Against the Grain

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Op Ed-Opinions and Editorials-Random Ramblings

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Op Ed — Random Ramblings

Sleeping Beauties, Flash-in-the-pan, Troglodytes, and Lasting Beauties: Categorizing Scholarly Communication

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I remember well the brilliant concept that I took away from seeing the film, *Amadeus*, in 1984. **Mozart** is not recognized for his musical genius because his music is too innovative and different from what the musical experts and audiences expect to hear. On the other hand, **Salieri**, the "villain," is the reigning champ in the musical world for his traditional compositions that please Viennese concert goers. Yet **Salieri** has enough intellect to recognize **Mozart's** genius and hatches a complex plot to impede **Mozart's** efforts to replace him as Vienna's musical star. Readers can guess the end result since **Mozart** is considered the musical innovator of his age while **Salieri** is legitimately forgotten.

Fast forwarding to 2015, I, though retired, happened to be on campus and was invited to participate in the interview of a candidate for a faculty position, **Timothy Bowman**. Since the **Mozart/Salieri** dichotomy appeared to be part of his research agenda, I asked him about it and was surprised to learn that this phenomenon has a name: "sleeping beauties." When I expressed interest in learning more about the topic, he provided a link to the following article: "Defining and identifying Sleeping Beauties in science" by **Qing Ke**, **Emilio Ferrara**, **Filippo Radicchi**, and **Alessandro Flammini**. (*http://www.pnas.org/content/112/24/7426.full.pdf*) Further research in *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text* and *Library & Information Science Abstracts* produced nine articles and nineteen articles respectively. I had to use a key word search since neither indexing source considered "sleeping beauties" to be a valid subject term. I also discovered that the opposite term is "flash-in-the pan" for those articles that are heavily cited when they come out but have no staying power. (**Jiang Li**, "Citation curves of 'all-elements-sleeping-beauties': 'flash in the pan' first and then 'delayed recognition',"*Scientometrics*100.2 (August 2014): 595-601.) I originally was going to describe this type of article as being a "bandwagon." I was disappointed, however, to discover that all the articles on both categories dealt with STEM research rather than my preferred Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines.

In what follows, I'm going to take a broader view of library literature and consider opinion pieces, presentations, Webinars, etc. in addition to research articles. When possible, I'll use examples that I've encountered in my academic career and may speculate a bit when I don't have precise examples.

Many factors explain the existence of sleeping beauties, that is, those publications with delayed recognition. Perhaps the most important is that they often require looking at the world in a different way and sometimes completely upending traditional perspectives. In addition, it is impossible to talk about anything until the vocabulary exists to do so. While both **Freud** and **Einstein** achieved fame in their lifetimes, understanding their radically different views of psychology and the universe required first understanding the words that expressed these concepts.

A second factor is that the new ideas from sleeping beauties may be less well formulated than the established viewpoints that have gone through periods of review and revision. I remember one conference where an **ARL** director presented contemporary research whose conclusions were still tentative and perhaps not yet completely clear in the mind of the presenter. While I was excited by this new knowledge, even with its rough edges, the next speaker wowed the audience with a canned, scripted presentation that he may have already given a hundred times and revised to ensure a positive audience reaction. But it said nothing that I didn't already know. My final observation is that the research may have been a sleeping beauty because the issue it addressed wasn't important then but has become so now. In a "A brief history of climate change," **Richard Blake**, **BBC News** environment correspondent, notes that "French physicist **Joseph Fourier** describes the Earth's natural 'greenhouse effect'" in 1824, but no one paid much attention. (*http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-15874560*)

To further muddy the waters, sometimes what we regard today as trite was innovative when it first appeared but has become so common in our culture that its initial freshness has turned stale. To give brief examples, I once read that the waltzes of **Johann Strauss II** were considered groundbreaking in the 19th century though they are now thought to be so old-fashioned as to elicit laughter. For a personal example, I had trouble understanding why **Hemingway's** *The Sun Also Rises* was considered a literary classic because I found it far inferior to his later work. Within the historical context, it was, however, one of the first modernist novels and helped pave the way for a major shift in literary taste.

The library and information science literature is especially rich in examples of flash-in-the-pan scholarship that is important and widely cited for a few years and then forgotten. As a practical discipline, many articles and conference presentations deal with immediate concerns that will become quickly irrelevant. I doubt that younger librarians will even remember the keen interest in filing rules, DOS, **OCLC** implementation, retrospective conversion, and microform sets. At the beginning of my career, I attended presentations on how exciting the newly implemented MARC format and ISBN's were and how they would solve so many library problems.

As a professor who taught management for decades, I'm especially annoyed at the "experts" who make their careers by latching on to a current popular trend. Most are destined to be flashes-in-the-pan; but, these sages publish articles, get paid gigs at conferences, and land lucrative consulting contracts by pushing the newest magical solution. My favorite example is Total Quality Management (TQM), the Japanese management philosophy that was all the rage in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the key to successful management for American organizations, including libraries. When the Japanese economy tanked, in part because of the negatives inherent in TQM, interest suddenly plummeted. What is bothersome about these experts is they often overpromise the benefits of the current flash-in-the-pan and move on quickly to the next new "miracle" solution with the hope that no one remembers their last one.

I selected the term "troglodyte" for the next category. The appropriate definition from the *English Oxford Living*

Dictionaries is: "A person who is regarded as being deliberately ignorant or old-fashioned." My focus is on the "old-fashioned." These authors focus on past values that are no longer partially or completely accepted. Two excellent modern examples are those who wish that libraries would continue to favor print books and reject eBooks or who believe that libraries should return, at least in part, to the ideal library of the past with an emphasis on reading and silence without any of the current innovations such as makerspaces, social interactions, or new technologies such as 3d printing. They often make partially valid points because the flash-in-the-pan librarians sometimes overemphasize the value of these current innovations. I perhaps even belong a bit to this class because I'm of the opinion that the public library remains a vital institution as a source for "free" reading materials; but I would add, either in print or as eBooks. Troglodytes are prone to forget the imperfections of the past — for example, their ideal library was often difficult to use with a paucity of resources compared with the extensive current availability of digital materials. This library was also likely to have fewer low brow materials like series books, media, and popular culture materials. I'm also old enough to remember the locked case where the library kept controversial materials.

My second point is that the best efforts of troglodytes will nonetheless never bring back the past. I often make the point that the Luddites were accurate that the new technology would destroy their current lifestyle but wrong in their belief that they could roll back the changes. While some of the new library innovations may fall by the wayside, libraries of all types must meet the needs of their users, including those who want access to the benefits of new technologies: eBooks, 24/7 access to resources, online databases, and managing their library records from home.

Unlike sleeping beauties, the library community will understand the viewpoints of troglodytes, provide them with a modicum of support, invite them to conferences for their controversial viewpoints guaranteed to increase attendance, and publish their articles that will get cited. To some, they will be heroes. What won't happen from their efforts is substantive change. Without naming names, I know of several librarians who were respected for their early career innovations but then tarnished their reputations by their old fashioned viewpoints in their later years. Like last year's best sellers, nothing is colder than the last generation's innovations.

What I have left out in my classification are solid studies that fall into none of these three types. These works were important when they appeared, are still relevant today, and will probably remain so for future generations. I'll call them "lasting beauties." To my mind, they share in sometimes unequal measure a study of philosophical issues of continuing interest and solid fundamental research on topics of ongoing appeal. **S. R. Ranganathan** may provide the best examples of enduring relevance for his philosophical articles. His "The Five Laws of Library Science," published in 1931, has 859 citations including almost 250 citations since 2013 (Source: Google Scholar for all citation information). As an example of subject content, *The American Public Library*, published in 1910 by **Arthur Elmer Bostwick**, has 110 citations including 23 since 2013. Part of the reason that these works remain popular is because they continue to be in print, are widely held by libraries, and their high number of citations encourage future citations. I would expect that luck also has a part to play in their success. Perhaps research by citation experts has already discovered the tipping point that creates a high probability of remaining read and cited across several generations.

To conclude, I have always been interested in the temporality of research. I have examined in this column the relationship between scholarship, broadly defined, and changing interests over time. Sleeping beauties were neglected when they appeared but became important later as scholars recognized the importance of their insights or the topic itself became more relevant. Flash-in-the-pan scholarship is of interest for the present since it deals with contemporary concerns but is unlikely to retain any importance as circumstances change. Troglodyte authors attempt to bring back the past and normally find some contemporary support but are unlikely to successfully turn back the clock. The lasting beauties include those works that were important when they appeared and have remained so because they treat enduring philosophical issues or provide solid studies on topics of permanent interest to the library world. 🌲

Biz of Acq — Going Green at a Library Near You. Transitioning from Print to Electronic Resources at the University of Baltimore Law Library

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Introduction

The **University of Baltimore** is one of seventeen campuses that makes up the **University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions (USMAI)** consortium. The current **John and Francis Angelos Law Center** officially opened its doors on April 16, 2013. This twelve-story 190,000 square foot law center houses a 300-seat moot courtroom, event space on the twelfth floor, fifteen classrooms, faculty and staff offices, and all of its law clinics and centers. The law library occupies 30,000 square feet, and is spread across six floors. The law library contains 29 study rooms and more than 450 seats. Students can find study space on each floor. Students can also find tables or study carrels with power outlets and conference rooms on each floor to promote learning and interaction. Like many academic libraries, the law library has been undergoing a transition from print to electronic format for a number of years in response to a smaller operating budget and the popularity of the digital format.

The **University of Baltimore Law Library** began this transition with cancelling most print journals and relying on the electronic equivalent through Hein Online (a database that consists of law and law related full-text periodicals) to reduce duplication of resources and to save the library money. The same applies to titles we receive through **West** (legal publications) and **Lexis Nexis** (legal publications) — select print subscriptions were also cancelled. Preparing for the move into the new law building was also occurring during this time. The current building offers more open space, and less shelf space, which enabled the law library to discard more than half of the collection, reducing our collection from 172,000 volumes to around 60,000 volumes at the time of the move. These discards