

[Review]. *Gendering Library History*, edited by Evelyn Kerslake and Nickianne Moody

Carmichael, J. V., Jr. (2002) [Review]. *Gendering Library History*, edited by Evelyn Kerslake and Nickianne Moody. *Libraries & Culture* 37 (Spring): 197-200.

Made available courtesy of University of Texas Press: <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/journals/jlc.html>

*****Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from the University of Texas Press. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.*****

Gendering Library History. Edited by Evelyn Kerslake and Nickianne Moody. Liverpool: Media Critical and Creative Arts, Liverpool John Moores University and the Association for Research in Popular Fictions, 2000. 241 pp. [pounds sterling]32.17, \$46.88. ISBN 0-9527-9780-5.

In spite of its off-putting title, this important collection, representing papers given by English and American scholars in England in May 1999 at a conference by the same name, at long last answers some questions about the status of women in librarianship in the otherwise most familiar of Western European countries. As for the title, besides this reviewer's antipathy for making verbs out of nouns, it promises a bit more than it delivers. If "sex" describes a binary (male/female) or at most, if one adds hermaphrodites, and the two trans-gendered possibilities, a five-sided biological phenomenon, then "gender" implies social roles and constructions based upon sex. While not all or even a majority of the essays go beyond the description of inequalities in the profession based upon sex to discuss gender roles, they do include aspects of sex not normally covered in a collection of this kind, namely, sexual minorities and men's studies. The interdisciplinary aspects of discussions that followed the papers, referred to in the acknowledgments section, are not reflected in the content of the majority of papers. On considering one wearisome Foucauldian exercise in postmodern terminology (31-39), this may be a blessing; expanding our knowledge of women in library history abroad alone would justify the collection.

While several of the authors make references to historian Dee Garrison's benchmark study of American women librarians (*Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian in America, 1876-1920* [New York: Free Press, 1979]), none refers to the work of American sociologist Christine Williams on the effects of sex on gender roles among men and women in feminized professions (for example, *Gender Differences at Work: Women and Men in Nontraditional Occupations* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989]), which would certainly support a more germane discussion of gender in librarianship. Throughout the volume, writers pay tribute either explicitly or in references to pioneer feminist library historian, Suzanne Hildenbrand, and one of the writers contributed to Hildenbrand's acclaimed collection, *Reclaiming the Library Past: Writing the Women In* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1995). Hildenbrand, along with American Mary Niles Maack and Britons Alistair Black, Margaret Kinnell, and Paul Sturges, served as plenary speakers, yet Hildenbrand's contribution is inexplicably and singularly absent from this volume.

The editors have divided the fourteen papers into four sections that provide "gendered insight" into "library practitioners and practices covering the years 1660 to the 1980s" (2). Thematically arranged, more or less, these are (1) general theoretical considerations of the writing of library history; (2) the women's history perspective; (3) the lesbian and feminist history perspective; and (4) the men's studies perspective, including male homosexuality.

Paul Sturges's *apologia pro vita sua* eloquently reviews his prolific writings on nineteenth-century English public library history with the ostensible aim of enumerating his "missed opportunities" in researching the place of women in these libraries. He makes the important point, however, that changes wrought by industrialization, far more than "gendered" concerns, dominated the evidence with which he had to work. Certainly, given the

wholesale destruction of library records in some American libraries, detailed analysis of nineteenth-century library use such as Christine Pawley's recently published study *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) are practically nonexistent.

Clare Beck expands her discussion of the career of Adelaide Hasse, "the difficult woman" of library history whose career she explored in the Hildenbrand collection, to question the terms by which powerful and professionally aggressive women are described compared with their male contemporaries. Her catalog of egregious (if unconscious) linguistic discrimination in the writing of library history implicates women as well as men. It is a classic essay that deserves to be read by all library school students. Beck notes, as has this reviewer, "remarkably little interest in stimulating theoretical concepts of gender in library historiography" (21), which she attributes to disciplinary tunnel vision but lays blame for these attitudes at the feet of inherent organizational characteristics more than to the sexism of individual transgressors.

Jeff Schneider and Ann O'Brien Cockerham describe "heteronormative" library practices that impede the equal access to library materials for sexual minorities and even for users interested in "erotica" collections. While they do not convince this reader that the jazzed-up postmodern terminology of queer studies will win any converts to a more tolerant treatment of gay and lesbian library workers or users interested in sex, period, their exposition on the treatment of nonreproductive sex in libraries, particularly in controversial collection development decisions involving rare and valuable collections of erotica, are a valuable addition to the landmark literature on this subject (e.g., Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen, *Pornography and the Law: The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography*, rev. ed. [New York: Bell, 1975]).

American library historians will be particularly interested in Chris Baggs's biographical sketch of Marian Frost and the feminist activities of the (two) Committees of Women Librarians (1913--1915). Baggs's discussion is lucid enough that the necessary historical background in the British women's rights movement may be inferred, although the more arcane aspects of the movement and the British certification process for librarians may call for a more general review of British library education and history from another source.

Mary Niles Maack's comparative biographical sketch of contemporaries Mary Wright Plummer (United States), Marie Pellechet (France), and Guilia Sacconi-Ricci (Italy) traces their friendship during Plummer's European travels and provides a fascinating insight into the varying cultural circumstances that led to each becoming "elite" authorities on bibliographical and bibliothecal practice in their native countries.

Margaret Kinnell Evans analyzes the position of women in managerial roles in the public service sector in Great Britain from the Second World War to the present day with an eye to comparative statistics for the United States. Linda Moore also adopts a comparative British-American perspective in surveying the "invisibility" of female library users in statistical reports issued by the government, individual British libraries, and the Library Association. Nickianne Moody explains how service in the "Booklovers" libraries of Boots Pharmaceutical Company provided a degree of upward mobility for young English women between the wars until such time as they married and respectability for spinsters who finished their careers in the service.

Two essays are indebted in different degrees to the scholarship of American historian Janice Radway (*Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001]). Janine Liladhar and Evelyn Kerslake examine the image of the library worker in two popular British romantic fiction series and in Smirnoff's advertising campaigns as a prelude to a discussion of the negligence of sex in statistical data for the library workforce. Val Williamson takes up the Woolfian theme of impediments to female authorship and highlights the growth of regional fiction as having made dedicated researchers of English working-class female authors. Susie West's essay on architectural versus social history of the private English library from 1660 to 1830 stretches the boundaries of the women's studies genre most successfully to incorporate philosophical, literary, and legal perspectives on women during that period.

Avril Roth's history of Lesbians in Libraries (LiL)--an organization founded independently of the Library Association in 1984--can be usefully compared to similar histories of the American Library Association Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table dedicated to sexual minorities. Nowhere in the present volume, incidentally, do British gay (male) librarians merit mention.

Alistair Black's study of the interwar Librarianship Masonic Circle provides a notable instance of male bonding and exclusivity within British librarianship, although his conception of the British male librarian stereotype, where bad male behavior is attributed to degrees of boyishness, is less than convincing since apparently it is drawn solely from personal opinion. More cogent is Wren Sidhe's study of the Seafarer's Education Service, which between the wars sought to anchor men in solid English heterosexual values and counter the popular if unstated image of homosexual "vice" among sailors. The collection concludes with a closely argued essay by Judith Bowen on the post-Revolutionary masculinization of the historical profession in France and its impact on French librarianship.

From this collection, we can surmise that due to many factors, not least among which are differences in prestige accorded to librarians in Britain, America, and various Continental nations, plus the value accorded to "pure" (i.e., noncommercial) intellectual labor in each of these areas, women have had a harder time penetrating and dismantling the old-boy club abroad than in the States. Due to the fact that the British have been more explicit about the significance of social class throughout their history than Americans, it is difficult to make sweeping comparative statements about sex or gender without caveats. In spite of sloppy editing (note that Lindy Moore's name changes to Linda Moore in the running head of her article, and Margaret Kinnell Evans appears under her maiden name in the introduction but nowhere else; sentence fragments rear their slapdash heads on pages 141ff.; there are a few typographical errors; and the editors should have included biographical statements for the authors) and the parochialism to which Americans have been heir since World War Two, this collection, as the first of its kind, deserves attention from a wide variety of readers.