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Best Sellers in Ethics

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Books Are Us

by Anne Robichaux (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina; Consultant, Majors Scientific Books) <akr772@mac.com>

From your editor, this column is supposed to cover fiction about people like us — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. All contributions are welcome. — AR

Thanks to Teri Lynn Herbert (Reference Librarian, Medical University of South Carolina) for passing on the following two titles, discovered on the Book_Arts_List discussion list ("the electronic meeting place for all facets of the books arts," based at Syracuse University and managed by Peter Verheyen. Check out The Book Arts Web: www.philobiblon.com):

The New Yorker (8/1/94) makes note of The Sixteen Pleasures/A Novel by Robert Hellenga (Soho Press, March 1994, $22, ISBN 1569470065; Paperback by Delta, 1995, 12.95 ISBN 0385314698), concerning a twenty-nine year old book conver who went to Florence in 1966 to "save whatever could be saved, including myself." Her desire to help restore priceless treasures damaged by the flood of the Arno led her to working and living in a cluttered convent helping to save the convent's invaluable library, both physically and financially, "through the potentially illegal sale of a volume of sixteenth-century pornographic pictures and sonnets." The reviewer found the novel sharply suspenseful and "modest, resourceful, and without malice," just like the conservators.

Websites from Barnes & Noble, and Amazon.com provided more details about this title, and further reviews, applauding not only the story, but the details given in the book about art and book restoration. The Charleston County Library's online catalog notes the conservator "Margot Harrington discovers a fabulous volume of erotic art that was supposed to have been destroyed four centuries earlier." Coincidentally, the College of Charleston Library has in its collection what appears to be a translation of the original work featured in this novel: I Modit: the Sixteen Pleasures: an erotic album of the Italian Renaissance, edited and translated from the Italian, with a commentary by Lynne Lawner Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1988, ISBN 0810180838)

Salamander by Thomas Wharton was described on the Book_Arts_List as a must for all people who love books and bookmaking. (McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, April 2001, $34.99, ISBN 0771085383; Emblem Editions, March 2002, $19.99, ISBN 0771088345; Flamingo, March 2002, £15.99, ISBN 0007128649; Washington Square Press, August 2002, $14.00, ISBN 0743441459). On the Book Lovers Website from Harper Collins Publishers (www.fireandwater.com) we learn that the story is set in 1717 where Count Ostrov, mourning the death of his only son, "loses himself in his love of puzzles, turning his spectacular Slav castle into a giant, mechanical conundrum of revolving doors, moving floors and unstable staircases." (Sounds like Hogwarts doesn’t it?). "The Count brings to this impossible castle the legendary English printer Nicholas Flood, and charges him with the task of producing a book without beginning or end." Along the way he is distracted from this task, and turns to working on another book entirely, "a tiny octavo volume with one word, Desire, gold-tooled on its spine."

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by Françoise Crowell (Yankee Book Peddler) <FCrowell@YBP.com>

Editor’s Note: The New York Times plays an important part in my Sunday morning ritual. One of my favorite sections (after the Book Review and Styles) is the ethics column in the Magazine. I wanted to see how the publishing world treats this topic and found that ethics (at least the topic) is alive and well in academic publishing. All aspects are represented: medical, environmental, business, historical, literary and political, to name a few. I looked at titles published over a 12 month period and found 256 imprints with Oxford UP, Cambridge UP, Routledge, Rowman & Littlefield, and SUNY publishing a large majority. This list represents just a hint of the issue, but it should keep your collection honest. — FC

Nussbaum, Martha Craven, 1947-. Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions. Cambridge Univ Press 2001 $40.00 Cloth 0521462029.


Hitchens, Christopher. Trial of Henry continued on page 71

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[Image of the book cover, including the title, author, and publisher information.]

[Reference to book availability and price.]
I, User — Down by the Ol’ Mainstream: Backlogs and Bottlenecks

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This ages old refrain of library technical services has led many to believe that backlogs are inevitable and backlogs are a fact of life. It is rare indeed to visit a library that doesn’t have any. The backlog may be in selection, ordering, receiving, or (most often) cataloging and it may be described as “the” backlog; the “real” backlog, the “back” backlog, the “front” log (really), the queue, or the unfinished reoc or shelf listing project. However we refer to them, they have earned permanent, full-time status in many academic libraries, costing valuable staff resources and severely limiting access. In some places, just managing “the backlog” has become a full-time job.

Technical Services — A Single Workflow

As configured below, there are six basic tasks which are universal to library technical services. Every library must accomplish them. We are quick to acknowledge, however, that there is remarkable variety regarding the sequence and the methods employed. Over and over again, we find that library staff members are quite familiar with one or two specific functions, but are remarkably unfamiliar with all others. This typical lack of familiarity often contributes to an irrational and inefficient work environment, where employees become isolated and routines become outdated.

A critical first step toward improved technical workflow is to ensure that each member of the library staff understands the entire sequence of functions as a single process, even as it crosses traditional, sometimes rigid departmental lines. When individual contributors understand their own responsibilities as part of an accurate bigger picture, they are more able to solve problems, and support procedures that strengthen the whole.

It can almost go without saying that technical services have a profound and immediate impact on the patron experience. It is obvious that the library can only fulfill its mission when the “flows,” unrestricted by bottlenecks. To a large extent, this requires adoption of a “production” orientation instead of an artisan or “expert” mentality which still prevails in many academic libraries.

Basic Workflow Components

New Title Identification is the first step in the process and can be thought of in the same way as the fisherman’s net. The net may be cast as wide as the library requires, trapping potentially relevant content. This function is well supported by materials vendors with important services such as approval and notification plans for new titles, and retrospective lists for backfilling in specific areas. As well, most vendor databases are fully browseable by subject, keyword, and interdisciplinary terms, extending options for finding appropriate content. Publishers support the title identification process via publication catalogs and new product announcements. Literary and scholarly review journals help to identify important materials that may have been overlooked at point of publication. Faculty and patrons often participate in this stage of the process, by requesting specific materials.

Selection, typically performed by subject specialists, is the second step in the process, critical insofar as it forms the intellectual basis of the collection. Incorporating many factors concerning the subject scope and depth; and the overall value of the item, choices are made about what should be added to the collection, and in what format (paperback, cloth, electronic, etc.). Fund codes and “notify” notes are often added at this point. Sometimes, location codes and vendors/cataloging/preservation instructions are attached. There has been a trend in recent years toward “electronic selection” within a vendor’s online system or within the library’s ILS. The visibility of this activity is an important advantage for peers, administrators as well as the technical support team. Visibility at this stage often translates as workflow efficiency elsewhere.

Ordering, can be almost fully automated when selections are made online. Even so, there is typically a separate staff responsible for releasing orders and en-cumbering funds. To the extent that orders must be created/entered manually, this function can require many resources. A surprising number of resources can be directed toward duplication control. Duplication can be controlled with automated support from the ILS, the material vendor, and by OCLC. Once orders have been placed, claims, substitutions, and cancellations must be managed, most often by the same staff that placed the order in the first place.

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