

On Routes to Immortality

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Readers of *Current Contents*[®] know that I will do almost anything to achieve immortality. Not long ago I told you of my frustration by those Dewar whiskey ads¹ that confer eternal remembrance upon a selected few. On various occasions since, I have tried to join that lucky majority of humanity that is able to enjoy the medicinal flavor and benefits of Scotch. But each time I tried I went into something like anaphylactic shock—dermatitis, nausea, or gastric pain.

Immortality isn't worth *that* sacrifice. My pain threshold is very low. If I were captured by the NKVD or the CIA I would instantly reveal all of ISI[®]'s secrets—and they would not have to raid my psychiatrist's office to find out all I know about the DOD, NIH, or the Library of Congress. My captors have only to ask, and I will give them my unpublished manuscripts on radio retrieval, life as a New York cab driver, and prolongation of life.

An alternate—and much less painful—way for us teetotalers to achieve immortality is to invent a word or law that bears our name. I pulled this off a few years ago, when I created Garfield's Law of Concentration.² Inventing a law is much more effective than coining a new term, which is likely to be taken over by some Johnny-come-lately. The road to the scholastic limbo is littered with the souls of scientists who had

good intentions but lacked sufficient imagination to enter the ranks of the immortals via neologism.

I can't remember when I first used the term "bibliometrics". I used to think I borrowed it from someone else until Pritchard³ came along to stake out his claim. I'm still waiting to learn about *Pritchard's Law of Bibliometrics*.

So next time you use a word, make sure you know whether or not it is new. Better yet, try to concoct a law, algorithm, number, or constant. Then you can create an eponym—the real blue chip of the immortality game.

But even experts at the neologism game can slip up. I once went on an international evangelical tour to preach the gospel of citation indexing. I called the chronic "occupational disease" of indexers the *Humpty Dumpty Syndrome*.⁴ (I think I even published this once with an authentic picture of Mr. Dumpty. Anyone who saw the original ISI film will remember this challenge to Fellini.) For lack of a sufficiently complete *Citation Index*, I will never know if I was the first to apply this novel description. But a few years ago I attended a lecture where a guy from the NBS used *my* syndrome to describe a similar condition. It is irritating to realize now that the "biographer" of citation indexing omitted this salient

tidbit from his article for the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*.⁵

I once sacrificed immortality on the altar of envy and spite. Back in the fifties B.C.I. (before citation indexes) I had a nice little company called Eugene Garfield Associates. Considering my well-known egomania, some find it remarkable that I did not keep that name or simply change it to The Garfield Institute for Scientific Information. A number of people use the latter name anyhow. They don't suspect the reason I sold out to anonymity. At the tender age of 30 I did not realize that immortality would eventually be more important than doing things bigger and better than the Russians. That's what happens when one reacts emotionally to something like a Sputnik or a VINITI.⁶ I've been paying the price of having yielded to that mortal temptation ever since.

Now, as I approach 50, a chance act of fate thrusts me into the company of the foremost scientific immortals. Debunking a letter I published in *Science*⁷, Kittel⁸ cited Einstein's 1905 classic on relativity.⁹ In doing so he created a co-citation cluster that places my name in a special sub-set of the *Index Oblivionis*--that special batch of papers never cited by anyone.¹⁰ Just think of those multitudes of permuted pairs that are never again cited. I have automatically removed my name from this list by co-citing myself and Einstein. However, I am informed by co-citation experts that one can reestablish uniqueness by adding a third or fourth name to a cluster.¹¹⁻¹² The probability that no one will ever cite me, Lewis Carrol, Fellini, and Einstein together has got to be as nearly infinite as any seeker of

oblivion could wish. But there is always some smart-alec library Ph.D. candidate who has to analyze *everything* written on the subject of citation analysis. One never knows when the quest for uniqueness (and oblivion) may be thwarted. (If you find it hard to relate immortality and oblivion, just think of it like love and hate--reverse sides of the same coin.)

This problem of immortality causes all sorts of ambivalences. I think that scientists are very biased. After all, how many of them can name the Bob Dylan of Galileo's time or the Louis Armstrong of Newton's England? But the disc jockeys today refer to their modern equivalents as rock and jazz *immortals!* Are they merely big fish in small ponds? Or is this more aptly said of science "immortals"?

Most of the scientific elite are probably best described that way--they are merely elite. Only a dozen or so Nobel Prize winners merit the immortality of an Einstein. Some sociologists or historians might argue that if he had died prematurely (or taken up plumbing) someone else would have come up with the theory of relativity. If that's the case, one can't help but wonder how much the personality of an Einstein is involved--in his gaining immortality. But no reasonable person would argue that if Bob Dylan or Shakespeare had not come along there would be another exactly like him.

If you think all this sounds like a tract from the *Journal of Irresponsible Results*, you are right. There are weeks when even I get tired of citation analysis. Never having learned to doodle, I dabble in irreverent or irrelevant reflections. Recently, my secretary de-

livered my mail to me in a large white 8 x 10 envelope. This gave me four sides of paper to scribble on—with these somewhat dubious results.

Next to the citation laureate of science, my favorite candidate for

immortality is Art Buchwald.¹³ He's a lot easier to emulate than any scientific candidate who comes to mind, especially the ones who make the whiskey ads.

1. Garfield, E. Illusions of grandeur and other disappointments. *Current Contents* (CC[®]) No. 26, 27 June 1973, p. 5.
2. ----- . The mystery of the transposed journal lists, wherein Bradford's law of scattering is generalized into Garfield's law of concentration. CC No. 31, 4 August 1971, p. 5-6.
3. Pritchard, A. Statistical bibliography or bibliometrics. *Journal of Documentation* 25(4):348, 1969.
4. Garfield, E. Jabberwocky, the Humpty-Dumpty syndrome and the making of scientific dictionaries. CC No. 41, 10 October 1973, p. 5-6.
5. Weinstock, M. "Citation Indexes." In: *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1971) vol. 5, pp. 16-40.
6. VINITI is the acronym for the name of the Soviet All-Union Institute for Scientific and Technical Information.
7. Garfield, E. Journal evaluation [a letter to the editor of] *Science* 182 (4118):1197-8, 21 December 1973.
8. Kittel, C. On citations [a letter to the editor of] *Science* 183(4126):702, 22 February 1974.
9. Einstein, A. Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper. *Ann. Phys. Leipzig* 17:891, 1905.
10. Garfield, E. The road to scientific oblivion. *J. Amer. Med. Assoc.* 218: 886-7, 1971; reprinted in CC No. 51, 22 December 1971, p. 5-6.
11. ----- . ISI is studying the structure of science through co-citation analysis. CC No. 7. 13 February 1974, p. 5-10.
12. Small, H. Co-citation in the scientific literature: a new measure of the relationship between two documents. *J. Amer. Soc. Inform. Sci.* 24(4):265-69. (Reprinted as part of reference 10, above).
13. For my foreign colleagues who don't know him, Mr. Buchwald is a syndicated columnist/humorist in the American press.