

## *Cruising the Library*

**Melissa Adler. *Cruising the Library: Perversities in the Organization of Knowledge*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017. 233 pp. \$100.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780823276363. \$28.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9780823276356.**

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In the acknowledgments section of *Cruising the Library*, Melissa Adler eagerly awaits — as only a librarian can — her book's complete bibliographic record, and wonders where it will be shelved. For the author, this is more than a matter of personal interest; it's of academic interest, since library classification is more or less what this book is about: a technology of power, control, and dominance that hides and limits as well as reveals and enables. In other words, *Cruising the Library* problematizes library classification; it's thick with theory and criticism (critical theory) and thin with practical proposals (creative critique). Where the book will be shelved is of particular interest in light of the book's interdisciplinarity. The publisher has provided the following headings on the book's back cover: library and information science; gay and lesbian studies; and American studies. Adler examines library classification, namely, that of the Library of Congress, through the lens of gay and lesbian studies. It is a particularly illuminating lens, perhaps even more so than that of theology and religious studies, for the simple reason that its vocabulary has changed so much over the years.

*Cruising the Library* is a complex work divided into five substantial chapters. The first chapter takes a critical look at Library of Congress subject headings dealing with homosexuality. Adler describes how she was searching for catalog records with the word "homosexual" in them. As she browsed through the results, she came across Wilhelm Stekel's 1934 book *Bi-Sexual Love: The Homosexual Neurosis*, which was marked with the headings "Neuroses" and "Paraphilias." The neutral, medical term *paraphilia* had replaced "Sexual deviation" in 2007, which had replaced "Sexual perversion" in 1972. When the book was originally cataloged in 1934, headings for "Homosexuality" and "Bisexuality" didn't exist, and they were never retrospectively applied to Stekel's book. This is problematic, according to Adler, primarily because medical terms have been applied to a wide variety of works that use quite different words. It is particularly problematic because the warrant for subject headings is supposed to come from the literature itself, as the Library of Congress urges and acknowledges.

Chapter two is quite a different investigation, one that tells the fascinating and obscure history of the Library of Congress's Delta Collection. This locked, closed-to-the-public collection of books, films, and ephemera with explicitly sexual or pornographic content and/or illustrations had accumulated over a period of decades as an attempt to police and protect public morals, as well as protect the items themselves from theft and vandalism. Many were seized by U.S. Customs and postal officials, or acquired by the Copyright Office. Although the collection was disbanded in the 1960s, Adler has been able to identify 1,010 books that once belonged to it, including *Erotic Prints of the Ming* and Nabokov's *Lolita*. Her archival research has also unearthed the rather paranoid atmosphere at LC that prevailed in the 1950s, when more than a dozen Library of Congress employees were charged with perversion.

The next two chapters focus on Library of Congress classification schemes, how they affect the physical location of books in the library building, and how those books relate to one another. For example, Adler's paradigmatic author Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's diverse output is spread across the following subject classifications: BF (Psychology), P (Philology and Linguistics), PN (Literature) PR (English literature), PS (American literature), and RC (Internal medicine). Most of these books have something to do with queer theory, which actually falls under HQ (Family, Marriage, and Women). In the academic library where Adler works, these books have been shelved on three different floors, so it is easy to see how a reader interested in Sedgwick's books might be frustrated trying to locate them all. If the reader were to go searching in the HQs, s/he might be shocked and/or dismayed to see books on homosexuality shelved with books on sex crimes. Updating the names of subject headings, as the Library of Congress has done, simply isn't enough if the classifications remain the same. What happens if race is factored into the equation? Here Adler notes that the majority of

books categorized as being about “African American gays” are classified according to sexual difference rather than racial difference.

Since one book obviously can't be shelved in two places at once, other considerations come into play, and this is where accusations of bias come in, since one aspect of a subject invariably gets privileged over another, and dominant groups are considered normative. Why, for example, are there subject headings for “African American gays,” “Asian American gays,” and “Hispanic American gays,” but not for “White gays”? There is no easy solution, but Adler offers a few “reparative taxonomies” in the final chapter. Unfortunately, these function more as imaginative exercises than as practical proposals, leaving us right where we started, though perhaps somewhat wiser and a lot more critical. Adler's critical analysis of taxonomies could certainly be extended to the disciplines of theology and religious studies, where Christian discourses dominate, with no less lurid and shameful results.

For a book that owes so much to critical theory (Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, to name a few), *Cruising the Library* is remarkably readable, despite a fair amount of jargon. This becomes most noticeable when Adler quotes others, because the quotes contrast so unfavorably with her limpid prose. The reader doesn't even need to be familiar with critical theory or interested in queer studies to find this book fascinating. But for those who are in the business of bibliographic cataloging and reference, this critical study is essential reading.

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