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The End of Books and the Death of Libraries

by **Matthew J. Bruccoli** (President, Bruccoli Clark Layman; Phone: 803-771-4642; Fax: 803-799-6593)

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that “The chief glory of every people arises from its authours.”¹ It follows that the chief glory of every people is perpetuated in its books, which are to be found in libraries.

I was trained during the Fifties by **John Cook Wyllie**, the Curator of Rare Books at the **University of Virginia’s Alderman Library** and subsequently head of the library. He was the best librarian and the best bookman I have ever known. Everything I believe about libraries; everything I know about books; everything I have accomplished as a bibliographer, publisher, editor, biographer, and book collector, I owe to **Mr. Wyllie’s** tutelage. Accordingly, I reasonably require librarians at research institutions to emulate his standards and values. I have worked for two men who qualified: **Hyman Kritzer** — the head of the **Kent State University Libraries**, who was a courageous acquisitions librarian and research-collection builder — and **George Terry** — Dean of Libraries at the **University of South Carolina**, who had a vision of what a research library should be and do. The party ended when I lost **George**.

It is appropriate for me to note my respect for two librarians I did not work for: **Charles Mann**, the Curator of Rare Books at **Penn State**, and **William Cagle**, head of the **Lilly Library** at **Indiana University**. My bookman heroes include **Charles Feinberg**, the great **Walt Whitman** scholar-col-



lector (“Without books my life would have been a desert.”) and my partner, **Frazer Clark**, who pauperized himself collecting **Nathaniel Hawthorne**. Neither **Charlie** nor **Frazer** was a librarian or an academician; but their monumental collections are now in libraries.²

I have declared my allegiances and acknowledged my obligations to prepare for my statement that books — books for study, books for research, books for reference — are imperiled. Even books for reading pleasure — which is where it all starts — are under threat of superannuation, or worse. **Nicholson Baker’s** “The Author vs. the Library” (*The New Yorker*, 14 October 1996), which deals with the pillaging of the **San Francisco Public Library**, ought to be mandatory reading for library users.

Books consist of bound printed pages. Books are not images on a screen. Therefore libraries — buildings full of common books, uncommon books, rare and precious books, worthless books, and people using them — are endangered. Without books, libraries will perish because they have no reason to exist without books. They will become buildings full of television screens and expensive electronic junk — and that attraction is diminishing as potential library patrons find it unnecessary to set foot in them. **Fred Kilgour**, a god of librarianship, wrote, “Not having to go to a library is a very important improvement in providing

library service.” He was not joking. There is now a population of college students who never enter their college libraries. To encourage students’ non-dependence on libraries is to betray them. The book is the most useful and usable learning instrument ever invented. If **Johann Gutenberg** were to produce the first book printed from movable type next week, it would be hailed as a miracle; and **Microsoft** would become a division of **Gutenberg, Inc.**³

I once felt secure in the conviction that libraries would last. I was certain that the book-haters and book-dopes would be prevented from destroying the books and the libraries. Now I’m not sure: I fear that they will destroy or discard the books before they go to librarian paradise where they will never have to see a book. I was amused the first time I heard a librarian or information specialist or whatever she called herself, cheerfully — maybe triumphantly — speak the phrase “virtual library.” I should have wept. The virtual librarians have embraced virtual books. Those electronic things on a screen are not books. They don’t work the way books work. They aren’t as good as books. On-screen matter does not allow for sustained reading. The universal virtual library will destroy reading techniques. Reading will become an anti-social act, as **Ray Bradbury** predicted in *Fahrenheit 451*.⁴ Public libraries — real libraries with real books — will be replaced by bookeries, where readers go to read books in secret.

A virtual library is just that. Without real libraries and real books, there will be a lot of unemployed librarians — er, information specialists. I do not know why librarians are eager to collaborate in the destruction of their profession by means of their ecstatic participation in the destruction of that irreplaceable research instrument, the card catalogue,⁵ and their orgiastic discarding of books and newspaper runs. A newspaper on screen is not a newspaper: it doesn’t work the same way; it is not read the same way. The make-up and the page lay-out are missing. Moreover, the newspapers microfilms are breaking down — and then there will be nothing. See **Nicholson Baker’s** noble *Double Fold* (NY: Random House, 2001).

Nothing can be more important than a book. Nothing can replace a real library. Nothing can duplicate or substitute for the excitement and intellectual stimulation of being in a building full of books. Nothing can replicate the experience of walking the stacks and seeing the books and touching the books and listening to them: “Me, me! Read me!” Here is young **Thomas Wolfe** in the stacks of **Harvard’s Widener Library**:

Now he would prowling the stacks of the library at night, pulling books out of a thousand shelves and reading in them like a madman.

The thought of these vast stacks of books would drive him mad: the more he

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And They Were There
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Session — Saturday, November 11, 2006 —
*STM in 2020: A Vision of the Future Business
of Scholarly Communication* — Presented by

David Worlock (Chairman and Founder, Electronic Publishing)

Report by **Ramune Kubilius** (Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library)
<r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>

Presenter **Worlock** (“we Worlocks are warriors”) rebounded from being unable to retrieve his **PowerPoint** “futurology” presentation slides, by telling the audience he had been “liberated” from **PPT**. Moving on briskly, he contended that the root problem is too much content. Metadata is the world we live in. Information is available for machine-to-machine linkages. In 2020, there will be no open access since there will be an assumption of access. There will be no copyright, since everyone will use the clickable license. There will be no “journals,” just trackable information events (but *Nature*, *Science* and *Cell* will still exist). There will be no “publishers,” only “value added service providers.” There will be no librarians, only “information support professionals.” **Worlock** contended that there isn’t enough research on research (behavior). STM is now small-team oriented, but is becoming “big science”, with large teams at multiple sites, and in 2020, enabled searches will allow “show me scientists making similar claims.” Indexing and abstracts will be a given. Three publishers will sell value-added technology and proprietary indexation in their lifelong personal ELN (electronic lap notebook) environments that will be checked and certified twice a year. Because of compliance requirements, no research projects will be initiated without informatics associates. The 2006 “semantic Web” in 2020 will just be “searching.”

read, the less he seemed to know — the greater the number of the books he read, the greater the immense uncountable number of those which he could never read would seem to be. Within a period of ten years he read at least 20,000 volumes — deliberately the number is set low — and opened the pages and looked through many times that number. This may seem unbelievable, but it happened. **Dryden** said this about **Ben Jonson**: “Other men read books but he read libraries” — and so now was it with this boy. Yet this terrific orgy of the books brought him no comfort, peace, or wisdom of the mind and heart. Instead, his fury and despair increased from what they fed upon, his hunger mounted with the food it ate.

He read insanely, by the hundreds, the thousands, the ten thousands, yet he had no desire to be bookish; no one could describe this mad assault upon print as scholarly: a ravening appetite in him demanded that he read everything that had ever been written about human experience. He read no more from pleasure — the thought that other books were waiting for him tore at his heart forever. He pictured himself as tearing the entrails from a book as from a fowl.

At first, hovering over book stalls, or walking at night among the vast shelves of the library, he would read, watch in hand, muttering to himself in triumph or anger at the timing of each page: “Fifty seconds to do that one. Damn you, we’ll see! You will, will you?” — and he would tear through the next page in twenty seconds.

This fury which drove him on to read so many books had nothing to do with scholarship, nothing to do with academic honors, nothing to do with formal learning. He was not in any way a scholar and did not want to be one. He simply wanted to know about everything on earth; he wanted to devour the earth, and it drove him mad when he saw he could not do this [*Of Time and the River*].

This is exemplary behavior to be emulated.⁶

The stacks of a good library provide a better education than is available in classrooms. Frequently the book you really need is the one you don’t know about until you find it shelved near the book you went there to get. My **Yale** education was incomplete because the library stacks were closed to undergraduates — although it had a card catalogue. The September-October 2006 issue of the *Yale Alumni Magazine* carries this item:

Technology chased a few pieces of **Yale** history out the front door of **Sterling Memorial Library** this year. In two phases in March and July, the library

removed and sold the 80 freestanding cabinets that once housed the card catalogue in the nave. **Yale** students, faculty, and employees were offered a chance to buy the cabinets for \$50 each on a first-come, first-served basis. (They went fast.) The built-in cabinets in the nave are staying where they are, at least for now. The cards themselves will be stored in the basement of **Sterling** and will be accessible to researchers. [Wanna bet?]

I got most of my education in the open stacks at **UVa**, and **Mr. Wyllie** granted me the freedom of the rare-book stacks. The rest of my education I acquired in used or antiquarian bookstores by handling books and buying them. I never paid too much for a book. There were books I failed to buy because I thought that I couldn’t afford them, but I was wrong. It was cowardice.

Biographer **Edmund Morris** has testified to what books mean to a bookman — not book fetishism but book love.

What I’ll miss in the virtual book is more of what I miss already:

the feel of a printed volume as something that has gone to press. Literally, that used to mean a construct of board, thread, and paper impressed with the weight of type. As a boy, I loved to run my fingers over those punched characters massing into words — sentences — stories. And if the book was new, to nuzzle my face in the gutter between the pages and breathe the oily fragrance of printer’s ink. Phototypesetting has done away with that delight: the characters now lie lightly on the odorless page, and seem less important in consequence. How much more superficial will be the books of the future, streaming slickly behind glass, easy to summon, easy to alter, easy to erase! But by then, with luck, I’ll be virtually dead (letter to **M.J.B.**).

The book-text on a screen — even assuming that somebody scanned the right impression of the right edition and that the electronic text is an exact duplicate of the printed text, which is a crap-shoot — is unreliable or worthless for textual scholarship. The image on the screen doesn’t reveal the watermarks or paper stock or paper thickness or the chain marks and wire lines. The gatherings can’t be collated. Cancels can’t be identified. Gutters can’t be measured. Type batter cannot be accurately identified. What about bindings: cloth grains, cloth colors, color stamping, and blindstamping? What about dust jackets and jacket variants? I do not expect that jackets will be scanned by the descendants of the people who have been routinely discarding and destroying dust jackets for more than a century because they cannot comprehend that jackets provide bibliographical, cultural, literary, graphic, critical, and biographical evidence.⁷ The blurb is a form of literary history. Thus: the earliest jacket for *Tender Is the Night* has blurbs by **T. S. Eliot**, **H. L. Mencken**, and **Paul Rosenfeld**; the later jacket replaces them with blurbs by **Padraic Colum**, **Gilbert Seldes**, and **Majorie Kinnan Rawlings**. A good scholar-researcher will find out why.

Evidence. The key duty of librarians in the age of the Great God Scan will be to identify and preserve the evidence. Special collections will be even more special as it becomes evident that they are irreplaceable and unduplicatable. Special-collections librarians or curators will perform better training, and their responsibilities will become more demanding and more respected — and presumably better rewarded.

Online manuscripts and letters are not usable for research purposes. The texts on the screen do not provide ink colors or reliably differentiate between pencil and ink or identify the papers. **Fredson Bowers** reconstructed the composition of *Leaves of Grass* from the evidence of the colors of the paper **Whitman** wrote on and the presence of pin-holes in the leaves that were once pinned together. Try that on your telly.

The best research material in academic libraries is not printed. The digitizers have been silent on the subject of manuscripts in the universal library. Poet-librarian **Philip Larkin** has observed that “All literary manuscripts have two kinds of value: what might be called the magical value and the meaningful value... I doubt if any librarian can be a successful manuscript collector unless he responds to [the magic of it] to some extent.” **Larkin** defines the meaningful value as “the degree to which a manuscript helps to enlarge our understanding of a writer’s life and work.”

When I entered the rare-book field in the Fifties, the rare rare-book room — and it was usually one room — at most academic libraries was typically staffed by a charity case who was too incompetent to be trusted at the circulation desk or by a failed academic. Even libraries at putative research institutions didn’t have rare-book rooms or even rare-book collections. When I arrived at **Ohio State University** in 1961 there was a locked janitor’s closet with mops, brooms, and buckets, maybe 100 volumes that constituted somebody’s idea of this university’s rare-book holdings. **Hy Kritzer** and I began the process of creating a rare-book collection by removing from the stacks books that were rare or valuable. The associate librarian returned these books to the stacks until I promised to steal them. He succeeded **Mr. Wyllie** as director of the **UVa Library**.

If I have conveyed the misleading impression that all the book-enemies at **OSU** and other institutions congregated in the libraries, I hereby stipulate that many of the worst offenders were on the faculty: fakes, frauds, and incompetents who didn’t know or care anything about the books in their fields — or any books at all — and were proud of their anti-bookishness. Consequently they were unable to advise the librarians about acquisitions — which is a scholar’s responsibility.

One of them who became chairman of the English Department angrily told me, “No book is worth \$300!” The one who taught the course on “The Art of Literary Research” — some art — condescendingly referred to the text of “The Gift Outright” that **Robert Frost** read from at the **Kennedy Inauguration** as a “mere

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collector's item." **Hy Kritzer** and I bought it for the library, anyhow.

A book evokes the circumstances, culture, and society that inspired it, produced it, and utilized it. It is not a "mere artifact" or a "mere collector's item"; beware of the mere-sayers. Great copies of great books don't work on telly.

When **William Cagle** was head of the **Lilly Library at Indiana University** he enjoyed showing students the first printing of the Bill of Rights with a transmittal note:

"The President of the United States requests the Secretary of State to accept this volume of laws."

Nothing can replace examining this book that **George Washington** presented to **Thomas Jefferson**. Or **F. Scott Fitzgerald's** annotated copy of *Ulysses* with a presentation letter from **James Joyce** — at the **University of South Carolina**. They are eloquent monuments of history, learning, and culture. Seeing them and touching them educates serious students in ways that nothing else can.

Library books are not enough. It is obligatory for educated readers to own books and to live surrounded by them. The sight of them comforts us. The annotations in your own books are more than study aids: they provide records of your taste, enthusiasms, and intellectual development — a way to resuscitate the reading experiences that shaped your mind and your life.

The destruction of books and runs of newspapers are not just crimes committed out of ignorance. The culprits are book-enemies, and they say so. I have worked with and fought against book-haters who were and still are in charge of research libraries. They are easy to identify: just look at the shelves in their offices or visit their bookless homes. Observe their behavior in a room full of books: they never look at the books, and they avoid contact with books to protect themselves from contamination.⁸

One good thing that may result from the digitization of books is that a lot of information specialists will have to acquire the training and education to function as librarians. When the administrators and electronic junkies replace libraries with bookless buildings stocked with screens, the librarians who select the books for scanning and preservation will become essential people in the profession. They will be trained to recognize editions, impressions, issues, and states. Not only will they know how to use a **Bowersian** bibliography, they will be expected to compile bibliographies. The new breed of librarians will have the responsibility for protecting and preserving our cultural possessions. "Keeper," the old-fashioned term for curator, will recover its meaning. The rare-book rooms and special-collections departments that survive the book-purge concomitant with the scanning pandemic will become increasingly precious cultural resources: not for display, but for use. Rare-book collections — including

manuscripts, letters, documents — are irreplaceable for scholarship and research.

At the crack of doom there will be library administrators convening committee meetings and generating reports on "Librarian Value of Service Outsources: Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis." But the authentic librarians will be irreplaceable. Their profession will be elevated. Great needs and great opportunities exist for the book professionals to restore bookmanship to its primacy in research libraries. In 1966 **Fredson Bowers** — under whom I studied—delivered his address on *Bibliography & Modern Librarianship* at the **Berkeley School of Librarianship** and the **UCLA School of Library Service**. After observing that "It is odd that of all forms of librarianship, the training of the rare-book librarian has been most neglected," he stated that "the only true source for fresh research on the frontiers of knowledge lies in the special collections housed in the rare-books division, and every scholar knows it." I'm not sure what every scholar knows in the computer age; but forty years later **Bowers'** prediction that properly-trained rare-book librarians would become increasingly necessary is now timely: "if the rare-book librarians do not protect the more innocent students and scholars of the future from the snares of microfilm or its successors, who will?" The successors to microfilm are now here, and they scare the hell out of me.

Millions of books will be discarded or destroyed after they are scanned or digitized or googled. I'll be damned if I believe that they will be preserved and made available. The lucky ones will end up in inaccessible warehouses. Most will become landfill. The books that survive the massacre because of their monetary value or rarity will be entrusted to the care of the properly educated librarians who know why the books are there.

The destroyers of books justify their crimes by invoking the shibboleth duplication: "How can we shelve new books unless we get rid of old books?" Easy: build bigger libraries with more stacks to accommodate the duplicates that may or may not be duplicates." **Mr. Wyllie** taught me that a duplicate copy of a book is not a duplicate until proven by bibliographical examination to be a duplicate. Even then, two copies are better than one. This rule obviously applies to pre-1850 books — before machine type-setting and machine printing. But concealed printings with textual variants abound in 20th-century books: there may be five concealed printings in the first edition of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). A lot of "duplicates" are needed to identify the true dupes. And what about the variants in the pre-book texts of *Old Man* in the regional editions of *Life Magazine*: the ones that libraries discarded as duplicates?

The book-enemies claim that scanning books preserves them. But they are not preserving the books: they are replacing them. Most books do not require electronic preservation. They will last if they are kept dry. It is not true that paper is oxidizing itself to death and crumbling on the shelves. This lie is a con promulgated by the people who manufacture

and sell machines to libraries. Microfilm, the once-celebrated panacea, has proven to be susceptible to self-destruction. Paper is more stable than hard drives or CDs. Newspapers were customarily destroyed during the act of filming them or discarded as unwanted duplicates. Now there are no copies of the real thing.

More money goes into library administration than goes into book acquisition. The university administrators don't want to squander money on books; they don't even want libraries to have books. A university president told me that his trustees didn't want to "waste money on pieces of old paper." He shared their position. In 1992 30% of library budgets was spent on technology. The figure is much higher now because the 1992 technology requires updating, replacement, and remedial software. That means less money for book acquisitions and, indeed, for librarians.

The universal library of digitally scanned books is not a library; it is a lot of electronic hardware and software — not books. A library has books: common books and rare books, valuable books and worthless books, books that are frequently used and books that haven't been used in decades. The function of a library is to have the books there when somebody needs them.

In 2006 the *New York Times Magazine* gave prominent space to the cover article "Scan the Book!" by **Kevin Kelly** (an editor of *Wired*, an online "magazine") extolling the forthcoming miraculous universal library. He promised that "when books are digitized... The universal library becomes one very, very, very large single text: the world's only book." That ought to scare the hell out of every reader. But I am not as frightened as I should be because **Kelly's** figures are haywire. He states that 75% of the books now in libraries are "orphaned" — a term that means an out-of-print book that is still in copyright. Nonsense. He further alleges that "about 15 percent of all books are in the public domain" (email to **M.J.B.**). Nonsense compounded. **Kelly** predicts that the UL will lead to "virtual 'bookshelves'" described by him as "a collection of texts, some as short as a paragraph, others as long as entire books.... Indeed, some authors will begin to write books to be read as snippets or to be remixed as pages." He's celebrating the death of literature and maybe the death of authorship. **Kelly** predicts that this snippetization of writing will change the economics of authorship from income earned by book sales to money earned by "performances, access to the creator, personalization, add-on information, the scarcity of attention (via ads), sponsorship, periodic subscriptions...." There is nothing good about that announcement — even if I believed it. The writer's task is to write — not to peddle himself. There are things wrong about American copyright that require correction. But these deluded electricians want to abolish copyright and thereby undermine the profession of authorship.

It is necessary to support authors by purchasing their work. Authors cannot live on

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library sales, even if the United States had a public lending right to provide minuscule royalties based on library circulation. The Websites are intentionally eroding the concept of copyright; but until copyright becomes unenforceable, readers who can afford it have the obligation to support the writers who perform the world's most precious work. Mark Twain understated it: "...almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product — when that product is fine and noble and enduring."

The eBook has been resurrected as the **SONY Portable Reader System** at \$350, which provides a screen on which one page at a time can be read. The sales pitch is that an eBook stores multiple book texts (80 at present), each of which is replaceable for the price of a real book. Purportedly, "the top six trade publisher were working with **SONY** to make more than 10,000 titles available." Lunacy.

When I asked the **SONY** demonstrator what the chief advantage of the **PRS** was, she explained that it obviates the need to own 80 books. I want to own 80 books. I want 800 books. I want 8,000 books.

I welcome one product from the world of gimmicks and gadgets: on-demand books. Short runs of new books can now be rapidly and affordably printed or reprinted, allowing writers to become authors. Publication is the essential act of authorship. Out-of-print books can be resuscitated and slow-sellers can be kept in print as needed. I am referring to books — those things that open on three sides and are filled with pieces of paper covered with little black marks: books, not screens.

As head of **Bruccoli Clark Layman**, the producer of 375 volumes to date of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* for **Thomson Gale**, I am particularly concerned about the impending death of reference books. Books for entertainment will last, but the reference book is terminal. The death-bed is surrounded by librarians, teachers, and even putative publishers who are yanking out the life-support tubes.¹⁰ The college reference librarians blame the teachers for failing to make library research assignments. The pusillanimous teachers claim that their students refuse to go to the library and will give teachers who require library work unfavorable ratings that will impede their promotion and tenure. All of them insist, on no evidence, that the information on telly is as trustworthy as in real reference books. The hell it is. Most of the reference data on telly is unedited and uncredited. There is no authority for it. Who provided it? Who deserves the credit or blame? In the word of **Bert Williams**: "Nobody." When "Nobody" is responsible, all reference tools become equally good — that is, equally bad. The online "providers" who have leased *DLB* entries have removed credits to the authors of the entries from their retreats. I can't explain this concealment of authority, which fosters plagiarism. When I check the

online competition, their stuff is pockmarked with errors. The **Wikipedia** entry for **F. Scott Fitzgerald** attributes a statement to me that I never made.

Kurt Vonnegut's story "Harrison Bergeron" deals with a society that is run by the Handicapper-General for the purpose of equalizing everyone: graceful people must carry weights, and intelligent people are forced to wear devices that prevent them from concentrating. The Handicapper-General is real, and she now controls online reference sources. She believes that no scholars or editors should be given online credit for their work. She destroyed the card catalogues, and librarians celebrated. She destroyed the newspapers runs, and librarians celebrated. Now she has embarked on the abolition of scholarly standards.

Scholar-teacher-poet **Catharine Brosman** has identified the threats built into the impending onlinization of literature (letter to **M.J.B.**):

What today's Internet pushers and their librarian-converts are doing is somewhat less than book-burning, as surely they would point out, but not entirely different from it. They propose to limit increasingly the number of tangible volumes to which we, whether ordinary readers or seasoned scholars and thinkers, have access, by reducing shelf space for books in favor of computer stations, thus necessitating getting rid of old, "useless" volumes, and inviting — often "obliging" us — to look up things in the new forms they impose, whose topics and range they will decide. That which is deemed useful, up-to-date, and popular will remain available; more esoteric and less timely materials will be increasingly difficult to obtain; and the public presumption will be that what is not on-line will be ipso facto inferior or negligible. It is likely that certain older books or writings by eccentrics or "unreconstructed" thinkers, judged dangerous or offensive, will be excluded from electronic reproduction on grounds of their contents; isn't conversion of a book library to an on-line imitation a perfect chance for the speech-and-thought police to rid America of texts expressing views deemed outdated, irresponsible, offensive, inflammatory, or in language now banned? (Just as one computer dictionary rules out, I'm told, the word "nincompoop," judged offensive, presumably).

Who will determine which books will be onlined and which will be suppressed? The Handicapper-General will.

In his article acknowledging his debts to the **Chicago Public Library**, **David Mamet** observes that "The computer presents itself as a tool of increased literacy and communication. The jury is out. It may very well prove, in retrospect, to have been the death of literacy and communication, for if information can be centrally controlled (and it seems that it can), it can and most probably will be altered" (*American Libraries*, December 2006).

The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is not as good online as it is inbook. The volumes were conceived as volumes: that's the way they work. A proper reference book is planned and ordered, organized and structured. The elements are integrated. Loose entries on telly are grab-bags. Moreover, the online *DLB* entries omit the illustrations, which are functional, not decorative: the facsimiles of manuscripts, revised typescripts, and corrected proofs have spiritual and instructional value. The best *DLB* volumes, the *Documentary* volumes, don't work online.

Yes — I know that online reference material can be instantly updated or corrected. Some is and some isn't. I can't tell. Subscribing libraries pay a Website maintenance fee, but I don't know what they get for it. Moreover, I'm tired of being told that thanks to Websites students can write their papers at 3 AM without going to the library — as though that merits commendation. At 3AM they don't do research: they plagiarize. How many students really do consult online resources at three in the morning? Even if there are a lot of them, they should not be encouraged in their dereliction. They belong in the library using books, browsing in books, marking books, mutilating books, and getting an education.

Books are at risk because reading is at risk. Students don't read books or anything else — probably because their teachers don't require or expect much reading from them. Students are losing the ability to write, because they don't read. Instead of suppressing book reading and discouraging library use, educators — including librarians — should herd students to the library. At gun-point, if necessary.

A college or university is a collection of books surrounded by students, teachers, and scholars using them. In the fifties, Catholic tourists at **Yale University** were observed crossing themselves when they entered the gothic **Sterling Memorial Library**. God was in the books then; but He went to library school.

Nothing can be more important than a book. Get the books. Preserve the books. Revere the books.

Notes

1. **Dr. Johnson** compiled his *Dictionary of English Language* without a computer. He read many books and retained what he had read.

2. The **Hawthorne-Longfellow Library** at **Bowdoin College** declined **Frazer Clark's** unmatched **Hawthorne** collection on the alibi of "too much duplication." A great research collection can never be duplicated.

3. **Bill Gates** bought his **DaVinci Codex** for 30.8 million dollars. Does he know something he isn't telling us?

4. **Bradbury** has written: "You must read dreadful dumb books and glorious books, and let them wrestle in beautiful fights inside your head — vulgar one moment, brilliant the next. You must lurk in libraries and climb the stacks like ladders to sniff books like perfumes and wear books like hats upon your crazy heads."

5. See **Nicholson Baker**, "Discards,"

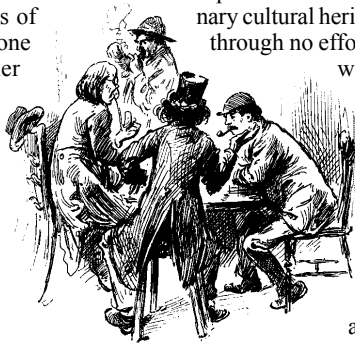
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Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers

by **Richard Abel** (Aged Independent Learner) <rael@easystreet.com>

This tale begins in the Spring of 1944. The author had enrolled the previous Fall as a freshman at **Reed College**. It was difficult for the college to find the help to both perform the janitorial and other duties incident to running a residential school and to pay much for such help. So, the college instituted a Labor Draft in which all residential students were obliged to perform some stipulated number of hours of such chores at the rate of 25¢/hour. As a freshman I was assigned the washing of the breakfast kitchen pans every morning beginning at 7:00 AM until all were washed and stored. If any reader believes that a late-to-bed-late-to-arise individual, working in greasy water to above the elbows, could readily complete such a job in time to make the first class beginning at 9:00 AM in any kind of mentally alert state of mind and prepared to learn they have not tried to play that game.

Several desperate avenues of inquiry elicited the fact that one might change jobs if another opening could be found. I started scouting the **Reed College Coop** staff for dropouts. As good fortune would have it a junior dropped out to transfer to another college, as was a common stratagem to avoid the lengthy, written Junior Qualification exams



the satisfactory passing of which was required to advance to Senior standing. The then student manager was delighted to have a volunteer draftee waiting in the wings. At the time the **Coop** handled only the few textbooks used at **Reed**, largely for the science courses all purchased with the opening of classes in the Fall; school supplies; candy, cigarettes, and soft drinks; and a few toiletries — toothpaste, soap, shampoo, etc. Save for a couple of weeks at the time of the beginning of classes, the **Coop** was open only an hour or two a day.

Now the fact that the **Coop** stocked no general books seemed quit strange to a kid from Montana who delighted in a kind of Great Books curriculum — the two-year Humanities Program — then required by **Reed** for graduation. While this requirement was a superb foundation for subsequent classes, I could only hope for more in-depth study of this extraordinary cultural heritage to which I had fallen heir through no effort of my own. All I had to do

was to read and seek to understand, often in extended and winner-take-all debate with a few like-minded fellow students I could find. I had learned of a Great Books program while still a boy in Great Falls, Montana. But children (presumably under 21 years) were not allowed to participate, so, I

had to make out as best I could.

The only independent bookstore and the single department-store book department in Great Falls were of absolutely no help in my earlier quests — the staff was preoccupied with the latest crop of novels and endeavoring to project an image of “culture” and literary sophistication. But after a brief voyage as a juvenile in these turgid waters I concluded that literary entertainment as well as literary criticism and gossip were pretty thin gruel. I was a growing adolescent and needed heaping servings of intellectual red meat. So, after some months of almost random slashing around and special ordering of a few mediocre to useless books, **Will Durant’s** *Mansions of Philosophy* came into view, found on a remainder table. Here was the key I needed to unlock the doors to the vast intellectual treasure of the world. **Durant** clearly wrote this book for people like me — neophytes seeking to learn of the towering figures of intellectual history, their chronological and intellectual relations, and, as welcome, extended sidelong glances at the same figures and histories forming the Chinese and Indian cultural traditions. Had I only been wise enough, I am sure I could have gone to **Ms. Trigg**, the long-time librarian at **Great Falls Public Library**, and saved myself much bibliographic and intellectual history navigational confusion and bibliographic uncertainty. But finding my own way seemed a less daunting, even if retrospectively a stupid, undertaking.

With the **Durant** key in hand there soon followed cheap editions of some of the works of **Aristotle**, **Plato**, **Augustine**, **Aquinas**, **Descartes**, **Schopenhauer**, **Nietzsche**, as well as some of the classic Oriental texts and a growing string of histories of the West, the United States and the Far East I even tried on **Kant**, but was quickly lost in the complexity of language and logic — I obviously needed a knowledgably guide to lead me through not just **Kantian** labyrinths but the more profound depths of those I had initially presumed I understood.

Now here I was in a place where such a learning opportunity was not simply available but required. And here was a faculty quite willing to advance such learning ventures. So, I soon proposed a **Plato** discussion group, lined up a dozen students who professed a parallel interest, and approached one of the faculty to act as the conference leader in the late afternoon following the end of classes. One by one the student attendance shrunk, finally leaving only a dedicated professor and me, so finis to that initiative.

To my further disappointment, the books being assigned/read in regular classes were all library reserve books, so one could not mark them up, go back as needed in connection with

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The Size of Thoughts (NY: Random House, 1996).

6. **Tom Wolfe** — the other one — has described library stacks as “the stored memory of a civilization.”

7. Librarians routinely instruct binderies to cut out the front-and-back matter — which may include reviews — when binding literary and scholarly journals, in order to save shelf space. This criminal act includes the journal covers.

8. One of the library administrators I fought was a carpet fetishist. His office shelves had carpet swatches — not books — and he spoke passionately about the library carpeting. The late **Mayme Agneu Clayton**, librarian at **USC** and **UCLA**, spent her own money building her collection of African-American material that included 30,000 books, the world’s largest collection of 16-mm films made by blacks, 75,000 photos, and “tens of thousands” of documents and manuscripts. That is exemplary conduct

to be emulated by good librarians. Yet **Ms. Clayton** did not arrange for placing her collection in a library (*The New York Times*, 14 December 2006).

9. A **DLB** editorial board member has been donating the volumes to the Rutland, Vermont, public library for a decade. On 19 July 2006 he received this message from librarian **Paula Baker**: “We are trimming down our reference collection in a very large way this year and will not be able to collect future volumes in the **Gale** literature series.” She didn’t even get the title right. Her note was written on a card with the printed slogan Get Connected!

10. On 25 October 2006 the **Thomson Corporation** announced that it was selling **Thomson Learning** — including **Gale Research** — in order to get out of the library reference book business. CEO **Richard Harrington** stated: “After the sale of **Thomson Learning**, the vast majority of our sales will come from electronic products and services with recurring revenues that are currently growing at high rates.” Is that what reference librarians want? The bidding starts at five billion dollars in January 2007. 🐻