

Biblio-Notes

libraries. The phrase, "popular fiction," is obviously ambiguous, but for the purposes of this article I'm referring to fiction by authors that are not commonly studied academically and consequently not widely collected by academic libraries. A lot of this fiction falls into categories or genres that are also somewhat ambiguous, including adventure stories, fantasy, historical fiction, magic realism, mysteries, romance novels, science fiction (hereafter referred to as "sci fi"), war stories, and westerns. Since chi

likely areas of collection development if any LES members are in the position of embarking on a new special collection. The genre of historical fiction occurs to me as a potential source of research not only into pop culture but also into cultural interpretations of the past.

Finally, the question of whether libraries are collecting or overlooking popular fiction as an important record of our culture warrants a more extensive and detailed survey and discussion. Some issues that neither the mid-winter discussion nor my survey fully explored include "whether we buy some genres but not others, how we make selection decisions, whether popular fiction needs special preservation or loss prevention handling, if our approval plans are useful in acquiring this kind of material," to quote the Membership Committee's handout describing the mid-winter Forum. Anyone looking for a topic for research and publication?

Laura Fuderer
Subject Librarian for English and
French Literatures
University of Notre Dame
Laura.S.Fuderer.1@nd.edu

A Library Student's First Visit to the NYPL Humanities and Social Sciences Library

I'm a third quarter MSLIS student at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA. I've spent years whiling away afternoons in libraries as a kid and later as a college student. The cozy confines, the quiet of the stacks, the nooks and crannies are perfect for settling in, for reading or studying or hiding out. The library has always been the perfect escape, at once comforting and intriguing in its mustiness. In short, I've always loved libraries, their peace and quiet, their way of siphoning my scattered thoughts into whichever project I needed to concentrate. The library has always been a familiar, comfortable place.

Or so I thought until a recent trip to the Humanities and Social Sciences Library

of the New York Public Library (referred to locally as the "Main Branch"). In Manhattan for the weekend, I was quickly recruited by an author friend to show him around, to navigate the inner workings of a research library (a prospect he found intimidating), and to help kick start a project he'd been long avoiding. Outside the library, at the cross section of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Streets, all about, scattered to and fro, was a nice cross section of urban humanity, performers and their audience, hotdog vendors, people chatting away on cell phones, enjoying the unseasonable warmth. The library as meeting point, I thought.

In contrast, the grandiosity of the library's edifice itself is something to behold. Imposing, looming, its scale is simply out of whack with most libraries as we all know them. I'm not sure what I had expected. Something less colossal, perhaps. After stumbling about in the foyer for a few moments, my companion and I helped ourselves to a somewhat intricate foldout map of the interior. Randomly selecting a direction, we lit out down a long hallway like a couple of tourists. Eventually, through regular fact-checking against our map, we came to the Map Room, closed off by a rather intricate door. We entered, silently, then had absolutely no idea what to do next. I tiptoed around, feigned interest in a map of Istanbul lying open, and attempted to not appear like the interloper I felt like. We stayed just long enough to lend the appearance that we hadn't wandered in by mistake, then quickly departed for the U.S. History room.

Okay. This room actually resembled a library as I know them. I directed my companion to the online catalog and then the reference desk, where his queries (concerning WWII) were met with rapt, helpful attention by the resident librarians. I was beginning to feel a bit emboldened. This initial feeling of confidence wouldn't linger very long, however.

I had been in a non-lending library before, and as I climbed the marble stairs and peeked into the public catalog room, it was clear that this was a system with which I was not familiar. Sure, I could peruse the online catalog, select the documents I

wanted, but then what? There was absolutely nothing intuitive about just how, exactly, one managed to get their hands on the desired texts. Everyone else seemed to know what they were doing. We staggered about, like seafarers in rough water, trying to eavesdrop, to spy, to discern what everybody else was doing. I watched with curiosity as other patrons furiously filled out the small white document request forms, then queued up to submit them to a clerk. There were several lines, all of which seemed to serve their own purpose. Which line went where, and for what, was a complete mystery. As was which people behind the counters were librarians and which were staff. After getting in the wrong (long) line a few times, we finally stumbled over to the correct employee. The clerk examined our forms, explained all the mistakes we had made, corrected them, then rolled up the slips, placed them in a canister and in turn into a pneumatic tube, at which point the canister was transported to some mysterious place, presumably to the stacks. This system was fascinating, unfamiliar and completely intimidating. We stood there like a couple of idiots, having no idea what happened next.

Apparently, our confusion was palpable, since the clerk pointed us in the direction of an adjacent antechamber, which in turn opened up into the main reading room. How, once in this locale, we received our books was anybody's guess, so eventually we enlisted the assistance of a nearby security guard. Another first. Having no way to determine who the librarians were, the security staff became our most dependable allies in our quest for research materials. The guard was polite, patient, and helpful (though would still frisk us again later on the way out). He ushered us towards one half of the vast reading room, which resembled the deli counter of a bustling grocery.

My rudimentary handle on the system's workings led me, after a nice interlude of panic and self doubt, to realize it was now time to wait our turn at the book deli. A gigantic tote board flashed numbers on and off, while all around us people glanced feverishly from their slips of paper to the board and back again. Plastic cartons of

impossible. This is a developing field of criticism, so there's the added possibility that the newest journals may not have made it into our directories yet. Finally, many journals that publish postcolonial criticism do not identify themselves explicitly as "postcolonial journals," but simply as journals of English-language literature.

Faced with this somewhat daunting task, I sent out a call for help on the LES discussion list. The response was immediate, thorough, and very helpful. Here's a summary of our colleagues' suggestions.

The **MLA Directory of Periodicals** permits searching for journals by keywords in title, scope note, and subject (depending on your interface).

rejections. They show me that librarians really take their profession seriously and they really do hold the patron's needs as a priority when hiring someone. That alone ought to ensure a newly hired employee that their library will be a viable tool for the patrons for a long time. Hiring someone is not a simple task and I am sure it must be difficult to choose just one person out

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