

Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Geller, Evelyn. *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984. 234p. \$29.95. LC 83-12566. ISBN 0-313-23808-1.

When Ivan Carnovsky said, in his classic 1950 essay in *Library Quarterly*, "I have never met a public librarian who approved of censorship or one who failed to practice it in some measure," he put his finger on one of the most fundamental dilemmas faced by both academic and public librarians. For the late Eli Oboler and many like-minded crusaders, the problem of censorship in libraries has essentially turned on the question of whether one has made an adequate commitment to the moral goal of intellectual freedom; censorship, as David K. Berninghausen suggested in the title of his 1975 book, represents a *Flight From Freedom*. But is that too facile an explanation for censorship as a historical phenomenon?

Nearly thirty years ago, in a report commissioned by the National Book Committee in 1956, Robert K. Merton and others called for a more objective approach. What was needed, they said, was research into the social psychology and economics of reading and the sociology of censorship. Through the years a number of ambitious studies have been undertaken, such as Charles Busha's study of the attitudes of midwestern public librarians (*Freedom Versus Suppression and Censorship*, Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1972) and Marjory Fiske's study of school and public librarians in California (*Book Selection and Censorship*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 1959); but few if any would have satisfied Merton, and certainly none

treating the pre-McCarthy era. Until now.

Evelyn Geller's book—the refinement of her 1980 doctoral dissertation at Columbia—is first and foremost an ambitious contribution to the sociology of professions. It is one of the very rare sociological studies of librarianship, and rarer still for its soundness and readability. Quite apart from her explanation of the development of the ideology of librarianship at midcentury, Geller makes a major contribution with the theoretical approach she takes to the structural dynamics of professional development. Hers is an approach that might be applied with great advantage to the study of other professions.

Many readers will value Geller's study for the historical account it gives of librarians' changing responses to issues of censorship and academic freedom in America during the six decades between the founding of the ALA and the outbreak of the Second World War, an account she puts together almost entirely from statements and news items in *Library Journal* and other published sources. Early on, the librarians in her study were ardently defending their role as censors in book selection against outside efforts to liberalize the public library. Later both public and academic librarians, in the name of freedom and the public interest, actively resisted censorship pressures from their communities and eventually enshrined their beliefs in the *Library Bill of Rights* adopted by the ALA in 1939.

But the change was not simply a process of developing a more mature sense of the correct balance between freedom and censorship (some degree of which is inevitable in book selection); for, as Geller

shows, many features of our profession, including its goals and functions, have not been given but have changed considerably as social situations and acceptance by others have shifted. She correctly surmises that the development of professional ideology is irregular and does not reflect something so obvious as the progressive evolution of a basic mission, or the swing of a pendulum from conservatism to liberalism, but is a multidimensional process that requires a more complicated theoretical explanation. This she finds in the "role-set" model and the play of competing values between librarians, their clients, and their sponsors (trustees, university bureaucrats, etc.). She identifies three major lines of stress as a source of recurring conflicts in the period covered by her study: disputes arising out of the assertion of institutional and status autonomy and those emerging from what she calls the "elitist-populist dilemma" and the "neutrality-advocacy dilemma." It is a thoroughly original approach, and only occasionally does the inevitable jargon of her discipline make trouble for the non-sociologist reader.

As a postscript, one cannot resist adding that in 1967, when Geller first published an article on this subject in *Library Journal*—indeed, one that was included in Eric Munn's anthology, *Book Selection and Censorship in the Sixties* (New York: Bowker, 1969)—she was editor of *School Library Journal*; today she works as an investment broker.—William A. Moffett, *Oberlin College Library, Ohio*.

Light, Richard J., and David B. Pillemer.

Summing Up: The Science of Reviewing Research. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1984. 191p. \$17.50. LC 84-4506. ISBN 0-674-85430-6. (alk. paper)

Advancing knowledge through a process of cumulation requires accurate and perceptive analyses of what has been studied, what has been discovered, and what remains to be done. Reviews of the literature, the authors maintain, are commonly inadequate to the task, and they discuss, in detailed and sophisticated fashion, ways to improve them. They have excellent credentials for their task,

Light as professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and Kennedy School of Government and Pillemer as assistant professor of Psychology at Wellesley College.

A review of previous research, though an established expectation, is all too often done *pro forma* and in pedestrian fashion. The most common approach is simply to summarize, serially, studies that seem to have some relationship to the new study being undertaken. The result is often more confusing than helpful, for the summarized studies have been based upon different definitions, assumptions, and methods and produce findings that are inconclusive or even contradictory. The researcher frequently concludes that the best course is simply to ignore the past and to begin again. Light and Pillemer convincingly argue that well-done reviews not only can prevent such duplication but, even more important, can help to shape improved research studies that genuinely advance knowledge.

In approaching their task, the authors emphasize four "themes":

First, each review should be shaped to respond to a specific question or to a particular purpose; a review designed as the basis for a pragmatic program decision ought to be quite different from a review that seeks to discover fundamental relationships.

Second, disagreements among studies, far from suggesting despair, ought to be considered opportunities for understanding; that different findings appear in studies carried out in different places, for example, may suggest locales and their cultural components as promising variables for further investigation.

Third, the natural appeal of the objectivity of quantitative measures should not be allowed to eliminate qualitative components; a statistically valid relationship may be comprehensible only in the context of informed interpretation of the real world situation.

Fourth, statistical precision cannot replace clear theoretical understanding; almost always, even when a number of studies seems to produce consistent findings, penetrating judgment and analysis