will read and take them to heart. If this were to come about, studies and reports such as this one would never be needed. —*Maryan E. Reynolds, Washington State Library, Olympia.*

Information, Mechanism and Meaning. Donald M. MacKay. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969. 196p. $2.95.

Most librarians today would agree that a major, if not the major, function of libraries is the transfer of "information" from authors to readers. To facilitate the execution of this function, librarians classify their collections, provide subject, author, and title indexes, purchase bibliographies of every description, provide professional reference service, etc. Yet what precisely is this "information" that librarians work so hard to help transfer? How can we recognize what information a potential reader is lacking? How can we be sure that we are doing the best job of representing in our catalogs the information which authors have represented in their books? Without an adequate theory of information we really have no way of answering these questions in a rigorous way. Dr. MacKay is concerned in this book with the beginnings of such a theory of information.

MacKay is head of the Research Department of Communication at the University of Keele. He puts his background in physics to use at several points in this development of a formal model of how human beings store their information and how they add to, modify, and validate this store. His approach is nonlinguistic; that is, he views the messages that human beings send each other as unanalyzed wholes, which, as entities, have meaning to the sender and to the receiver of the message. He hypothesizes that the human mind at any given time is in a state of conditional readiness to react to stimuli in a certain way. When a message containing information is received, it results in a change in the individual's state of conditional readiness. The meaning of a message he defines as a function which selects a particular state of conditional readiness from all the possible states of conditional readiness. He does not suggest that his hypothesis describes how the brain really handles information, only that his model is a mechanism capable of representing what the brain seems to do.

None of the ideas contained in this book are new. The book is a collection of three radio broadcasts and nine papers (plus two more papers reproduced as appendices) presented by the author from 1950 to 1964. Hence, the date of publication is misleading. MacKay has added an introductory chapter and has inserted a foreword and postscript to many of the papers, each a chapter in the book, in an attempt to provide continuity. He has used the technique of putting passages which can be skipped by readers of earlier chapters in small type. This technique only partly alleviates the major fault of the work—redundancy. In the later chapters, there is much said that has been said before, sometimes in almost identical terms. It is unfortunate that MacKay could not have taken the time to pull together all of the ideas from the various papers and present his thesis in a more organized fashion. It is also unfortunate that he has added no new references to those originally included in his papers. The work does not provide a very good entry into the literature of information theory, since even the original references were not intended to be exhaustive.

This book is certainly not a definitive work on the theory of information. However, in many respects, it is a stimulating and highly theoretical work. Those seeking practical advice on the design of library automation projects or the construction of information retrieval systems should look elsewhere. Those seeking insight into the basic nature of the information transfer process may find something here to stimulate their thinking.—*Edward A. Eaton III, The University of Texas at Austin.*

Library Lit.—The Best of 1970. Bill Katz and Joel J. Schwartz, eds. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1971. 429p.

An apparently self-appointed jury of five (its origin is unclear in the introduction) took on the stultifying task of reading (scanning?) the full runs of some 200 library and general periodicals of the period November 1, 1969–October 31, 1970. The jury (the editors, professor and student, respectively, at Albany; John N. Berry, editor of *Library Journal;* William R. Eshelman, editor of *Wilson Library Bulletin;* and Eric