

mentioned that staff were reassigned from technical to public service positions as a result of outsourcing. Everyone indicated the need for careful planning in advance and for periodic evaluations. In gauging the success of outsourced work, several authors granted that no figures existed for making certain comparisons. A surprising number of institutions lack data on cataloging error rates, turnaround time from order to shelf for new acquisitions, and so on.

More appendices outlining contract specifications would have strengthened the case studies and provided potential assistance to those who are anticipating the outsourcing of some operations. The book was intended to present case studies of successful outsourcing, however; and this purpose was fulfilled. The text proper is followed by an annotated bibliography. Included are almost 125 citations to materials that present both the negative and positive aspects of outsourcing. Anyone with an interest in the subject will find this work a useful addition to the literature.—James W. Williams, *University of Illinois-Urbana*.

Radway, Janice A. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1997. 424p. alk. paper, \$29.95 (ISBN 0-8078-2357-0). LC 96-52037.

Janice A. Radway's first book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, dared to take seriously one of the most despised genres of mass fiction and to listen to the voices of real readers. Those were the days when popular culture was still unmentionable in many English departments. In this new project, Radway tackles a tamer, but more ambiguous, subject: the Book of the Month Club and the middlebrow culture it both reflected and promoted. She seems determined to repeat her earlier triumphant vindication of reading matter scorned by highbrow critics. But times have changed

since 1984. Attacking the modernist canon, validating the reader's desires, interpreting the economic, social, and psychological meanings of cultural texts—all this is old hat today. Radway acknowledges her uncertainty about what she herself describes as a work of self-discovery whose focus "oscillates continually between critique and appreciation."

A Feeling for Books consists of three sections, each with a distinctive subject matter and methodology. It begins with a field study of the Book of the Month Club organization that Radway undertook in 1985 as part of an "ethnographic" study of reading. She recounts her impressions of the club's editors as they responded to a takeover by Time Incorporated. The second and longest section uses a more detached, scholarly approach to survey the history of publishing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the rise of the Book of the Month Club, and responses to it. In conclusion, Radway offers personal interpretations of several club titles she read as a fourteen year old: *Marjorie Morningstar*; *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*; and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

When the well-read advertising man Harry Scherman launched the Book of the Month Club in 1926, he knew exactly what he was doing. He applied modern techniques of marketing and distribution to bookselling to "sell new books as an identifiable category with recognizable uses for potential buyers." The books were selected by a carefully chosen panel of judges who were presented as both experts and generalists. The ingenious "negative option," which allowed readers to reject a book, enabled the club to maintain an illusion of freedom and individuality. (The irrepressible Scherman described readers' rejection of a chosen title thus: "The country didn't want *The Heart of Emerson's Journals*; they didn't want any part of Emerson's journals.") The number of subscribers quickly stabilized at a million. By the 1950s, the club had become a cultural icon, subject of an

oral history project at Columbia University. A long, slow decline led to today's more purely commercial orientation.

Radway interprets and deconstructs the Book of the Month Club as a social and cultural symptom and force with relish. Her ability to find meaning in what some might regard as a minor, if not trivial, subject is prodigious. Middlebrow culture, she demonstrates, defined itself in opposition to high culture and not as a diluted form of it. Valued above all was the personal experience of both author and reader, the emotional experience of being caught up and transported by a book. The Book of the Month Club saw itself as the "book club of record," which maintained the highest standards in balancing reader demands and literary quality, matching the best books of all types to potential readers. Radway rather hesitantly defines the readership as a socially insecure, rising class of managerial professionals who used these books both to gain information about contemporary issues and for the emotional element missing from their professional lives.

Radway is an exciting thinker who can ring interesting changes even on the familiar triad of race, class, and gender. Early critical attacks on the Book of the Month Club, for example, had an underlying gender bias, and popular novels during the Cold War subtly promoted the superiority of the white man. Yet, I found the book profoundly irritating. The trendy words *desire*, *performance*, *boundary work*, *circulation*, and *construction* echo like mantras. Radway's residual grudge against the English professors who clipped her wings in college leads her to belabor the culture wars between modernist and middlebrow culture ad nauseum. Repetition and overinterpretation leave the reader weary, whereas important questions, such as the cost of buying these books and their reception by ordinary people, remain underexplored. (Radway's explanation that data on readership are lacking is not convincing. What

about book reviews in newspapers and popular magazines, book club lectures, etc.?) The book's tone can be inflated comically, as in the claim that "a system enshrining speed, repetition, circulation, and integration . . . did away almost from the start with the very idea of origin, creation, inspiration and source." Unfortunately, all the comedy is unintentional in this earnest exploration of a subject that cries out for humor, as Sinclair Lewis well knew.

School and public librarians may see themselves mirrored in the Book of the Month Club judges who tried so hard to anticipate the needs of all kinds of readers. The relevance of *A Feeling for Books* for academic librarians is less direct. This is a fairly accessible example of cultural criticism that can serve as an introduction to the burgeoning study of reading, readers, and the book. It explains (albeit in a biased way) some of the ideological struggles going on in academic departments of English. It can make us pause and consider the assumptions and biases that go into our own choice of resources for the library, and to understand that there are no eternal, universal, and unconstructed (to use a trendy word) principles of selection.—*Jean Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.*

Restructuring Academic Libraries: Organizational Development in the Wake of Technological Change. Ed. Charles A. Schwartz, for the ACRL. Chicago: ALA, 1997. 289p. alk. paper. \$28 (ISBN 0-8389-3478-1). LC 97-40243.

The computer has radically changed how librarians and patrons access information. Librarians search to find the best organizational structures and services to utilize new technologies most effectively. Numerous articles and books address these issues. Now, the ACRL has published this collection of nineteen essays concerning library organizational change in light of technological development. Although these essays offer few new insights, they