

RESEARCH METHODS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

This paper is designed to acquaint the Brazilian student with the tools at his disposal in the field of American Literature, which will enable him to carry out the research requirements in his courses, especially the licenciante thesis — a research paper of about thirty pages written normally in the last year as a requirement for the licenciante degree.

The present paper will not concern itself with the technical aspects of report writing. It will concern rather, the different sources available to the university student from which he may draw the essential information needed for his reports and thesis.

Since this work aims at a restricted audience, that is — the students of American Literature in the Department of Letras of the Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Marília, it will concern itself for the most part with those works available at this institution. Nevertheless, mention will be made of certain indispensable works, which, although not available at this university, will represent fundamental knowledge for students who may go on into graduate school. Moreover, although the Marília university student is our principal target, others throughout Brazil may look upon these comments as a general orientation for their specific projects.

It is generally accepted in Brazil that a university student must write one or two long research papers before his final, culminating effort — the Licenciante Thesis. This consists of a thirty to fifty page research paper written by the student under the orientation of the discipline's chairman. It is then presented to a three man committee and argued before a board.

Generally, the teacher under whom the student is working will provide him with the topic for his thesis. The teacher

believes that the student will profit by wasting no time searching for a topic or tackling a topic too broad or too difficult for the paper's range. Still other advisers may permit the student to wattle in his materials and choose a topic of his liking. Those who hold to the latter theory believe that discovery on the part of the student is of the outmost importance. He expects that the student will develop a liking for the subject — the best reason for carrying out a project of this kind. The adviser who permits his student to choose his theme believes it the best way to start him on the road to independent research.

The first sources we will enumerate are not to be found at the Marília University Library, nor at very many libraries in Brazil. Because they are such indispensable tools for gathering knowledge in all fields, we will take them up, nevertheless.

The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature is an index to more than one hundred general periodicals in all fields published in the United States and in England. It is published twice a month, except for July and August when it is issued monthly. However, every two years, a hard bound cumulation volume is published in book form at odd-numbered years. **The Readers' Guide**, as it is commonly called, provides an index for articles appearing in magazines and journals within the period of time covered by a specific volume. Per example, supposing one wanted to find what had been written on Fernando Pessoa in American periodicals. Consulting the **Readers' Guide** volume for the year 1955, one would find:

Fernando Pessoa
The Several Names of Fernando Pessoa, Roditi, E.
Poetry, 87: 40+ 0.55

Besides this entry under Pessoa's name, there are also cross-references under Roditi, Edouard and under Modern Poetry, non-American. **The Readers' Guide** follows a certain criteria in displaying its information. The magazine title may be abbreviated; however, authors' names and titles are always spelled out. The volume number is the first information after the magazine title followed by the page and the issue. For instance, in the Fernando Pessoa entry referred to above, it may be in-

terpreted that the article is on volume 87, page 40; a plus (+) sign after the page number indicates that the article continues on the following pages. The reference testifies that it is the October issue, 1955.

Since the **Readers' Guide** encloses lists of periodicals in all fields of knowledge, its concept tends to be too broad for the specific literary field. Nevertheless, it is the only guide to general, non specialized periodicals. A sister source to the **The Readers' Guide** is the **Book Review Digest** (1965). This guide provides an index to book reviews of some 4000 general books appearing in about 75 American and British periodicals. It is published 11 times a year, but it is cumulative semiannually and annually. Through a quick glance at these book reviews, the student may discover the merit of the books to be consulted and whether they are worth any further investigation. Both the **The Readers' Guide** and **The Book Review Digest** are to be found in the American Embassy in Rio de Janeiro.

More readily available are general Encyclopaedias whose articles on American Literature include, at the end, a selected bibliography for further reading. Encyclopaedias most easily available in Brazil are:

1. **Collier's Encyclopaedia**, 20 vols., New York, 1949-51.
3. **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, 24 vols., Chicago, 1929-1954.
3. **Chambers's Encyclopaedia**, 1955, 15 vols.
4. **Encyclopaedia Americana**, 30 vols. New York, 1954.

Although other encyclopaedias are available at the Marília University Library, such as the **Enciclopédia Universal Ilustrada** and the **Enciclopedia Italiana**, the ones mentioned above are the most likely to be helpful to the student doing research in American Literature. **The Encyclopaedia Americana** may be consulted at the Marília Binational Center, that is — the **Centro Cultural Brasil-Estados Unidos**.

Along with the encyclopaedias, the student conducting research in American Literature should have at his disposal the

following fundamental works. **Twentieth Century Authors**, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, which is published by the H. W. Company. The date of publication is 1942. This book gives a biographical account of each major author from every country in the world with a greater emphasis, of course, on American and British writers. At the end of every article for each specific author, there follows a selected bibliography with a listing of the works published about each author. The other indispensable volume is a companion volume to the above entitled, **American Authors 1600-1900**, published in New York by the H. W. Wilson and Company in 1938. This reference work deals with American authors only and also includes a bibliography on each specific author.

As we move on in our considerations from the general to the specific, it is necessary to refer to works on American Literature of an historical-critical nature. The first work of this type which comes to mind is Spliller, Thorp, Johnson and Conby's, **Literary History of the United States**, published in New York by the MacMillan Company in 1948. There were originally three volumes, but the work has been published in a one volume edition with the former third volume consisting of a bibliography still being published separately. It is this volume which is of the outmost interest to the research student in American Literature. It provides a thorough bibliography on every American writer up to nineteen hundred and forty eight. The bibliography encompasses every major period of American Literature and it is further subdivided into the genres. A **Bi-bibliographical Supplement** has already been issued, covering articles published from 1948 to 1959; it is a selected listing of books and articles indispensable to the student.

Other important aids are the **Oxford Companion to American Literature**, by James D. Hart, 3th Edition, published by the Oxford University Press in 1956 and the **Cambridge History of American Literature**, edited by Trent, Erskine, Sherman and Carl Van Doren in New York and Cambridge, England, by the Macmillan Company in 1958. The **Cambridge History of American Literature** is similar in scope and presentation to

the *Literary History* published by Spiller. It doesn't include, however, the bibliography. The **Oxford Companion** is a reference work listing items connected with *American Literature* in dictionary form.

Since hardly anyone disposes of enough time to read and study the innumerable publications published each year in the field of *American Literature*, there has been a tendency for scholars to elaborate selected bibliographies. A major advancement toward this purpose is a volume entitled **Contemporary Literary Scholarship**, edited by Lewis Leary and published in New York by Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. in 1958. It is made up of a series of essays treating the major publications concerning each period in *American and British Literature*. The first part deals with the periods — Beowulf, Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Seventeenth, the Eighteenth century, the Romantic period, etc.; the second part studies the publications concerning the different types or genres, such as — poetry, drama, the novel, comparative literature, etc.. The editors of this most useful work attempt to meander through the existing scholarship in order to bring out the thoroughly indispensable critical works dealing with the major topics. Following is a list of books mentioned in connection with an indispensable bibliography in *American Literature*.

1. F.O. Matthiessen — **American Renaissance Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Melville**. New York, Oxford University Press, 1941
2. D. H. Lawrence — **Studies in American Literature**, 1922.
3. Ralph L. Rusk — **The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson**. New York, Scribner's, 1949.
4. Perry Miller — **The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century**. Cambridge. The Harvard University Press, 1939, reissued in 1954.
5. — **The New England Mind: From Colony to Province**. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1953.
6. R. B. Lewis — **The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedies and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century**. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1950.

7. Henry Nash Smith — **Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth**. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950.
8. Alfred Kazin — **On Native Grounds — An Interpretation of Modern Prose Literature**. New York, Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942.

These are the books which the surveyor thought most useful for a study of American Literature. Again, it is important to state that although it is profitable to read what is indispensable first, a student preparing an advanced dissertation can not afford to overlook the innumerable books and articles connected with the specific field in which he is working. Although reference to a selected bibliography such as the one referred to above may be time saving, it should not replace the bibliographies appearing in specialized current periodicals. From this point onwards, we shall concentrate on the magazines and journals available at the **Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Marília's** library. We will be concerned with journals in the field of American Literature only.

The library has subscribed to several journals in the field since 1960, the date of the establishment of the American Literature Chair. The journals and magazines available since 1960 are the following:

1. **American Literature**, 1929 — published quarterly; bibliography in each number.
2. **P M L A**, 1881 — **Publications of the Modern Language Association**, Bibliography in every May issue for the preceding year. Bibliography issued since 1921.
3. **American Quarterly**, 1949 — Published quarterly since 1949; bibliography in every Summer issue for the preceding year. Bibliography appeared since 1955.
4. **Kenyon Review**, 1939 — Published quarterly. Book Reviews.
5. **Poetry**, 1912 — Published monthly since that date. Book Reviews.
6. **Saturday Review**, 1917 — Formerly, **The Saturday Review of Literature**. Published weekly. Book Reviews and articles.
7. **The New York Times Book Review**, 1895 — Published weekly by the New York Times Company. Book Reviews.

8. **Horizon, 1958** — published quarterly. Book reviews and general articles of great distinction.

Besides these magazines and journal subscriptions begun in 1960, the Marília University has also the back numbers for the following periodicals:

- a. **American Literature**, complete, since 1929.
- b. **PMLA**, since 1930.
- c. **American Quarterly**, complete since 1949.
- d. **Poetry**, complete since 1912.
- e. **Kenyon Review**, complete since 1939.

As demonstrated above, some of these periodicals present a bibliography for the preceding year. Per example, **PMLA** and **American Quarterly**. **American Literature** registers all articles published in the field during the three months preceding its latest issue. Since it would be too troublesome to search every issue for a bibliography in the periodical entitled **American Literature**, an index volume to articles and book reviews has been edited by Thomas F. Marshall. It is called the, **An Analytical Index to American Literature**, vols. I to XXX, March, 1929-Jan., 1959.

A similar index has been compiled by Lewis Leary and published by the Duke University Press in 1954. One should note that Leary's book called, **Articles on American Literature 1900-1950**, includes articles and book reviews published in any magazine or periodical within those dates, while Marshall's **Index** deals only with articles and book reviews appearing in the magazine entitled, **American Literature**.

PMLA's bibliographical index published every year in the May issue records articles published on every Modern Language and their respective literatures. It provides a guide for articles dealing with American and British Literature, French, Italian, Brazilian and Portuguese languages and literatures, as well as the remaining modern languages. It is a very thorough account of articles published all over the world

on these various languages and their respective literatures during the year preceding the May issue. Incidentally, as it has been mentioned above, the **PMLA** index provides a thorough bibliographical reference to articles in both Portuguese and Portuguese and Brazilian literature.

Naturally, the bibliography appearing in **PMLA** (May of each year) on American Literature will cover almost the same articles (**PMLA** is a bit more detailed) as Leary's **Index**. The **Index**, since it deals with articles on American Literature only, presents the information contained in various May issues of **PMLA** at once. In other words, perusal through every yearly issue of **PMLA** is too time consuming. It is even more time consuming to consult every issue of **American Literature**, for a bibliography is included in every issue every four months. A look at Leary's **Articles on American Literature** will yield at once all articles written by and about an author, by just looking under his name. Besides the enumeration of articles on American authors, there are also references to articles published in the following connected fields. "Aims and Methods in American Literature", Bibliographies, fiction, foreign influences and estimates, frontier, humor, Indian, literary criticism, Negro, newspapers and periodicals, poetry, prose, regionalism, religion, science, social aspects, societies and the theater.

To recapitulate. In order to find books pertaining to a subject under study, one should begin with such general reference works as the **Readers's Guide**, **The Book Review Digest**, the general encyclopaedias and the biographical volumes by Kunitz and Haycraft. One should also refer to up to date anthologies which usually give a standardized bibliography. One such anthology is Norman Foster's **American Poetry and Prose**, a work of the outmost importance. The afore mentioned work edited by Lewis Leary, **Contemporary Literary Scholarship**, should not be overlooked. It will provide a short cut to what is most valuable in the field. Thus a pattern should present itself now. The reference works provide us with a bibliography. The literary histories and anthologies refer us to

the most important full length works and the magazines and periodicals will yield us the articles on a particular subject. To discover what articles appeared where, the student will then refer to the Indexes, Marshall's for articles published in **American Literature** and Lewis Leary's for articles published in any periodical from 1900 to 1950. To bring our investigation up to date, the student will then refer to the yearly bibliographies in **PMLA** or **American Quarterly** or even to the one in **American Literature**, thus being close to the present time. One should remember also that the Supplement to the **Literary History of the United States** compiled by Spiller covers publications appearing as far ahead as 1959. Looking up the bibliographies in the magazines as shown above, the research would be brought up to the present time.

The students writing on American Literature in Brazil have often discovered that although they may have found a complete bibliography they can not obtain the various articles and books indicated. It is because of this that I have attempted to offer this present paper. Its purpose might be twofold. It may provide the means for obtaining what is essential for a library in American Literature in a small Brazilian college, or it may offer a wide enough choice of listings that the student may choose what he has already at his disposal. After all, there is so much being written in the field of American Literature that a student will not be able to read everything, especially if he lives in a foreign country. Nevertheless, should the scholar be preparing for an advanced degree, such as the doctorate or "livre docência", it would be necessary for him to augment his bibliography in the United States.

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