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Review of *What is Documentation? English Translation of the Classic French Text* by Suzanne Briet

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Despite her record of achievements, Hasse's professional life was filled with obstacles and controversies, and this book covers them in detail. Hasse's ability to stand out made her a target for men who felt threatened by her visibility as a new kind of single, ambitious, and independent woman, deemed by Beck the "New Woman." (Beck states that the phrase "New Woman" was first used in Hasse's day in an interview with famous songwriter Jessie Bartlett Davis.)

Hasse and other women library professionals of this era endured hostile workplace environments, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling, and other forms of discrimination throughout their careers. This biography shows how an enthusiastic, hardworking, and energetic individual could be kept from reaching her potential, was treated unfairly, and suffered damage to her reputation because she did not conform to a woman's role as subordinate.

Hasse's sexual harasser was none other than library icon Melvil Dewey. Chapter nine, entitled "The Crisis," is especially poignant, because it details her turbulent downfall and removal after twenty-one years as Chief of New York Public Library's Economics Division. It is also ironic that Hasse, unlike her male counterparts, did not have a pension on which to rely in later years, despite the fact that she had worked approximately sixty years.

Each of the twelve chapters, as well as the prologue and the epilogue, ends with an extensive notes section. The text is also complemented by a preface, a list of abbreviations, acknowledgments, and a comprehensive index. Beck compares and contrasts her findings with Dee Garrison's *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (Wisconsin, 2003), which examined the impact of historical events on current librarianship and society's view of libraries. It should also be noted that Beck penned an earlier essay about Adelaide Hasse for Suzanne Hildenbrand's *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women*

In (Ablex, 1996). Beck is to be praised for this impressive and long overdue biography of Adelaide Hasse.—*Caroline Geck, Kean University.*

Briet, Suzanne. *What Is Documentation? English Translation of the Classic French Text.* Trans. and ed. Ronald E. Day and Laurent Martinet with Hermina G.B. Angheliescu. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2006. 84p. alk. paper, \$25 (ISBN 0810851092). LC 2005-23628.

In 1951 Suzanne Briet published *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*, a forty-eight page pamphlet consisting of three essays that defined the field of documentation and placed it within the scholarly context of the era. The translators of this English edition argue Briet's work continues to be relevant because it offers compelling alternatives to the positivistic attitudes that the translators believe pervade today's information science.

Briet was born in 1894 and qualified as a librarian in 1924. At the time she published these essays, she was chief of the reference service at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. She had already been heavily involved in the development of the documentation profession, including being one of the founders and leaders of the Union Francaise des Organismes de Documentation. However, only three years after publishing *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*, Briet took early retirement and until her 1989 death pursued numerous nonlibrary interests, including writing poetical, historical, and biographical works. Michael Buckland contributes a bibliography of Briet's writings and a brief but interesting biography. As Buckland points out, Briet's three essays are manifestos, the first defining the boundaries of the field, the second distinguishing documentation from traditional librarianship, and the third examining societal needs for vigorous, proactive documentation services.

Briet defines a document as "any concrete or symbolic indexical sign, preserved or recorded toward the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a

physical or intellectual phenomenon." So while a star, a pebble, and a living animal are not documents, photographs and catalogues of stars are documents, stones in a museum of mineralogy are documents, and animals that are cataloged and shown in a zoo are documents. Books and similar written works are types of documents, and, given Briet's understanding of documents, it follows that librarians are a type of "documentalist." But Briet believes the documentalist profession also includes the roles of archivist and curator. While librarians preserve and conserve books (the exhibits of acquired facts), documentalists preserve, conserve, and interpret. The documentalist identifies, interprets, and disseminates documents relevant to researchers and subject specialists. This is similar to the role some special librarians play within research institutes or corporations. Most of Briet's second essay expands on her concept of the documentalist profession. Much attention is given to the documentalist's methods and instruments (most of which, she acknowledges, are borrowed from old techniques developed by similar professionals: e.g., librarians), and to the kind of education necessary for documentalists.

In her final essay, "A Necessity of Our Time," Briet considers how the documentation movement contributes to the progress and unification of civilization. Premising her remarks on the belief that humanity strives toward unity, she discusses how an international network made up of local document centers is the most feasible model for developing a unified, worldwide knowledge system, as contrasted with the "universal bibliography" envisioned by many of her predecessors. Ronald Day, assistant professor of library and information science at Wayne State University, offers a provocative interpretation of the significance of Briet's views and their implications for today's information scientists. Day argues that Briet anticipated the enormous challenges to traditional library practices from new technologies, and as a result developed

a broader understanding of what constitutes a cultural document. Briet's vision of the future of documentation is rooted in an understanding of the world as a patchwork quilt of cultures producing myriad kinds of documents. Each culture and its documentation centers will require techniques and technologies suited to the different kinds of documents. Instead of seeking the universal library, Briet advocates creating a network consisting of the documentation centers from every culture. According to Day, "Just as Culture is transformed in cultures, so the Library is dispersed into documentary techniques and technologies. This is something that still needs to be seen and reckoned with in library education and in library institutions. Briet wrote of it a half century ago, and these changes have only increased since then."

A worthwhile read for librarians, information scientists, and students. —W. Bede Mitchell, Georgia Southern University.

Lanham, Richard A. *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 312p. alk. paper, \$29 (ISBN 0226468828). LC 2005-22857.

Like many before him, Richard Lanham is impressed by one of the big technological changes of our time. For centuries, we have relied on various forms of paper and, to a lesser extent, other hardcopy surfaces to record, preserve, and transmit texts. But now we appear to be in the midst of an epochal shift, from these more familiar surfaces to an increasingly digital "expressive space." Lanham began the inquiry reported in *The Economics of Attention* with the question "What's next for text?"; but this narrower question of the movement from page to screen seemed to invite and perhaps even require reflection on an even broader one: "What's new about the 'new economy' and what's not?" The movement back and forth between these two issues creates the central tension of the argument.