

Letters

The Uses and Limitations of Trueswell

To the Editor:

I was somewhat astonished at the vehemence of Richard Trueswell's rejoinder (*C&RL*, Sept. 1979) especially as it seemed to make no reference to that particular aspect of his work of which I was most critical. I would like to close my side of the discussion by commenting on three matters.

First, I did not claim that Trueswell's basic procedure is fallacious. On the contrary, I think it is a major contribution, perhaps the best and most practical technique we have for finding out from circulation statistics how a collection is being used. If I had not thought that his procedure was both sound and useful, I would not have adopted it for my own research.

But a procedure is one thing; the drawing of conclusions after using the procedure may be something else again. This brings me to the second matter for comment: Trueswell's stance with respect to library policies. In general, it is true that we should not hold researchers responsible for the use that others make of their work. We should not blame Robert Ardrey on Konrad Lorenz, or Herman Kahn on Einstein. But when a researcher knows that his or her work is being repeatedly cited in professional literature in support of a certain policy, the researcher probably has a responsibility to take a position on whether or not the use of the conclusions seems appropriate. If the researcher does not do so, on-lookers are probably justified in assuming that silence implies assent. I had, of course, read Trueswell's disclaimer of any particular policy recommendations; but by publishing his article under the title "Growing Libraries: Who Needs Them? A Statistical Basis for the No-Growth Collection," he has made his research vote in a sweeping and emphatic way on the basic policy issue in question. Surely, my paraphrases do not seriously overstate the implications of that title.

The third matter is my specific use and

criticism of Richard Trueswell's work. The article that I referred to from Gore's *Farewell to Alexandria* collection, the title of which is quoted above, is Trueswell's most recent statement of his procedures and results as they relate to book collections. If my criticism had been directed at omissions, his complaint that I have not cited other articles would probably have merit. But since I was commenting on what seems to me a mistake in what he did say, it still seems reasonable to treat his most recent statement as authoritative.

The mistake or fallacy that I was commenting on was not a matter of data or sampling procedure, but of analytical method. And the basic point of a preliminary study should be to get such methods straightened out.

Once again, my criticism is directed at the claim, developed on pages 84-86 of *Farewell to Alexandria*, that a core collection consisting of those books that have circulated since the established cutoff date can be expected to satisfy 99 percent of circulation requirements. More precisely, the fallacy consists in establishing the core in such a way that all books that have never circulated are excluded from it, regardless of how recently they were obtained. Trueswell is saying, in effect, that there is a 99 percent probability that the next book to circulate will have circulated at least once since the established cutoff date.

What he is justified in saying is, There is a 99 percent probability that the next book to circulate will have circulated or been added to the collection since the cutoff date. This is more than a lapse of language, it must be noted, since it is confining the core to those books that have actually circulated that leads to the famous and mistaken claim that more than half the collection could be disposed of with only a 1 percent decline in user satisfaction.

This point that I have criticized is a rather important one from the standpoint of the current debate on library policy, but a

very small one from the standpoint of judging the value of Trueswell's contribution. I will close by apologizing for a tone that perhaps implied a fuller condemnation than I intended. I would be truly disturbed if I thought that the effect of my comments would be to discourage librarians from exploring and using the Trueswell procedure.—*Seymour H. Sargent, Library Science Department, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.*

In Search of New Horizons

To the Editor:

That is a strange review of my *In Search of New Horizons* in the July issue of *College & Research Libraries*.

Every standard reference book that I have consulted states that Admiral Robert Peary reached the North Pole on April 6, 1909, and spent thirty hours there planting flags and making observations. I wonder if Madden believes in the thoroughly discredited Dr. Cook story.

As to the question of whether the ALA is a proper publisher for such a book, it should be noted that *In Search of New Horizons* is a book about books, in the same category as *Books That Changed the World*. Even in a profession increasingly crazed about automation and computers, I assume that the ALA is still somewhat book-oriented.

I can offer no defense of my writing style, though it doesn't seem to have stood in the way of my books selling in the hundreds of thousands of copies, and a well-known science writer, David Dietz, described it as having "clarity, force and charm."—*Robert B. Downs, Dean of Library Administration Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

Response

To the Editor:

Standard reference works have the unfortunate habit of perpetuating the mistakes of their predecessors, as well as inventing new ones, such as the *New Columbia Encyclopedia's* identification of Franz Ferdinand as a grandnephew of Franz Joseph. A dispassionate reading of the literature of polar exploration establishes that neither Peary nor Cook reached his goal, despite the claims in their self-serving narratives.

The fact that *In Search of New Horizons* is a book about books, which I discerned at first reading, does not cause me to modify my doubt concerning the appropriateness of its publication by the American Library Association.

I am happy that hundreds of thousands of Dean Downs' books have been sold to readers who have a taste in style different from mine.—*Henry Miller Madden, Fresno, California.*

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