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A Bibliotecal Heresy -- Response from Walter de Gruyter

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culations worth three or four other books that could be purchased for the cost of one Benjamins or de Gruyter title? If I used my money differently, I might be purchasing many more potential circulations than I am by sticking with expensive, well-reputed publishers.

On the other hand, I can’t stop buying Benjamins and Kluwer titles without risking faculty ire. If publications of the most prestigious international presses are not available in anticipation of need, I could appear to be either incompetent or contrarian. I may inconvenience the chaired professor or the dissertation grad student who needs the most specialized material. In the long run I risk reducing the quality of the collections for some potential short-term gains in circulation. By favoring Kluwer and Benjamins titles which are mostly in English, I would be contributing to the decline of German as a language of scholarship in our collection—ironic and sad for a West European bibliographer [sic].

So, I am torn between the need to purchase high-quality but expensive books that will make a richer collection but will rarely circulate and the possibility of favoring less expensive (English-language) titles from less prestigious presses in Europe. It is tempting to buy four or five of these instead of the de Gruyter title. And I might actually get more circulation from those than from the de Gruyter title.

Now that so many titles cost well over one hundred dollars each, I feel obliged to do some investigation to make a sound decision. (Of course deliberation by bibliographers adds further to the cost of purchasing expensive monographs.) On an experimental basis I am trying to cooperate more with Duke University’s library on expensive titles from European presses.

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A Bibliotecal Heresy — Response from Walter de Gruyter

by Dr. Anke Beck (Editor in Chief, Mouton de Gruyter)

Column Editor: Bob Nardini (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services) <nardini@ybp.com>

W e at Walter de Gruyter Publishers are somewhat surprised by the ongoing debate about the price structure of books published by our company, and gratefully accept the opportunity to respond directly to John Rutledge’s article “A Bibliotecal Heresy: Cost over Quality?”

The above-mentioned article was written by a librarian operating under financial constraints made even worse by the current exchange rate. We acknowledge, and hope it is clear, that our response is not aimed toward John Rutledge personally. Rather, we take our response as a welcome opportunity to introduce our publishing policy and to explain why some books will always be more expensive than others; why it is difficult to compare some publishers with others; and why, in conclusion, we think it is not appropriate to denounce one particular publishing house for pursuing “bibliotecal heresy” when their goals may be totally different from other publishing houses.

There is a puzzling element to articles of this nature, commonly known as the “apple and oranges problem.” Walter de Gruyter is not just one company, with one program and one price structure. Rather, it consists of many entities, with two primary divisions. The first is Walter de Gruyter, the parent company, with its humanities departments including Theology, Classics, Philosophy, Archeology, German Literature and (German) Linguistics, and the Natural Sciences and Medicine divisions. All of the aforementioned departments publish mainly in German. Second, there is Mouton de Gruyter, which was known as Mouton Publishers until acquired by Walter de Gruyter in 1976. More than 90 percent of this division’s publications are in English. Mouton de Gruyter is therefore the only division that is comparable to Kluwer and Benjamins, the publishers highlighted by the author of “A Bibliotecal Heresy.” Both Benjamins and Mouton are scholarly publishers with a core program in linguistics.

It is presumptuous to believe that the circulation of a German-language book in an American library would be as high as an English-language book in the same library. Although Germans sometimes choose to ignore this fact, the ability to read in the language of the philosophers is lower than the German writing academia acknowledges. That, however, does not make contents written in that language less important. It is true for a large percentage of Walter de Gruyter publications that the subject matter is German original texts (like Kant continued on page 86

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Leaving the Books Behind: Preservation Woes

by Stephanie A. Kobezak (University of South Carolina)

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Column Editor’s Note: Stephanie is a distance education student at the University of South Carolina. — TM

Many of us participating in a distance education program in library and information science have had experience working in a library setting. Personally, I had the opportunity to work in the Preservation Department at an academic library. While there, I had a variety of interesting experiences including inadvertently hiring klutzy student assistants to handle book repairs, odd patron requests, bindery glitches, wet books, items that at one point in time might have been a book, and interesting book repair tales. One such memorable event was an eruption of glue at my workstation. Now, there are various types of eruptions but this was unique for it shouldn’t have occurred. It happened so quickly, yet so slowly. The immediate event, the spewing forth of PVA, was rapid. Now just in case you are unfamiliar with PVA, it is officially polyvinyl acetate adhesive, which has a pleasant smooth, creamy consistency. As a main component of the preservation supplies, it resides in a good size container generally kept full. Though, that situation was reevaluated. As the process of cleaning the work area came to a close after completing numerous repairs, the lid to the PVA was tossed aside in a violent (okay, maybe violent is too strong, but it isn’t, for this staff just shoved the lid off). Anyway, the PVA spewed forth everywhere. Within milliseconds, there was an immense PVA flow engulfing everything in its path. First the brushes, followed by the scalpel, then the scissors, only to swallow the desk entirely. Okay, I exaggerate a bit but only about the scalpel. I remember thinking that I should do something, like panic, but I only watched in slow motion in a haze (perhaps PVA fumes?). As time crept by (flowed might be more appropriate), I contemplated my options - hmm, I could just hide in the stacks until the end of the day or simply return to my desk and appear surprised when a co-worker noticed the floor was sticky. As I contemplated my next course of action, I did notice the floor - it was oozing with PVA. Hmm, maybe no one will notice. The trash can, though directly in line with the flow-

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