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 LBSC 650

Assignment 3: Search Process

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Search Process

My research topic, the role of the Fool in Shakespeare's plays, meant I had to search both literature and theatre databases. I have experience with *MLA International Biography* and *Academic Search Premier* (literature databases indexed by EBSCOhost), so I decided to start

with those and then transition into the more specialized theatre and Shakespeare databases, the *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance* and the *World Shakespeare Bibliography*. My initial search parameters were focused on journal articles specifically about the text of Shakespeare, excluding all articles about the theatrical performance of “Fool” characters. This wasn’t an issue in the literature databases, as the search terms [Shakespeare] AND [Fool OR Clown] (Shakespeare academia uses the terms Fool and Clown almost interchangeably) provided a comprehensive list of results, few of which focused on the theatricality of the Fool. Therefore, I didn’t need to add any NOT operators in my search that would exclude all performance-related articles. But, the volume of results in the literature databases solely about Shakespeare’s *King Lear* were overshadowing those articles that represented his whole body of work. I decided to revise my search terms. Luckily, EBSCOhost allows for complicated Boolean searching, so I performed another search with the keywords: [Shakespeare] AND [Fool OR Clown] NOT [King Lear]. With this new search strategy, I was able to focus on browsing and choosing articles that gave a more complete analysis of the Fool character.

As I transitioned into the theatre and Shakespeare-specific databases, I quickly realized that I had been mistaken in excluding performance-related articles. My search terms in these databases generated articles about actors who might have influenced Shakespeare’s Fool characters and other outside factors that affected his writing. I decided that articles of this nature would be crucial to my research, as historical context is always important when analyzing cultural figures like Shakespeare. I read through and chose the top articles regarding acting and theatricality of Shakespeare’s Fool characters for my bibliography.

After a first search in the databases I chose, I decided to search the bibliographies of the articles I had already found. This proved to be mostly fruitless as the articles I had selected focused on the author’s own analysis of primary sources and mostly cited Shakespeare’s plays or

academic books. While it makes sense that literary scholars would focus on their own analysis, bibliography searching is usually a strategy that works for most other topics in which articles sometimes have upwards of 100 references.

The search process helped me form the focus for my research. While I was initially staunchly against any performance-related articles, the discovery of the role of the Fool in Shakespeare's theatre as well as his text suddenly became a new and exciting layer of research. I also revised my search terms after browsing results from various databases to make sure my research represented a wide range of Shakespeare's works. Finally, after searching bibliographies of relevant articles, I realized that when writing a real research paper on this topic, I would need to reference the primary text and probably search through books as well. Without this intensive search process and willingness to let the databases and articles offer me indirectly relevant resources, my research would have been incomplete and one-dimensional.

Annotated Bibliography

Literature Resource Center. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group.

The *Literature Resource Center* has access to millions of full text scholarly articles, critical essays, book reviews, overviews of literary topics, biographies, full-text primary sources, and links to websites that cover humanities topics such as literature, film, theatre, etc. The dates of primary source coverage are the 22nd Century BC to the 21st Century AD; coverage of secondary sources is not listed. The search interface includes specialized search fields such as "Person-By or About" or "Name of Work." The database does not support Boolean searching and inputting [Shakespeare] in the Keyword field returned more relevant results than the specialized "Person-By or About" field. The results list provides publication information with a link to the full record and can be filtered by subjects on the left sidebar. I found that the subjects were sporadic and it was not clear

where they were pulling from. The full text of the article is either provided as HTML text in the record with search terms highlighted or through a link to its location elsewhere in the integrated catalog (UMD Research Port). *Literature Resource Center* is most useful for finding a wide variety of resources on specific primary sources. Unfortunately, this was not the best database for looking at a theme of Shakespeare's body of work, as many of the specialized search fields did not work with my terms. Also, since the database only offers full text in HTML format, a user cannot cite page numbers in their research. However, the highlighted search terms within the HTML full text made browsing articles for relevance easier than any other database I searched.

ABELL Plus / Literature Online. Ann Arbor: MI. ProQuest – Chadwyck Healey. 1920–present.

Literature Online is listed as *ABELL Plus* in UMD Research Port, but it is a database that encompasses *ABELL* and other collections. *Literature Online* has access to over 35,000 literary full text journals, author biographies, and other reference resources. The user has the option of searching just *ABELL* or the Core Collection (to which UMD has access). The database supports Boolean searching within the Keyword field. The results list provides publication information with a link to the full record, sorting by relevance, and a key as to what the user can access once they click on the link (full record, full text, page image, *JSTOR* full text). When a full record was available in my results list, it included a summary, full publication information, a link to the full text on *JSTOR*, and relevant page numbers for my query. However, the links to *JSTOR* only brought me to error pages. This might have been due to faulty links or lack of access through UMD. I had to find full text of relevant articles by starting my search over again in *JSTOR*. Navigating the *Literature Online* interface was also very confusing; there were too many “search” links on the sidebar, each of which directs to a different search interface. There are also many “help” links which direct to different information pages about the database (searching,

accessibility, subscriptions)—it would have been helpful to have all related information together instead of having to click on various links. The front-end design and lack of full text access made using this database very frustrating, but not fruitless. *Literature Online* provided many relevant results, but I often had to search for full text elsewhere.

World Shakespeare Bibliography Online. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1960–present.

The *World Shakespeare Bibliography Online* is published by the *Shakespeare Quarterly* and has over 131,800 annotated records of Shakespeare-related articles in more than 120 languages and representing every country in North America, South America, and Europe and almost every country in Asia, Africa, and Australasia. UMD Research Port has access to the *World Shakespeare Bibliography*, but it has not been integrated like other databases I searched; full text articles need to be found in other databases or catalogs. The front-end design of *World Shakespeare Bibliography* is very simple and while it does allow for Boolean searching, the user has to select either the AND or OR operator for the keywords they enter. The NOT operator is *not* an option. The results list provides the publication information with a link to the full annotated record. The database has an indexing system for their records, similar to the structure of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, which is included as a clickable link in the annotated record. This can be very useful if the article has a very specific index location with a small number of articles in the same location, but the majority of the records I searched had a general location that included thousands of records (10.55.05 General Shakespeareana; General Studies; General Studies). As I performed my search, I found two relevant annotated records in the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* from foreign, obscure, pre-1970 journals, but could not locate the full text articles or journals in any databases or catalogs I had access to. This was frustrating as these

articles could have been relevant for my research, but having to search fruitlessly elsewhere for obscure articles, authors, and journals made for an overall negative experience. While the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* is a good starting place for Shakespeare research, the lack of full text access or catalog integration, insufficient index locations, and inclusion of obscure articles might cause some researchers to look towards other, more user-friendly databases.