A Bibliography for Booklists: Should- and Want-to-Reads
Colorado Association of Libraries Conference November 11, 2006

Though not comprehensive, this bibliography is an introduction to the literature on booklists and the literary canon in libraries.


Arboleda argues that despite advances in technology which would seem to create a more interconnected world; researchers, scholars, and publishers tend to demonstrate the "'Gutenberg syndrome,' in which the history of the book, the world of publishing, and scholarship in general are viewed in terms of Western principles and practices."


This discussion highlights a convergence of concerns related to small presses, marginalized points of view, and underrepresented disciplines and groups. Some concerns raised by the discussion include:
(1) Is content watered-down to become more palatable for main-stream markets?
(2) If collections lack diversity, effective browsing is denied; similarly, counterpoint arguments to prevailing thought is unavailable
(3) With the twelve largest publishers accounting for 80% of the market, and the remaining 50,000 publishers providing the rest, marketplace realities threaten small press existence. Small presses are less likely to be distributed by major vendors, and less likely to be reviewed (key in many libraries)
(4) Do library practices and approval plans create “vanilla collections?”


Though bestsellers have long been associated with public libraries, with the increasing interest in popular culture studies, academic libraries may also have an interest in bestsellers. In a convenient sample of bestseller holding in Pennsylvania, Crawford and Harris discover a trend for academic libraries to own a higher percentage of older fiction bestsellers, with sketchy newer or nonfiction bestseller holdings. If this trend continues, many works valued by popular culture researchers may disappear.


Cyzyk argues that the literary canon is most likely defined as the best of the written word throughout history. Yet that definition requires a subjective view of literature from each point in history. If libraries are to collect the canon, they must collect both what is considered to be part of the canon now and what may be written today but not considered part of the canon until tomorrow. The author asks how this can be done and answers this dilemma by placing the responsibility on libraries as a whole and not individually.


Canons evolve and are not completely stable, argues Doherty. In discussing the canon as it exists today, the author expresses that works included in the canon are, by definition, a reflection of established ideologies and therefore are necessarily elitist and exclusive. Librarians are trained and educated by the establishment, thus the canon will continue to reflect these ideologies. However, Doherty argues, librarians can allow the canon to evolve by encouraging independent thought in their practices.

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Eisenman suggests that though both teaching and research benefit from a variety of viewpoints, both tend to be liberal. In one illustration, Eisenman refers to an example from Goldberg in which he points out that the media will frequently identify a concept as being from a “conservative group,” but rarely do they identify a concept as being from a “liberal group.” The emerging conclusion is that ideas that are liberal are the standard, and conservative ideas are somehow deviant.


Fialkoff advocates for libraries to create lists of “best sellers,” or “best circulators.” This practice would allow libraries to share in the success of many well known commercial lists, such as the New York Times bestsellers list.


Graham describes the library’s increasingly difficult dichotomy between neutrality (merely storing information for users) and social responsibility (guiding users to information that is ‘true’ or ‘just’). Graham concludes that in the spirit of service, librarians strive for neutrality, but inevitably partisanship, at times, shows through.


While the Hupp study found that Ohio libraries actually include more conservative books in their collections, Harmeyer concluded that California libraries include more liberal viewpoint sources in their collections. Interestingly, he found that of the academic libraries, religiously affiliated schools provide a more balanced set of resources on social issues.


Heinzkill identifies forces that have shaped the canon of the past: anthologies, titles in syllabi and reading lists, publishers (especially university presses), literary journals and histories, and *Books for College Libraries*. He then discusses how the canon (or canons) of the future will be formed. He suggests that libraries take their collection development cues from English departments, which are experiencing “rapid evolution and revolution” as a result of a generation of professors who are retiring.


Bias in library collections is not a new controversy. It is most often argued that libraries include more sources that have a liberal viewpoint. However, this researcher found that in Ohio libraries, more conservative titles appear on the shelves than liberal.


Following 9/11/2001, Manley argues that it is crucial for libraries to provide information from a broad spectrum of viewpoints, not allowing fear and hysteria to blind us.


In this article Staley suggests that though the acquisition of an author’s archives is not only way for an author to make it into the canon, it does seem to be a likely avenue. Libraries, rather than single wealthy patrons, are now most likely to collect this type of archive. Thus, it is libraries that have much of the power in deciding the canon. This intriguing argument is in juxtaposition to arguments that libraries simply collect the canon.

For additional information or to share your own resources on booklists or the literary canon, please contact:
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