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@Brunning: People and Technology -- At the only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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on orders from a blind Egyptian cleric Omar Abd al-Rahman, stabbed Naguib Mahfouz twice in the neck with a switchblade as he sat in a car outside his Nileside home in Greater Cairo.” Wow. How fast can I drive home in order to continue?

Once home, I continued with the Introduction: “The young man who attacked the then 82-year-old author, the first Arab to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, clearly intended to silence him forever. Though the assault, which damaged the nerve that controls his right arm and hand, did prevent him from writing for over four years, the fanatic’s mission failed. Not only did Mahfouz survive this nightmarish crime — he lived to tell us his dreams.” Twenty-five dreams later, I forced myself to momentarily set the book down to absorb what I was reading in this incredible gem of a book.

Just as we learn cause and effect in science, Mahfouz’s literature provides the same illustration. “Children of the Alley,” the serialized fiction that provoked the attack, is set in Gammaliya and follows mankind’s corrupt ascent from the days of Adam and Eve to the era of modern science. “The Dreams” is the result.

Each dream is short, yet some how busy. You awake with him in the middle of a scenario carrying some meaning, defining a feeling of his about the world and its conflicts. He is on the street, at his house in Abbasiya, praising God, looking for love, bathing naked in the shadow of a crescent moon, hungry — “faint with starvation yet enticed by hope.”

As I read the dreams I found myself marking Dreams 5, 20, 30, 55, 57, 77, 84, and 85 with bright orange post-it notes. I re-read these marked Dreams several times while writing this column as I wanted to include one dream in the text. I narrowed the mental debate to Dreams 5 and 57. Unable to choose I finally decided to leave you with both Dreams.

“Dream 5. — I am walking aimlessly without anywhere in particular to go when suddenly I encounter a surprising event that had never before entered my mind — every step I take turns the street upside-down into a circus. The walls and buildings and cars and passersby all disappear, and in their place a big top arises with its tiered seats and long, hanging ropes, filled with trapezes and animal cages, with actors and acrobats and musclemen and even a clown. At first I am so happy that I could soar with joy. But as I move from street to street where the miracle is repeated over and over, my pleasure subsides and my irritation grows until I tire from the walking and the looking around, and I long in my soul to go back to my home. But just as I delight once again to see the familiar face of the world, and trust that soon my relief will arrive, I open the door and find the clown there to greet me, giggling.”

“Dream 57. — I walked around the fort twice — a citadel of stone whose windows were like tiny holes. From each window appeared a face that I not only knew, but adored. Some had been traveling a long while; others had departed our world at different times. I stared with passion and grief — and imagined that each one was begging from its depths for me to set them free. After looking hopelessly at the stone fort’s gate, I went to the authorities to ask for help.

I left them feeling satisfied, clutching a pole made of steel, and returned to the fort. I brandished the pole, and the faces peered out as I struck a mighty blow at the door, which split apart and collapsed. The faces banished from the windows as shouts of joy and pleasure rose up, and I stopped, my heart beating hard — waiting to meet the dear ones with longing and desire.”

If you want to read the other 102, PASCAL is very user-friendly. ☏
tiger. The chain bookseller will sell stuff that will work on PC, Mac, and iPhone/touch. This beats Kindle which goes nowhere close to the desktop or laptop but does app out to the iPhone/touch. Pogue pounces on the booksellers claim of 750,000 titles as opposed to the Kindle's mere 270,000. Apparently 500,000 titles are Google Book scans from the library project. These are freely available on Google and wildly vary in scan quality. Just not good enough for prime “e” reading time.

But you’ve got to give it up to B&N for putting its E Reader on Blackberry, iPhone/touch, PC, and Mac. Just look at the screenshots. Just the sight of that iPhone — so touchable, so sleek, chic, and doable. Well, it’s addictive.

The upside for libraries is the renewed market for reading. And for the publishers with whom we’ve had a decent two hundred or so year “relationship,” it keeps them “agnostico” open to any distribution channel and closed to dominance by any one distributor or device maker. This mixes it up for the publishers offering no one device maker dominance over distribution — an opportunity for us to buy with variety.

The downside is all those patrons lining up at the circulation desk or its online equivalent, palming yet another gadget in front of you, demanding download.

Right now the Sony approach bodes well for us. The download support services formats that work on computer and the Sony Reader. The reader uses technology on par with the Kindle and has gotten good reviews. Hands down, Sony’s e content is beautiful. @ Brunning owns versions of several Updike novels from Rossetta Books, LTD which rival original hardcover editions as quality print objects.

But the Kindle...it’s everywhere we be online. When we wake up and check email, Amazon has recommended books. When we check the book blogs, we’ve got links upon Kindle links. When Amazon can’t deliver we can tell the publisher, please Kindle this book. Please, please, please. What’s an addict to do?

Addendum: at press time, Canada was still without the Kindle. Amazon doesn’t have a cell phone contract in the Dominion and although most US and UK books are copyright cleared for Canadian distribution, many book publisher contracts with Amazon preclude Canadian sells. Some intrepid readers have programmed an app that helps download Kindle books to a device that happens to be the Sony E Book Reader.

O Canada, sorry! You may have universal health but you don’t have Kindle.


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Fragments

@Brunning Fragments — they will make you whole...

KGB — Knowledge Generation Bureau (http://kgb.com/)

Almost instant answer service for those who got wireless minutes to spare and got to know attention spans...hmm, another next generation reference service? Going for it — a new channel, the omnipresent cell phone. Against it — information wants to be free (or something to that effect).

KGB prices each text answer at 99 cents — Steve Job’s magic price. It is the dollar store of information. Remembering that Google Answer — Google’s simulacrum for the reference desk — folded its auction priced service a few years ago, Ask.Com (AskJeeves if you ask us) never had a run except in the corporate sponsorship of Sunday afternoon NASCAR, and Yahoo Answer limps along more often wrong than right, we wonder about KGB. Is there a business model in a happy hour question service via cell phone. Why do you have to ask someone questions when your phone is so smart?

Reference at your thumb tips? Or the Kremlin called and wants its name back?

The Long Shaggy Tail of Blogging

Some journalists see the long tail of blogging dying off.

Peter Whitehead, Digital Business Editor for the Financial Times, scoffs at the notion that blogs — the ordinary variety — were ever significant. Whitehead pointed to traffic reports that the majority of the millions of blogs haven’t been updated in the last four months and most of this solipsistic writing has moved to social media like Twitter and Facebook.

Consequence has never been an attribute of common blogging or so argues Mr. Whitehead. Apart from a small percentage which inform or entertain they have little value. They are as Whitehead phrases it “vanity publishing only made feasible by the removal of costs.”

The big problem Whitehead concludes is that the ordinary person doesn’t have the time to blog. At work you are supposed to be, well, working. The successful blogs are linked to organizations able to provide time, resources, and justification to spend inordinate amounts of labor on this resource intensive activity.

Tipping point for libraries — good blogs are journalism and we take journalism seriously. Apart from a small percentage which inform or entertain they have little value. They are as Whitehead phrases it “vanity publishing only made feasible by the removal of costs.”

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