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Book Reviews

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Book Review

Column Editor: **Barry Fast** (Academic Book Center)

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Publishing and Development in the Third World.

Edited by **Philip G. Altbach.**

London: Hans Zell

Publishers, 1992.

Reviewed by: **Patricia Putney**
(Head Acquisitions Librarian,
Brown Univ.)

This book is the outcome of an international conference on publishing in the Third World, held in Bellagio, Italy in February 1991. The conference brought together 26 experts on publishing, representatives of donor agencies, and publishers from Africa and Asia. Their purpose was to review the variety of approaches designed to help with the development of book publishing in poor countries; to determine which approaches have been most effective; and finally, to consider whether successful programs could be applied in other countries.

The central theme of this volume is the importance of publishing to the intellectual and educational development in the Third World. The traditional book is still the primary format for knowledge dissemination in developing nations and tracing the history of publishing in these nations provides insights into the causes and solutions to the "book famine." Africa and Asia provide the main focus of the essays due to contrast in the level of success achieved in the development of indigenous publishing.

The book is organized into four sections: issues and trends; Africa; Asia; and book aid. The first section includes four essays which analyze the importance of indigenous publishing in the Third World and link it to the national goals of culture and education. The primary importance of publishing is to promote education within the countries and secondarily to allow these countries to share the wealth of culture and knowledge they possess.

Section two includes nine essays on book publishing in several African na-

tions including Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. The economic problems of the last decade are responsible for the backward movement of publishing in most of Africa. These problems are compounded by political instability, low literacy rates, population increases, weak book distribution channels, and the number of languages. Despite these problems, there are bibliographical sources for new Third World books such as the AFRICAN BOOK PUBLISHING RECORD for domestic and export use.

In contrast, developments in publishing in Asia as reported in the four essays in section three, describe a higher level of achievement. Tracing publishing in Berma, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, India, the Philippines, and several other nations, it is clear that economic growth has been a key factor in the development of book publishing. Other contributing factors include: a domestically controlled publishing infrastructure, use of national languages, higher rates of literacy, and a greater level of political stability.

The fourth section analyzes programs aimed at improving Third World publishing sponsored by agencies such as the World Bank, and the governments of several Western nations. The review of these programs provides lessons for future investments. Although many programs did not focus on promoting indigenous book development, the most successful ones achieved it as a by product of book provision programs. The failure of many programs is tied with their failure to report their experiences in a timely manner. These experiences may have provided lessons for other projects.

In addition to a comprehensive index, each article contains lengthy bibliographic notes. The contributors write with authority and bring a sense of the development of culture to the development of book publishing. The recommendations of the Bellagio Conference are included in an appendix to the volume. The first group contains practical solutions to be achieved at the micro level. These range from implementing programs to improve book

distribution in Africa, to the establishment of a nonprofit international clearinghouse to promote increased cooperation among publishers from developed and underdeveloped nations. The macro level recommendations address general perspectives necessary to understand in a broader context the development of a "book society" in the Third World. This includes defining the role of government and aid agencies in promoting the development of indigenous book industries.

In a world of information on electronic publishing, *Publishing and Development in the Third World*, provides an interesting account of the status or publishing in the Third World. It is important for information professionals to understand the problems facing developing nations, and to learn about cooperative ventures designed to market Third World publications and to enhance indigenous publishing.

Sex, Art & American Culture by **Camille Paglia.**

Vintage Books, 1992;

\$13.00; paperback

Reviewed by **Barry Fast**
(Academic Book Center)

I think it was E.B. White who said that the reason feuds in academia are so vicious is that the stakes are so small. He was only partly right. In the case of political correctness, the feuding is particularly nasty and personal, but the stakes are, for once, worthy of passions. It is freedom that is at risk.

Camille Paglia, an anti-feminist feminist, an "academic rottweiler," an "Italian Joan Rivers," does not merely offer her radical, anarchistic, conservative, liberal, simplistic, perceptive viewpoints on PC; she grabs you by the intellectual throat and screams them in your face. You cannot ignore her; you have to listen, think, argue and respond. Here are some examples:

"I think woman is the dominant sex. Men have to do all sorts of stuff to prove they are worthy of woman's attention."

"Our problem is not patriarchy, but, in the urban industrialized world, col-

lapsing manhood, which male homosexuality properly remedies by its glamorous cult of the masculine."

"Women's studies is institutionalized sexism."

"Women's studies is a comfy, chummy morass of unchallenged groupthink. It is, with rare exception, totally unscholarly."

"Women's studies is a jumble of vulgarisms, bunglers, whiners, French faddists, apparatchiks, doughface party-liners, pie-in-the-sky utopianists, and bullying sanctimonious sermonizers. Reasonable, moderate feminists hang back and, like good Germans, keep silent in the face of fascism."

"And who's doing the preaching in Ivy League humanities departments? Lily-livered, dead-ass, trash-talking foreign junk bond dealers."

"Today's academic leftists are strutting wannabes, timorous nerds who missed the Sixties while they were grade-grubbing in the library and brown-nosing the senior faculty."

"To be a scholar is the greatest of vocations: to compose a devout commentary, a Talmud, on the created world."

"I subscribe to a Renaissance cosmology, a divine network of correspondences, where everything is an analogy to everything else . . . what Jung calls synchronicity."

"Every year, feminists provide more and more evidence of the old charge that women can neither think nor write."

This woman can write. And think. And make you laugh and get you angry. I read *Sex, Art and American Culture* on a night flight to Europe. It was like having an entertaining, irascible seat mate who alternately charmed and disgusted me. I agreed with about a third of her ideas, disagree with the other third, and haven't decided about the remaining third. Although she can be a boor, she is not boring.

Paglia makes some important points about the state of scholarship in academe. She has nothing but contempt for the deconstructionists. The politically-correct MLA types are not only ridiculous, but downright dangerous. They attract the scorn of the very people who vote for the funds that keep them employed. If our declining university system is losing public and governmental support, some of the blame, according to Paglia, belongs to those who are making it irrelevant. The

party line that is preventing people from speaking their minds, no matter how disagreeable, makes academic freedom operative only if you obey the increasingly restrictive rules.

Paglia, an admirer of the gay culture, excoriates AIDS activists who disrupt church services, offending the supporters they need. They will be the first to suffer in the intolerant society that they are working to create. She celebrates transsexuals, whose flamboyance delights her pagan sensibilities. In fact, she describes herself as a pagan Catholic and scorns the uptight, austere Protestantism of our culture. She describes American feminism as a direct descendant of naive, intolerant, anti-sensual Presbyterianism.

Her views on rape, especially date rape, are "controversial." While claiming that she is often misquoted or her opinions distorted, one can draw no other conclusion from her actual writings than this: Date rape is the fault of stupid, sheltered, spoiled girls who are sent off to college by over protective parents who have never explained that young men, especially when drunk and in groups, are dangerous. When women are forcibly raped, and I am not referring to date rape here, Paglia says they should get up, dust themselves off, and think of the whole experience as a mugging. Are you angry yet?

Here's more. Pornography can be art, or not, but it should always be protected. Even child pornography. (Camille, honey bunch, come back from that planet. If you keep talking about women taking responsibility for their own lives as the real essence of feminism, how can you celebrate, yes celebrate, something that hurts and degrades children? Certainly you can't think that kids go into porn to explore the outer limits of their sensuality. You gotta agree that the bottom feeders who produce this stuff are just plain evil.)

I am distorting Paglia, however, by focusing this review on the writing that is most outrageous, most offensive, and some parts with which I most disagree. It is more balanced to convey the impressive intellect that is far more evident than the in-your-face viewpoints. Paglia can be astonishing as she works carefully through an examination of the roots of Western philosophy and critical thinking. She is insisting on high standards, on slow and painstaking scholarship, on months in the library

instead of hours at the MLA conferences, on solid teaching which brings the joy of helping students see the ancient truths.

Paglia believes in history. She thinks the experiences of the human race can tell us something vital about ourselves today; the unvarnished past lights the present. Scholarship, according to Paglia, is mainly discovery, not interpretation — which comes later and maybe never at all. Her contempt for modern academe stems from the sense that there are few real scholars because scholarship requires so much work.

She sees MTV as a modern art form, but at the same time recognizes that the generation raised on it will not, maybe cannot, ever be satisfied with a life lived in concentrated scholarship. She celebrates the '60s as a moment in time when the world really did turn upside down, but she knows that the fleeting dream of living free and for the moment ended in the awful tragedy of AIDS. Paglia believes that history demonstrates we are created and defined by an unfair, unfeeling natural world.

The ancient Greeks understood our powerlessness, and through their pagan religion and philosophy explained and dealt with this. According to Paglia, no one has significantly improved on what the Greeks knew. As products of our nature and our history, we face a dangerous life full of sexual traps and daunting choices. Paglia thinks that this is just grand; it gives life excitement and challenges our man or womanhood. This is a book of and about passion.

Sex, Art and American Culture is important because Paglia represents a new kind of thinking about education and scholarship. Or perhaps she represents a very old tradition, but she has transformed the presentation of her ideas into a series of gonzo essays: *Hunter Thompson Goes to College*. She should be taken seriously because she is smart and honest, but I think even she would admit that she goes too far. Maybe that is the counterbalance we need against those who would prevent us from expressing our thoughts because they are hurtful, upsetting, dangerous or unpopular. Paglia is a fierce American satirist; nowhere else could she flourish but here.

She also has included in her book a very amusing index: Look up — chicken, rubber; Crocker, Betty; Naugahyde, zebra.☞