Resources “On the Road”...
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Resource Sharing Center, CEDDS contact person Julie Hayward and her student assistants go into action. Often, the first steps require her to be both a detective and a mind reader. Faxes may come through quickly, but problems occur that are not obvious at the point of origin. One of the most frustrating is the blank page—due to upside down insertion of the origi­nals into the fax machine. Other common problems include what appear to be missing pages, i.e., the cover page number noted does not match the number of pages received; patrons include everything except their names and addresses so there is no known place to send the material; and, as one might expect, incomplete citations are sent, i.e., authors, titles of books and journals, dates, pages needed, etc., may be missing. Finally, and not a minor problem is the fact that handwritten requests may not be legible or readable especially on a fax. Each of these problems requires time and considerable creative effort to resolve.

Once the initial problems are resolved, the requests are searched in WestCat, the University Libraries’ Online Catalog, and call numbers identified. Requests for material not owned by the Libraries, incomplete/incorrect citations, and items that are in circulation (already checked out) or non-circulating (such as reference and rare books) are set aside for special processing. The remainder of the requests are divided by call number and library, i.e., Waldo, Education, Music and Dance, and then must be physically retrieved for further processing and shipment. Journal articles, or chapters in books, are photo­copied; entire books are checked out to the individual who requested the loan. During 1997/98, 220 books were shipped and 2,950 articles were copied. All books are sent UPS; articles are sent by the U.S. mail. Patrons are notified of requests that are unavailable along with a reason as to why.

Needless to say, this service has been invaluable to the off-campus students and staff. The success of this special effort to meet continuing educational needs is heavily dependent on the fine communication skills of the library personnel servicing the document delivery system. On many occasions, Julie Hayward works directly with the patron to solve problems, identify the right source, and provide a positive experience in the use of the University Libraries. As with the faculty who teach the use of resources off-cam­pus, Waldo library staff who work “at a distance” make every effort to help students better understand the library and its resources. They are there to assure that the University Libraries CAN work for all who study in regional centers and sites.

A Curse Against Book Thieves

“For him that stealth a book from this library, let it change into a serpent in his hand and rend him. Let him be struck with palsy, and all his members blated. Let him lang­uish in pain crying aloud for mercy and let there be not surcease to his agony till he sink in dissolution. Let bookworms gnaw his entrails in token of the worm that dieth not, and when at last he goeth to his final punishment, let the flame of hell consume him for ever and aye.”

Curse Against Book Stealers from the Monastery of San Pedro, Barcelona

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The Venereal Game

By Laurel A. Grotzinger

The whole episode began innocently. E-mail among colleagues is not always “simply business.” Therefore, several minds were curious about the e-mail that was identified on the subject line as “Group of Librarians.” The message quickly explained it: “In an effort to create a useless, mind-stretching activity, I question the following: What do you call a group of Librarians?”

Who could resist? Before an hour was up, “watson@wmich.edu” was besieged with responses—some witty, some cute, some slightly insulting, some, indeed, thoughtful. As the offerings sprang forth on the computer screen, I was reminded of a superb book that was published many years ago. James Lipton had “gathered” together the imaginative figures of speech, often known as collective nouns, in a curious volume called An Exaltation of Larks or, The Venereal Game (Grossman Publishers, 1968).

One has to read a few pages into the Introduction to learn more about the term “the venereal game.” Basically, Lipton was enjoying himself identifying the appropriate phrase for groups of animals—and providing pieces of history. The thesis of this book can be summed up very simply: when a group of ravens flaps by, you should, if you want to refer to their presence, say, ‘There goes an unkindness of ravens.’ Anything else would be wrong. (p. 8). He then goes on to list several synonyms: “nouns of multitude,” “nouns of assemblage,” “group terms,” and, yes, “terms of venery.” You really should read his explanation of this phrase, but, in short, he relates its etymological roots to hunting and the chase. The venereal game is on and, in the following pages, Lipton identifies terms of venery for a variety of birds and beasts of the field and city as well as the human kind. The end result is a charming, informative, and delightful volume that is artfully illustrated.

Lipton goes so far as to identify six “families”: onomatopoeia, e.g., a gaggle of geese; characteristic, e.g., a tidings of magpies; appearance, e.g., a hover of trout; habitat, e.g., a nest of rabbits; a good or bad comment, e.g., a shrewdness of apes; and, strangely enough, a simple error, e.g., a school of fish originated from the venereal phrase, a shoal of fish. Lipton’s suc­ceeding text is initially based on the origi­nal terms of venery that date from the fif­teenth century. The author has gathered them together as “some new candidates for our contemporary lexicon.”

They are the trophies of what has been, for me,

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The Venereal Game...

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A long and exciting search that began when I realized with a sudden exhilarating shiver that GAGGLE OF EESE and PRIDE OF LIONS might not be just isolated pools of amusing poetic isodoxynacy but estuaries leading to a virtually uncharted sea, sparkling with found poetry—and intriguing poetic possibilities. ... It isn't just that we will be able to turn to someone and cooly and correctly say, "Look—a charm of finches." What is more important is that a charm of poetry will have quietly slipped into our lives (p. 19).

As you turn the pages of the book, and examine its illustrations, you will discover, if not already obvious from the first examples, that some of the terms of venery are well-known, for example, "A Host of Angels," "A Swarm of Bees," "A Litter of Pups." But Lipton's compilation of collective nouns includes many more that are completely new and unexpected, and you begin to wonder why some of them had never occurred to you. At one point, Lipton notes, "These terms are authentic and authoritative. They were used, they were correct, and they are useful, correct—and available—today" (p. 30). To try and select a few from the many, is difficult, but, among those that caught my fancy in Lipton's first set of examples are:

- "A Murder of Crows"
- "A Skulk of Foxes"
- "A Parliament of Owls"
- "An Ostentation of Peacocks"

In a section called "The Unexpected" are found:

- "A Converting of Preachers"
- "An Obeisance of Servants"
- "A Skulk of Thieves"
- "A Melody of Harpists"

Finally, Lipton concludes with some contemporary "collectives" that he thought to be "shards of poetry and truth." Among them,

- "A Sample of Salesmen"
- "A Nerve of Neighbors"

"An Aroma of Bakers" and, horrors,
"A Shush of Librarians."

And, so, we are back, full circle to the question. And, let it be known, only one person referred to a group of librarians in a similar manner—and then only historically—since, in today's electronic environment, libraries are seldom quiet or "shushful." In fact, one respondent even suggested that "A Cacophony of Librarians" was not unlikely! Several of the suggestions were of the kind that only someone who knew library history and language might understand as, for example,

- "A Dewey of Librarians"
- "A Quire of Librarians"
- "A Classification of Librarians"
- "A Tracing of Librarians"
- "A Stack (or Shelf) of Librarians"
- "An Archive of Librarians"

Others, however, seemed to have a sense of the purpose of a term of venery—or a librarian. But let the respondents speak for themselves:

- "A Book of Librarians"
- "A Collection of Librarians"
- "A Catalog of Librarians"
- "A Circulation of Librarians"
- "A Knowledge of Librarians"
- "A Resource of Librarians"
- "An Authority of Librarians"

and even,

- "A Library of Librarians"

Rather surprisingly, in today's world of computers and online information that dominates the contemporary library, not one person suggested

- "A Network of Librarians"
- "A Database of Librarians"
- "A Web of Librarians"
- "A Screen of Librarians"

Is there a message in this omission? Perhaps, but in the spirit of Gatherings, which is both a reflection of the Friends of the University Libraries as well as the "leaves of a book that are folded and stitched into one signature," possibly the real name for a group of information professionals is "A Gathering of Librarians."

"Interconnected globally, they [computers] will form a network, which is being called the information highway."

—William H. Gates III

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James Lipton's centerfold from An Exaltation of Larks.