Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Oboler, Eli M. *To Free the Mind: Libraries, Technology, and Intellectual Freedom.* Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1983. 137p. $15. ISBN 0-87287-325-0.

Eli Oboler died before he finished writing this book on a subject that dominated his personal and professional life—intellectual freedom. In this short piece the author explores the impact of technology on intellectual freedom. He warns us that our present courtship of technology must be pursued with extreme caution lest we find that the embrace smothers all that is best of the humanist heritage in librarianship.

In Oboler's interpretation of the uneasy marriage between libraries and technology, danger lurks in every bit and byte. A cornerstone of his argument is that since computerization and networking cost a great deal of money, "access is automatically restricted in relation to the amount of money available to any particular library. And denial of access is, of course, one way of restricting intellectual freedom." (p.21). Furthermore, the creation of large databases makes possible massive invasions of privacy.

Were his discourse aimed largely at discussing the relationship between libraries and technology, Oboler's case would be clearer, if not stronger. However, we often find him wandering off to discuss the production of information as opposed to its dissemination. While there is an obvious link between intellectual freedom and unfettered communication, the role of the library is less apparent. As a result of excursions of this type, the book more resembles a potpourri of semidigested thoughts rather than a carefully reasoned and argued discourse. This tendency is reinforced by the frequent inclusions of excerpts of his previously published essays, some having but the most tenuous relationship to the intended thrust of the book.

At times the reader will be tempted to dismiss Oboler's cautions as railings against "willy-nilly modernization." That would be a mistake. His insights about the inherent dangers in "compunication" (the combined effects of computerized data processing and telecommunications) remind us that only our goodwill prevents the use of the machine against individual freedom. And since we hesitate to trust too much to that goodwill, we need a voice such as Oboler's. In the struggle between people and machine, people must prevail.—*Jay Whaley, University of California, Irvine.*

Dowlin, Kenneth E. *The Electronic Library: The Promise and the Process.* New York: Neal-Schuman, 1984. 199p. $24.95. LC 83-21957. ISBN 0-918212-75-8.

Most of the serious interest to date in "the electronic library" has come from public libraries. The inherent conservatism of scholarship has buffered academic libraries from some of the electronic winds of change. Community college and undergraduate libraries, coping with the computer-literate products of secondary schools, have been more quickly affected than university and research libraries. Ultimately, however, all libraries will have to deal with the odd shapes and sizes, complex "reading" equipment, and different organizations of the newer forms of "publication."