

*MLAIB and ABELL: Periodische Fachbibliographien, CD-ROM- und Online-Datenbanken zur Anglistik.* By JOST HINDERSMANN. (Anglistik/Amerikanistik, 4) Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT. 1997. 93 pp. €10.90.

'To see ourself' as others see us' is always salutary and, in this instance, not too traumatic either. Hindersmann, as part of his professional training in librarianship, sets out to compare, from the point of view of students and scholars working on literature in English, the Modern Language Association of America's *International Bibliography* and the Modern Humanities Research Association's *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature*. Clear, careful, and cautious, he provides much practical information and a useful analysis. The publishers of the two bibliographies might well consider his observations at this juncture when vast numbers of scholarly publications are appearing each year and when the means and methods of electronic information storage and retrieval are also being continuously enhanced. Though *MLAIB* used to have the advantage of appearing more promptly after the end of the report year, *ABELL* has been catching up since Hindersmann made his investigations. In both bibliographies the relatively high percentage of material bearing earlier dates is as often a reflection of belated publication as it is of tardiness in collecting material. Though assigning writers to centuries throws up anomalies that are no doubt likely to become more acute as life expectancy improves, *ABELL*'s single alphabetical listing of the authors from a given period avoids the delicate problems confronting *MLAIB* as it strives to allocate them to various subgroupings. On the basis of spot checks Hindersmann finds, despite substantial overlap in coverage, differences significant enough to persuade him that the best course for users is to consult both. This pragmatic advice is sound, but some may be prompted to wonder whether co-operation would not serve the scholarly community better than more or less parallel endeavours. The time appears ripe for doing so particularly because contemporary reorientations in literary studies are tending to shift the focus of attention away from individual authors. Hindersmann gives an interesting account of modern ways of gaining access to a wide range of material from bibliographies. Impressive as electronic techniques are in theory, they nevertheless depend in practice on the quality of data extracted from the scholarly sources and made available for retrieval. Though much has already been done, particularly by *MLAIB*, the task for bibliographers in the future remains formidable, no less in the conscientious development of full, objective, and reliable subject indexes to meet the changing needs of scholarship. Hindersmann will be thanked by German Anglicists for an enlightening account of research tools that they ought to use regularly and with some sense of familiarity. Whether the publishers and editors of *MLAIB* and *ABELL* will find much here that really is new to them is doubtful, but they will be cheered by Hindersmann's appreciation of their work and encouraged by his urging them to carry on in the right directions.

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