Reader on Top: Public Libraries, Pleasure Reading, and Models of Reading

CATHERINE SHELDRICK ROSS

ABSTRACT

This article examines competing models of reading that have been available for librarians to use in their discourse and policy making about pleasure reading. Two models, "Reading with a Purpose" and "Only the Best," developed within public librarianship, while the others developed variously in education, psychology, mass media studies, and sociology. These models have differing stories to tell about the power of the text, the role of the reader, and the effect on the reader of what is read. Who is in charge in these stories of reading? Is reading a receptive process of extracting meanings right there in the text or is it a productive process that involves the reader as a co-creator of meaning? What happens during the reading transaction itself? Is the reader empowered? Or is the reader duped, dumbed down, tranquilized, or deceived? Each model of reading makes its own power claims and each has its own entailments. Some models are more appropriate than others for public libraries now that they are seeking to play a more significant role in the leisure structure. The article uses two types of readers as test cases whose reading tastes have historically been denigrated: the series book reader and the romance reader.

A child is half hidden seated in the crotch of a tree, munching on an apple and reading from R. L. Stine's Fear Street series, oblivious to the world around him. A woman is curled up in a big arm chair reading a Nora Roberts romance; the television is on in the next room but she doesn't hear it. In each case, all that an observer can see is that the reader sits there, with eyes fixed on the book, the only motion being the regular turning of

the pages. The reader seems to be in another world, occasionally smiling, frowning, or laughing. What is the meaning of this scene of reading? What is the reader experiencing or thinking? Is this reading event a good or bad thing? In the library field, the worry has persisted that reading popular fiction is harmful because it wastes time and instills "false views of life" in impressionable readers. Women and children were considered especially at risk, particularly when reading dime novels, series books, and romance novels. The fact that the reading experience can be intensely pleasurable was scarcely a commendation, for solitary pleasure itself has long been viewed with suspicion. In the library literature, librarians have drawn analogies between voluptuous reading and the consumption of sugary treats and even drugs to explain the repetitive nature of readers' consumption of popular fiction, as they close one novel and reach for another (Carrier, 1965; Ross, 1987).

Why is there still so much disagreement about popular fiction and its effect, for good or ill, on readers? The answer seems to be that what we believe about the value, if any, of fiction reading depends on the model of reading we subscribe to. These reading models are rarely made explicit in discourses about reading. They reveal themselves in the competing metaphors variously used to describe the reading experience itself: reading is an addiction; reading is a ladder; reading is eating; reading is mining for meaning; reading is poaching; reading is entrancement; reading transports you to another world; reading is a journey; reading provides a blueprint for living; reading is a cognitive game; etc. (Ross, 1987). This article examines some key models of reading that have competed for our allegiance in public libraries and considers how the reading model we espouse makes a difference to the role we think public libraries should play in the leisure structure.

Reading for pleasure is the domain where sharp differences in reading models are thrown into high relief. There is no contest about the value of reading utilitarian and improving works—textbooks, reference books, how-to-do-it manuals, spiritual and religious texts, works of history or philosophy. But reading popular fiction can still raise alarm bells for the guardians of public taste. When public librarians were inventing themselves as a profession in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a key challenge was what to do about the so-called "fiction problem"—the problem that readers enjoyed fiction and wanted to read it repetitively. In his "Seventh Annual Report of the Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny, Pennsylvania of 1896," William M. Stevenson justified his removal from the library of books by popular fiction writers such as Horatio Alger, Bertha M. Clay, May Agnes Fleming, E. P. Roe, and Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth by saying: "It is certainly not the function of the public library to foster the mind-weakening habit of novel-reading among the very classes—the uneducated, busy, or idle—whom it is the duty of the public library to lift

to a higher plane of thinking" (Quoted in Carrier, 1965, p. 258). As he explained it, "Once the [reading] habit is formed, it seems as difficult to throw off as the opium habit." (Stevenson, 1897, p. 133). In the face of readers' preferences, public librarians defined themselves as the ones setting and maintaining standards. Theirs was the professional expertise to recognize, select, and celebrate "the best" and to keep out the "mediocre," the cheap, and the meretricious. In the "Annual Report of 1906," the chairman of the Board of Management of the Toronto Public Library noted:

> One of the great arguments advanced against the free library system is founded on the fact that so large a percentage of the books read are works of fiction. Granting that, as in our case, perhaps 47% of the books read are novels, our able chief librarian, by tactful and courageous selection, endeavors to see to it that only the best class of fiction is placed on our shelves and he is proud to point to the fact that day by day and year by year there is a strong gain and increase in the percentage of solid works as against books of fiction. I am quite free to confess that there is an indulgence in the reading of trashy novels which is destructive to the mind.

Public libraries have continued to grapple with the problem of what to do about popular fiction (Carrier, 1965; Garrison, 1979; Yu and O'Brien, 1996; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2005). As a strategy for winning public support, being the exclusive champion of "solid works"—that is, nonfiction, information, and educational matter—is a non-starter. Public libraries have repositioned themselves within the leisure structure as spaces where people can go not just for information but for community and for story. Public libraries now actively court pleasure readers. They have created popular reading centers, embraced readers' advisory services, and implemented research-based recommendations on how to help readers connect with books they will enjoy. Routinely, libraries stock popular genres and provide ways to help readers find books they will enjoy: for example, the creation of book displays by theme or by situation, for example, parenting or mountain climbing; identification of genres by spine labels; shelving of genre books together; providing bookmarks with headings like, "Read everything by John Grisham (or Patricia Cornwell or Nora Roberts)? You might also enjoy. . . ." Since the watershed publication of the first edition of *Genreflecting* (Rosenberg, 1982), there has been a burgeoning of professional tools for readers' advisors, including electronic tools such as NoveList (EBSCO) and Readers' Advisor Online (Libraries Unlimited). We seem to have come a long way from the 1890s when libraries tried to throttle fiction circulation with strategies such as the "two-book system" (borrowers may withdraw two books at a time but the second book must be nonfiction) (Carrier, 1965, pp. 172–173) and the "six-month rule" (libraries should delay acquiring a new work of fiction for six months until demand has tapered off) (Putnam, 1890, p. 264).

But despite changes in practices in dealing with popular fiction, many librarians still feel conflicted. Yes, circulation of popular materials is increasing. Yes, we are helping readers find popular books to read—we are even stocking series books and romances—but we worry about it. If we abet children's desire to read series books by acquiring Junie B. Jones, Captain Underpants, Sweet Valley High, Fear Street, and the Nancy Drew Case Files, aren't we somehow participating in mass culture's race to the bottom? If we buy romances with titles such as *My Surrender* (Connie Brockway), *The Mail Order Groom* (Sandra Chastain), *Welcome to Temptation* (Jennifer Crusie), *True Confessions* (Rachel Gibson), *The Paid Companion* (Jayne Ann Krentz), *This Heart of Mine* (Susan Elizabeth Phillips), *The Marriage Contract* (Cathy Maxwell), or *Seduced by a Scoundrel* (Barbara Dawson Smith), aren't we helping to inculcate in impressionable female readers patriarchal values? The conflict arises because deep-down many librarians think of reading as a ladder with popular fiction at the bottom and literary fiction and canonical texts at the top (Ross, 1987). As recently as 2007, Dilevko and Magowan's book on readers' advisory attacked the "Give 'Em What They Want" philosophy on the grounds that it panders to readers' desire for pleasure rather than for solid instruction:

> We argue that post–1980 readers' advisory has lost its way. It focused less on the meaningful educational and cultural rationale with which it was associated in its earlier phases than on a mindset in which the reading of books, no matter their intrinsic quality, is construed as good and where discretionary reading becomes commodified and disposable entertainment, as manifested principally in genre fiction and genre nonfiction (genre titles), bestsellers, celebrity-authored books, and prize-winning titles. (Dilevko & Magowan, 2007, p. 5)

Why do Dilevko and Magowan think it wrong to give readers what they want? Because they view readers as incapable of making appropriate choices on their own, either because of the reader's inherent weakness or because of the irresistible nature of outside forces that dupe the reader. Dilevko and Magowan (2007, pp. 13–17) use the subheading "Lulling Readers to Sleep" for a section describing various efforts to direct readers' choices toward the same commercial and commodified books: the bandwagon effect of blockbusters and celebrity authors, the creation of literary prizes to channel demand, and "taste management" as represented by Nancy Pearl's "If All of Seattle Reads the Same Book" and Oprah's Book Club. In this scenario, the reader is weak and easily lulled, but much of the blame is directed at librarians who have abandoned their proper role as an educational force and a bulwark against popular culture.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE READER

Reading models matter because, as we see, they are used as bedrock in arguments about what librarians should think and do about building collec-

tions and serving readers. These models often make assumptions that are nowhere made explicit but are used to justify policies and recommendations. To see how this works, consider the opening paragraph of a *Library Journal* article by Rudolph Bold (1980, p. 1138) that purports to describe the typical romance reader:

> She's a 200-pound lady with a bad complexion, a husband who philanders, and kids who never shut up. She didn't graduate from high school, had to get married, and can't afford a psychiatrist, and so she must continue to live in a world she never made and doesn't much like. For her there is the escape of reading, not best sellers or popular biographies, but those paper-backed romantic nirvanas that sell themselves in supermarkets and bus terminals. And along with other house-bound housewives, maiden aunts, retired telephone operators . . . she escapes for an hour or two each day into a delicate world where romance warms the heart and perversion dare not enter.

Who is this 200-pound high school dropout and where did she come from? Not, certainly from actual data on romance readers. Readership surveys have consistently found that romance readers resemble a normal cross-section of the female population, apart from having attained, on average, a higher level of education. This demographic was true when Bold was writing (Mann, 1981; Mussell, 1984, pp. 11–15) and has not much changed (Linz, 1992, p. 12). According to "Romance Literature Statistics" posted on the Romance Writers of America website, of those surveyed who read any books at all in 2007, one in five read romance novels; that is, almost 65 million Americans read at least one romance novel in 2007. In terms of education, 42 percent of romance readers have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Clearly this 200-pound dropout is a fiction. She is an encapsulation of the negative view of the romance reader current when Bold was writing, an image familiar enough to *Library Journal* readers that Bold could expect her to be recognized. This invented woman is made to stand in for the typical romance reader: her voluptuous reading displaces productive work; she is passive, reading for escape because she can't take active steps to change her real life; the romances she reads numb her pain and may lull her to sleep but they don't teach her anything. Bold goes on to argue that the common practice of excluding romances from library collections is therefore inappropriately elitist: "If standards are lowered by pandering to the less gifted, at the same time good may also be done. Helping someone trapped by loneliness, a bad marriage, or infirmity to escape through books extends a therapy of sorts and tranquilizes those who cannot change their circumstances" (Bold, 1980, p. 1139). That is, romances are read by maiden aunts, spinsters, dissatisfied housewives, and retired or infirm women in order to compensate for deficiencies in their actual lives.

This empty-life hypothesis is routinely produced to explain the appeal of romances, though rarely used for other popular genres such as detective stories, horror, or science fiction. Tellingly, in this construction, the romance reader is the Other: she is less enlightened, less self-aware, more suggestible, and more easily deceived by false views of life than is the critic, who observes the scene of romance reading from a safe distance.

Commentators such as Bold have constructed the romance reader as simply weak and "less gifted." However some feminists have considered her both weak and blameworthy: she is letting down the side by indolently reading when she should be mounting the barricades and pushing for structural social and political change. Kay Mussell has made the point that critics of romance "shared the political perspective of feminism that romances were patriarchal structures that encouraged women to become reconciled to their social and political conditions" (Mussell, 1997, p. 9). In her pioneering ethnographic work on romance readers, *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway explains that she doesn't take at face value what readers say, because her feminist theory has pre-armed her to look for unconscious desires "very likely felt by [the readers] but not admitted to consciousness precisely because they accept patriarchy as given, as the natural organization of sex and gender" (Radway, 1984, p. 10). The scandal of romance reading, it seems, is false consciousness. With its affirmation of the prime importance of love and its happy ending, the romance embarrasses its critics by its enormous popularity with female readers.

In response, put-upon romance readers and writers rallied to argue for a model of the romance reader as empowered. Librarian and romance-writer Ann Bouricius (2000, p. 5) claims, "Romances are about women winning. As Deborah Smith once said, 'In romances, the woman always ends up on top.'" Another romance-writer and former librarian, Jayne Ann Krentz agrees. In her introduction to a collection of articles by romance writers on the appeal of the romance entitled *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, Krentz notes that a "strong theme that emerges from the essays is that of female empowerment. Readers understand that the books celebrate female power. In the romance novel . . . the woman always wins" (Krentz, 1992, p. 5). In this scenario, the experience of romance reading recharges the reader's batteries and strengthens her for more robust re-engagement with the world when she closes the book. These contrasting models of the romance reader clearly perform differing ideological work. The models articulate deeply held beliefs about the nature of the female reader and are therefore not to be easily dislodged by an appeal to empirical data, survey research, or interviews with readers themselves (readers' accounts may be discounted as more evidence of false consciousness).

This article examines competing models of reading that have been available for librarians to use in their discourse and policy making about

pleasure reading. The first two developed within public librarianship itself and the others developed variously in such fields as education, psychology, mass media studies, and sociology:

- "Reading with a Purpose"
- "Only the Best"
- "The Great Debate"
- The Reader as Dupe
- The Reader as Poacher
- Blueprints for Living
- The Reader as Game Player

Not surprisingly, these seven models of reading are not entirely distinct. Just as games like football, soccer, and basketball are recognizably different but share features such as the goal of getting a ball into a protected zone, so there are family resemblances among models that share a common feature, such as the view of the reader as an active (or contrariwise a passive) agent. For this reason, compatible models can be drawn upon and used together in the same argument. However, some of these models are clearly incompatible. A model that views readers as suggestible, easily duped, and likely to make the wrong reading choices can find little common ground with a model that views readers as active meaning makers who learn to read by reading and who develop their reading skills by making choices.

To distinguish among these models, we need to pay attention to the differing stories they tell about the power of the text, the role of the reader, and the effect on the reader of what is read. Who is in charge in these stories of reading? Is the agent the active reader who takes charge, making sense of texts in the context of her own life? Or does agency belong to the active text whose fixed meanings are a package to be transferred intact into the head of a reader? Is learning how to read thought of as a natural process, like learning how to talk, or is it thought of as an artificial process that needs to be scientifically managed? Is reading a receptive process or a creative process that involves the reader as a co-creator of meaning? What happens during the reading transaction itself? Is the reader empowered and the reader's life enhanced? Is the reader engaged in a cognitive activity of skill building? Or is the reader duped, dumbed down, tranquilized, or deceived? Does the construction of the reader involve a division between Them (the readers who are often misled) and Us (the reading experts or critics who know best)? What relationship, if any, is assumed in the reading model between the two long-accepted goals of literature: amusement and education? Is, for example, pleasure a legitimate goal in itself? Or is pleasure at best the sugar coating on the educational pill and at worst a distraction from genuine educational goals? In this article, I argue that some models are more appropriate for a public library that wants to play a key role in the leisure structure of the twenty-first century.

The Purposive Reader

In the 1920s in public library circles in North America, the preferred model of the reader was the purposive reader who reads to learn. The public library could thus be justified as an institution of learning, not recreation. The 1925 launch of the American Library Association's "Reading with a Purpose" program coincided with the first heyday of readers' advisory in public libraries and was based on a construction of the reader as adult learner. Between 1925 and 1933, with funding from the Carnegie Foundation, the ALA developed and sold to readers some 850,000 copies of bibliographic guides on sixty-six different subjects, including biology, economics, geography, farm life, sociology, psychology, the young child, race relations, philosophy, English history, Russian literature, music appreciation, architecture, American education, Latin America, George Washington, and advertising (Lee, 1966, p. 50; Dilevko & Magowan, 2007, p. 224). Written by subject specialists, these pamphlets included a twenty to thirty page introduction to the subject plus an annotated list of ten or so books. These lists were designed to provide a variety of viewpoints on a topic while leading the reader in orderly, consecutive steps from introductory works to more complex treatments. Reports from readers during the 1920s and 1930s indicate that for many the public library was indeed a place for adult education.

Contemporary discourse about this ALA program constructed the ideal reader as a person whose leisure time was productively used for systematic self-education. The reader with a purpose makes steady progress up the reading ladder. The librarian's goal was to help common readers read like literary critics or historians. The reader's goal was to achieve a coherent, unhurried, and complete synthesis that balanced opposing points of view. In an article published in the *ALA Bulletin* entitled "Helping Readers with a Purpose," John Chancellor (1931, p. 136) emphasized the role of the public library as a "people's university":

> I believe we should emphasize consecutive reading, getting more than just one view of a subject, trying to get the person to read more than just one book or one article on it and combating as much as we can this tendency—a true offshoot of the hurry of the modern age—to get just a smattering. . . . Let us emphasize *thoroughness* as much as we can, the getting of a whole and complete view, a view from various and opposing positions. Let us not just urge people to read—read haphazardly—but to "read with a purpose," a very apt slogan. (p. 138)

The purpose, it should be noted, must not be simply pleasure. In fact, pleasure, if anything, was viewed as a distraction from the only purpose that really counts: systematic learning. Real readers often fell short of the ideal, however, as was ruefully reported in the library literature. In the proceedings of the Adult Education Round Table published in the *ALA Bulletin* in 1927, Virginia Cleaver Bacon (p. 317) warned against the

disillusionment facing a novice to reader's advisory work: "if she expects as a prevailing characteristic of its users that greater definiteness of aim, fixity of purpose and tenacity of effort which certain blithe idealists have described as the characteristics of adults seeking education." As the adviser in adult education at the Portland (Oregon) Public Library, Bacon had first-hand experience of the frailty of human nature:

> [O]ften the individual presenting himself for library aid is only vaguely or momentarily interested in study; is indefinite in his plans which are subject to frequent interruptions; may be skeptical regarding either or both the adviser's and his own abilities, or falsely inflated by the "get wise easy" type of advertisement; is inexperienced in methods of study and has a mind made lazy by its easy victories over popular magazines, light fiction and moving pictures. . . . (Bacon, 1927, p. 317)

In the "reader-with-a-purpose model," the pleasure reader is judged and found wanting—he or she is faltering in purpose, easily distracted, lazy, and apt to be seduced from the goal of education by the easy allure of popular culture.

"Only the Best"

An important battleground for defining worthwhile reading was the field of childhood and children's reading. As children's librarianship carved out space for itself as an area of professional expertise in the early decades of the twentieth century, the child reader was constructed as needing firm guidance and a strong push toward quality books. Left to their own devices, children were thought to follow the path of least resistance to embrace the "mediocre." They gobbled up dime novels in the nineteenth century and series books in the twentieth century. The overwhelming popularity among children of series books was the unwelcome finding of the Winnetka Survey of 1925, directed by Carleton Washburne, superintendent of the Winnetka, Illinois public schools and sponsored by the American Library Association. The embarrassing discovery was the big gap between children's own preferences and what reading authorities thought children *should* like. Washburne asked 36,750 students in thirty-four representative cities, among other things, to fill out "ballots" on all the books they had read during the school year. Almost 100,000 ballots were submitted. It turned out that 98 percent of the pupils reported reading the inexpensive series books known pejoratively as "fifty-centers," the most often mentioned being Tom Swift. The reading choices of fifth, sixth, and seventh grade readers were dominated by Edward Stratemeyer series books such as the Bobbsey Twins, Tom Swift, and others "'unanimously rated trashy' a priori by a select panel of librarians" (Soderbergh, 1974). Children's librarians embarked on a campaign against the "mediocre," advocating nothing but "the best" for children. In their backlash against series books, children's librarians were galvanized into positive initiatives

that made a permanent contribution to children's literacy and reading, among which were Children's Book Week and the Newberry Medal.

Anne Carroll Moore, the first supervisor of Work with Children in the New York Public Library, did a lot through her regular column of reviews of children's books in *The Bookman* to argue for a rigorous, sustained criticism of children's books that would draw a clear line between "mediocrity, condescension," and "cheap optimism" on the one hand and "the best" on the other hand (Moore, 1920/1961, p. 23). In these reviews, many of which were collected in *Roads to Childhood* (1920), *New Roads to Childhood* (1923), and *Cross Roads to Childhood* (1926), Moore proved herself a tireless enemy of low standards and "the commonplace in theme, treatment and language" (Moore 1920/1961, p. 23). Critical of what she calls "the series idea," Moore said, "It is inevitable that it should result in just such a state of arrested development as we find today" (Moore 1920/1961, p. 92). In her influential reviews, she demonstrated the distinguishing mark of the new professionalized children's librarian: the ability to discern the best in children's books and identify and promote those few that deserve to be called literature. Moore's vision was carried on by her apprentice, the Canadian librarian, Lillian H. Smith. In the often-reprinted *The Unreluctant Years* (1953), Smith argues that the same high standards of good writing and literary excellence used to judge adult literature should be used in the evaluation and selection of children's literature. For librarians, the key in doing collection development is to recognize the very best. Smith warns against "time-fillers," "written-to-formula books," and "encroaching mediocrity," all of which need to be distinguished from "books of genuine quality" (Smith, 1953, pp. 189–190).

Smith's *Unreluctant Years* and other similar contemporaneous guides to children's literature consolidated two opposed repertoires of vocabulary and ideas for use in discussing children's books. On the one hand, there is the repertoire of "the best"— here one speaks of "books of honesty, integrity and vision" (Smith, 1953/1976, p. 13) that provide genuine pleasure, insight, and growth because they embody permanent and universal values. On the other hand, there is the repertoire of "mediocrity"—here one speaks of inauthentically written, ephemeral, commodified books that lack all the positive qualities of the best and provide only meretricious pleasure, distraction, and stultification.

From the 1910s onward, librarians led the charge against series books, which were seen as the enemy of the best. They were denounced for their lack of realism, their tendency to instill false views of life, their poor literary value, their assembly line methods of production, and their success in the marketplace. The newly emerging profession of children's librarianship defined itself by what it was not. It was *not* a friend of series books, trash, or mediocrity. This point is made repeatedly in the titles alone of articles in the library literature: Franklin K. Mathiews's "Blowing Out the

Boy's Brains" (1914); Irene Bowman's "Why the American Library Association Does Not Endorse Serials for Boys and Girls" (1921); Mary E. S. Root's "Not to be Circulated" (1929); Lucy Kinlock's "The Menace of the Series Books" (1935); Margaret Beckman's "Why Not the Bobbsey Twins" (1964); Lou Willett Stanek's "Stunting Readers' Growth," (1986); and Judith Saltman's "Groaning Under the Weight of Series Books" (1997). Saltman regrets the shift in buying power from expert librarians to amateurs, who buy series books directly through bookstores and school book clubs:

> The shift in targeted market has moved from knowledgeable, informed adult book selectors whose choices are made on a fine balance between literary merit, popularity and usage to the general public of parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, and children themselves who primarily make book-purchasing decisions based on impulse and brand recognition fueled by product marketing. (Saltman, 1997, p. 24)

Given this impulsive child reader and the "deluge" of series books, Saltman (1997, p. 25) concludes that "now, more than ever," knowledgeable and informed experts are needed to help children grow from "mediocre reading . . . to more challenging and exhilarating literary experiences."

Librarians' century-long campaign against series books ultimately failed because it overlooked the experience of the child reader. The rhetoric of "the best" is a text-centered approach to reading that assumes that books in themselves can be ordered on a single, universal scale of value. Within this model, the best is absolute and unchanging. There is no room to take into account differing reading interests and abilities or to ask what is the best for this particular reader at this particular time looking for this particular reading experience.

THE GREAT DEBATE

While children's librarians concentrated on *what* children read, educators were naturally concerned with *how* children learn to read and with the pathologies of reading. With the help of awards such as the Caldecott and Newberry medals, children's librarians argued that childhood was so short that children should spend it in the company of genuine works such as *Make Way for Ducklings, Charlotte's Web,* and *The Secret Garden.* Educators, on the other hand, worried about children who couldn't or wouldn't read. The stakes were obviously high because literacy has become a precondition for full participation in the political and economic structure of a modern society. Parents and teachers were caught in the middle of a fight over pedagogy and the control of the curriculum, not to mention the lucrative textbook market. The battle was fought over the key question of how children learn and which group of professional experts gets to decide. P. David Pearson (2004) has called this contest over reading instruction and reading research the "reading wars."

In her very influential *Learning to Read: The Great Debate,* Jeanne Chall has characterized the contest as "*code-emphasis* (or decoding) versus *meaning-emphasis*" (Chall, 1967/1983, p. 2). The research on code-emphasis instruction was typically conducted by psychologists using large samples, random assignment of treatments, and controlled experiments. Typically the outcome measure in the controlled experiment was speed or accuracy on some specialized reading task—for example, an alliteration oddity test in which the child is asked to identify the odd man out from lists such as: pin, win, sit, fin (Bradley & Bryant, 1983). The research on meaning-emphasis, on the other hand, was typically conducted using case studies and ethnographic observation in family and school settings. The code-emphasis advocates developed performance standards and assessment instruments. The meaning-emphasis advocates investigated family literacy and the conditions under which learning to read seems naturally to occur, such as during the bedtime story (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). At bedrock, the two groups had very different views of how children learn to read. Is it an artificial process that needs to be closely supervised or is it a natural developmental process? Can reading be directly taught or is it something that children themselves learn, given the right conditions? Is the measure of reading success the test score on a standardized instrument or is it the delight that the child takes in hearing stories and in engaging in voluntary reading? One stubborn fact is that some children learn to read on their own before they go to school with no apparent instruction, while others fail at reading, despite intensive instruction.

For the code-emphasis group, reading starts with words and subwords (letters, syllables, prefixes). Phonemic awareness—the ability to segment words into component sounds and to blend separate sounds into words—was identified as the key to reading. Concepts such as "reading readiness" developed in the 1920s and 1930s enforced the notion that, before children were ready for real reading of whole books, they needed to be primed with exercises that increased awareness of letter-to-sound correspondences. The solution was to break the process of reading down into small sequenced steps—first the alphabet, then single words such as "fan, man, rat," then words put together into sentences such as "The tan man is in the van," then several sentences combined, and finally whole texts. The mark of a good reader was the speed with which she could identify a single word or nonsense syllable exposed on a screen or flash card. Summarizing extensive research in *Beginning to Read,* Marilyn Adams (1990, p. 14) says, "Research indicates that the most critical factor beneath fluent word reading is the ability to recognize letters, spelling patterns, and whole words, effortlessly, automatically, and visually." She says that "programs explicitly designed to develop sounding and blending skills produce better word readers than those that do not" (Adams, 1990, p. 293).

Code-emphasis instruction identified a hierarchy of skills and subskills to be acquired by the child in an orderly sequence. In the 1950s, parents were warned not to interfere with reading instruction but to leave it to the experts. When children choose books "opportunistically," they encounter phonemes and words in a higgledy-piggledy, unsystematic way. Code-emphasis instruction controlled the child's exposure to words through basal readers, "decodable text" (e.g., "Dan can fan Nan"), controlled vocabulary, flash cards, color-coded sequences, and graded reading schemes. Power over reading and the choice of what to read was transferred from classroom teachers, librarians, and parents and from learners themselves to a teaching apparatus, namely a set of scientifically produced materials that both taught the skills and tested them. First one learned to read and then one read to learn. The final step was the extraction of meaning from texts. Comprehension tests at every level monitored students' success in text-mining. The novice reader was successful if she extracted from the text the meaning that the author was thought to have "put into" the text.

On the other side of the debate were those who advocated whole language and whole texts. Children's reading specialist Margaret Meek (1983, p. 68) has argued, "Literature makes readers in a way that reading schemes never can." The meaning-emphasis advocates claim that reading, like language, is so complex that it can't be directly taught as a system of rules. Instead beginning readers, like beginning talkers, need to be immersed in an environment where they can interact with texts, practice writing, and experience how stories work. Whole language theorists insist that learning to read is a developmental process analogous to learning to walk or talk, which children learn because they want to become walkers and talkers. Beginning readers learn to read by reading, learning from the texts themselves important lessons in how stories work. Describing literacy learning as developmental, Don Holdaway (1979, p. 14) says: "it is short on teaching and long on learning; it is self-regulated rather than adult-regulated; it goes hand in hand with the fulfillment of real life purposes; it emulates the behaviour of people who model the skill in natural use." He goes on to say, "the most powerful rewards in learning reading and writing are intrinsic and meaning-centred, and that self-regulation in actual reading and writing is more important than extrinsically applied contingencies—or even than instruction of any kind" (p. 15).

A key question is: whose meanings count? Whole language advocates reject the information-transfer model of reading, where the reader's job is to mine meaning that is already there. "The problem [with the information-transfer model]," argue Harste and Mikulecky (1984, p. 72), "is an inadequate conception of how language and literacy work. A more useful and powerful perspective recognizes that reading and writing share much in common and each relies greatly on social contexts. . . . Both reading and writing are generative processes that draw upon the participant's thought,

previous experience, and social context." Whole language theorists such as psycholinguist Frank Smith (1988) emphasize the constructive activity of readers, including drawing inferences. Readers make sense of texts as they link what they read to what they already know about the world and about other texts. Meaning is not *there* in the text awaiting extraction. It must be created anew in each reader's encounter with the text. Each reading is therefore different from one reader to another and from one time to another as the same reader reads the text at different stages of life. Says Kenneth Goodman (1984, pp. 96–97), "what the reader brings to the text [is] as important as the text itself in text comprehension. . . . Readers use the least amount of available text information necessary in relation to the reader's existing linguistic and conceptual schema to get to meaning."

In *Read with Me* (1985, p. 6) Liz Waterland describes how she transformed her teaching of reading from an approach that viewed reading as a hierarchy of specific skills to an apprenticeship model. She says, "I came to adopt, instead, a view of the learner not as passive and dependent like the cuckoo chick but rather as an active and already partly competent sharer in the task of learning to read." Jettisoning a "pre-reading program" of flash cards, color-coded reading schemes, and word attack skills, Waterland (1985, p. 45) began to use real books from the very beginning: "reading is not something they will do 'one day' but something they do now—at whatever level. They all, however mature or immature, believe themselves to be readers and behave like readers." A key element is the importance attributed to choices made by the readers themselves: "The logical challenge to the teacher is to provide such a wide range of real books that children will find their own book, which will be meaningful to them; letting them choose which ones they wish to read and letting them find the meaning for themselves" (Waterland, 1985, p. 13).

Comparing code-emphasis and meaning-emphasis approaches, we can see that children's librarians are more valued as allies of reading within the meaning-emphasis framework. What children's libraries do best is to offer a wide array of choices of books and then let the child choose.

THE READER AS DUPE

But the notion of reader-choice itself has been contested as an illusion. Stepping back from the scene of individual reading to look at the big picture of production and distribution, some observers see totalizing structures. They give the most weight to the role of corporate gatekeepers, publishing decisions, marketing campaigns, and advertising in the manufacture of taste and the creation of bestsellers. In the communication circuit of author, publisher, bookseller and reader, they privilege the node of supply and access. For them, everything depends on the corporate decisions that make books available. It is assumed that readers, deprived of genuine choice, read what they are told to read by corporate

interests. The docile reader is helplessly bombarded by repetitious messages and images from series books, romance fiction, glamor magazines, comic books, pulp fiction, self-help manuals, not to mention blockbuster movies, soap operas, talk shows, rock videos, and videogames. This model of reading constructs the consumer as what media theorist John Fiske (1989) has called a "cultural dope."

This reader-as-dupe model goes hand in hand with anxiety about mass taste. By the mid-twentieth century, mass media critics had become increasingly worried about the effects of cheap reading as books, magazines, comics, and other media products could be produced inexpensively in very large numbers for a mass audience. The hallmark of quality being rarity, popularity was naturally suspect. If too many people like something, that something must appeal to a debased taste. The edited collection *Mass Culture* (Rosenberg & White, 1957) is a classic source that provides an early documentation of anxieties directed at mass taste. In the introduction, Bernard Rosenberg makes it clear where he stands: "Never before have the sacred and the profane, the genuine and the specious, the exalted and the debased, been so thoroughly mixed that they are all but indistinguishable" (Rosenberg & White, 1957, p. 5). Popular culture, so it was thought, was not a genuine art form but a cheap, standardized, manufactured commodity geared to the lowest common denominator. It attracts its audience by spurious gratifications and emotional appeals. It manipulates people and colonizes their leisure time, reconciling them to the status quo. In contrast, high art is considered the last holdout of the autonomous, critical spirit.

In this model, an important question becomes: what does reading do to people who are conceptualized as a "mass." The metaphors used in the reader-as-dupe model suggest an answer. The cheap, commodified products of mass culture are a "deluge" or a "flood"; readers and audience members are "bombarded" or "swamped" or "inundated." Discrimination among commodities is impossible because works of popular culture are all the same, performing the same ideological work. One romance novel is identical to every other because love always triumphs; one Hardy Boys series book is interchangeable with every other because the criminal is always caught and the status quo restored. In short, the apparent variety of products on offer is illusory because they are all products of the same "culture industry" and they are all marked by homogeneity and predictability (Storey, 1999, p. 19).

Since, in this model, works of popular fiction are interchangeable, it is not necessary for a critic to read more than one or two exemplars to assess the value of the genre and its appeal to readers. So, for example, when Harold Bloom, soon to become famous for his expertise on the Western Canon, was unexpectedly prevailed upon to review for *Vogue* (1985, p. 322) the uncorrected proofs of Danielle Steel's *Family Album,* he was able

to conclude that "Steel, and her ilk, are enjoyed by millions of people who ought to know better." He notes, "In four hundred pages, there is only one memorable phrase, when we are told that 'Jason and George were getting on like a horse afire,' but that, alas, doubtless will vanish when 'horse' is corrected into 'house.'" In Bloom's review, the Them vs. Us dichotomy could not be clearer. For a Sterling Professor Humanities at Yale, he acknowledges, the "experience of getting through Danielle Steel's *Family Album* is rather dismal, and does require a certain bravery, one that a literary critic ordinarily need not display."

Just as works of popular culture are all the same, so too are readers of popular genres all the same. They all read the same way (unless, of course, they are reading professionally and not for fun). Mass readers swallow the cultural messages that are "in" the texts. In interviews, these mass readers might deny their status as victims. They might claim that they have no difficulty in telling apart the wish-fulfillment fantasies of fiction from the disorder of everyday life. They might protest that works of popular fiction differ from each other in important ways that directly affect their reading experience. But within the frame of the reader-as-dupe model, what readers say can be discounted as additional evidence of the stupefying power of mass-produced cultural products, which bypass critical awareness to work on the unconscious, lulling readers to sleep. An odd feature of this model is the way it silences the class whose interests it claims to promote.

The Reader as Poacher

Gaining ground recently is a model of the reader that shifts the emphasis from structures to everyday practices. John Fiske (1989, p. 33) claims that a knowledge of totalizing structures tells only half the story. We also need "an often contradictory, sometimes complementary, knowledge of the everyday practices by which subordinated groups negotiate these structures, oppose and challenge them, evade their control, exploit their weaknesses, trick them, turn them against themselves and their producers." Fiske's reference to "everyday practices" aligns him with a group of French theorists that study everyday life. Of particular relevance is Michel de Certeau, who in *The Practice of Everyday Life* developed the metaphor of the reader as "textual poacher." The interdisciplinary body of work by French thinkers on everyday practices has recently been mapped in Michael Sheringham's *Everyday Life* (2006). About Certeau's construction of the reader, Sheringham (2006, p. 213) observes: "Certeau mounts a strong challenge to the portrayal of consumers as docile and manipulated subjects. His basic hypothesis is that consumption or use is in fact active and productive. . . . And often it makes sense to ask what the consumer *makes* ('fabrique') with the images he or she consumes."

Certeau sees ordinary people developing "tactics" of resistance, in contrast to the "strategies" of the dominant elite. Tactics are an art of the

weak and powerless, guerrilla raids that ordinary readers carry out upon texts produced by the dominant culture. As Certeau (1984, p. 174) puts it, "readers are travelers; they move across lands that belong to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves." Through acts of selective appropriation, readers engage in a secondary form of textual production as they use texts for their own purposes—purposes that may be very different from the intention of the author. Certeau (1984, p. xix) is interested in the "tactics" of consumption—"clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', maneuvers"—as readers take back a degree of power from texts by finding nooks and crannies of resistance. Certeau's reader is resisting dominant power, but we can extend the model of the poacher reader to include reading for pleasure.

The model of the meaning-producing poacher reader has given impetus to studies that use ethnographic methods and in-depth interviews to discover what readers actually do with texts in the context of their everyday lives. If the reader makes meaning, it's not enough to know about the economy of access or even that millions of copies of a particular text have been sold. We need to ask what the readers *did* with what they read. What meanings did they construct? What did they pay attention to and what do they remember? Empirical studies have lent support to the view of the poacher reader who takes liberties with texts and sometimes even rewrites them. In case studies of actual readers, people report that they seize upon whatever speaks directly to their immediate lives, they forget or simply skip over the parts they don't find meaningful, and they sometimes rewrite unsatisfying endings. They are not usually trying to read like literary critics whose goal is to achieve a comprehensive, unified interpretation of significant textual features. In an influential study, *Watching Dallas* (1985), Ien Ang reports on the idiosyncratic and varied meanings that viewers produced—for example, a Dutch Marxist feminist explained that her pleasure viewing *Dallas* came from her sense that the excesses of capitalism and sexism depicted in the program provided a trenchant social critique.

A good example of productive poaching is provided by L. M. Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables* and assiduous letter writer and journal keeper. In a letter to Ephraim Weber dated June 22, 1936, she describes her childhood reading of Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, a novel set at the time of the French Revolution that ends with Zanoni's sacrificial death by guillotine to save the woman he loves. Montgomery tells Weber:

> In early girlhood I was always *living* the book—reconstructing parts of it to suit my wishes. Sometimes I was *Viola*—but not the *Viola* of the book, whom I considered a foolish weak creature utterly unworthy of *Zanoni*. I could never forgive her for her desertion of him. In my version we were parted but not through any fault of our own—and at the last

we escaped the Terror and fled back to our isle. Just as often I was not Viola but myself . . . I attained the great Secret—the first woman who ever "passed the ordeal." . . . I *rewrote* certain parts of the novel. . . . It always worried me terribly to think of that poor baby [Zanoni's child] alone in the world, especially the world of the Terror. I used to lie awake at nights in that old farmhouse by the sea and rescue it and build up a wondrous life for it. (Tiessen and Tiessen, 2006, p. 225)

Montgomery's account provides a rich picture of reader as poacher, actively producing meanings in the context of her own life. It is not surprising that Montgomery, having lost her own mother at the age of two, responded especially keenly to the thought of the "poor baby alone in the world."

Such accounts of actual reading practices run counter to the notion of the compliant reader as a receptacle for meanings produced by others. In "Reading as Poaching," Certeau (1984, pp. 169–170) argues that the reader "invents in texts something different from what [their authors] 'intended'. . . . He combines their fragments and creates something unknown. . . . Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control." Radway (2002) talks about "narrative gleaning," but is referring to the same process of the reader's picking and choosing, fashioning the self from a selection of diverse materials that come to hand. She says that readers "sift and select" (2002, p. 186).

Following a Blueprint for Living

It used to be a truism in literary critical circles that genuine art invited a distanced contemplation of the aesthetic object. Only bad art—for example, pornography or propaganda—roused readers to action in the real world. And if reading a genuine work of art caused readers to act (e.g., some early readers of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* who were alleged to have been moved to suicide), then that was considered the fault of the readers who were not reading properly. The stance appropriate for an encounter with art was thought to involve aesthetic distance.

Readers themselves, on the other hand, often talk about books as a source of models for living, examples to follow, or rules to live by. Some readers report that reading changes their beliefs, attitudes, or pictures of the world, which in turn alters the way they choose to live their lives after the book is closed. Others say that they look for characters whose lives offer models for living and they seek out books that are helpful as blueprints in conducting their own lives. This concept of books as blueprints has been embraced by two influential promoters of books: the Book-of-the-Month Club and Oprah's Book Club. Commenting on Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC) editors who make their selections on behalf of middle-class

readers, Radway (1989, p. 275) notes that these editors look for books that provide "suggestions, models, and directions about how to live." According to Radway (1989, p. 276), the editors demanded from the stories chosen as BOMC selections that readers be able "to map the insights gained from the experience of reading onto the terrain of their own lives." This model of reading gives readers ammunition against the view that pleasure reading is a time waster. At the same time as they enjoy themselves reading entertaining books, readers can point to a payoff in terms of education, self-improvement, and lessons for life.

The Oprah Book Club also advocates a view of leisure reading as simultaneously pleasurable and instructive. The reader need not choose between enjoyment and learning but can have both. The books that Oprah Winfrey picked shot to the top of bestseller lists because her largely female fan base trusted her ability to select enjoyable books of relevance to their everyday lives. Books chosen for the first Oprah Book Club (1996–2002) became famous for their representations of strong women in difficult life situations who triumph over adversity. Encouraged to feel part of an intimate community of readers, millions of women accepted Oprah's call to get the whole country reading again, some of them reading a novel for the first time since leaving school. Publishers quickly felt the Oprah Effect. As Daisy Maryles (1997, p. 18) noted in *Publishers Weekly*, Oprah's first pick, Jacquelyn Mitchard's *Deep End of the Ocean*, jumped from 100,000 to 915,000 copies in print after being selected. The second pick, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, went from 300,000 copies in print to 1,390,000.

These books were not light reads, Oprah assured her viewers, but they offered a big pay-off: personal transformation. Cecelia Konchar Farr (2005, p. 60) quotes from Oprah's introduction in November 2000 to *House of Sand and Fog*: "Literature is powerful. It has the ability to change people, to change people's thoughts. . . . Books expand your vision of yourself and your world." Oprah's own life story, which she has told many times, is an exemplary tale of the transformative power of reading: she started off as a poor and lonely kid growing up in Kosciusko, Mississippi and become a national icon. So when Oprah promises book club members that reading could change their lives for the better, she claims to speak from personal experience. R. Mark Hall (2003, pp. 649–650) describes the way that Oprah has used her own life story to illustrate the liberating power of books: "As Winfrey has gradually revealed this life story on her show and in the popular media, fans have learned, over time, how literacy freed Winfrey herself, making possible her enormous fame and fortune. Books provided education, friendship, and solace."

To get the country reading again, Oprah offered her daytime television audience what Farr (2005, p. 41) calls "reading lessons." She acted as a reading coach, encouraging infrequent readers to take the plunge, promising both pleasure and the satisfaction of serious learning. *Song of*

Solomon, she tells viewers, is about, among other things, "the ways we discover, all of us, who and what we are" (Hall 2003, p. 658). Urging readers to stick with Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, she says, "When you finish this book, you will know that you have really accomplished something because it is a great journey. . . . Once you accomplish reading this book, then you are a bona fide certified reader" (Farr, 2005, pp. 40–41). Moreover the proper mode of reading is to engage both mind and heart: "You don't read this book just with your head. You have to open your whole self up. It's a whole new way of experiencing reading and life" (Farr, 2005, p. 47).

Reading lessons are also provided in the supplementary material on the Oprah website accompanying most of the selections. This material includes an online discussion space, a set of discussion questions about the book, and instructions on how people can write their own reviews. Readers are encouraged to read the book in the context of their own life's concerns. In the supplementary material on Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, a section called "How to Write Your Own Review" suggests, among others, the following questions as good starting points: "How did this book touch your life? Can you relate to it on any level? What do you believe is the message the author is trying to convey to the reader? . . . What did you learn from this book? Was it educational in any way?" The first two posted comments on the discussion page illustrate a kind of reading in which transformation ("This book changed my life") and recognition ("This book is secretly about me") are key values:

Suzanne: "When I heard that you would be discussing Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, I felt compelled to write. THIS BOOK CHANGED MY LIFE."

Sheri: How did Barbara Kingsolver know me? I asked this over and over while reading *The Poisonwood Bible*. I am Leah Price.

Reader as Game Player and Rule Learner

This seventh model of reading turns on its head many of the assumptions of the previously considered models. Steven Johnson sums up a key idea in the title of his book *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (2005). Johnson draws on the domains of television and computer games for his examples, but his discussion can also be applied to popular fiction. In Johnson's model, it is not the content that matters. The important point is that, when people engage in popular media because they enjoy it, they are at the same time practicing and improving high-level cognitive skills. Practice is important because it takes 10,000 hours of practice at anything to become really, really good at it, whether it's playing chess, performing music, doing brain surgery, or playing hockey (Gladwell, 2008). It's the pleasure of the experience itself that keeps people reading/watching/playing for all the hours

needed to become proficient. In repetitively reading dozens of series books or playing computer games, readers/players are discovering the rules of the games they play. In her book on the Stratemeyer Syndicate series books, Carol Billman (1986, pp. 154–155) made this same point over two decades ago: "To read a rigidly formulaic series mystery is to enroll in a beginners' course in the elements of prose fiction; within the book itself, then tender readers continue to receive directions for exploring the unknowns of fiction." This way of looking at reading puts the emphasis on the reader's apprenticeship in the cognitive skills of reading, rule following, decoding, and pattern recognition, not on the "messages" or content. Johnson (2005, p. 14) says he looks at media "as a kind of cognitive workout, not as a series of life lessons." Immersion in popular culture makes us smarter, claims Johnson.

Previously reading experts have worried that immersion in popular culture changes brains for the worse—dumbing readers down as big media companies compete to appeal to the lowest common denominator. Books like Jane Healy's *Endangered Minds* (1990) and Sven Birkerts' *Gutenberg Elegies* (1994) have argued that immersion in visual media such as television or videogames or hypertext puts at risk what we consider thinking itself— the ability to pursue the development of an idea, step-by-step in a logical chain of reasoning, through sentences and paragraphs. In contrast, Johnson makes the case that popular culture is getting increasingly complex as audiences learn the formal conventions of how stories work and how games are played. Johnson (2005, p. 177) draws on the field of cognitive science and neuroscience to argue that the human brain is wired to pay attention to new stimuli and that it learns best in the zone somewhere between too easy and too hard.

Computer game designers know this, says Johnson (2005, p. 177), quoting game scholar James Paul Gee, who claims that the architecture of successful video games follows the "regime of competence" principle: "Each level dances around the outer limits of the player's abilities, seeking at every point to be hard enough to be just doable. . . . which results in a feeling of simultaneous pleasure and frustration." As the player gets better through practice and familiarity, the level of the game played gets harder. In the case of television and film, there is a media environment of after-markets, syndication, reruns, and DVD sales that rewards those shows that can keep the audience's attention through repeated viewings: "Shows that prosper in syndication do so because they can sustain five viewings without becoming tedious. And sustaining five viewings means adding complexity, not subtracting it" (Johnson, 2005, p. 159). Christopher Nolan's Batman movie *The Dark Knight* (2008) reportedly broke box office records because fans return for repeat viewings to puzzle out what they missed the first time around.

In making the claim that popular culture is getting more, not less, complex, Johnson points to what has happened in film conventions. In the mock-slasher film *Student Bodies*, the home-alone, teenage babysitter opens the door to check on a noise outside, finds nothing, and closes the door. In this parody of first generation slasher films like *Halloween*, says Johnson, "a flashing arrow appears on the screen, with text that helpfully explains: "Door Unlocked!" (Johnson 2005, p. 73). The flashing arrow is an exaggeration of the signposts that popular stories routinely use to help audiences keep track of what is going on. As audiences get more sophisticated and learn the rules of the genre through repeated readings, the flashing arrows are not needed—everyone now knows that in a horror film the home-alone babysitter should expect the worst. Notes Johnson (2005, p. 77), "Like those video games that force you to learn the rules while playing, part of the pleasure in these modern television narratives [*The West Wing*, *Lost*, or *The Sopranos*] comes from the cognitive labor you're forced to do filling in the details. If the writers suddenly dropped a hoard of flashing arrows onto the set, the show would seem plodding and simplistic."

In this model, the reader is in charge. Pleasure is a good thing because it keeps the reader/player engaged with the text/game long enough to progress through developmental stages of learning the codes and rules. At the introductory level, the task may seem simple but it is still challenging to the novice. In the context of this model, series books, for example, may be referred to as "training wheels."

So What Is at Stake for Public Libraries and for Library Users?

In this article, I am arguing that a lot is at stake for public libraries when we choose one reading model over another. When librarians think about the role they want public libraries to play in the leisure structure, they find themselves making arguments about reading that are likely to use one or more of the reading models just reviewed. Since unexamined assumptions can be dangerous, teasing out entailments is a useful first step as we consider which models are most compatible with the values of public librarianship. If readers are passive and susceptible to harmful messages in the dominant text, it follows that a "Give 'Em What They Want" philosophy is bad and that readers' choices need to be carefully constrained by experts. If reading is a meaning-making transaction to which the active reader brings half the meaning, then it makes sense to trust and support the reader's own choices. As we can see, each model of reading makes its own power claims and each has its own entailments. In comparing the models, it is helpful to identify where each locates itself with respect to the following dimensions:

- Agent in charge (reader/text/political economic structure)
- Desired outcome of reading (pleasure/instruction)
- Effect of reading on the reader (beneficial/harmful)
- Process of learning to read (a natural developmental process/a specialized process for experts)

We should ask which models are most useful, now that public libraries seek to become important players in the leisure structure. To return to those two pleasure readers that we encountered at the outset reading a series book and a romance, which model helps us most? I suggest that public libraries need to embrace a model of the reader as an active meaning-maker who can be trusted to make choices. We need to get over the suspicion that reading for pleasure is somehow harmful or a waste of time. And if readers can be trusted, then public librarians need to hone their readers' advisory skills so that they can match books to the reader's expressed preferences. The goal can still be to recommend "the best," so long as the best is defined in the context of the particular reader reading at a particular time.

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Catherine Sheldrick Ross is a professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario, where she teaches reference, readers' advisory and reading, and research methods. In addition to articles on reading and the reference transaction, her book publications include *Alice Munro: A Double Life* (ECW Press), *Conducting the Reference Interview* (Neal Schuman), *Reading Matters* (Libraries Unlimited), and four nonfiction books for children (Kids Can Press).