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## Bremertown Postcard-Tom is buying books

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# Bremertown Postcard

Column Editor: **Tom Leonhardt** (International University Bremen)

In college, I majored in German. I studied the German language, linguistics, and literature and developed a fondness for all three but time to pursue only the literature once I took up a career and as my family grew. I cannot claim to have read all that many books in German after leaving college but I kept it up enough and in the past ten years or so have tried to pick up the pace. The more I read, the better my reading vocabulary became and the more eager I became to keep reading.

As long as I was working at a research library, I had no trouble finding good books to read and even at the **Oregon Institute of Technology**, I was able to find almost any title I sought by using the **Orbis** union catalog. Not only could I borrow books from the **University of Oregon**, I discovered that the **Reed College Library** contains a wonderful German literature collection. But some titles, not widely held, turned out to be on the shelves of the libraries at **Whitman College**, **Lewis and Clark**, **Willamette**, **University of Puget Sound**, and even **Oregon State University**, perhaps the last school, after **Oregon Tech**, where I would expect to find German novels in German. But then I remembered that **Bernard Malamud** once taught English at **Oregon State** (see his *A New Life* for details). As it turns out, the prophecy by some in the 1970s that approval plans will create identical collections everywhere, turns out to be a false prophecy and individual taste and discrimination prevails after all so that the German novel I need is found in a library I would not have considered and did not consider. Thanks to technology and library cooperation, **Orbis** found those books for me.

But finding books to read is not the same as finding books to buy and own and make notes in and admire on one's very own bookshelves. Borrowing someone else's books serves only one need. I wanted to buy books in German, novels, grammars, dictionaries, and more. But very few cities offer anything beyond dictionaries and phrase books. Happily, there were a few occasions each year or every year or so, when I could find at least a few titles to choose from and a few from those that met my needs and my budget.

When I lived in the Bay Area, I had a couple of choices. There was the **University of California** bookstore and there was **Cody's** upstairs where one can find German, Italian, Spanish, and French titles and maybe some other languages, too. And other bookstores along **Telegraph**, such as **Moe's**, might occasionally offer something in German. Otherwise, I would have to go to the City (San Francisco) and visit the **European Book Store** on Larkin between Post and Geary. This past summer **ALA** was in San Francisco, and even though I was visiting from Germany, I wanted to browse in the store and maybe find some language books about German from an American point of view. I found the store right where I expected it to be but it was boarded up and empty. I felt badly, not because I couldn't browse, that was a certainly a disappointment, but I mourned the loss of a wonderful independent book store that car-

ried a variety of non-English language books and learning materials for children and scholars and everything in between. There was no sign telling me that **European Books** was now in a new location. I would rather have paid for a cab to a more distant location than to know that the store was gone. I don't know why but I think I know and it is sad. It reminded me of the time I found **Kroch's** and **Brentano's** in Chicago vacant of books but inhabited by the literary and publishing ghosts. I know that **Saul Bellow** used to go there and probably **Studs Terkel**. **Lyman Newlin** is the person to ask but as I write this, it is only five a.m. and he should be resting up for his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday party and not answering one of those awful-hour phone calls that should be reserved for emergencies only.

A few years ago I was spending a lot of time in Chicago. No matter what my business was and no matter which end of Michigan Avenue my hotel was located, I had four places I liked to visit, **Kitty O'Shea's Irish Pub** at the **Chicago Hilton** and **Towers**, **Rose's Records** and **Carl Fischer Music** (both gone now and both in the loop on Adams, I think), and **Europa Books** (832 N. State Street). **Kitty O'Shea's** and **Europa Books** are at opposite ends of Michigan Avenue and then over a couple blocks more to reach State Street. When staying at the Hilton, I would earn my pint(s) of Guinness by hiking up to the Europa and back with a heavier load than when I started. I don't know how many miles that is but with such rewards at each end (not to mention the exercise itself), it was worth it. When staying at a hotel at the northern end of the Miracle Mile, I would earn my pint(s) of Guinness by walking to the Hilton.

Since May 2001, I have been in hog heaven. **International University Bremen** is actually in a suburb called **Grohn** and the largest town (Bremen is a city state with town-like suburbs or neighborhoods) near **Grohn** is **Veegesack**. **Veegesack** has a pretty good bookstore, locally owned and operated, **Otto Buecher** ([www.buecher-otto.de](http://www.buecher-otto.de)) is in the pedestrian zone with a selection that tends toward popular titles and line B fiction, travel, language, maps, children's, local history, etc. There is also a de-

cent selection of English language books, classics and mysteries for the most part. **Otto Buecher** has just the kind of atmosphere you look for in a bookstore with bins and shelves full of titles to browse and a friendly staff with computers at hand when you need help.

There is also an antiquarian book seller in **Veegesack**, **Antiquariat Bahr & Kemper**. Sadly, the selection for literature is wanting and the condition of too many of the books makes otherwise reasonable prices seem too high. Nevertheless, I was able to find a couple of volumes to buy and will buy some more the next time I visit there. I feel an obligation to buy at least one book any time I visit an antiquarian dealer.

Bremen city center (more or less) has several good bookstores. There are two, **Thalia** and **Phoenix** almost next door to each other and **Storm** books not too far away. But my favorite, discovered recently, is **Buchhandlung Geist**, a scholarly, language-oriented local book store containing just the kinds of books I have been looking for, literary classics (German), reference books, literary histories, and grammars. I have already spent more money in **Geist** on German books than I have in one visit since I was a graduate student. It felt good as I left the store with my heavy plastic bag of books. I plan to fill out my collection of **Duden**, both the regular and the small volumes, and the **Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag** history of German literature is now within my grasp, too.

To be honest, I had found sources on the Internet where I could order any German book I wanted and I did order a few and will order others once I return to the States, but in the meantime, I am having fun browsing and finding books that I don't really need but can't really resist. Ordering books by mail (let's face it, that is all you are really doing when you order from a Web site) can be fun and convenient and all that you have when outside a big city, but it will never replace a good bookstore, even those where you have to walk outside and up the street a couple of meters before finding a place to sit down and order **Aeinen Milchkafee und Apfelstrudel@** to enjoy while examining those crisp new volumes. 🍷

## Drinking From The Firehose from page 90

reviews (also mostly negative). Find what you will from these pages. I assure you if you take the time to read the book, you will ask yourself some surprising questions. If you are a regular reader of *Against the Grain* (and especially if you write for it) you owe yourself this task. **Tony Ferguson** took the time to read it, and his comments in the June issue of this journal were well considered and fair.

It is extremely important in this time of electronic content, that we focus on what it means to be saved for posterity. What posterity will be in the future could be something altogether different than what we have thought it was in the past. If we care about saving anything we

mount as a web site, digital content, or otherwise create in a format that requires a machine to access, we need to think about how this will be assured. Let's face it, if Baker's book inspired me to write this column, it just might be worth your time to read it. Trust me on that. 🌱

## Issues in Vendor/Library Relations from page 89

the network; now the work doubles, as we develop **GE2** and think about today's users, and tomorrow's; and keep our eye on the competitors too. Much of **YBP** revolves around **GOBI**. Other companies have imitated it. Hundreds of libraries depend upon it. **GOBI** is a big success. **GE2** will make it new again. But some days we wonder, when did **GOBI** begin to own us? 🍷