



The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

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J. D. COWLEY, in his book *The Use of Reference Materials*, describes reference work as a “. . . series of crises which arise whenever anyone wants to know anything. . . .”¹ To meet each such “crisis” the reference librarian must be prepared with full knowledge of available library resources in order to provide the inquirer with the materials best suited to his particular need. This is not the time to discover the reference title which should have been ordered last year; nor is it the proper moment to make a first acquaintance with a book. Indeed, as Mr. Cowley so graphically points out, “The enquirer has not time to wait while we discover whether a book is indexed, whether it has bibliographies, or how it is arranged. He expects the librarian to know these things beforehand, just as we expect a doctor to know, generally speaking, what the insides of our bodies look like without opening them to see.”²

Reference service depends first, then, upon a knowledge of what reference books have been and are being published, secondly, upon an evaluation of each of these reference sources, and thirdly, upon a thorough knowledge of the use of each reference book available.

Since a definition of terms is preliminary to any discussion, this paper should properly start with a terse but conclusive definition of the “reference book.” *The ALA Glossary* regards a reference book as “a book designed by its arrangement and treatment to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively.”³ This is concurred in by most authorities,⁴⁻⁶ although from time to time the idea is espoused that any book which supplies a fact wanted by a person could be called a reference book. For the purposes

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of this paper, the narrower definition will be employed. However, whenever selected lists of reference works are used, the validity of the selection of titles as being "reference" books will not be questioned.

There is no need to sketch herein a history of the publishing of reference books since this has been concisely, but adequately, treated by Raymond L. Kilgour.⁷ His discussion of some of the major reference sets and reference publishers, particularly during the period from 1946 to 1957, specifies outstanding new titles and revisions of older and established reference sets. Yearly reference lists from 1958 to the present time can bring the reader up-to-date on specific titles. There remains for us, therefore, a brief analysis of who is publishing what type of reference tool and in what subject areas publishing seems most active.

Preliminary to any such analysis there must be an overview of the realm of reference book publishing, an understanding of the total from which certain traits or characteristics are drawn. The actual number of reference books published to date remains an unknown quantity. As Dr. Shores pointed out in 1952: "The world's reference books now comprise a literature so extensive that it is no longer possible to compile an inclusive bibliography."⁸ The monumental listing of reference sources, Constance Winchell's *Guide to Reference Books*, lists 5,500 titles in the seventh edition published in 1951.⁹ The four supplements, covering the period from 1950 through 1962, add 4,730 titles.¹⁰ But even with this seemingly vast number, Winchell does not pretend to have a complete listing of *all* reference books published.

As we cannot count the number of reference books published in the world from the earliest date to the present time, so we cannot give the actual number of reference books published in any one given year. Lists of reference works are made, but each list maker qualifies his choices in some way and then admits the probability of his missing many titles which should have earned a place. It is safe to answer as did the mythical scholar who, when asked how many books were published in his field that year, "... consulted his records, studied a minute crack in the wall, and stated 'In 1953 there were exactly 2,569 science titles published in the United States. And nobody can prove otherwise.'" ¹¹

No person would deny, however, that the number of reference books published each year is increasing. Dr. Shores, in his "Patterns of American Reference Books," cites the one hundred fifty titles in the

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

Saturday Review's Annual Reference Roundup in 1952 and the annual reference list in *Publishers' Weekly* to confirm his conviction of the growing rate of new reference titles.¹² Corroboration is found in the increase in the number of books listed in the supplements to the *Guide to Reference Books*, from 1,000 titles for 1950-52, to 1,200 (1953-55), to 1,230 (1956-59), to 1,300 for the 1960-62 years.

It might be safe to assume that the number of new reference books published yearly will increase in proportion to the increase in the total book production. Robert W. Frazee, presenting statistics of actual book production in the United States for 1951 and 1960, with a projection for 1980, has predicted an increase of between 66 per cent and 100 per cent by 1980 if the present publishing trend continues. Foreign book production, based on the activity in 31 countries, might show an increase of about 75 per cent in 1980 over the figures for 1959.¹³ Assuredly the number of reference books published will increase within this framework.

The announcement of these new reference titles will be made by publishers' advertisements; by a listing in the "Weekly Record" of *Publishers' Weekly* and in the *Cumulative Book Index*; by a review in the general reviewing sources such as the *New York Times Book Review*, *New York Herald Tribune Book Week*, and *Saturday Review*; or by mention in such library periodicals as *Booklist*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, *Library Journal*, *College and Research Libraries*, *Special Libraries*, *Horn Book*, *Top of the News*, etc. Subscription books may be presented with a full review in *Booklist* and *Subscription Books Bulletin*.

Annually many lists of reference books are published, to furnish a checklist against which reference librarians can measure their knowledge of the current output of possible reference acquisitions. There is the list of the "outstanding reference books," published yearly since 1953 in the *Library Journal*. Winchell and her colleagues at Columbia University Libraries have prepared semi-annual lists of reference works which have been published each January and July since January 1952, in *College and Research Libraries*. The *Saturday Review* has presented a yearly reference book round-up from 1950 to 1955 and a review of selected reference titles since then, while *Publishers' Weekly* devotes an annual issue to this type of publication. The *Wilson Library Bulletin* has a monthly listing of reference titles, "Current Reference Books," started in 1938 by Louis Shores and continued by Frances Neel Cheney since November 1942.

Realizing the futility of attempting to compile a comprehensive list of all reference works as a basis for an analysis of the trends of reference book publishing, Seaberg selected for her field of inquiry the reference books reviewed in the *Library Journal* for 1952, along with the lists of selected reference titles for 1957 and 1962 published in that journal; the semi-annual lists of reference books appearing in *College and Research Libraries* for 1952, 1957, and 1962; and the titles on the monthly lists of "Current Reference Books" in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* for those same three years. Although some uniqueness in titles might be expected, it is nevertheless surprising to find that there is little duplication among the reference books in the three sources. In 1952, 92.5 per cent of the titles were on only one of the lists; by 1957, this had decreased to 83 per cent, which figure dropped to 80 per cent in 1962. While by 1962, 4.7 per cent of the titles appeared on all three lists as opposed to a 1.1 percentage in 1952, it is quite obvious that librarians need to use all three sources to keep abreast of new reference titles, even "selected" reference books.

This divergence in selection is due, in major part, to the difference in purpose of the three listings. The aim of "Reference Books of 1962" in *Library Journal* is ". . . to select publications suitable for small and medium-sized libraries, with emphasis on the public library but with possibilities of usefulness for smaller college libraries. . . ." ¹⁴ *College and Research Libraries'* lists are ". . . to present a selection of recent scholarly and foreign works of interest to reference workers in university libraries . . ." and ". . . does not pretend to be either well-balanced or comprehensive." ¹⁵ Much more general in nature is "Current Reference Books" which started with the avowed intention of reviewing, noting, and listing ". . . reference books of interest to general libraries that are not sold thru subscription." ¹⁶

That reference books are published predominately by the trade publisher comes as no surprise, as indicated in Table I. Of the titles appearing in the three lists cited above, 71 per cent were trade publications in 1952 and 1957, the percentage dropping to 64 per cent in 1962. The university presses, gaining in importance since World War II, have provided libraries with from 16.5 per cent to 18.5 per cent of the reference titles on these three lists each year. Stimulated by grants from the Ford Foundation and provided with a growing number of manuscripts due, perhaps, to the rising "break-even" point of the trade publisher, the university press continues to develop as a publisher of serious nonfiction and reference and research materials.¹⁷

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

TABLE I

Reference Books from Three Selected Sources by Publisher

Type of Publisher	Percentage of Total		
	1952	1957	1962
Trade Publishers	71.2	71.4	64.8
University Presses	16.5	18.5	17.6
Professional Organizations and Learned Societies	7.4	7.2	11.4
Governmental Bodies	4.5	2.6	5.8
Individual	.4	.3	.4

Learned societies and professional associations have increased their publishing activity during these ten years by over one-third while governmental bodies accounted for almost 6 per cent of the titles on the selected lists. The growing contribution of these two types of publishers to the store of reference works will require of librarians an alertness to find announcements of the appearance of new titles not as well advertised as those of trade or university presses.

An analysis of the type of reference books published is presented in Table II and indicates the steady popularity of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks. Bibliographies, union catalogs, and catalogs of special collections show the most increase, an indication of the pressing need felt by librarians and scholars alike for knowledge of what has been published and where copies of publications are located. New methods of publishing catalogs of great collections have opened the door to such publishers as G. K. Hall who has reproduced some sixty-seven catalogs of varying size and subject matter, offering them to libraries at costs ranging from \$12 to \$9,170. The steady rise in the number of indexes also reflects this expanding need for bibliographical control of information, and the necessity for cooperation in identifying and sharing research resources.

Concerning the subject matter of these reference titles, Table III shows a continuation of publishing patterns of the past, with the humanities the most prolific, followed by the social sciences and then the sciences. While reference works in science and technology comprise

TABLE II
Reference Books from Three Selected Sources by Type

Type of Reference Book	Percentage of Total		
	1952	1957	1962
Dictionaries and Encyclopedias	20.7	17.1	27.3
Handbooks, Manuals, etc.	33.2	41.7	22.9
Bibliographies, Catalogs, Union Lists	10.4	11.5	25.7
Historical or Expository	24.4	11.3	6.6
Indexes and Directories	7.1	10.7	11.0
Atlases	2.1	3.2	4.6
Anthologies	1.7	4.6	1.1
Tables	0.4	0.0	0.7

only 14 per cent to 20 per cent of the titles on the three selected lists, it must be pointed out that this is somewhat less than a fair estimate of the number of titles published. In the introduction to "Reference Books of 1951-52," Winchell states ". . . with the exception of two titles, the sciences and technologies have again been omitted."¹⁸ Although this statement is not repeated in 1957 and 1962, the sciences continue to be comparatively neglected areas.

TABLE III
Reference Books from Three Selected Sources by Subject

Subject of the Reference Book	Percentage of Total		
	1952	1957	1962
General	9.9	10.4	17.8
Humanities	47.0	40.3	41.1
Social Science	29.0	27.5	24.0
Sciences	14.1	21.8	17.1

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

Of considerable interest is the increased production of reference titles with a national or regional emphasis. Over 32 per cent of the titles listed in 1962 were regional in nature, almost double what it was in 1952. In a year when activity in Saigon, Indo-China, Vietnam, and the rising countries of Africa was uppermost in the news, the publications reflect a continued predominant interest in North America and Europe, with only a slight increase in works on Africa and a decrease from previous years for reference books on Asian countries. The increase in titles on South and Central America may well reflect this country's growing awareness of our southern neighbors.

A final observation drawn from the Seaberg analysis of reference titles from three library periodicals, is the fact that about 25 per cent of the 1962 citations are revisions of earlier works, added volumes to standard sets, or an annual volume continuing a series. This attention to the matter of up-to-dateness is also noted by Shaw, in his introduction to "Reference Books of 1962," in which he commends editors and publishers for their awareness of the need for currency in reference information.¹⁴

Two additional trends in the publishing of reference books should be noted, both the results of publishing innovations. The first is the appearance of numerous reference books in paperback. "Thanks to paperbacks," writes J. Sherwood Weber, "a private citizen with a modest income can for the first time in history possess a serviceable reference library without taking a personal loan or mortgaging the house."¹⁵ The number of titles available is impressive—377 paperback books are classified as "reference" in *Paperbound Books in Print* for October 1963.²⁰ Of this number, 107 are dictionaries while 196 are "personal and practical guides."

Along with the attention given to making reference books easily available to the general public through an inexpensive form of publication, there appears to be a concern on the part of publishers to provide libraries with titles or volumes of reference works which have long been out-of-print. The Wilson Company's reprinting schedule for early volumes of the *Book Review Digest* is only one example of this welcome activity. In addition there are increasing instances where some form of photo-reproduction such as xerography has been used to bring us such out-of-print works as the early volumes of the *Accountants' Index*, the *Art Index*, *Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities*, *Bibliography and Index of Geology Exclusive of*

North America, Bibliography of Indonesian Peoples and Cultures, to name just a few.

What is the "state of the art" of reference publishing? In one word: flourishing. The number of new titles is ever increasing while at the same time publishers are giving increased attention to bringing standard works up-to-date. Dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks are still popular, and the printed catalog, the union list and the bibliography have more than doubled in number within the past five years. Xerography has made possible the reproduction of a great many of the catalogs of unique library collections; its use in reproducing formerly out-of-print titles is expanding. And, finally, reference titles are now available for the average person to own and use in his home.

Reviewing of Reference Books

Faced with the multiplicity of titles which might conceivably produce the necessary fact, figure, idea, or citation needed by an inquirer, the librarian searches for some description and evaluation of new reference titles. The *Book Review Digest*, *Technical Book Review Index*, *Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities*, and *Bibliographie der Rezensionen* are known sources for starting a search for book reviews. However, each of these has its limitations for locating reviews of reference books.

The *Book Review Digest*, started in 1905 by the H. W. Wilson Co., has performed an admirable job through the years of guiding people to book reviews appearing in some eighty-one journals. Not until Ditzion reported on a brief study of book reviewing media, in 1934, was there any published criticism of the *Book Review Digest*, and in this article he bemoaned the fact that many late reviews in professional journals were not being indexed.²¹ In a letter to the *Library Journal* in response to this criticism,²² the editor of the *Book Review Digest*, Marion Knight, pointed out that the policy governing the publication was to index reviews of a title only if two reviews had appeared during the indexing period, or three reviews if the book were fiction. To support the omission of reviews from many professional journals, Knight cited examples of the time lag between publication of a book and the appearance of the review in the more scholarly journal, a lag of from two to four years in some instances.

Merritt's study of the *Book Review Digest* for 1948, fourteen years later, revealed the continuation of this situation, showing that the *Book Review Digest* indexed 21,068 reviews of 3,836 books appearing

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

in eighty-one journals but did not index single reviews of 12,758 books published in those same journals.²³ A check of three journals indexed in the 1961 *Book Review Digest* revealed a similar pattern, the *Book Review Digest* indexing only nine of 74 reviews in *Library Quarterly*, twenty-three of 93 reviews in *Journal of Religion* and forty-one of 118 reviews in *Journal of Political Economy*. Thus one must conclude that the *Book Review Digest* is only a partial index to reviews, even in the journals listed.

The *Technical Book Review Index* is, as its name implies, limited to books in the fields of science and technology. Started as a quarterly by the Technology Department of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and expanded in 1935 to a monthly (except for July and August), this index cites single reviews, generally from technical or scientific journals. The problem in locating reviews of science reference works is not one of using the *Technical Book Review Index*, but rather is inherent in the practices of reviewing science books in the science journals. Culver and Long found, in their study in 1949, the same situation that Schutze recorded two years earlier,²⁴ that only 18 per cent of the reviews of technical books appeared within four months of publication, while 60 per cent of the reviews located in scientific journals were for titles published within a seven-month period.²⁵ In an attempt to find ways to reduce the amount of time between the publication date of the book and the appearance of its review, Culver and Long interviewed publishers, periodical editors, booksellers, and abstractors, learning from them some of the reasons for this time lag: delays in the printing process, the practice of gathering reviews and holding them for one big book issue, and the lack of prepublication copies which could be made available to the reviewers. The problem of 1949 appears to be a continuing problem today; for, in the September 1962, issue of the *Technical Book Review Index*, 18 per cent of the titles listed were 1961 publications, reviews of which appeared between June and August of 1962 in science journals.

A third book review index, *Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities*, is still too new to be assessed, bothered, as it seems to be, by problems of finding a feasible publication schedule. The unfortunate demise of the fourth title, *Bibliographie der Rezensionen*, in 1943, was a blow to research libraries whose librarians and clientele had located English and non-English language reviews through this magnificent indexing tool.

All of these titles along with the various periodical indexes are

valuable sources for finding book reviews within their limitations. However, most librarians will use them for retrospective rather than current needs; for evaluation of new titles, they will go to the current journals which publish reviews.

One problem of reference book reviewing, then, is expressed in the two questions: Are there reviews of reference books? Are the reviews being published rapidly enough after publication date to be useful to the librarian?

Shores, in discussing the evaluation of reference books in 1952, says that ". . . we have more means than ever through which the alert reference librarian can detect inferiorities."²⁶ To substantiate this statement he cites the *Guide to Reference Books* as the first and foremost source for evaluative data, with additional aid from the *Subscription Books Bulletin*, *Saturday Review*, *Wilson Library Bulletin* and the *Library Journal*. No one would question the importance of the *Guide to Reference Books* and its supplements as the ". . . reference librarian's mainstay for the selection of materials for purchase";²⁷ but all would agree that it is not kept right up-to-date for new books, necessitating other reviewing sources more current in nature.

An approach to the problem of assessing the quantitative adequacy of reviews of reference books is the study made by Catherine Glennan as a master's project for Western Reserve's School of Library Science.²⁸ Taking a random sample of one in every four books listed in each of the annual "Reference Checklists" published in *Library Journal* for the years 1953 through 1957, Glennan searched for reviews of these titles in five sources: *Library Journal*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, *Booklist* and *Subscription Books Bulletin*, *Book Review Digest*, and *Technical Book Review Index*. When one remembers that the reference titles included on the annual lists are judged the best or at least the superior books of each year, it is surprising to note that only 63 per cent of these were reviewed at all. In addition to the 37 per cent not reviewed, another 22 per cent were reviewed only once, and thus Glennan concludes that 59 per cent were either not covered or inadequately covered. An additional fact to add to this bleak picture is that 20 per cent of the reviews which *were* written appeared in the year after the date of publication.

An earlier survey was conducted by F. R. Pryce in England and reported to the Group Meeting of the Research and Special Libraries Section of the Library Association in 1954.²⁹ Analyzing the reviewing of reference titles, he reports that from the evidence obtained ". . . it

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

is apparent that the greater number of reference books are either inadequately reviewed or entirely overlooked."³⁰ Two of the four titles cited in the brief table accompanying the report show serious time lags from publication date to review appearance, a year in one case and five years in another.

As an additional check on the availability of reviews of reference works, thirty titles were selected from the *Ready Reference Collection*, the list of basic reference books recommended for the Ready Reference Center of Library 21 at the Seattle World Fair 1962. Ten titles published within a 1950-1955 date and ten titles appearing between 1960 and 1962 were chosen arbitrarily, with another ten titles selected from pages 5 and 6 of the list. In the selection process, all continuations were omitted as well as all revised editions of earlier works, since few reviews would be expected to be written for these types of publications. Reviews of the thirty selected titles were sought in *Book Review Digest*, *College and Research Libraries*, *Library Journal*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and *Subscription Books Bulletin*. The results from this brief study revealed sixteen of the thirty titles were listed in the *Book Review Digest*; eighteen out of thirty in *Library Journal*; six in *College and Research Libraries*; twelve in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and six in the *Subscription Books Bulletin*; six titles were ignored by all these reviewing media. This inadequate sample indicated no improvement in reviewing in the 1960's over the early 1950's; for while the *Library Journal* reviewed more of the 1960-62 titles than the earlier sample, the *Wilson Library Bulletin* reviewed less, and *College and Research Libraries* had the same number.

It would appear in the light of the evidence and pending further studies of a more extensive nature that the reviewing of reference books is highly inadequate as far as their existence and the rapidity of their appearance are concerned. However, this conclusion is based on studies of single reference titles and has ignored generally the subscription book. What about these expensive sets of reference works?

The subscription book, sold directly by the publisher to the consumer,³¹ is much more in need of reviews than the reference books included on the list just discussed. This need was recognized by librarians early in the 1900's as evidenced by the appearance of numerous articles in the periodical press discussing the problems of the subscription book and decrying some of the practices of some agents and publishers. Out of a need for reliable information about subscription books came the reviewing bulletin of the state library as-

sociation of Massachusetts and the *Subscription Books Bulletin* of the Pacific Northwest Library Association. By 1926, sentiment on the part of librarians caused the American Library Association to establish a committee headed by Julia Ideson to study this type of reference book and their publishers. It was the work of this committee which led to the establishment of the first Subscription Books Committee of the American Library Association in 1929, and a new reviewing medium, *Subscription Books Bulletin*, in January 1930.

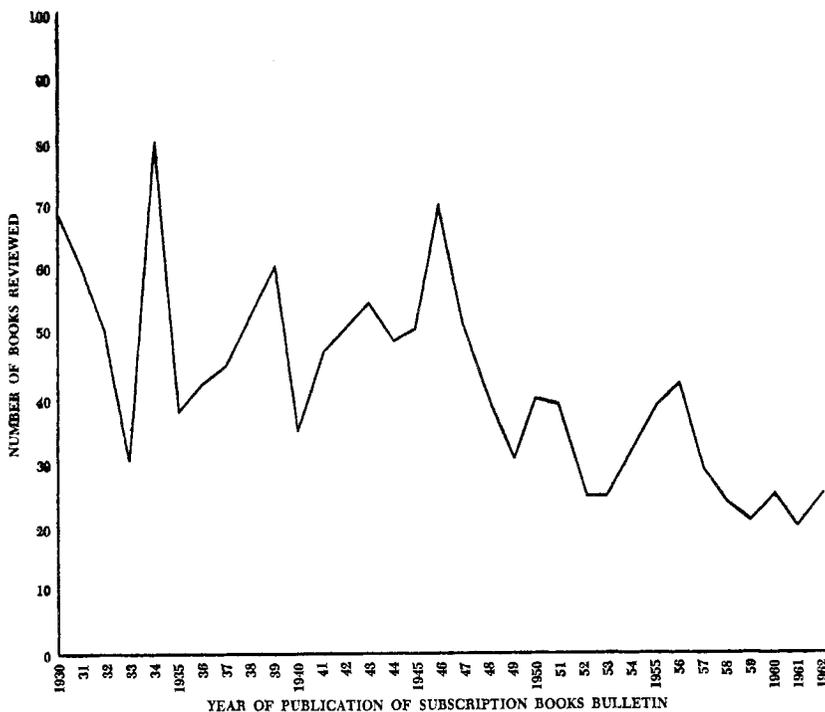
From January 1930, reference librarians appointed by the American Library Association to be members of the Subscription Books Committee have worked diligently to fulfill the aim expressed by the first Committee: ". . . to examine every set sold by subscription or otherwise qualifying and to furnish pertinent buying information and appraisal of value or special usefulness."³² A description of the methods used by the Committee in its reviewing procedures will be found in Dorothy Black's article in *Illinois Libraries*,³³ while articles by Kerr³⁴ and Conat³⁵ furnish valuable historical information.

Librarians would all agree with Shores when he wrote in 1948, "In the 18 years that have elapsed between Miss Wigginton's first year as chairman and Joseph W. Rogers' current chairmanship, the Subscription Books Committee has built an enviable reputation for fairness. . . . Today the SBB has become a potent influence for good."³⁶

Although subscription books suffer the uncounted state of all reference books, the U.S. Government does record the number of copies sold, publishing these figures every four years in the *Census of Manufactures*. Thus when we are searching for an overview of the comprehensiveness of subscription book reviewing, we can compare the rate of increase or decrease in sales of subscription books to the number of books reviewed.

In 1947, there were sold 14,626,000 copies of subscription books. This increased to 25,860,000 in 1954 and jumped to 30,650,000 by 1958.³⁷ While this activity was steadily rising, the number of reviews of subscription books appearing in *Subscription Books Bulletin* was declining as the accompanying graph clearly shows. The merger in September 1956, of *Subscription Books Bulletin* with *Booklist*, protested by many reference librarians out of fear of losing a potent evaluating force, appears to have had a deleterious effect on the output of the Subscription Book Committee. Never have so few reviews of subscription books been published in *Subscription Books Bulletin* since the very beginning of this periodical.

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books



**NUMBER OF REVIEWS APPEARING IN SUBSCRIPTION BOOKS BULLETIN
1930-1962**

One argument for a merger of the two periodicals was the possibility of more up-to-date reviews, since *Booklist* was published twice a month as opposed to the quarterly schedule of *Subscription Books Bulletin*. However, an analysis of those reviews appearing in the *Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin* from September 1960 to July 1962, reveals an average time lag of eight months from the appearance of the title on the market (generally counted from its listing in *Publisher's Weekly*) to the time the review appeared in the *Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin*. Taking a random sample of three reviews per issue over the years of *Subscription Books Bulletin*, one finds that the average lag runs six months in 1934-37, seven months for 1938-41, seven and one half months for 1942-45, seven months for 1946-49, and eight months for the next two periods. In other words, there appears to be no shortening of the time-lag under the bi-monthly schedule of the reviewing medium.

While we might wish for more reviews appearing more rapidly, the quality of the reviews in *Subscription Books Bulletin* leave nothing to be desired. Through the years, the standards of unbiased analytical consideration of each reference book have earned the highest accolades from librarians and publishers. Following the criteria set forth in Isadore Mudge's "Introduction" to her sixth edition of *Guide to Reference Books*, the introduction so wisely reprinted in the seventh edition compiled by Winchell,³⁸ the *Subscription Books Bulletin* has set models of good reviewing practices for others to follow.

Have the reviewers of non-subscription books followed these principles and given to librarians the same high quality of reviewing? This question is not new. In 1891, the *Library Journal* carried a plea by Iles to remedy the ". . . haphazard and inadequate way in which reviewing is now conducted."³⁹ Among his recommendations were the following: the most competent authorities and critics should write reviews of books in special fields, the work reviewed should be compared with others in the field, and reviews should be signed.

Andrew Keogh, reference librarian at Yale University, criticized the reviews of the early 1900's as being written often by the author or a non-expert and influenced unduly by advertisements appearing in the reviewing media. Burpee's article is an attempt to refute these criticisms.⁴⁰

However, criticisms of book reviewing, some warranted and others unwarranted, have continued through the years, becoming stronger in the later 1950's and the turn of the decade. Such articles as "The Decline of Book Reviewing" by Elizabeth Hardwick appearing in *Harper's Magazine*,⁴¹ LeRoy Merritt's "Patterns of Book Reviewing" published by Wayne State University Press,⁴² and Wagner's "The Decline of Book Reviewing" in *Cross Currents*⁴³ are merely examples of the attack now rampant against the lacklustre review, the favorable, or at worst noncommittal, review which appears to be the pattern today. Some of our basic sources for book reviews, such as the *New York Times Book Review*, are being criticized in articles appearing in the periodical literature.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵

These criticisms are launched at reviewing in general. A search of the literature will find many articles as well as theses and dissertations analyzing the book reviewing in specific subject fields and by specific journals. Unfortunately, only the studies by Pryce and Glennan have been concerned with reference books *per se*. Pryce judged the quality of reference reviewing by analyzing reviews of reference works

The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

published after 1947 according to five criteria: purpose and scope, collation, availability, date and period, and authority. One observation made in the study was that the more specialized the reference tool, the better the review; but the total pattern led him to the conclusion that there is an urgent need of more critical judgment.²⁹

Glennan, in the study previously cited, categorized each review as being "informative" ("one which describes the volume with no more critical opinion than 'recommended'"), "evaluative," ("a review which gives an opinion or other critical material"), and borderline cases of either "informative-evaluative" or "evaluative-informative," depending on which factor was predominant.⁴⁶ An analysis of the reviews for titles on the selected reference lists from 1953 through 1957 in *Library Journal*, *Wilson Library Bulletin* and *Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin* revealed that 31 per cent were evaluative, 35 per cent informative, 3 per cent were evaluative-informative, and 7 per cent were informative-evaluative. The remaining 24 per cent were merely listings of the titles. Glennan concludes from this study that "the lack of annotation and the many merely informative reviews are of little help"⁴⁷ to the librarian with the small budget.

In a paper on the reviews of best sellers, Boaz summarized her findings of reviews of some reference books on the best seller lists, these titles being *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*, *Information Please Almanac*, and the *Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary*.⁴⁸ She concludes: "The reviews of this group of books were good in that they noted the authority of the authors or the compilers; they pointed out the particular purposes of each title, and told how well those purposes had been achieved."⁴⁹

The desire on the part of librarians for more critical reviewing continued to appear even as late as June 1963, when our Canadian cohorts expressed this wish for *Library Journal* reviews through A. W. Bowron⁵⁰ and when Helen Silverman in the same issue urged better general reviewing while praising the *Library Journal* annotations.⁵¹ Speaking for many of the *Library Journal* reviewers, Harold Lancour specifies the salient points in the brief reviews: ". . . what the book is about, its reading level and quality, its dimensions and limitations, and where it fits into the other material currently appearing in the same field, . . . (and) . . . something about the author especially as it has bearing on his competence to write that book."⁵² Excellent criteria for all reviewers of reference works!

On the horizon are recent developments which portend a brighter

future. The *New York Review of Books*, first appearing during the newspaper-less days of 1963, is now into its first volume. "It is the first—and a welcome first—attempt to raise reviewing in America to an intelligent level,"⁵³ wrote Louis Untermeyer. Whether the *New York Herald Tribune Book Week* will be simply an extension of its former *Books* or a fresh approach to books and their reviewing remains to be seen. A third newcomer has yet to appear on the scene, but the announcements have come from the American Library Association and the Council on Library Resources.⁵⁴ This will be a monthly journal to be published by the Association of College and Research Libraries under the editorship of Richard K. Gardner, and to consist of reviews of between 10,000 and 15,000 books a year, aimed at the interests of the college library. All of these new media may review reference titles.

J. D. Scott has said, "Of all books, it (the reference book) is the least easy to review, since its true quality emerges only in a long series of minor crises."⁵⁵ As we have viewed the trends in reference book reviewing, we find that the reviewing media have not been able to keep abreast of the publishing activity. Even in the field of subscription books, the facts show a decided decline in the number of books reviewed. Furthermore, the time lag between publication date and review continues to be a serious problem for the librarian who must have guidance in her selection process.

On the other hand, quality of reviewing in *Subscription Books Bulletin* remains the finest, setting standards for others to follow. The brief annotation in library periodicals is often descriptive rather than evaluative, but when found to be critical is a valuable aid to librarians. The reviewing found in *Library Journal*, *Wilson Library Bulletin* and *College and Research Libraries* deserves commendation for what has been done. Librarians look forward to more reviews, both more critical in nature and prompt in appearance.

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The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

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The Publishing and Reviewing of Reference Books

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