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This paper examines the parallels in problems public libraries past and present have faced in providing the services patrons want and need, in particular those services of providing popular fiction and current technology. Both fiction and technology have been deemed controversial at times, and both have been argued against as being, at best, not a part of the public libraries' true mission, and at worst, a dangerous influence for harm. In the case of popular fiction, librarians' negative attitudes reflected the distrust that contemporary cultural critics felt for popular culture. In spite of these objections, public librarians eventually realized that they must provide the services people wanted in order for the public library to remain relevant. This realization leads us to implications for our present day version of the fiction debate, which is our challenge to provide the technology our patrons want and need in spite of limited resources.

Headings:

Fiction in libraries -- History -- 20th Century

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FICTION AND TECHNOLOGY: PARALLEL PROBLEMS FROM PUBLIC
LIBRARIES' PAST AND PRESENT

by
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For the public library, providing the technology (and assistance using that technology) that our patrons want and need, without privileging one of those categories over the other, is a problem. There is too much demand, and unfortunately, too little of nearly everything else. Anyone who has spent more than a day working in a public library would be hard-pressed to deny this, and studies also support such a view. In a 2008 survey conducted for "Public libraries and the Internet 2008-2009: issues, implications, and challenges," Bertot et al. found that

> Public libraries continue to expand the public access computing and Internet services and training available to patrons. As has been the case for several years, virtually all public libraries are connected to and offer public access to the Internet, with an increasing number offering wireless access as well. The vast majority also offer arange of services and training related to the Internet. While patron and community demand for Internet access, training, and services is so routinely extensive that most libraries cannot meet these needs during normal times, the unprecedented economic downturn has further stressed library resources through reduced operating hours and more demand for library services and resources — particularly Internet–based services (CNN, 2009). In addition, libraries continue to struggle with issues of infrastructure as the types of Internet–related services become more complex and bandwidth–intensive, require a range of building technology upgrades, and continual staff skills development.

What people want and need from the library in terms of technology is increasing, as providing that to them is becoming increasingly difficult. This is made all the more unfortunate when one further considers the implications of the reduction in the operating hours of many libraries: "Public libraries continue to stand as virtually the only social institution that ensures that free public Internet access" and are often "the only provider

of free public Internet and free public computer access in their communities or service areas" (Bertot et al.). Thus, 'These drops in hours are likely related directly to downturn in the economy, negatively affecting many libraries where the services they provide would be most desperately needed" (Bertot et al.).

The challenge that this state of affairs presents to libraries is indeed worrying, but it is encouraging to note that libraries have already faced a similar problem and prevailed. New technologies such as the Internet and Web 2.0 may be fairly recent developments; however, the problems public libraries inevitably face when something new comes along are not. Those have been around for about as long as public libraries themselves. During the nineteenth century, that something new was popular fiction. For public librarians during this time period, the problem that arose was not quite the same as ours today. While we are trying to broaden access to technology, they were trying to limit access to fiction. However, their motivation was similar to ours: They hoped that by doing so they were providing what their patrons needed. By examining the way these librarians handled their problem within the cultural context of their time, we can better understand our own current situation. As such, this paper will begin by exploring the relationship between librarians' early attitudes toward popular fiction, and how those attitudes were informed by the cultural critics of popular culture at that time. Once this relationship has been examined, it becomes easier to see the implications of the debate over popular fiction for our present day challenges, and a comparison between our difficulties with technology can be made to earlier difficulties caused by popular fiction in libraries. Finally, this examination of the past and comparison to our present will lead to suggestions as to

where we can go in the future, because while our problems and context may not be quite the same, perhaps our solutions should be in some way similar.

1. Early Public Libraries and the "Fiction Problem"

Understanding that easy access to fiction was seen as a problem in the first place is important, as it is highly unlikely that any of us today would think twice about approaching a librarian and requesting a recommendation for a work of popular fiction to read. If you were to approach your local public librarian and say, "I like John Grisham's books, but I've read them all. What do you recommended?" the librarian might make a suggestion based on their own personal reading or knowledge of books, or direct you to a list of legal thrillers compiled by another librarian. None of these reactions would come as a surprise, but it is unfathomable to imagine that the librarian would try to dissuade you from reading fiction, or that the librarian would try to steer you toward a "better" title, namely, one which wasn't a work of fiction. After all, popular culture, of which popular fiction is a part, is just taken for granted as an aspect of everyday life. Or, as Fred E.H. Schroeder puts it in *Twentieth-Century Popular Culture in Museums and Libraries:* "Popular culture *is* twentieth century American culture" (Schroeder 7). However, this hasn't always been the case, and the reaction to an innocent readers' advisory question that seems unbelievable to us today is the very reaction one might have faced when making a similar inquiry at an American public library during the late nineteenth century, and perhaps even well into the twentieth.

That is not to say that no one was reading popular fiction during this time period, or that no one was going to the public library to get it. As William Fletcher points out in his 1894 book *Public Libraries in America*: "Generally our libraries have circulated

works of fiction far in excess of all other classes of books, the great majority of readers

seeming to care for nothing else. This simply shows how great is the demand for reading

as recreation" (Fletcher 31). However, even if patrons were using the library to obtain

fiction, they were doing so during a time when fiction was largely dismissed as being

without merit and when its place in the library was under debate.[1] The prevailing opinion

about the place of fiction in the public library was simply that it had no place, or as Dee

Garrison writes in her book *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American

Society, 1876-1920*: "Clearly the public library was designed to serve mass taste. Just as

clear was the determination to uplift mass taste through exclusion of undesirable books"

(90). Undesirable books often meant fiction. For many libraries, even a small decrease in

the circulation of its fiction collection was a cause to boast. Several libraries reported

such decreases between 1878 and 1895, with one library, the Indianapolis library,

reporting a decrease "after heroic efforts had been made by the librarian to stop fiction

reading" (Garrison, "Apostles of Culture" 68). So strongly did many of those in the

library profession believe that fiction was "injurious" to the masses that they referred to it

as the "fiction problem" within library literature until about 1900 (Garrison, "Apostles of

Culture" 99).

Even as references to the "fiction problem" began to make themselves scarce in

the library literature of the new century, there was still plenty of talking and writing about

fiction amongst library professionals, and though they may no longer have used the term

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, fiction will be defined as popular fiction, and will exclude classical works of fiction which were considered part of the canon. Librarians distinguished between the two, and "defenders of traditional esthetics clearly remembered the educated generation who were familiar with relatively few books, who, 'were well-acquainted with the greater Greek and Roman classics…, who had read and reread…Milton in prose'"(Garrison, "Apostles of Culture" 69). Since most librarians did make this distinction between the literary and the popular in fiction, their arguments for keeping fiction out of libraries were mainly focused on popular fiction.

"fiction problem" to describe it, it is clear that there were still many in the profession who perceived it as a problem. In her book *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900-1950,* Esther Carrier notes that in spite of the diminishing references in library literature to the "fiction problem," the controversy surrounding it still existed, and that librarians had not yet reached a consensus on the debate: "Although society and literature had changed greatly in the seventy-five years that followed the organization of the ALA and the establishment of library work as a profession, no agreement on the fiction question had been reached" (Carrier 299). She elaborates that "The attitudes of librarians and the percentage that supported different points of view had changed somewhat, but the same issues that had been forcefully presented by early leaders of the library profession were those that were still not settled," though she does allow that "probably the majority of public library users sought the library reading they wanted with little question that fiction was an integral part of library service" (Carrier 299).

That librarians should be so concerned about the reading of fiction, while at the same time making the very books they disapproved of available to their patrons, seems contradictory and baffling. However, it begins to make a bit more sense if we put it in the context of what was going on in cultural theory at the time. This debate over popular fiction is not entirely unique to libraries, as it grows out of a larger societal debate of the time, the debate over popular culture. The debate arose for reasons pointed out by John Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Storey notes that industrialization, along with urbanization, instigated changes in living and working relations, which in turn led to cultural changes that paved the way for the beginnings of a

popular culture which "marks a decisive break with the cultural relationships of the past" (Storey 17). This was indeed a decisive break from the status quo, for

> No longer was there a shared common culture, with an additional culture of the powerful. Now, for the first time in history, there was a separate culture of the subordinate classes of the urban and industrial centres. It was a culture of two main sources: (i) a culture offered for profit by the new cultural entrepreneurs, and (ii) a culture made by and for the political agitation of radical artisans, the new urban working class and middle-class reformers…Each of these developments in different ways threatened traditional notions of cultural cohesion and social stability. One threatened to weaken authority through the commercial dismantling of cultural cohesion; the other offered a direct challenge to all forms of political and cultural authority. (Storey 17)

The resulting challenge to traditional forms of authority gets to the root of why both librarians and cultural critics were so worried about popular culture in general, and popular fiction in particular. As Storey points out,

> The popular culture of the majority has always been a concern of powerful minorities. Those with political power have always thought it necessary to police the culture of those without political power, reading it "symptomatically" for signs of political unrest; reshaping it continually through patronage and direct intervention. In the nineteenth century, however, there is a fundamental change in this relationship. Those with power lose, for a crucial period, the means to control the culture of the subordinate classes. When they begin to recover control, it is culture itself, and not culture as a symptom or sign of something else, that becomes, really for the first time, the actual focus of concern. (Storey 17)

So the rise of mass culture, along with the subsequent loss of power of the elite, led to the beginning of the study of what we today call popular culture. While libraries were negotiating the "fiction problem," both during the nineteenth century when that's what it was called, and during much of the twentieth when that's just what it *was*, cultural studies was producing the texts of what is known as the "culture and civilization" tradition in popular culture studies (Storey 18). British cultural critic Matthew Arnold,

who wrote about culture in the late nineteenth century, is credited with inaugurating "a tradition, a particular way of seeing popular culture, a particular way of placing popular culture within the general field of culture" (Storey). The Leavisites, who wrote their major works on culture during the 1930s, picked up where Arnold left off to continue the "culture and civilization" tradition (Storey 23). The cultural critics responsible for this approach to popular culture study were examining the implications of the emerging popular culture at the same time that librarians were examining the implications of the current popular fiction. Coincidentally, they were no more complimentary in their assessment of popular culture's new offerings to culture than the librarians were of popular fiction's latest offerings to libraries. These similarities in thought between cultural critics and librarians make it easy to draw parallels between the two. This is especially helped by the fact that one of the forms which this new popular culture took was popular fiction, and as Storey points out, it was one of the "key aspects of mass culture" which was often isolated by cultural critics as a topic of special discussion (Storey 24). And even when popular fiction was not the specific topic for discussion amongst cultural critics, much of what they wrote about popular culture in general echoed what librarians thought about popular fiction in particular. So although these two groups of people, that is, librarians and cultural critics, are not strictly dealing with the same concerns, their interests tend to converge enough so that by examining the writings of cultural theorists alongside the writings of professional librarians, we can begin to understand the motivations of librarians who tried so hard to keep fiction out of their patrons' hands. And while this debate over what true culture encompasses is not unique

to the public library, the public library is a place where both the high and low of culture coexist, and thus a logical place for part of that debate to take place.

2. Arguments Against Popular Fiction and Popular Culture

The similarities in rhetoric between early popular culture theory and the debate over fiction in public libraries manifest in two main ways: first, in the philosophies of the cultural theorists and librarians themselves, and second, in the language and ways of talking about those philosophies. The first example of a cultural theorist whose philosophies and language were echoed by public librarians is the British cultural critic Matthew Arnold. While public librarians were wringing their hands about the potentially negative effects of allowing fiction to be placed on the library's shelves and in patrons' hands, Matthew Arnold was concerned with the effects of an emerging popular culture he viewed as insidious. His writings mark the beginning of "the study of popular culture in the modern age," although he never actually used the term "popular culture"[2] in his writings (Storey 18). How many librarians read or were influenced by Arnold directly I do not know. However, many of the ideas he puts forth in his work "Culture and Anarchy" were echoed by the actions, beliefs, and discourse of librarians in the late nineteenth century. These librarians were not simply forming their ideas and attitudes about fiction in a vacuum; they were very much a product of the times in which they lived. They were very likely influenced by members of the upper and middle classes (classes to which, as Garrison points out, many librarians themselves belonged to) who like Arnold, spoke out against popular culture (or fiction) and its perceived injurious

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[2] The term "popular culture" did not really gain currency until 1965, "most particularly after the founding of the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1967 by Ray B. Browne at Bowling Green State University and the establishment of the Popular Culture Association at the 1969 national meeting of the American Studies Association in Toledo, Ohio, under the leadership of Professors Browne, Marshall Fishwick and Russel B. Nye" (Schroeder 3).

effects (Garrison, "Apostles of Culture" 68). Arnold's writings make clear the threat of popular culture to his class's authority. For Arnold culture means two things: a body of knowledge and a concern "to make reason and the will of God prevail" (Storey 18). Arnold has a four part definition of what culture is: the ability to know what is best, what is best, the mental and spiritual application of what is best, and the pursuit of what is best (18). He often repeats the terms "the best" and "the brightest," and "sweetness and light" when trying to convey what culture should be. Arnold uses anarchy as a synonym for what we would today call popular culture (19). He hoped that culture would rid us of anarchy, or popular culture, because he believed that popular culture was symptomatic of social disorder.

It seems that many librarians took a similar view of fiction, and read it as being symptomatic of social disorder. Thus, they saw it as their duty to curb the masses' taste for fiction. As Garrison points out, the rapid growth of popular culture which they saw as inferior at best and immoral at worst was a major source of unease for the upper middle class: "Early librarian chieftains" who were "upper middle class to the core…feared that their missionary work with the masses would be subverted by the popular passion for suspect fiction" (Garrison, "Apostles of Culture" 68).Garrison's arguments illustrate that the resistance by librarians toward fiction grew out of deep-seated fears that popular culture put the masses in "moral peril" and that it was the responsibility of librarians to provide much-needed guidance ("Apostles of Culture" 69). This fear of fiction amongst librarians is similar to the fear of popular culture expressed by Arnold when he likens it to "anarchy," or social disorder.

Just as Arnold hoped that true Culture could yet overcome anarchy (popular culture), librarians sought to redirect interests in popular fiction to worthier reading pursuits. They likely felt, as Arnold did, that "culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like, the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that" (Arnold 17-18). Amongst these librarians, it was felt that even if fiction and recreation were what brought people to the library, an attempt must be made to influence their tastes for the better once they were there. This was done out of the belief that:

> No agency has yet been found more efficient than the public library
> in providing all classes of the community with the means of culture
> of the worthiest type. Beginning, then, with the recreative agency of
> the library, and proceeding to higher uses, it is instrumental in
> elevating and refining taste, giving to the worker in every
> department greater efficiency in daily occupation, diffusing sound
> principles of social and political action, furnishing intellectual
> culture to all, and co-working powerfully with the churches in the
> endeavor to lead men to live the higher life. (Fletcher 38)

The sentiment that such guidance is necessary at all shows that like Arnold, librarians feared the "anarchy" of the emerging popular culture. As Garrison puts it, "Only professional guidance and clearly defined standards would establish order in the anarchical provinces of popular taste" ("Apostles of Culture" 70). Arnold declared that "culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy" (Arnold 259). For Arnold; true Culture was "the best and the brightest;" for librarians, true Culture meant providing only the "best" books. Librarians were largely concerned with what was "the best," just as Arnold was: "In these days of earnest discussion of economic and social questions, our libraries are well furnished with books and periodicals voicing the views of the best thinkers; and

the people who have access to such a library are eager readers of them" (Fletcher 36).

Like Arnold, librarians hoped that culture (i.e., the "best" books) could overcome anarchy

(popular fiction.)

By providing people access to the "best" books, librarians were very much in

agreement with Arnold's ideals, and fit the picture of what both he, in his description of

the cultured elite, and Garrison, in her description of early librarians, deem apostles.

Arnold believed that

> This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles
> of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a
> passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end
> of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their
> time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh,
> uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it,
> to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and
> unlearned, yet still remaining the *best* knowledge and thought of
> the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.
> (Arnold 49)

In addition to helping them to follow Arnold's directive to be apostles, librarians'

attitudes about popular fiction again reflected his idea that popular culture is symptomatic

of social disorder. Garrison points to the fear that "If fiction mirrored social disorder and

meaningless existence, or effaced the lines between virtue and vice, then the reader,

especially the feminine one, might be led to question the fundamental truths of the

benevolently ordered world" ("Apostles of Culture" 72). Thus the public librarian sees a

social problem and fancies himself the solution. In the face of threats to the social and

moral order, the popular view was that the "public library is a great educational and

moral power, to be wielded with a full sense of its great possibilities and the

corresponding danger of their perversion" (Fletcher 33). Yet again, librarians find

themselves on the same page as Arnold, who states "education is the road to culture"

(Arnold 267).

Though culture and education seem to go hand-in-hand for librarians and for

Arnold, Arnold says that even more importantly, culture will "make reason and the will

of God prevail." Just as Arnold believed that "not a having and a resting, but a growing

and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it; and here, too, it

coincides with religion," so too did libraries feel that they must play an important role in

making sure that the moral and religious values of society prevailed (Arnold 13). After

all,

> None are more impressed with the need of culture to lay a basis for
> large, tolerant, and truly Christian views and practices than those
> who endeavor to show the masses the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
> Not that their salvation is to begin with culture, but in order that
> religion may be all that it should, the enlargement and development
> of the higher human faculties obviously should precede.
> (Fletcher 38)

Fletcher's thoughts here are compatible with what Dee Garrison calls "the moral ire of

those who sought to shape mass reading taste ("Immoral Fiction" 71). She points out that

in the late nineteenth century "deviance in moral theory was a good index of radicalism

in general. The person who questioned ethical standards was also likely to entertain

heretical views regarding the efficacy of prayer, the concept of private property, and the

benevolence of political parties" (Garrison, "Immoral Fiction" 71-72). Once again, it

becomes clear that for public librarians, keeping fiction out of the hands of its patrons

was seen as a means to keep a much more sinister social problem than mere dubious

reading tastes at bay.

As one can see by comparing Arnold's writing to those of early public librarians, many of Arnold's ideas about popular culture are echoed in library literature about popular fiction. But even his language is echoed at times. In a paper read at the 1886 meeting of the library association held in Milwaukee, Hewins describes the small public library which "has existed in a half-alive state with poor American reprints of English books, novels in wretched condition, antiquated volumes of science, biographies of the dreariest, incomplete volumes of magazines" ("How to Make the Most of a Small Library" 395). She then borrows Arnold's own phrasing and asks "How can such libraries be made centers of sweetness and light in country towns?" (395). For Arnold, culture is "sweetness and light," so her question could be rephrased "How can libraries be made centers of culture?" But make no mistake, Hewins, like Arnold, was talking about *true* culture with a capital "C." Popular fiction certainly did not fit the bill for Hewins any more that popular culture did for Arnold. At the same meeting where Hewins asked how libraries could be made centers of sweetness and light, she also proclaims that "A small library has this advantage over a large one, that it cannot afford to buy poor novels" ("How to Make the Most of a Small Library" 397). Therefore, while both Hewins and Arnold believed in making culture accessible to the people, this should only be done insofar as it fit their narrowly defined definitions:

> If I have not shrunk from saying that we must work for sweetness and light, so neither have I shrunk from saying that we must have a broad basis, we must have sweetness and light for as many as possible…Only it must be *real* thought and *real* beauty; *real* sweetness and *real* light…Plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgments constituting the creed of their own profession or party. Our religious and political organizations give an example of this way of working on the masses. I condemn neither way; but culture works differently. It does not try to reach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to

win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made
judgments and watch-words. It seeks to do away with classes; to
make all live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, and use
ideas, as it uses them freely---to be nourished and not bound by
them. (Arnold 48-49)

The question of how to make libraries centers of "sweetness and light" seems to be a question which other librarians besides Hewins were indeed asking. Samuel Green wrote in "Personal Relations between Librarians and Readers" that librarians should take "pleasure in brightening any glimmerings of desire that manifest themselves in people to grow in culture" (Green). One way of helping people to "grow in culture" was to provide guidance as to which were the "best" books. Green advocates a female library assistant whose job will be to provide "every person who applies for aid with the best book he is willing to read" and believes that in this way "a great influence can be exerted in the direction of causing good books to be used." The influence of librarians over patrons' reading taste was seen as something not to be taken lightly. Fletcher echoes Green's sentiments on this point: "Some lady librarians especially, through a wise helpfulness in directing readers, are wielding an influence for good second to that of no preacher or teacher" (Fletcher 33). These observations from Green and Fletcher fit in well with what seems the common assumption at the time, namely that the masses lack the discernment needed to distinguish the "good" books from the "bad," and that it is the task of the librarian to do so for them. In fact, readers were thought to be so lacking in discernment that "Half the battle for readers is in a wise selection, even of novels. No library ought to issue works of fiction except under the constant oversight of an attendant qualified to give wholesome advice to readers, thus furnishing that guidance which all need, and very many request" (Fletcher 33).

One tactic of librarians who wanted to provide such guidance was to discourage patrons from reading novels and suggest "good" books in their place. One way of accomplishing this was to simply not provide the popular fiction, even if people wanted it. In the annual report of a small public library in Germantown, Pennsylvania, the author writes, "I have been much interested in weaning them from a desire for works of fiction. On first joining the library, the new-comers often ask for such books; but failing to procure them, and having their attention turned to works of interest and instruction, in almost every instance they settle down to good reading, and cease asking for novels" (Litwin 16). Another approach was to provide popular fiction, but hope that the masses could eventually be spurred on to worthier pursuits. Librarians who took this view of fiction "believed that when the habit of reading is formed, the taste of readers improves and they naturally turn to the better class of books. They held, too, that much is to be done and should be done by librarians to raise the standard of the reading of users of libraries" (Green 20). However, both schools of thought take a similar view as Arnold when it comes to the idea that what the public naturally wants, and what is truly best for them, must be at odds. Arnold writes:

> Now, if culture, which simply means trying to perfect oneself, and one's mind as part of oneself, brings us light, and if light shows us that there is nothing so very blessed in merely doing as one likes, that the worship of the mere freedom to do as one likes is the worship of machinery, that the really blessed thing is to like what right reason ordains, and to follow her authority, then we have got a practical benefit out of culture. We have got a much wanted principle, a principle of authority, to counteract the tendency to anarchy which seems to be threatening us" (Arnold 67).

Or, in other words, as it relates to librarians and their relationship to popular fiction: "Not what different classes in the community call for, but what will tend to elevate and refine

should be their criterion in the selection of books for recreative reading" (Fletcher 32-3).

Fletcher believed that those who had the authority to decide what types of books were

made available to the public should exercise that authority, stating that:

> Various views of the powers and duties of directors have been held;
> it is sometimes claimed that the demands of the public must be
> met, and that the directors have no right or duty of censorship. But
> such a view has little to commend or support it. On the contrary, it
> is generally felt that library directors are permitted, and by proper
> interpretation of their trust required, to accept and exercise full
> responsibility for the moral character and influence of the library"
> (Fletcher 32).

But unfortunately for Matthew Arnold, Fletcher, and other librarians who saw the

keeping of culture as their moral responsibility, the time when their authority to do so

was unquestioned was swiftly coming to an end. Even though "many librarians would

have preferred to directly participate in the safekeeping of Culture through fashioning

acquisition policies that would have limited the purchase of, if not banished from the

library all together, what they called 'trash,' the public would not let them (McCrossen

174). This loss of authority, control, and influence over the public's reading tastes brings

us to the second example of cultural theorists whose philosophies and language were

echoed by public librarians. These theorists presented the Leavisite perspective on

popular culture, which emerged in the 1930s with the publication of: *Mass Civilization

and Minority Culture* by F.R. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* by Q.D. Leavis,

and *Culture and Environment* by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (Storey 23). These

three texts apply Arnold's cultural politics to the "cultural crisis" of the 1930s (Storey

22).

The "cultural crisis" that Leavisism is primarily concerned with includes a decline

of culture and the elite minority's "collapse of authority" (Storey 23). This supposed

decline of culture was seen as a serious problem: "According to Leavis and the Leavisites, the twentieth century is marked by an increasing cultural decline. What had been identified by Arnold as a feature of the nineteenth century, it is argued, had continued and been compounded in the twentieth: that is, the increasing spread of a culture of 'standardization and levelling down.' It is against this process and its results that 'the citizen…must be trained to discriminate and to resist'" (Storey 22-3). Many public librarians held similar opinions of cultural decline caused by the spread of the popularity of fiction so that "by the twentieth century, the 'best-selling novel' had become a matter of special concern for librarians," because they "frequently had an influence on the public for good or evil out of proportion to the single title's real merit," with some librarians believing that fiction "was bad and becoming worse" (Carrier 15). They also agreed with the Leavisites that "the citizen…must be trained to discriminate and to resist" the influence of popular fiction (Storey 22-3). As Wheeler puts it, "Obviously the task is to provide better substitutes for poor reading" (Wheeler 373). The goal of these better substitutes was that patrons "could be weaned from the funnies, the sport page, and the squawking (not the sound, but the mental effect) radio to useful, consistent, pleasurable reading" (Wheeler 373). Or, in other words, patrons would be "trained to discriminate and to resist" those lesser pursuits in favor of worthier reading.

The next concern of Leavisism, which is the concern over the elite's collapse of authority, is also a comparable concern to one of librarians. One response by Leavisites was to try and exercise and preserve what authority the cultural elite still had left in order to preserve the cultural traditions of the past. In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*, F.R. Leavis writes, "it is on literary tradition that the office of maintaining continuity

must rest" (1). However, the educated, elite minority needed to safeguard culture in order to maintain continuity, as "the literary tradition is alive only so long as there is a tradition of taste, kept alive by the educated (who are not to be identified with any social class); such a tradition…as constitutes a surer taste than any individual can pretend to" (F.R. Leavis 82). The taste of the educated is considered the authority here, resulting in the few guiding the many, and this was often the case in public libraries as well. As Joseph Wheeler states in his article "Methods for Making Known to Inexperienced Readers the Resources and Facilities Offered by American Public Libraries.": "The public library's obligation is not primarily in the one direction of intensive service to a select few, but is equally in the direction of attracting, serving, and stimulating many thousands of men, women, and young people who have not yet come to 'purposeful reading' but are still satisfied with recreational reading, sometimes of a far from meritorious character" (Wheeler 372-73).

This notion of the few selecting books for the many is very much in keeping with what Storey says is the basic assumption of Leavisism (Storey 23). This assumption is articulated by F.R. Leavis when he writes, "culture has always been in minority keeping" (12). It is also the basic assumption of librarians who sought to elevate the public through attempts to guide and shape their reading tastes. Wheeler felt that one important function of the public library is "to attract and serve the average man or woman passing by…whose intellectual curiosity has been dulled, but who may yet be led to get some of the beauty and pleasure and inspiration from books" (Wheeler 373). True culture and good books are things that the majority must be led to an appreciation of by the minority, for "In any period it is often a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art

and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who

are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment" (F.R. Leavis 12). Therefore, "Upon this

minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they

keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition" (13). Librarians too felt that

they were the minority which the majority depended on for the preservation of the best

books culture had to offer; therefore, "it becomes the directors of a public library to use

discretion in the supply of fiction, which may be exercised both in the selection of books

and in the manner of their distribution" (Fletcher 32).

Similarities between the philosophies of librarians and the Leavisites as to what

their duties as the critical minority include become even more readily apparent when F.R.

Leavis turns his attention specifically to fiction. In regards to the influx of fiction

publication that mass production allows for, Leavis argues that "The critically adult

public, then, is very small indeed: they are a very small minority who are capable of

fending for themselves amid the smother of new books" (16). The answer then, for some

librarians, was to make sure that no one would have to fend for themselves: Clarence

Sherman, a librarian in Rhode Island after the depression, "believed the book-reading

public would be the real beneficiary of a plan that insured fewer and better books"

(Carrier 33). He said that "Fewer and better books, in the not too distant future, may be a

test by which successful librarianship is evaluated. After all, selection requires more skill

and should command more respect than collection. Any half-wit can collect, if given

purchasing power" (Carrier 33). Fletcher elaborates on Sherman's and Leavis' ideas

when he suggests that the public library's mission should include helping their patrons

select quality reading material, rather than leaving them to fend for themselves:

> This craving for that romance in literature which is missed from life
> will be met in some way; it is the province of the public library to
> meet it with a supply which is wholesome and ennobling, in order
> that it may not turn to other sources furnishing only that which
> degrades or is lacking in good influence. Indeed, one of the highest
> aims for a public library may be to divert the recreative reading of
> the community into better channels, to replace trash with light
> literature of increasingly high order, and so gradually elevate the
> ideals and sentiments of the people. (Fletcher 32)

The notion that the average reader could discriminate for himself what constituted "literature of increasingly high order" was not one that was entertained by most public librarians or the Leavisites. Discrimination amongst fiction is seen as nearly impossible due to the sheer number of choices: "There seems every reason to believe that the average cultivated person of a century ago was a very much more competent reader than his modern representative. Not only does the modern dissipate himself upon so much more reading of all kinds: the task of acquiring discrimination is much more difficult" (F.R. Leavis 15). Librarians, too, saw this as a problem, and wanted to develop a means of discriminating between the good and the bad of fiction: "For non-fiction the accepted library schemes were available, but—as no public librarian will be surprised to learn—60-75 percent of all reading was done in fiction, and thus distinctions in that field became imperative" (Foster 124). One reason which is cited for these distinctions or "well-defined criteria of quality" being needed is that "the inferior novel, itself neither intellectual nor impersonal in tone, seems especially prone to rouse personal reactions to its subject matter—a factor which modern psychology recognizes as more cogent in affecting literary judgment even than Matthew Arnold thought when he voiced his familiar warning against it" (Foster 125).

So for both amongst cultural critics and librarians there is a clear feeling that the minority

should help the masses discriminate what books are worthy. Guidance from the minority

was needed in order to curb the influence of popular culture and fiction, and must be

given in spite of the challenge posed by popular culture to the minority's authority.

Of course, the very fact that F.R. Leavis bemoans this collapse of authority

indicates that Leavisism looks back longingly to a time before popular culture when that

authority remained unquestioned. As Storey points out, that idealistic view of the past is

telling:

> What is interesting about their account of the past is what it reveals
> about their ideal future. The golden age was not just marked by
> cultural coherence, but happily for the Leavisites, a cultural
> coherence based on authoritarian and hierarchical principles. It was
> a common culture that gave intellectual stimulation at one end, and
> affective pleasure at the other. This was a mythic world in which
> everyone knew their place, knew their station in life. (Storey 26)

The public librarian was no stranger to these authoritarian and hierarchical principles. In

his 1896 address as ALA president John Cotton Dana argues, "A strong sense of parental

responsibility—this is a prime essential in the growth of true culture—in the increase of

social efficiency" (Litwin 90). Fostering the growth of "true culture" should then be the

goal of the librarian. This goal has a moral imperative:

> But neither the supply of recreative reading nor the better
> equipment of men for their work or for social or civic duties
> represents the highest and best influence of the library. That may be
> summed up in a single word *culture*, although abuse has perverted
> the term into something like cant. No word so well describes the
> influence of diffusion of good reading among the people in giving
> tone and character to their intellectual life. And that not only the
> intellectual but the moral and spiritual life of a community is
> ameliorated by good books, none will deny. (Fletcher 37)

And so it is not enough to simply provide books; instead the librarian must provide culture through good books, because "to produce a maximum effect…to produce even a desirable effect" the librarian must be able to place "the right books" into "the right hand at the right time" (Dana 91). Culture is once again portrayed by both librarians and cultural critics as having the ability to uphold the traditions of the past, while helping to ensure that they will continue into the future. "At the centre of our culture is language, and while we have our language tradition is, in some essential sense, still alive" (F.R. Leavis 81).Thus through culture, "'largely conveyed in language, there is our spiritual, moral and emotional tradition, which preserves the 'picked experience of ages' regarding the finer issues of life" (81). Therefore, the "debasement of the language is not merely a matter of words; it is a debasement of emotional life, and of the quality of living" (48). The resistance of popular culture by such librarians and cultural critics, which today seems an exercise in futility, makes more sense when one considers that for them it was a moral imperative—they truly believed they were doing the public a disservice by providing it, and that they would have been encouraging further cultural decline by doing so.

In addition to their concern about the minority's collapse of authority, Leavisites are also concerned with the loss of what they call the "organic community," which they say was destroyed by the Industrial Revolution. F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson write about this loss in *Culture and Environment*: "What we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied…The great agent of change, and from our point of view, destruction, as of course been the machine—applied power" (1, 3). Leavis and Thompson argue that the machinery that has made possible the mass production of

goods has resulted in a mass production and standardization of culture, and that the

product (popular culture) is inferior as a result:

> The advantage it brings us in mass-production has turned out to involve standardization and levelling-down outside the realm of mere material goods. Those who in school are offered (perhaps) the beginnings of education in taste are exposed, out of school, to the competing exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses; films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, commercially-catered fiction—all offer satisfaction at the lowest level, and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasures, go with the least effort." (Leavis, Thompson 3).

According to Storey, the Leavisites view the "growing importance placed on leisure…as

a sign of this loss" (Storey 26). The new time afforded leisure as a result of

industrialization is likewise problematic for librarians, for "Whether mired in anxieties

about idleness or steeped in aspirations for uplift, public librarians understood their work

as being in opposition to and in competition with commercial, mass culture. To prevail in

this contest they had to formulate both positive and negative attitudes toward leisure"

(McCrossen 170). Just as the Leavisites heralded the advent of leisure as a sign of the

loss of the "organic community," librarians recognized the threat of the loss of the

traditional model for libraries "which began as collections of books...which were

considered the preeminent signs and symbols of 'Culture'" (170). For librarians, one

result of the increase in leisure time was that "In fashioning activities and spaces for a

community's free time, public librarians and their supporters mediated between fears of

'idleness'—embodied in loafers and bummers—and hopes for re-creation implicit in the

public library's association with cathedrals and the vestibules of churches" (McCrossen

170). Public libraries helped to give leisure an institutional form, even as many librarians

disapproved of what the public chose to use their leisure time reading (170).

Along with the new importance afforded leisure, Leavisism argues that

furthermore, industrialization has caused the experience of work to deteriorate to the

point where workers are "incapacitated by their work" (Storey 27). They believe that the

result is this:

> Therefore, instead of recreation (re-creating what is lost in work),
> leisure provides workers with only "decreation" (a compounding of
> the loss experienced through work.) Given such a situation, it is
> little wonder that people turn to mass culture for compensation and
> passive distraction; the drug habit develops and they become
> junkies addicted to "substitute living." (Storey 27)

F.R. Leavis & Denys Thompson elaborate on this concept of "substitute living" in

Culture and Environment:

> They [the masses] find compensation in Substitute-Living.
> Unhappily, if the routine of one's life does not call for any subtlety
> or fullness of living, then the kind of compensation one is capable of
> is apt to be correspondingly poor. If one's work allows no
> fulfillment of the personality, then the fulfillment one finds in
> Substitute-Living will most likely be pitifully unrelated to the
> possible conditions of actual life. (99-100)

Q.D Leavis particularly warns against substitute living as it relates to fiction reading in

Fiction and the Reading Public, in which she argues that "It is generally recognized that

the universal need to read something when not actively employed has been created by

modern life…The old order made reading to prevent boredom unnecessary, whereas the

narrowing down of labour that specialisation has produced has changed the working day

from a sequence of interests to a repetition of mechanical movements of both body and

mind. (48) She complains that people of all classes who read popular fiction do so

"simply in order to pass time" and that it is "wish-fulfillment in various forms that the

modern bestseller" provides (Q.D. Leavis 49-51). Librarians too recognize these

motivations for reading fiction: "To the masses of people, hard-worked and living hum-

drum lives, as well as those lapped in luxury and pining for something to kill time, the novel comes as an open door into an ideal life, in the enjoyment of which, even in fancy, one may forget the hardships or the tedium of real life" (Fletcher 31-2).

However, Leavis does not consider this distraction to be innocuous; she refers to fiction reading as a "drug addiction" throughout *Fiction and the Reading Public.* In one passage she notes that

> It is significant that the proportion of fiction to non-fiction borrowed is overwhelmingly great, that women rather than men change the books (that is, determine the family reading), and that many subscribers call daily to change their novels. This, along with the information volunteered by a public librarian that many take out two or three novels by Edgar Wallace a week, and the only other books they borrow are 'Sapper's' and other 'thrillers,' suggests that the reading habit is now often a form of the drug habit.
> (Q.D. Leavis 7)

Likening an appetite for fiction to an appetite for drugs is not unique to Leavis. Here is another case where not just the sentiment of librarians, but the language they use as well, echoes that of cultural critics. At the 1895 ALA conference, George T. Clark, a librarian at the San Francisco Free Public Library, delivered a paper entitled "Improper Books" (Litwin 85). In this paper, Clark criticizes the notion that writers of popular novels "have a place in the public library because of their drawing qualities; that they attract a certain class of readers which would otherwise remain away, and that after a time, these readers will have absorbed such literature to the point of saturation and can then be induced to take something of a higher order" (Litwin 86). Clark disagrees with this argument, and argues that "better results could…be obtained without such a waste of means" (Litiwn 86). Then he takes his argument a step further, implying that by providing popular fiction librarians are not only wasting their means but also enabling a bad habit: "By supplying

such books, a library fosters the taste that craves them, and increases the demand"

(Litiwn 86).

Clark was not the only librarian who likened fiction to a drug:

> In his presidential address at the 1902 ALA conference, John S.
> Billings, director of the New York Public Library, quoted William
> Dean Howell's statement of "reading to stupidity" as being the
> object of many readers of current fiction. Tired and worried, they
> frequently read to forget or to go to sleep. Billings commented, "The
> average novel will give this result in from six to ten minutes, and
> the after effects are not nearly so bad as that of chloral or
> sulfonal."(Carrier 18)

Though perhaps not as dangerous as an actual drug, Leavisites, along with many

librarians, saw the "substitute living" afforded by fiction reading as no better than a drug

addiction.

There is at least one way in which Leavisites and librarians were right in

comparing fiction reading to a drug addiction. Just as it is futile from trying to try to keep

a junkie from getting his fix, it proved to be just as impossible for librarians and other

guardians of Culture to keep fiction from those who wanted it. Though it is hard to say

when librarians finally stopped arguing the place of fiction in libraries (as mentioned

before, Garrison and Carrier disagree), one can say that it did firmly establish its place

whether librarians liked it or not, "Although the original impetus of public libraries was

for "cultural uplift" (for better, the *mission* persists; for worse, the *image* clings), with the

advent of Carnegie libraries at the turn of the century, the die was cast for "populist"

libraries, free to all and excluding no one" and so "adults were accustomed by the thirties

to find special shelves for current bestsellers and for detective, western and science

fiction" (Schroeder 5-6).The tension between giving the people what they wanted and

giving them what it was thought they needed, articulated by Fletcher, may still have remained for many librarians: "Care must always be taken not to fill a library with 'good books' which nobody will read; at the same time the library must go before the demands of the people, and create a taste and desire for that which it supplies" (Fletcher 71). However, librarians had found that "No matter how well stocked it rooms, the public library could not attract the public without providing the reading that reflected mass concerns" (Garrison, "Apostles of Culture" 87).

Just as librarians had to learn to accept (or at least resign themselves to) the presence of fiction in order for libraries to continue as a relevant institution, cultural critics had to move from an evaluative to an analytical approach to culture in the movements following the "culture and civilization" tradition in order to continue the evolution of cultural studies. Both libraries and cultural studies have progressed immensely since the days of the "fiction problem" and the "culture and civilization," so that both seem like the relics of an outmoded way of thinking. But as Storey points out, though it may be "very easy to be critical of the Leavisite approach to popular culture," at least their work helped to make discourse on the subject possible (Storey 27). Likewise, it is very easy to be critical of early public librarians who worked so hard to keep their patrons from reading fiction, but the fact that they eventually came around to providing it, however grudgingly, provides the foundation for the very model of service in public libraries today that makes it so unfathomable to us that the "fiction question" should have been a question at all. On their own, the "culture and civilization" tradition and the "fiction problem" clearly had great significance to their respective disciplines. But I would argue that these movements are even more compelling when examined together, as

in doing so we can come to a better understanding of both. Looking at these two together provides librarianship with valuable historical and cultural context, the value of which should not be underestimated. The context and insight we gain from examining them makes it easy to see the implications for librarianship today. Technology is our industrial revolution, and how we go about providing the technology our patrons want and need is our "fiction problem."

3. Present Day Public Libraries and the Technology Problem

In many ways, our attitudes toward technology might not be much like Arnold's and the Leavisites' attitudes toward fiction. Probably not too many of us are running around accusing the Internet of threatening the moral and religious integrity of our society, or worrying that Web 2.0 is a symptom of social disorder which can only lead to anarchy. However, it might be fair to say that librarians are still worried about maintaining their authority and traditions. In some ways we are reacting just as librarians did then, although these days it probably has more to do with a fear of and resistance toward doing things differently from the way we always have, rather than from a motivation to maintain our status as the elite cultural authority. Joseph Janes points this out in his article "But Is It Librarianship?":

> In my travels, I've been to my share, big and small, urban and rural, rich and poor. And I've noticed a striking phenomenon over the past couple of years: Most patrons are on computers. It seems unusual these days to run across a library where the majority of people aren't online. Obviously, this isn't a novel observation; we've all seen it and considered and discussed it. Deep down inside, I think a lot of us are bothered by it, as though somehow simply providing computers and internet access isn't quite librarianship, isn't worthy of us, isn't what we're here for. It certainly seems different from our traditional book-centered, service-oriented professional and institutional model. (34).

It's not that technology itself is seen as bad; rather, it just doesn't fit our traditional self-image as librarians. Or as Janes puts it:

> Perhaps not surprisingly, given the array of impacts of the traditional concept of public libraries, some have suggested that Internet access, training, and services run contrary to the missions of public libraries. Critics — both in the popular media and in library research — have attacked libraries' perceived confusion of purpose and rush toward the Internet, which is seen as entertainment, and away from books, which is viewed as a more pure service to communities (Baker, 1996, 2001; Brown and Duguid, 2002; Buschman, 2003; Tisdale, 1997). However, as the data collected over the past decade and a half by the *Public Libraries and the Internet* surveys have demonstrated, patrons and communities have embraced the Internet–related aspects of library services as essential contributions of the library. (34).

But though this attitude may be understandable on some level, as Laura Cohen points out in "A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," we should be willing to "let go of previous practices if there is a better way to do things now, even if these practices once seemed so great."

A tendency to cling to tradition is one way in which we can relate our technology problem to the "fiction problem," but another thing we have in common with librarians and cultural critics of the past is our propensity to make judgments about what is the "best" we have to offer in terms of technology. In a study of perceptions of Web 2.0 technologies and librarians amongst Informatics undergraduate students and Library and Information Science graduate students conducted by Lorri Mon and Ebrahim Randeree, this penchant to discriminate becomes evident from the library school students' responses. Questions asked in this study tried to determine whether or not students considered questions about Web 2.0 technology, such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites, to be appropriate questions to ask librarians (Mon andRanderee 164). One might expect library school students to be fairly open to asking such questions of

librarians, but that is not exactly what the study indicated. Although both groups of students did express "doubts as to whether it was appropriate to ask a librarian for help with Web 2.0 topics" and question "whether, if asked, a librarian would be knowledgeable or likely to help them with this topic, "LIS graduate students were more likely than the undergraduates to report that they might try asking a librarian" (169-70). That does not mean they necessarily approved of the idea. One student responded "I don't think of that as the function of a library. Why and how would a librarian help me use Flickr or delicious? What does that have to do with librarianship?" (G007, graduate student)" (170-71). Furthermore, "some graduate students felt that Web 2.0 sites were not 'serious or important' (G025, graduate student), not 'educational' (GO 14, graduate student), not 'authoritative,' (GO 15, graduate student), and used words such as 'waste of time' (G025, graduate student) or 'frivolous' (G026, graduate student) in describing Web 2.0 sites. Preferred and appropriate types of user questions were described as those involving 'academic searches' (GO 14, graduate student) or 'help with actual research' (G025, graduate student)" (171) Most of these comments sound awfully familiar if we think back to the criticisms of popular fiction above. Instead of trying to make judgments about the relative value of services users want, we should instead say, as does Cohen: "I will avoid requiring users to see things in librarians' terms but rather will shape services to reflect users' preferences and expectations."

If we do not do this, then it seems a pretty short leap from these sorts of negative value judgments to actually restricting access, which as Bertot et al. point out, could begin to seem necessary for practical reasons as well:

> Despite some changes, the infrastructure plateau continues to plague libraries, both in terms of quantity and quality of access.

> Social networking and other Web 2.0 media constantly demand greater amounts of the connection pipeline, as more people use them for entertainment and communication and the content involves more formats that hog bandwidth, especially audio and video files. And these patron interests compete for computer time with the large number of patrons who now need the computers and connection speed to apply for jobs and seek assistance. While the number of libraries with connection speeds of 769kbps or greater increased from 73.1 percent to 79.3 percent, the perpetual upward spiral of demands on connection speed make such gains the equivalent of running to stand still.

However, if this leads to a reduction in service to those using technology in order to gain access to Web 2.0 media or other form of technological entertainment, that would be rather judgmental and inequitable, just as it would have been if discrimination amongst "good" and "bad" fiction had continued to afford books only to those who wanted the "good" ones.

Bertot et al. correctly argue that

> if usage of social networking tools, online gaming, and personal e–mail are limited to ensure more time and capacity for people seeking jobs, interacting with government, and doing educational work, such a choice would be emphasizing the more essential aspects of Internet usage, but it would also deprive many patrons of a main source of communication and entertainment. One outgrowth of the economic crisis is an increase in the number of people seeking the free entertainment available at the library (Carlton, 2009; Van Sant, 2009). Reducing access to these services would disappoint many patrons who are seeking solace from the harsh realities of the physical world.

Personally, I would go even a step further and say that it is not for us to decide what are "the more essential aspects of Internet usage," any more than it is for us to decide which books should be read by the masses in order to uplift them. Or as Janes puts it: "It's [library Internet use] also good because it helps to connect people with information, one of the raisons d'etre of libraries Let's be honest: There's lots of use of computing and

communications capacity in libraries that is somewhat shy of the pristine notions we'd all

like to have of library use. This, however, was always the case, and it's not up to us to

dictate what people do with the information tools we offer, within the bounds of the law"

(34).

Libraries do for the most part seem to be at least trying to provide technology

without dictating what people do with it. For one thing, as Bertot et al. indicate, "Public

libraries continue to stand as virtually the only social institution that ensures free public

Internet access." But as such,

> Analysis of the data from the 2007 survey pointed to an emerging
> trend that raised serious concerns for public libraries — patron and
> community needs for Internet access, training, and services were
> quickly outpacing the ability of libraries to meet those needs
> (Bertot, *et al.*, 2008a, 2008b; McClure, *et al.*, 2007). This situation
> was the result of a confluence of major factors such as public
> libraries being the only source of free public Internet access in
> three–quarters of communities; the movement of more and more
> educational, entertainment, and economic activities online; the
> increasing reliance of governments on libraries to ensure public
> access to e–government; the greater bandwidth required by popular
> social networking applications; and, libraries not having sufficient
> physical, staff, funding, and support resources to meet these
> demands.

Even though public libraries are in most cases trying to provide technology to our

patrons, these factors make it hard to do so. These challenges can make us resistant to

change in a different way, one that is against our will. Still, as Cohen suggests, we should

"not be defensive about" our library's circumstances, but should instead "look clearly at

its situation and make an honest assessment about what can be accomplished." While the

motivations behind libraries resistance to change in regards to technology are somewhat

different than those of librarians who resisted fiction in the public library, they ultimately

amount to the same thing—a poor excuse not to provide what our customers want and need. Not only does this let our customers down, it works against our own self-interest.

In a world where it is beginning to increasingly look as though libraries and librarians must go digital or go home—as our patrons most surely will when the Internet goes down—it remains to be seen whether we will respond to our own "fiction problem" the way the librarians who came before us did. These librarians eventually not only allowed fiction in libraries, but eventually learned to provide it without judgment to all who sought it. I hope that we will be able to do the same when it comes to technology, and any other new service that the public library might need to provide in order to remain relevant to the lives of its users. Fletcher's words from long ago could have been written today:

> The future of public libraries is difficult to foretell. We may be sure that for many years yet to come libraries will grow rapidly in size and number; that ingenuity rightly applied will ever be bringing into use new apparatus and new methods, so that what are now of the newest will soon be antiquated; also that the people at large will increasingly support and use libraries, and that the *free* public library, especially, will take its place among the chief agents of civilization. (Fletcher 120)

In fact, one can see the spirit of Fletcher's words echoed in these much more recent remarks from *Library Journal* Editor-at-Large John Berry:

> In libraries of every type, from that "experience [public] library" in Cerritos, CA, to the ivy-covered halls of America's academic and research institutions, the new library is emerging. Librarians are winnowing a functional set of technological apparatus and software out of the onslaught of new devices for the discovery and retrieval of content and its incorporation into current knowledge or information. They are defining and selecting the best of the old and new services and organizational models to create what they call Library 2.0, although it looks as though they have already surpassed that place and number. In the process, they have rediscovered and understood that most important insight, the old cliché that change,

especially technological change, accelerates at a rate that requires constant attention to separate the fads and fashions from the functional. (10)

Both statements recognize that times will change, and so must we.

As Cohen points out in her manifesto, these changes happen fast, and that change requires something of us. Like Cohen, we must be able to say: "I will recognize that the universe of information culture is changing fast and that libraries need to respond positively to these changes to provide resources and services that users need and want." Furthermore, we must also be realistic: "I will recognize that libraries change slowly, and will work with my colleagues to expedite our responsiveness to change" (Cohen). Still, realism must not lead us to become too easily discouraged: "I will be courageous about proposing new services and new ways of providing services, even though some of my colleagues will be resistant" (Cohen).

If there is a final message that librarianship can take from the "fiction problem," it is that the public library cannot remain, as Fletcher envisioned, "among the chief agents of civilization" unless it is willing to adapt along with civilization in order to prevent becoming unneeded, unwanted, and ultimately, obsolete. We will need to continue our willingness to change as technology changes. Berry's words are encouraging:

> Recent examples of Librarianship 2.0 follow hundreds that came before. They prove that, despite our worst fears of obsolescence and entrenchment in the past, libraries are actually one of the few public sector institutions or agencies responding fully to the pressure of change. While the newest librarians are sometimes impatient with the old institution's pace of change and resistance to it, they have still become champions of the survival of libraries and the job libraries do to meet unique societal needs. The cadres of Library 2.0, like Laura Cohen, will not only be the ones who guarantee that there is a future for libraries, they will create that future. (10)

And if there is a final lesson for librarians in the "culture and civilization" tradition it is this: If we wish to proclaim, as did Matthew Arnold before us, that "I am, above all, a believer in culture" we must never presume that we know better than our patrons what culture is (Arnold 4). We must always be willing to broaden our definitions of culture and of public library service, and never become unwilling to question whether the way we have always defined things or done things is in fact the "best" way. Instead we should, like Cohen, "validate, through [our] actions, librarians' vital and relevant professional role in any type of information culture that evolves." Otherwise, we may not get to be a part of that culture.

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