

## Editorial

# Bookish Librarians



Our journal is mostly about articles. We consider around a hundred article manuscripts a year, and from those submissions, we select about thirty—we hope the best—for publication. These peer reviewed articles, running 3,000 to 6,000 words in length, usually report the research results of a focused study on a particular process, procedure, or policy stance in academic librarianship. In this current issue, for example, you will find interesting and useful reports on assessing library scholarship, corporate annual report collections, the impact of library training on graduate student performance, proficiencies for instruction librarians, who are “authorized users” in electronic resource licenses, and library applications for mobile devices. These types of articles are our main business, and their like make up the bulk of scholarly communications in the social sciences and even more so in the sciences. How often these articles are cited, as measured by citation indexes, can make or break the reputation of a researcher or a journal. Our journal, thanks to its influential articles, has one of the higher citation “impact factors” in the field of librarianship. You can read most articles quickly in one “sitting.”

While journal articles occupy most of our pages, I want to remind readers that we do book reviews too. Ably managed by our book review editor, Geoffrey D. Smith, who by day is the Head of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at the Ohio State University, this section at the end of each issue offers five to six cogent reviews on a variety of new books in librarianship, publishing history, and information science. In this issue you will find reviews on books about book selling since the fifteen century, mistakes in library management (one we should all read), book makers (the legitimate

kind), jazz, and magic. Writing a concise and insightful book review is not easy, and I thank Dr. Smith and his book reviewers for their good efforts. Most of the letters to the editor I receive, and I do not get many, are in response to book reviews. An author or a publisher takes exception to a comment made by a reviewer. I am glad to get these, for they show someone is carefully reading, and sensitive about, what we write.

I like reading book reviews. Maybe it is a throwback to my days as a bibliographer, my favorite job in librarianship. Trying to stay on top of the subject literature of my field, American and British literature, I was an inveterate reader of book dealer catalogues, publisher lists, selection forms, and book reviews. I was very well read at the citation and abstract level! Of course, reading a book is much better than reading about it, but who has the time? Apparently fewer and fewer of us, if measured by declining books sales in recent years. Unlike an article, a book cannot be read in one “sitting,” and some books require extended concentration and time.

Most nonfiction books have never been read cover to cover, or what do we call it now, from digital beginning to end. We skim, we browse, we delve into chapters or sections; we use the table of contents or index to find what we need. However, some books are meant to be, and deserve to be, read slowly with concentration from beginning to end, often over multiple sittings. Belles lettres, histories, biographies, and significant books in many disciplines need to be read sequentially and carefully. Carlin Romano, a professor of philosophy and humanities at Ursinus College, recently wrote about this in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (“Will the Book Survive

Generation Text," August 29, 2010). Romano believes that reading a book "requires concentration, endurance, the ability to disconnect from other connections." Can we "disconnect" from our wired, multi-tasking way of life to concentrate on a book from start to finish anymore? Romano worries that in the academic curriculum of the future we may find "the death of the book as object of study, the disappearance of 'whole' books as assigned reading." That would be a shame.

Back in 1983, Paul Metz from Virginia Tech wrote a book entitled *The Landscape of Literatures: Use of Subject Collections in a University Library* (Chicago: American Library Association). I read it cover to cover when it came out. I marked it up, cited it many times, and have kept a copy on my office bookshelf these many years. For me it was one of the classics in the field of library collection management and warranted my concentrated reading.

Mr. Metz has now updated his seminal work, and our journal has accepted it for publication. You can find "Revisiting the Landscape of Literature: Replicating and Change in the Use of Subject Collections" (posted August 2, 2010) on our *Preprints* service. This new article took me back to his great book.

Finally, let me recommend one more book I just read cover to cover, savoring every word. (What librarian can resist recommending books?) Janet Soskine's *The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels* (New York: Knopf) came out last year, and it is a wonderful historical biography. I suppose you could skim it or sample different chapters, but then you would miss the fascinating development and arc of success in the lives of these two pioneering women scholars. Soskine calls her heroines "adventurers," and she also describes them as "bookish." I see no contradiction there.

Joseph Branin, Editor



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