

and well done.—*Janita Jobe, University of Nevada, Reno.*

Beinhart, Larry. *The Librarian.* New York: Nation Books, 2004. 432p. \$15.95 (ISBN 1560256362). LC: 2004-303800.

This taut, well-written political thriller has everything one might expect of the genre, including conspiracies, dirty tricks, covert operatives, secret assignments, car chases, and more, spiced throughout with dark humor and plentiful doses of sex, violence, and profanity. What makes this thriller different is that the central character, David Goldberg, is an academic librarian. After providing a brief synopsis of the plot, I will focus on three questions: How does Beinhart portray librarianship and librarians? What impact does Goldberg's role as a librarian have on his behavior? Will academic librarians who read this book find any special insights into their profession?

Despite a number of twists and turns, the overall plot of this thriller is relatively simple. At the request of a female colleague, Elaina Whisthoven, whom he recently fired due to budget cuts, David Goldberg, director of library services at an unnamed academic library, agrees to take her place for a few evenings on a project to scan, organize, and index the papers of aging businessman Alan Carston Stowe, a conservative billionaire who desires to leave his records to posterity as a memorial to his greatness. What Goldberg does not know is that Elaina is being hounded by a shadowy group of covert operatives loosely connected with Homeland Security. They are concerned that Stowe's papers might include clues to an ongoing conspiracy to steal the upcoming election for the incumbent Republican president if it begins to look like the Democratic candidate has a chance to win. Their suspicions turn to Goldberg, who quickly becomes a fugitive. Using his skills as a librarian and lots of luck, along with the aid of several unlikely compatriots, including two female librarians and the wife of one of the covert operatives, Goldberg

finally discovers what the conspirators are trying to hide. In the final chapters, their conspiracy is put into motion, although Goldberg and his colleagues are able to slow things down enough that the final result of the conspiracy is in doubt as the novel ends.

How does Beinhart portray librarianship and librarians? On the one hand, he incorporates several themes that reflect important aspects of modern librarianship, including the stress librarianship places on preserving, organizing, and disseminating information. Goldberg is clearly concerned with these issues as he begins his work on the Stowe papers. Beinhart also calls attention to the value librarians place on freedom of information. In addition, he portrays librarians as computer experts and exceptionally skilled researchers. The implication seems to be that no one but a librarian could have done what Goldberg accomplished. Above all, Beinhart stresses the point that librarians love books.

On the other hand, Beinhart sometimes portrays librarians in a less positive vein. Elaina Whisthoven is doughty, shy, and retiring. Goldberg comes across as a bookish nerd and clearly has difficulties dealing with the opposite sex. Inga Lokisberg, identified as the head librarian at the university, although clearly lower in rank than Goldberg, is a former exchange student with a rather checkered sexual history. And Susan Cohen-Miller, an acquaintance of Goldberg who works at the Library of Congress, is an ardent feminist with a rather unhealthy, ambivalent attitude toward men, including Goldberg. Also, Beinhart makes great play out of the idea that librarians are underpaid but are willing to remain so because of their love for books, despite the implication that part of Goldberg's motivation for working on the Stowe archives was the extra income.

What impact does Goldberg's role as a librarian have on his behavior? Given its title, one might be led to believe that his role would be a central focus of this novel.

In some ways it is and in some ways not. Goldberg is clearly attracted to the Stowe project because of his love for records, but, as noted above, the extra income also plays a part. When he learns that he is the target of a covert operation, it seems that self-preservation becomes his primary motive for seeking the information the conspirators are trying to hide. But his librarian skills clearly contribute to his climactic uncovering of the conspiracy. Although his role as a librarian is important, it is clearly not, in my opinion, the glue that holds the plot together.

Will academic librarians who read this book find any special insights into their profession? In my opinion, academic librarians will learn very little about their profession from reading this thriller, except that we have a long way to go to educate the general public on what academic librarianship is all about. I was especially disappointed in Beinhart's failure to mention, except in passing, the reference and instruction roles of today's academic librarians. At least Goldberg is characterized as proactive and even a bit heroic, which raises his character to a somewhat higher level than most other fictional librarians. But I believe it's likely that the unflattering stereotypes employed by Beinhart will bear greater weight in the public eye.

For academic librarians who like a good political thriller and are willing to put up with plenty of sex, violence, and profanity, Beinhart's novel will likely be an entertaining read. But they should be aware that the depiction of conservative Republicans is very negative. Also, they should not expect to gain any special insights into the nature of academic librarianship. —Wade Kotter, Weber State University.

Frohmann, Bernd Peter. *Deflating Information: From Science Studies to Documentation*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 2004. 311p. alk. paper, \$65 (ISBN 0802088392). LC 2004-276469.

Bernd Frohmann, an associate professor of information and media studies at the

University of Western Ontario, has written a number of articles and reviews leading up to this volume. In it, he tackles the "paradox of scientific documentation": the question of why science's "most important medium" —its written record— is somehow both "essential to science, indeed, thought itself to be 'a form of science,' [and simultaneously] marginal to work at the research front, ...pos[ing] grave threats to the effective communication of the very information required for scientific knowledge production" via the unwieldy mass of scientific documentation. This particular field is so important, he argues, because it is held up as the most important, most developed, and most effective of information systems. His response is to deconstruct and "deflate" the term *information* as it appears in the literature, and the result is a useful book in some respects, but one with a number of flaws.

In order to deflate information, Frohmann sets the stage with a précis of Wittgenstein's deconstruction of words and language, exposing the lack of concrete Aristotelian meaning (language is a "game" and words signifiers). He then rhetorically connects three other thinkers who have written about science: the seventeenth-century English philosopher Francis Bacon, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Belgian meta-bibliographer and documentalist Paul Otlet, and the distinguished twentieth-century American sociologist Robert Merton. From Bacon, he derives a socially organized system of scientific knowledge production, with documented advances at its core. From Otlet, he derives a focus on useful original content (information), as distinct from the surrounding dross in scientific writing, which is to be extracted and cumulated into a "universal book" of organized scientific knowledge. From Merton, he derives a set of mores and norms within modern science that increasingly rely on rhetorical reward systems of citation, recognition, and eponymy (a major discovery named af-