

## Letters

To the Editor:

David Stam's review of Volume IV of my *History of Book Publishing in the United States* (C&RL, November 1981) is so grossly unfair, and just plain wrong, that I can't let it go unanswered.

In a scant half-dozen paragraphs, Mr. Stam gives us a splendid example of what's wrong with so much scholarly reviewing these days, beginning with that hoariest of non sequiturs, that is, nit-picking a few errors (one of them typographical), and declaring that this casts doubt on everything else in the book. Mr. Stam works in a library and he certainly ought to know that every book has errors in it, and the greater the number of facts contained in a volume, or set of volumes, the greater the number of errors. There is no way of avoiding them, even with the most meticulous checking, which Chandler Grannis and I carried out. A fair-minded reviewer would have understood that. The critical cliché that Mr. Stam indulges in here is always witness, always offensive, and wrong.

Mr. Stam seems to complain that the bulk of the book is made up of histories of individual companies, but what in the world does he imagine the history of book publishing consists of? That is the history of publishing, and I have organized these histories in a way that relates the growth and development of the various kinds of publishing. The charge that there has been "little discrimination in [the] choice of facts presented" is without any basis whatever.

Mr. Stam is in no position to make any such judgment in the first place, and I assure him that I exercised the greatest discrimination in what was included and what was left out. Mr. Stam says the coverage is uneven; I say he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Worst of all, perhaps, is Mr. Stam's assumption that this is merely "a collection of raw materials toward a history of book publishing in mid-twentieth-century America."

It is nothing of the kind, and no other reviewer in the scholarly journals has made any such absurd charge. Mr. Stam obviously didn't bother to read the preface, where I discussed my sources thoroughly. The personal knowledge of the industry that Mr. Grannis and I brought to this task, spanning the entire time period covered by this volume, is not even mentioned, although it was a prime resource. Mr. Stam cites as a "glaring omission" the lack of a statistical summary of production and financial data, but in the preface I state clearly that this kind of material, which does appear in the previous three volumes, was omitted in the present work because these are so easily available elsewhere that to produce them in this work would have been redundant.

"The net has not been cast widely enough, many leads have not been pursued, and much should have been culled," says Mr. Stam. Again, absolutely wrong. Every possible lead was pursued, and everything even remotely relevant that could be culled was utilized. Mr. Stam doesn't understand that the prime sources of publishing history in this period are the pages of *Publishers Weekly* and the Bowker Vertical Files, whose resources he is apparently unaware of, and I have used them judiciously and with care throughout.

I supplemented these with other secondary sources, with the tremendous amount of firsthand knowledge of the industry that Mr. Grannis and I share, plus interviews with living participants in many of the events. For an evaluation of these sources, I refer Mr. Stam, and other interested readers, to the speech I made in January at Columbia University, when I accepted the annual award of the American Printing History Association. I won't rehearse it again, but it's just possible Mr. Stam might learn something about the availability of source material in this field. He and one or two other reviewers have implied that there is some great vast mine of

material out there somewhere that I either overlooked, or ignored. There isn't. Regretfully, such treasure troves of material simply don't exist, and that situation is also covered in the preface to Vol. IV.

This is by no means the end of Mr. Stam's sins of commission and omission. It astonished me that so many of them could be packed into a mere six paragraphs.

Fortunately, it isn't the old story of the writer thinking he's right and the reviewer wrong. More knowledgeable reviewers in other media have given this labor of love that has occupied fifteen years of my life much more judicious and approving notices, many of them all a writer could ask for. I ask readers of *College & Research Libraries* to use their own good judgment and decide for themselves who's right and who's wrong in this case.—*John Tebbel, Southbury, Connecticut.*

To the Editor:

I regret that I have outraged Mr. Tebbel with my review of his monumental study of *The Great Change*. There is a great deal of material of value in the work, and my review attempted to emphasize some of its virtues. I still contend, however, that the work does not provide the needed synthesis that this reader sought. It is not a question of right or wrong, but of critical judgment. Of course, users of Mr. Tebbel's work will decide for themselves.

As to sins of omission, I could have packed many more into fewer paragraphs.—*David H. Stam, The New York Public Library, New York City.*

To the Editor:

Brian Nielsen's proposal of a nebulous third role for reference librarians (*C&RL*, May 1982), one in which they neither emulate academic faculty and divide librarianship, nor monopolize knowledge, shows his disregard for the different needs of different library users.

In my job as an academic reference librarian I am both an intermediary and a teacher. My teaching a student who is working on a term paper how to find information, rather than finding it for him, is part of the student's education. It is part of the job I am paid to do. If the chancellor calls me for information

to convince the legislature of campus needs, I will not entice him to the library with a promise that I will show him how to go about finding what he wants. I will locate what he has requested and get it to him as quickly as possible. If my search turns up other information which I think could be useful to him, I will send that too. This service seems to be what Mr. Nielsen calls monopolizing knowledge. Such requests from staff and faculty make them dependent on me only in the sense that they depend on me to do my job.

I fail to see how an on-line reference system changes this picture. Even if the student does not actually run the search, part of his education should include an explanation of efficient search strategy and his help in developing the strategy to be used. On the other hand, I would never offer such explanations to the business manager if he called me for financial statistics unless he requested such explanations. I would assume that the information he wanted is the statistics rather than my search procedure.

The needs of the user determine whether I'm an intermediary or a teacher, and I think these considerations are applied by other librarians in public, academic, and research libraries. Switching roles is not only necessary, it is an integral part of my job. If I were unable to determine when to switch roles, it would be unfortunate for the users, who would get less than they should. It would also be unfortunate for me because I would very probably be fired. Perhaps, if this should happen, I could be consoled by a special librarian who was fired because he ignored the intermediary function of his job, or shared information by passing it on to his company's competition.—*Valerie Burnie, Public Services Librarian, University of South Carolina, Spartanburg, South Carolina.*

To the Editor:

As to the nebulosity of the third role I propose in my article, I plead guilty; I can only reiterate here that the shaping of that role will require thoughtful action, dialogue among colleagues and users, and the conduct of my research by many librarians in the field. I appreciate the opportunity for dialogue on a critical point which Ms. Burnie's letter provides.

What, really, is "need" in the situations

described by Ms. Burnie? One could substitute the word "status" for "need," and the issue would become clearer. Though it is certainly true that, given the present level of staffing in academic library reference departments, a student is better served who serves himself, the attribution of "need" of that student for instruction is something a librarian invented. One could just as logically, and incorrectly, state that every student "needs" a personal reference librarian to find, check out, and carry home his books. Ms. Burnie provides adequate rationale for this position, as the most successful student who achieves status on the campus later in life obviously has all such services provided. If the chancellor ever had a library instruction course, it was obviously a waste of time.

It is important for us to develop our service goals more carefully. There are situations in which it is far more desirable to give the undergraduate student a fact than to tell him how to find it himself; there are also situations in which the administrator or faculty member would be better served by being given training in the use of a tool. As on-line searching protocols become simpler, for instance, the business manager would be better served by being given a terminal on which to

do his own searching, and some training, than to have him try to explain to a librarian the nature of his problem.

Whatever kind of service is provided, it should be based on a judgment that takes into account the context of the user's problem, not the user's status. Making *any* user dependent on a librarian is a disservice, as the nature of relevance and meaning of information is so subtle, that we must always encourage the user to look directly, and not through our eyes.

Switching roles between teacher and intermediary "works" when we serve reactively to the demands imposed upon us by others. Switching does not help us develop a proactive work style in which our own talents, knowledge, and values contribute to thoughtful practice. Respect for ourselves and for the mission of our occupation should, I think, direct us to avoid this schizophrenia and to evaluate more carefully where our energies might best be placed.—*Brian Nielsen, Head, Reference Department, Northwestern University Library, Evanston, Illinois.*

(POSTSCRIPT: Page 187, line 22 of paragraph two in column one should begin with the word "instruction" rather than "information.")

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