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Review of the Book: Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900 by Bautz, Annika and James Gregory

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Review: Book Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900* by Annika and Gregory

Review by: Anders Tobiason

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The organization and objective, contextually driven design of *Silenced in the Library* invites readers to consider and come to their own conclusions about the nature and outcomes of book challenges and bans, as well as the larger literary and cultural significance of books in general as related to notions of intellectual freedom, literary quality, and propriety.

Compared to other texts on the subject, *Silenced in the Library* serves foremost as a reference tool, focusing on the contexts of the challenges themselves, rather than replicating any ideological or theoretical analyses of censorship or literary merit. In contrast to resources like Dawn Sova's extensive Literature Suppressed series, *Silenced in the Library* is a more concisely composed and researched retrospective, designed suitably for on-the-spot reference, readers advisory, and trivia, rather than in-depth scholarship and analysis. Jarvis brings new titles and authors into the conversation, with his range of included genres and publishing dates extending beyond the ALA-centric lists of usual suspects found in their Hit List series and popular guides such as Herbert Foerstel's *Banned in the U.S.A.*, while still holding space for those more notorious major players in this well-rounded collection.

In all, this is an accessible and navigable guide to texts central to the history and future of intellectual freedom, as well as a narrative recollection of evolving popular attitudes toward divisive topics, proving useful for librarians, educators, and anyone engaged in reader's advisory and book-adjacent education, as well as activists and readers of all kinds. *Silenced in the Library* would certainly be an asset in planning informed and engaging programming related to censorship and intellectual freedom for any literacy and library advocate.

Bautz, Annika, and James Gregory, eds. *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900*. New York: Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 978-1138593190. Hardcover: \$149.95.

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Walter Benjamin writes that “there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order.”¹ The essays in *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900* (Routledge, 2018) often give concrete examples of that dialectical tension, as well as illustrate the interesting and surprising ways in which order can be imposed on a collection. In this journey

the role of the collector takes center stage. The essays here fall broadly into two categories: Case studies of people and/or places, and broader studies of phenomena in certain places and/or time periods. The chapters are all highly divergent, making it difficult to find an overarching theme or methodology for the book. That being said, the social aspect of collecting does feature prominently in many chapters. In the best essays the reader is guided into the lives and libraries of these fascinating subjects by each author's exploration of their collection's inherent tensions. The book, as a whole, engages with many of the interesting scholarly conversations in the history of libraries (broadly defined) about how the image that a collector wished to portray to the world affects both the actual collection and its organization or cataloging. Each essay, despite investigating different subjects, brings original insight into how a collection is shaped by its collector(s). Many also wander through and around the idea of a collection as a kind of self-portrait: a concept that spans both time periods and geography.

Annika Bautz and James Gregory have wisely divided the book up into four parts: (1) "Renaissance Collectors"; (2) "Gentlemen and Their Libraries from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries"; (3) "Beyond Mere Records of Collecting: On Book Catalogues"; and (4) "Bibliomania." As a summary and introduction, the editors write that "these varied case studies allow us to explore the many social (and indeed emotional aspects) of practices of collecting and using text collections against diverse cultural backgrounds" (1). Diverse is a bit of a stretch, as only two essays have subjects outside of the British Isles, but the range of topics and time periods is impressively varied.

In part 1 the social aspect of a collection takes center stage. Robyn Adams and Louisiane Ferlier investigate the ways in which the Bodleian Library constructed its own image through the careful cataloging and displaying of books from donors of prestige. Both Catherine Sutherland's and Lucy Gwynn's chapters illuminate how one particular relationship can be used to help understand their collectors' habits and collecting evolution. Giulia Weston's investigation of Cardinal Bernardino Spada's collection of books, however, is truly exemplary. Weston weaves a tale of the Spada library as a place of both challenge and inspiration for theologians, scientists, and artists. The relationship between the painter Niccolò Tornoli and Cardinal Spada, and, more specifically, with Tornoli's painting *The Sacrifice of Mirtillo*, is central to the essay. Weston writes that "if Bernardino Spada's library should be interpreted as both an outward and inward 'self-portrait,' Tornoli's canvas could be assimilated to an 'official portrait' of Bernardino's passion for theatrical literature" (41).

Here one can clearly see how Weston frames her argument about vitality of the Spada library in terms of the creation of art and self-image. She writes intriguingly about how Spada's library is a self-portrait, as well as how the artists he surrounded himself with created works that could only have been done so with the library's specific resources. Thus the paintings are also portraits of the collection itself and a kind of ghost image of the collector.

The essays in part 2 are of a different sort, linked by the concept of a gentleman's library rather than a defined time period. Mary Chadwick and Shaun Evans's case study of Thomas Mostyn and Sophie Defrance's case study John Couch Adams will be of interest to scholars of those particular collectors. The standout essay in the group in terms of a broader audience is Susan Leedham's exploration of the "Displaying of the Cottonian Collection from 1791–1816" (104–18). She turns her attention to how we might understand the selling of much of the original collection under William Cotton II in light of how a gentleman collector would wish to portray his collection in the late eighteenth century. Her argument is quite engaging and she posits a far more nuanced and complicated take on what has often been deemed a mistake by Cotton II.

Part 3's essays touch on how and why a collector or group of collectors might have created a catalog to portray a particular aesthetic or public image. This is perhaps the most diverse section of the book with essays that span the theoretical to the international to the provincial. The section begins with Alex Wright's illustrative investigation into the changing concept of literary history as it pertains to the *Catalogus Bibliothecae Harleiana*. In the second essay, Luciane Scarato explores the catalogs of the Luso-Brazilian book trade, and then the section concludes with Annika Bautz's extensive overview of the Plymouth Public Library's nineteenth-century catalogs. Each is a fascinating deep dive into their subject and all certainly add critical dimensions to the conversation surrounding the history of cataloging and catalogers.

"Bibliomania," the title of part 4, is certainly fitting as each essay features some aspect of the mania that can surround collecting. Shayne Husbands explores how we might read the satire of the nineteenth century to find some of the realities of bibliomania and brings a real critical inquiry and method to bear ushering the reader through an important conceptual reimagining of the popular image of the bibliomaniac. James Gregory's illuminating discussion of the mania surrounding Whittaker's Golden *Magna Carta* shows just how quickly a collecting fad can get out of control. And finally, K. A. Manley's effusion on the importance of the library as a shared phenomenon is a fitting

closing for the book. Manley posits that a library's primary function must be to share its resources and thus also that a library is not just about books. Indeed he argues that the people who interact with the books are just as vital as the books themselves. The essay's subjects transverse Montaigne in the sixteenth century to Sir Charles Gavan Duffy in the late nineteenth century, with reading as a communal act binding these disparate figures together. Indeed, finishing the collection of essays with this idea is a particularly powerful statement.

The book complicates many of the categorizations regarding British collecting that have been predominant since the publication of Seymour de Ricci's opus, *English Collectors of Books and Manuscripts (1530–1930), and Their Marks of Ownership* (1960).² Many of the same subjects appear in the current book under review, but in far more complex ways. Edward Potten's "Beyond Bibliophilia: Contextualizing Private Libraries in the Nineteenth Century" (2015) is a more recent article that also muddies the traditional waters concerning collecting patterns.³ In fact, Potten argues that de Ricci's book cemented a kind of categorization of collecting habits that new research, both his and that of the essays in this book, often refutes. In a way *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900* can be seen as a response to the plea in the final line of Potten's article for more such refuting research.

This collection of essays has something for just about anyone interested in the history of collectors and their libraries. The book as a whole can feel quite disjointed due to the wildly different subjects of each of the chapters, but the scholarship contained within each chapter is universally quite excellent. The collected essays will certainly appeal to scholars of the history of British libraries, while others may just wish to read an essay or two on a particular subject. The tension between order and disorder in this collection of essays itself, in fact, might be seen to embody Benjamin's dialectic vision of the collector's life.

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 60.

2. Seymour De Ricci. *English Collectors of Books and Manuscripts (1530–1930), and Their Marks of Ownership* (London: Holland Press, 1960).

3. Edward Potten, "Beyond Bibliophilia: Contextualizing Private Libraries in the Nineteenth Century," *Library and Information History* 31, no. 2 (2015): 73–94.