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ATG Interviews Meris Mandernauch

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The Odd Case of Book Reviews from page 40

not those charges were true, we cannot on the one hand insist on anonymity for referee's reports in order to reduce or eliminate bias, and then act surprised or skeptical when a reviewer who does know an author's identity is suspected of having let bias intrude.

Personal considerations can produce favorable reviews no less than unfavorable ones. There can be arrant cronyism. And when a junior faculty member, or an Associate Professor angling for a promotion, reviews a book by a major senior scholar in the same specialty, one expects, at the least, a certain caution on the part of the reviewer.

Editors should do their best to prevent cases like those just mentioned. They also should be wary of self-initiated, unsolicited book reviews. Some journals choose to bar such submissions; at the least, editors who receive unsolicited reviews should do some checking about possible motives.

In some situations where bias threatens to rear its head, it is not always clear which way the editor should decide. For example, book reviewers should generally be specialists in the area of the book they are reviewing. But if the reviewer is a person of stature, his or her name is likely to be mentioned in the book, and the reviewer's work may have been discussed in the book at some length. (It has been said that a scholar is someone who upon receiving a book immediately looks for his name in the index.) If the reviewer's name isn't mentioned or isn't featured, bias may again infect the review. How should the editor proceed? If he or she assigns the review to a non-specialist, the editor sacrifices expertise. To be sure, even anonymity in a referee's report is no guarantee against bias resulting from an author neglecting or disputing the referee's work. Indeed, the problem is arguably less severe in the case of a published book review because the audience may pick up on the conflict of interest. But the editor has a dilemma nonetheless. A helpful editorial strategy is to vary or rotate book reviewers in a particular subfield, since using the same reviewer several times means that each review could be tinged by bias in one direction or another.

To make discussion balanced and interesting, some editors specifically assign books to reviewers who they know will not agree with the author. Some book reviewers feel and express admiration for books they disagree with, but too often disagreement results in a negative and even harsh review. Giving the book review to an ideological adversary advances the goal of conversation very well, but it could have an unfair impact on the author's reputation, (even granted that getting a bad review may be preferable to not being reviewed at all and that one bad review won't necessarily ruin a reputation).

Another controversial issue is whether bias affects editors' selections of books for review. Some have charged that, in assigning reviews, journals favor books from high-pres-

tige presses. They label this preference a bias. At least one journal editor confesses that his journal's reviews are tilted in that direction, but he defends this result. He argues that while title selections are made on independent grounds, the high-prestige presses tend to have the best books and to attract the most interesting and important authors. A book editor from a less prestigious press, however, sought to rebut this assertion. He responded that the referees for his press, like those for the high-prestige presses, are drawn from the world's top scholars, and that acquisition editors at the elite presses are not necessarily wiser than those at other presses. An empirical resolution of this dispute — e. g., do reviews of books by high-prestige publishers really dominate? Where do good authors submit their manuscripts? — would require data. Regarding the normative question — *should* they dominate? — there appears to be no reason why books from certain presses should be favored, at least in terms of the first two goals of book reviews mentioned earlier: guiding consumers and conferring credentials on authors. Furthermore, once an editor is convinced there is a correlation between prestige presses and interest or importance, the possibility of that editor's ignoring books of great value due to bias becomes strong. Books from high-prestige presses certainly do not have a monopoly on importance and the ability to generate good conversation.

Summing Up

I close by quoting a 1979 statement by

editors of a publication (called simply *Review*) devoted to book reviews:

As long as universities fail to reward worthwhile reviewing and as long as editors pay little attention to reviews, we may continue to expect many reviewers to write hurriedly, to impose lax standards, and to turn out comments that are more often "cute," emotive, or biased than fair-minded or painstaking. Such performances, often shot through with backscratching and cronyism, will not be taken seriously by universities, and so the circle will go on and on (**James O. Hoge** and **James L. W. West III**, "Academic Book Reviewing: Some Problems and Suggestions," *Scholarly Publishing* 11, 1 (1979): 41).

I confess that in this piece I have violated my own strictures by not providing chapter and verse for my claims about the current state of affairs. But the thirty-year old admonition just quoted will, I think, resonate with contemporary scholars in a variety of disciplines, notwithstanding the progress that has been made over the years in the book review process. 🐼

*Author's Note: Certain of the issues treated here are discussed more fully, with references, in David Shatz, **Peer Review: A Critical Inquiry** (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), ch. 4.*

ATG Interviews Meris Mandernach

Collection Management Librarian James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Meris, you are engaged in a summer research project. Tell us about it.*

MM: In April 2008, I became the Collection Management Librarian at **James Madison University (JMU)**. As a means of orienting myself to my new position, I met with all of the liaisons at **JMU**. Each liaison at **JMU** is responsible for reference, instruction, and collection development/management of at least one department. Several liaisons suggested that a workshop in the general principles of collection management would be beneficial in order to develop a holistic view of their area of the collection at **JMU**. The goal of this summer leave is to visit other institutions, in-state and out-of-state, to examine how they train subject specialists/bibliographers in the areas of collection management and gather ideas for training liaisons at **JMU**. I focused my visits to universities of a similar size/make-up as **JMU**, schools that have a clustered approach to collection development, or schools that have exemplary collection programs.

ATG: *Where have you gone and who have you interviewed? What have you learned?*

MM: My target is to visit five to seven schools as part of this research leave. I visited **Miami University of Ohio** (**Aaron Shrimplin**), **Indiana University** (**Charla Lancaster**, **Lynda Clendenning**, **Angela Courtney**, **Robert Goehlert**, **Moirra Smith**, and **Julie Bobay**), **Virginia Tech** (**Paul Metz**), **The College of Charleston** (**Katina Strauch**, **Tom Gilson**, **Bob Neville**, and **Sheila Seaman**), **University of Virginia** (**Carol Hunter**, **Carla Lee**, **Dawn Waller**, **Lynda White**, and **Esther Onega**), and **Longwood University** (**Virginia Kinman**, and **Patricia Howe**). I also met with the **OhioLINK** State-wide Library Depository Coordinator (**Donna Straley**) where I learned some techniques for coordinating projects and individuals at various locations. I also spoke on the phone with the collection management coordinator at **Appalachian State**, **John Abbott**.

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I should warn you that I'm still processing the information from the interviews as I'm still in the midst of the data gathering stage. However, at this point I've learned that some of the procedures currently in place at JMU serve our population effectively, while other processes have room for improvement. I have found that collection work is varied based on a number of factors including: size of collection, size of school, number of selectors, number of staff, mission of the library, and mission of the school. It has been very interesting to see how collections are defined at each institution and which department is responsible for overseeing collection work. Though the process of collection management varies from school to school, a constant theme exhibited at each institution is open communication, particularly in regards to budgetary decision making processes. Additionally I have found that training of selectors, either those new to the subject area or new to the profession, are wildly different from school to school. At some institutions there is a lot of hand-holding of new selectors while other collection managers are given free reign and encouraged to "learn as you go." I look forward to delving further into the transcripts to tease out other trends from the interviews.

ATG: *You are planning to develop a workshop series to train collection management librarians. Can you tell us more? And will you be talking about this at the upcoming 2009 Charleston Conference in November?*

MM: I intend to create a multi-week workshop series for JMU liaisons to orient them to the basic principles of collection management. I plan to cover topics of weeding, subject policies, the role of the collection development committee, the approval plan, gifts, new resources, and future trends in collections. The intent is that liaisons could choose which sessions they would like to attend and brush up on those particular skills. As for the **Charleston Conference**, I'm working on a proposal to present the findings from my summer research.

ATG: *Tell us about the JMU Library and specifically about Collection Management. How many employees are in your area? What is your materials budget?*

MM: Collection Management is a relatively new department at JMU. It was created in April 2008. The Collection Management Department at JMU is responsible for year-end library statistics, liaison statistical requests (circulation, cost/use, accreditation reports, and weeding statistics), journal and database statistics management, trials for electronic resources, replacements for lost or damaged materials, gift books, configuration of the approval plan, and updating/maintaining a database of information about our subscription resources. We also troubleshoot off-campus access issues to our subscription resources. Collection Management also gathers other data to support liaisons and the collection development committee in the collection development endeavors of the library. Within the Collection

against the grain people profile

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Meris Mandernach

BORN AND LIVED: Decatur, IL.

EARLY LIFE: Thought I wanted to be an orthodontist.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:

2003-2004: **Loyola University Chicago**, Instruction Coordinator Science Library

2004-2006: **Loyola University Chicago**, Science Librarian

2006-2008: **James Madison University**, Science Librarian

2008-present: **James Madison University**, Collection Management Librarian

ALA Member

FAVORITE BOOKS: Mixture of fiction and non-fiction, though I love company histories as well as children's books.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Hope to continue to innovate and grow in this profession and love my job.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:

My fingers are crossed for a greater push toward open access to information. It will be very interesting to see how **Google** continues to impact the industry. The focus may switch to more user education on finding information through portals than owning the information housed in a building. 🐼

Management Department there is one librarian, one full-time staff, and two part-time staff.

ATG: *You/your library have/has recently implemented a cluster concept? Can you give us more details?*

MM: In order to explain the cluster concept we implemented at JMU it may be useful to define the scope of our collections committee. The Collection Development Committee (CDC) at JMU plans, organizes, and monitors activities related to collection development, evaluation and maintenance for all types of information resources. The committee is committed to a global view of collections and develops policies and guidelines for collection development, including collection maintenance, analysis, and assessment of the collections. The CDC has the primary responsibility for managing continuing expenditure commitments (e.g., periodicals, licensed electronic resources) and makes decisions on major purchases and licenses in response to recommendations from librarians, university faculty, and the library Collection Management Department. The Collection Management Librarian serves as the permanent chair. The Associate Dean for Technical Services is a voting ex-officio member of the committee. In addition, one liaison from each standing cluster (Arts and Humanities; Science, Technology, and Business; and Health and Behavioral Sciences) will serve renewable three-year terms. Members selected from a cluster are expected to rotate. The clustered approach was implemented during Summer 2008 in an attempt to make the decision-making process of the CDC more transparent. The committee is currently

evaluating the clustered approach to determine its effectiveness, both in terms of purpose and membership.

ATG: *What is the difference between collection development and collection management? There are predictions of all user-driven purchasing and the end of collection development as we know it. Do you have any comments/predictions?*

MM: In my mind Collection Development is a subset of Collection Management. Management of a collection involves weeding, addressing changes in the curriculum, responding to user needs, and handling preservation issues as well as collection development. While user-driven purchasing does have its advantages, it is unclear that users would generate enough requests to fully expend a materials budget. I would predict that collections of the future will be a mixture of both user-driven purchasing and librarian selected materials. This approach would blend the expertise of researchers in the discipline with the experience of collection managers, who provide holistic views of collections. I think the more important challenge facing those developing collections is that of promoting and marketing the materials the library owns and leases.

ATG: *Tell us about yourself. Where are you from originally? What do you like to do? Read? Anything you want to tell us?*

MM: I'm originally from the Soybean Capital of the U.S. (Decatur, IL) and after heading to Ohio for a B.A in Chemistry from the **College of Wooster**, I bounced back and forth between Illinois and Ohio before heading to the

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At the only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

The Editorial Side of Things: Q&A with Carol Saller, Senior Editor, Manuscript Editor, University of Chicago Press

@Brunning enjoys people on the publishing & editorial side of things. We are proud to introduce new friend, **Carol Saller**, author and editor at the **University of Chicago Press**. Carol writes about her passion for editing in her new book, the *Subversive Copy Editor* (University of Chicago Press) and at her blog. She also edits the popular Q&A column for the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

@Brunning: *Starting with the cocktail party question: what is a copy editor? What's your day like?*

CS: (You might want to get your martini before I start.) Days when I sit at the computer and edit a manuscript all day are rare. Today was more typical: I proofread jacket copy for a book I had copyedited, checked the revised page proofs of another project and proofread its index, phoned an author to figure out how a chunk of his text got dropped from his page proofs (typesetter's error) and how another chunk got duplicated (my goof) and how to fix it, attended a meeting to discuss why production schedules for a certain book series had lengthened in the last four years, evaluated the readiness of eight new manuscripts so the managing editor could assign them, and started on the paperwork for sending a manuscript to typesetting.

@Brunning: *Your new book, the Subversive Copy Editor, was just published and William Safire highlighted it in a recent On Language column in the Sunday New York Times Magazine. I'll bite — what is so subversive about copy editing?*

CS: Well, you caught me out. I don't really have much potential as a subversive. But so many copy editors — especially inexperienced ones — take their style guides as sacred texts, I began to *feel* subversive in counseling them to be more flexible and break rules when it helps the reader. And as a colleague pointed out, *The Subversive Copy Editor* is a much more fun title than *The Sensible Copy Editor*.

@Brunning: *I grew up in the typewriter era. The bible for correct format and references was Turabian. I'll admit more than one teacher deducted a point or two for not "following Turabian." Did you get to call her Kate or was it Professor Turabian? Does she still influence you?*

Alas, the late great **Kate** was before my time and didn't actually work at the Press. Nor was she a professor. (In fact, she never attended college.) Rather, **Kate Turabian** was dissertation secretary at the **University of Chicago** until 1958. Although she lived nearly thirty years after that and continued to update her style guide, sadly my tenure didn't overlap with hers, and we never met. In high school **Turabian's Manual for Writers** provided my first exposure to style rules, but as a professional copy editor I have always used *The Chicago Manual of Style*, since **Turabian** is geared for students writing papers and dissertations, while *CMOS* is for writers of scholarly books and journal articles.

@Brunning: *You are the editor of the Chicago Manual of Style's Q&A column. Has any question ever really stumped you?*

CS: Oh, good grief yes. Many! Daily. The stumpers usually concern how to cite a difficult source. Librarians especially will sympathize, knowing how many people are engaged in writing and editing arcane, inscrutable

matter in obscure languages by unspellably transliterated authors whose own sources are questionably documented and available only in subscription-based databases every other full moon...

@Brunning: *Students love software that automates endnotes. Any comment?*

CS: If the software is ever perfected and writers learn how to use it properly, it will be a cause for great rejoicing. The potential is there. Occasionally I see a manuscript where it's used well, resulting in a small miracle of organization and consistency. More often, though, it's used ineptly, and the mess it makes of notes and bibliography can be maddening.

@Brunning: *I love Librarians so much I became one. I can travel to the antipodes and attend the annual antipodal library conference and we talk the same, we know each other. Do copy editors feel the same?*

CS: Yes, I believe so. Perhaps librarians experience the disadvantages as well, however, that people you meet at cocktail parties think they have to be on good behavior around you? Around us, they think they have to speak polished prose; around you, I suppose they think they have to whisper.

@Brunning: *Another librarian question: we never know when we're done. There is always another book to buy, journal to evaluate and subscribe to, and always another question to answer. Knowing when the job is done is a theme in your book. When is the copy complete?*

CS: When I say so. There's a section in *The Subversive Copy Editor* called "Working to Rule" that urges copy editors to put down the pencil when they've given their best in the amount of time they're being paid for. Perfection isn't the goal, because there's no such thing as a perfect manuscript.

@Brunning: *User-produced content or Web 2.0 — what is the copy editors role in this open access to the word?*

CS: Although plenty of text goes cyber without the benefit of copy-editing, content on the best sites is professionally edited in the same way printed works and advertisements have always been. Readers can tell the difference. There will always be a place for copyediting; the question is whether it will ever be fully automated. At the moment that seems unlikely...but who knows?

@Brunning: *What grade does Wikipedia get for readable and comprehensible prose?*

CS: I suppose a slightly above-average grade would be safest, so let's say B-.

@Brunning: *You work at one of the most fascinating places — the University of Chicago and the esteemed University of Chicago Press. Some of my favorite authors wrote for the press — I have all of Wayne Booth's books. Any memorable blue pencil moments you can share with us?*

CS: As it happens, I copyedited one of **Wayne Booth's** books, *For the Love of It*, and his habit was to deliver his manuscript and page proofs personally. He rode his bike everywhere, pretty much to the end of his life, and would stride into my office, sit down, and chat without ever taking his helmet off. I wondered if he wanted to be prepared for a quick getaway.

@Brunning: *Thank you for a career devoted to making books on our shelves (and online) more readable and useable and writing so well about your art! As well — thank you for the edit which we preserve...*

Interview — Meris Mandernach from page 44

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for my MS in Library and Information Science. My first professional library job was as the Instruction Coordinator at the Science library at **Loyola University Chicago**. In 2006, I came to **James Madison University** in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I love to travel to visit with friends. When in Harrisonburg and not at work, I love to learn new crafting techniques such as: throwing pottery, quilting and spinning yarn from llama fiber. 🐫

Another Medium Moment: The New Yorker Digital Reader

Is it device, delight, or just plain digital — @Brunning explores...

@Brunning caught **C Span's** book network late, late, one sleepless weekend night recently. Some authors were participating in a panel on U.S. torture during **W's** presidency. A side-story emerged, though, about the journalist's role in investigative reporting when all the newspapers and magazines were gone. *Newsweek's* **Charles Fineman**, commented that technology, as we speak, was developing new ways to present news

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