



# BIBLIO-NOTES



NEWSLETTER OF THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUP #7

## MINUTES, CHICAGO 1985

### I. Program: Building Collections of Contemporary Fiction

1. Charles Brownson (Arizona State University) presented a study of "mechanical" selection methodologies (as opposed to selection based on expertise) using three test cases (popular American fiction, contemporary German fiction, contemporary American poetry). When values for measures such as efficiency (the ability of a given selection mechanism to limit itself to the desired items) and accuracy (the ability of the mechanism to identify the desired items) are calculated for alternative means of mechanical selection, librarians are better able to gauge the relative benefits of different selection strategies. Mechanical selection may be more applicable in the humanities, and for smaller libraries, than is generally thought. Ultimately, the issue is whether staff time cannot be freed to allow bibliographers to engage in those selection activities for which mechanical means don't work. Discussion members wishing further details on this presentation should contact Charles Brownson, University Library, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287. Tel.: 602/963-3258.

2. Robert Sewell (University of Illinois) discussed the use of popular genre fiction (the romance, the western, science fiction, etc.) as research material which reveals social attitudes and values of a wide segment of contemporary society. Its usefulness for scholars is as a cultural artifact, and, indeed, it may be the social rather than the literary historian who will be most interested in popular genre fiction. The literature bibliographer may find the vast majority of genre fiction not appropriate for the collection, but since it looks like literature, the collecting responsibility is often assigned to that area by default. A new perspective and a redefinition of selection responsibilities are needed to accommodate the researcher and teacher interested in popular culture. Recommended for further reading: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture in Museums and Libraries (1981), Betty Rosenberg's Genreflecting (1982), and Frank Hoffmann's Popular Culture and Libraries (1984).

3. John O'Brien (Review of Contemporary Fiction) brought a publisher's perspective to the panel. Writers and publishers of small press books are vying to contend with a marked

decline in financial support for the literary arts. To publish 1500 copies of a 200-page novel now costs approximately \$6000, and the result is a vicious cycle: no capital - small runs - no distributors - no sales - no capital. If non-commercial literary publishing is to continue, libraries must think more energetically about how to acquire small press books. (The housing of small press exhibits at the present ALA meeting in a virtually inaccessible area is all-too symbolic). The censors of today are not the "little old ladies in Dubuque" but the accountants in New York.

A lively discussion focusing on the mutual responsibilities of libraries and publishers ensued.

## II. Business meeting

1. Over 130 names are now on the mailing list.
2. The officers for next year are William McPheron (Chair), John Dillon (Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect), Jean Weldon (Secretary), and, the three Members-at-Large, Wendy Bousfield, Eric Carpenter and Carolyn Fields.
3. The collection of ten essays on selection in English and American literature should be ready for submission to a publisher by November.
4. Any ideas for involvement of the Discussion Group at the Baltimore ACRL meeting should be sent to Bill McPheron.
5. Alternative sources of funding for the newsletter are being explored.
6. John Dillon's "back-up" idea for the 1986 Conference is a program on the MLA Bibliography. Other suggestions should be communicated to John as soon as possible. His address and new phone number are entered on the revised mailing list.

Stephen Lehmann  
Secretary

## MIDWINTER 1986, CHICAGO

The midwinter meeting of the ACRL English and American Literature Discussion Group has been provisionally scheduled for Sunday, 19 January 1986 at 11:30-12:30. Please forward any proposed agenda topics to Bill McPheron prior to 15 November 1985.

## NOTICE

If your address is incorrect, or if you want your name removed from the following membership roster, please notify the Chair.