



# ACCESS

## NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AT NOTRE DAME

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### The Future of Medieval Studies: The Librarian's Role

by Mary C. English

One of the greatest challenges facing academic librarians is the ongoing struggle to achieve acceptance as full participants in the educational process in the university setting. As professionals in our field and as members of the academic community we strive for recognition and appreciation of the contributions we make both to the teaching and research endeavors of our teaching faculty colleagues and to the overall goals of our respective institutions. Such acceptance as equal partners in the academic process is perhaps more easily gained by the subject specialist librarian who, either through collection development activity with members of specific university departments or through reference work, interacts with faculty as a recognized expert in a particular subject area. The combination of academic expertise in one or more fields and direct contact with other faculty provides a vehicle for the academic librarian to promote his or her role in the educational process by demonstrating a command of the literature in their area of specialization, an intimate knowledge of how that literature is organized and how it can be accessed, an awareness of current issues in the field at large and a familiarity with local programs and the specific concerns and interests of the faculty in their institution.

University programs which cut across several disciplines offer special challenges to the academic librarian. Programs in medieval studies, both graduate and undergraduate, historically have encompassed the areas of theology, philosophy, history, language and literature, law (both civil and canon), fine arts, liturgical studies and others, in addition to so-called auxiliary fields, which include paleography, diplomatics, heraldry and archaeology. The traditional focus of medieval studies in North America has until now been largely on a Western, Christian and European Middle Ages. Thus, by its very nature, medieval studies has been reliant on the availability of primary and secondary sources in several European languages and this, combined with its interdisciplinarity, has proved challenging for medievalists and librarians alike. With the exception of bibliographical aids such as the *International Medieval Bibliography* and *Medioevo Latino* which provide access to current literature published in all the disciplines which constitute medieval studies, the medievalist and the specialist librarian must acquire varying degrees of familiarity with the tools which are available for each of those separate disciplines, but which do not limit their coverage to the medieval period. This variety of subjects, together with the predominance of materials and bibliographical aids in languages other than English and the equal importance of

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### Libraries, Librarians and the First Amendment

by J. Douglas Archer

Librarians are often portrayed in the media as relatively mild mannered, retiring individuals who enjoy nothing more than a quiet day spent stamping due dates in the backs of books. If you wish to discover just how inaccurate this image can be, try asking a librarian to remove a book, any book, from your local library's shelves. You will in all likelihood encounter the proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove: a polite receipt of your request, a professional description of applicable library policies and a firm refusal to do any such thing.

It was not always thus. Early in this century Arthur E. Bostwick in his inaugural address as president of the American Library Association (ALA) could say:

"Some are born great; some achieve greatness; some have greatness thrust upon them." It is this way that the librarian has become a censor of literature ... Books that distinctly commend what is wrong, that teach how to sin and tell how pleasant sin is, sometimes with and sometimes without the added sauce of impropriety, are increasingly popular, tempting the author to

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retrospective and current bibliography, creates an extremely complex literature structure which requires special expertise in the areas of collection development, acquisitions, cataloging and reference service.

At a recent conference sponsored by the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame ("The Past and Future of Medieval Studies," February 20-22, 1992) it became clear that, if anything, the boundaries which currently encompass the literature of medieval studies will have to be stretched even farther to include new disciplines and new methodologies. For example, a growing appreciation for the benefits which could be gained through increased dialogue between medievalists and Islamicists, Byzantinists and specialists in Jewish studies was apparent. A trend in this direction would naturally have implications for the scope of the "literature of medieval studies," both in terms of language and geography, as the traditional "borders" for collection development would be pushed farther to the south and to the east to include coverage of northern Africa, the Middle East, eastern Europe and parts of Asia.

Some of the most animated discussions at the conference centered around questions of the appropriateness of new methodologies and theoretical approaches which share perspectives from the theories of feminist literary criticism, postcolonialism and anthropology. Questions of how medieval studies is done today and how our perceptions of medieval culture have been shaped or biased by how medieval studies was done in the past are leading many contemporary medievalists to acknowledge and consider, if not draw on, the theories and methodologies of disciplines which never concerned them before. These innovations, which challenge some of the most fundamental concepts in

medieval studies (e.g. the text as fundamental source), also open up new areas for consideration in collection development and access for any library which supports the study of the Middle Ages.

The conference also touched on advances in information technology which have had their effect on medieval studies. Many collections of texts are now available in CD-ROM format which provides the scholar with the ability to analyze and compare vast amounts of primary sources in a fraction of the time it would take using traditional printed and critical editions. However, the substantial financial investment often required to subscribe to comprehensive collections in such formats may be prohibitive to many libraries or have a negative impact on other areas of collection development in this era of tight and shrinking budgets. Thus, the specialist librarian's ability to assess the potential use to be made of such items and to communicate to teaching and research faculty the implications of acquiring or not acquiring them is crucial.

The cover article in the March issue of *Perspectives*, the newsletter of the American Historical Association, identifies a need for a "faculty bill of rights for library services." It calls on teaching and research faculty to familiarize themselves with library operations and to work in partnership with library staff so they are better equipped "to provide the best possible service" to the academic community as a whole and to individual patrons. To address the complexities of medieval studies, there must be communication and cooperation between the library and the teaching and research faculty, together with mutual respect for the expertise of each.

### **Tax Window Still Open a Crack**

The special tax provision that allowed taxpayers to deduct the full, fair market value for donations of art works, manuscripts and historical items in 1991 has been extended by Congress for six months. Please note that this tax relief will therefore apply to all gifts given to the University Libraries before July 1, 1992.

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imitate them, the publishers to produce, the bookseller to exploit. Thank Heaven they do not tempt the librarian. (Office for Intellectual Freedom, *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 3rd ed., Chicago: American Library Association, 1989, p. xv.)

In the intervening years librarians have yielded to temptation, to the lure of the First Amendment's freedom of the press made manifest in free and equal access to intentionally diverse library collections. A contemporary expression of the profession's position is the *Library Bill of Rights* as last revised by the ALA Council in 1980.

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

1. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
2. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgement of free expression and free access to ideas.
5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, race, background, or views.
6. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use. (Office for Intellectual Freedom, *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 3rd ed., Chicago: American Library Association, 1989, p. 14.)

As with most policy statements promulgated by professional associations, this one is not endorsed or observed by every member, much less by every librarian. However, the ALA works very hard to encourage these views and to support libraries and librarians in their opposition to censorship in all its forms. This organizational support is exhibited in many ways.

The association and most of its semi-autonomous units maintain intellectual freedom committees, whose task it is to monitor developments inside and outside of the profession and to recommend policies or actions consistent with the principles enumerated in the *Library Bill of Rights*. The Indiana Library Federation also maintains a similar committee. The public rarely becomes aware of such activity unless a particular incident happens to make the nightly news. Recent regional activities include a challenge in federal court to an Indianapolis pornography-as-violation-of-civil-rights ordinance and support for the Niles Public Library librarian and board during visits by the Ku Klux Klan.

In addition to these somewhat bureaucratic structures typical of many professional societies, the ALA includes a grassroots oriented organization known as the Intellectual Freedom Round Table. It is now the largest of such groups within ALA with over 2,000 members. Its primary functions are to sponsor programs at ALA meetings to further educate the general membership and to provide a means of networking for local librarians.

The Freedom to Read Foundation, an autonomous but closely related organization, supports legal action in defense of intellectual freedom or in opposition to library related censorship attempts. A foundation rather than an association, this group annually solicits contributions from the ALA membership and from other library related constituencies.

Lastly, the ALA, through its Office for Intellectual Freedom, provides professional staff support for librarians and libraries engaged in the defense of first amendment rights. Judith F. Krug, its director for the last twenty years, and her assistant, Anne E. Levinson, are vigorous, articulate advocates. Chances are that you have seen Krug, if only briefly, on a network news report. If your local library is ever in trouble, you could do it few greater favors than to call her at 312-280-4222 or 800-545-2433.

While librarians may still have an image problem, the substance of their commitment is no longer in doubt. A strong dedication to intellectual freedom has become an integral part of the profession's self-understanding.