays, those subject forms will not be assigned to any new material and their "keyword" afterbirths, still weakly attached to the originally-cataloged titles, will totally lose all links to other, related topics: e.g., "Gay men. see also BEARS (GAY MEN)" will evaporate. Does this certainty strike you as an "improvement"?

Similarly, the scores of descriptors that have been thoughtfully and sensitively fashioned to ensure equity in the treatment of religious material, favoring no one faith over another, will be undone--and Christian primacy reestablished. How does that square with HCL's commitment to diversity and multiculturalism?

At present, HCL catalog-searchers can (expectedly) seek material on the "Prostrate" and be transparently guided to the correctly-spelled primary subject form, PROSTATE. Likewise for "Columbia" and "Colombia." In a matter of months, anyone making these searches will encounter nothing. Nada. Zip. Simply because such cross-references are not sanctioned by the Library of Congress.

Attached are two consecutive, random pages from one of the last HCL Cataloging Bulletins. Kindly note that the reported HCL changes and additions--for instance, the cross-reference from "Mexican riddles" to RIDDLES--MEXICO and the "see also" links from RUNAWAY GIRLS--FICTION and TEENAGE GIRLS--FICTION to the more precise, narrower RUNAWAY TEENAGE GIRLS--FICTION--will be exterminated. Why? They are not "standard." Useful and appropriate, sure. But, alas, not appearing on the IC/OCLC database or authority file. So...auf wiedersehen! Does that delight--or depress--you?

ever,

Stanford Berman  
4400 Morningside Road  
Edina, MN 55416

Enclosures

cc: R. P. Johnson, Deputy County  
Administrator  
M. Opat, Chair, Hennepin County  
Board of Commissioners



- xx Food columnists  
Food writers
- ☛ Riddles--Mexico.
  - sf Mexican riddles
- ☛ Risoles.\*
  - cn HCL form. Assignment: George and Sherry La Follette Zabriskie's Empanadas and other international turnovers (1983), which includes risole recipes.
  - xx Cooking, Italian  
Turnovers (Cooking)
- ☛ River boat pilots.
  - sf River boat captains  
Riverboat captains
  - xx Ship captains
- ☛ River patrol boats.\*\*
  - cn LC form. VEDETTE BOATS.  
Assignment: Michael Green's River patrol boats (1999).
  - sf Boats, river patrol  
Patrol boats, River  
Riverine boats (Warships)  
Vedette boats
  - xx River boats  
Warships
- ☛ Road novels.
  - sf Road stories
- ☛ Robbery--Fiction.
  - xx Stealing--Fiction
- ☛ Romani Holocaust (1933-1945)--Children.
  - sf Children in the Romani Holocaust  
Romani children in the Holocaust
- ☛ Roth IRAs.\*
  - cn HCL form. Assignment: Slesnick/Suttle's IRAs, 401(k)s & other retirement plans: taking your money out (1998), which includes "Roth IRAs"; Gobind Daryanani's Roth IRA book: an investor's guide (1998); Gail A. Perry's Complete idiot's guide to doing your income taxes 1999 (1999), which includes "the latest updates on changes to the tax law, including: ...the Roth IRA..."
  - sf IRAs, Roth  
Roth individual retirement accounts
  - xx Individual retirement accounts
- ☛ Rotterdam, Netherlands--Description and travel --Guidebooks.
  - xx Netherlands--Description and travel --Guidebooks
- ☛ Runaway teenage boys.\*
  - cn HCL form. Assignment (with --UTAH-- FICTION): Will Hobbs' Maze (1998).
  - sf Teen boy runaways  
Teenage boy runaways
  - xx Runaway teenagers  
Teenage boys
- ☛ Runaway teenage girls--Fiction.
  - xx Runaway girls--Fiction  
Teenage girls--Fiction

☛ Rustic decorative arts--Mexico.

xx Arts, Mexican

☛ Samhain.

sf Samaine

☛ Samosas.\*

cn HCL form. Assignment: Priya Kulkarni's Secrets of fat-free Indian cooking: over 150 low-fat and fat-free traditional recipes--from samosas to mulligatawny soup to lamb curry (1998).

sf Samosas

xx Cooking, Indian  
Turnovers (Cooking)

☛ San Juan, Puerto Rico--Fiction.

xx Puerto Rico--Fiction

☛ Santa Fe, New Mexico--History.

xx New Mexico--History

☛ Satsuma pottery--Catalogs.

xx Pottery--Catalogs

☛ Scales (Fishes).

sf Fish scales

☛ Scientists in films.

xx Films  
Scientists in popular culture

☛ Scientists in popular culture.\*

cn HCL form. Assignment: David J. Skal's Screams of reason: mad science and modern culture (1998).

sa Scientists in films

xx Popular culture

☛ Sea stories.

sf Nautical stories

☛ Sea stories, Irish.

sf Irish sea stories

xx Irish fiction

☛ Second chances.\*

cn HCL form. Assignment: Judith S. Wallerstein's Second chances: men, women, and children a decade after divorce (1989), Paul Vigyikan's Seizing life's second chances (1990); further assignment (with -- BIBLICAL TEACHING): O. S. Hawkin's Johan: meeting the God of the second chance (1990); further assignment (with -- FICTION): Alice Adam's Second chances (1988), Jane Mason's Jack Frost: the movie storybook (1998).

sf Chances, Second  
Opportunities, Second  
Second opportunities

xx Chance  
Options, alternatives, choices