Back Talk-Double Fold or Double Talk

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Recommended Citation  
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3493

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DIVORCE HAPPENS TO LOVE GURUS
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Megabucks authors Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider promoted The Rules as a chronicle of their experiences in snagging the wily male animal. Rules II was hot too, and Rules III—holding that marriage takes place through subterfuge, long hair and low expectations of partners' sense of humor—was due out. Then Fein let it drop to Warner Books that she was about to divorce her husband. And the action had been filed a year earlier ... before she signed the contract. She claims to have kept it a secret for a reconciliation. Now the cover blur will have to be redone, dropping the claim to Fein's enduring marriage. See—Devan Spurgeon, "Author's Divorce Fits Her 'Rules' Against Reality" in Wall Street Journal, p.B1, March 23, 2001.

LEATHERSTOCKING TALES FROM MITTELEUROPA
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Chief and swindler Karl May's Westerns have sold 100 million copies of 80 books, making him the bestselling German author of all time. His fans included Hitler and Einstein, and he sparkled all the German Western clubs. Lufthansa recently laid on a non-stop trip to Phoenix to haul all the German tourists to May literary sites. May died in 1912 having never visited the Southwest. All his data came from magazine articles on Indian wars which he first found in a prison library. Now the Karl May cult has hit American campuses. John Lye's book, Audits, Film Festivals—possibly because the white men were usually villains, thus passing the p.e. test. Can doctoral dissertations and deconstruction be far behind? See—Cecilie Rohwedder, "Germans Have a Thing About the Wild West, Thanks to Karl May" in Wall Street Journal, p.A1, April 4, 2001.

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Sumner Redstone expanded his father's drive-in movie chain into Viacom. It owns CBS, Paramount, MTV, Blockbuster and Nickelodeon. And with the help of that necessary "accomplished collaborator" he's going to tell us all about how he did it. Conveniently, Viacom owns the publisher Simon & Schuster. Which is giving him a coast-to-coast publicity tour, network TV appearances and a high-priced "lay-down date." That means the book will be launched everywhere on a single day, which requires a lot of tricky shipping. Sales staff have been treated to the launch as "A Passion to Keep Our Jobs," a little word play on the book's title A Passion To Win. Traditionally, these top exec books were highly suspect and were taken to another publishing house to prove they weren't total vitriols. As you can guess, many don't sell very well. See—Laurie P. Cohen, "Simon & Schuster's More Than Excited About a New Author," in Wall Street Journal, p.A1, April 5, 2001.

BUT DOES HE HAVE A TRUST FUND?
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Charles Webb was born rich, and his family was contemptuous of his novel The Graduate until it became a movie and a huge success. Irritated by the success ethic and American consumerism, Webb gave the money away to charity and moved with his wife to England, drawn by the English eccentric lifestyle. Now after forty years, he has published again—New Cardiff with Little, Brown & Co. And he doesn't care at all for the hype connecting him with his famous earlier book. In fact, he had six novels after The Graduate, all panned by critics as inferior to his big hit. See—Wade Lambert, "Author of 'The Graduate' (Finally) Publishes Again," in Wall Street Journal, p.B1, May 8, 2001.
Back Talk Double Fold or Double Talk

by Anthony W. Ferguson (Library Director, University of Hong Kong)

Before commenting on Nicholson Baker’s new expose on the sins of librarians, I must first confess that I was employed, until last month, by one of the evil university libraries depicted in his book and I was recruited by the central dark-side protagonist featured in Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper, Random House, 2001.

Baker’s book is a very personalized account in which he is the hero, and most librarians are the villains. He suggests that we:

1. Simplified/ lied about the wood pulp deterioration hyperbole: We said because the corners of a book or bound newspaper printed on acidic wood pulp paper will break when folded back and forth, within a few years the whole volume will crumble and become dust. The rate of wood pulp paper deterioration is not linear, but is greatly affected by actions under our control: the level and mode of use, temperature, humidity, etc.

2. Dishonored newspaper runs and books prior to microfilming and then discarded the remains to speed the microfilming process and to avoid gutter shadow. Ignored filing book cradles that have been around for decades. Failed to reshelved the remains or to find libraries who would put them on shelves for research use. In the process discarded thousands of rare and valuable materials.

3. Participated in film and sell schemes to pay for filming by selling off original newspaper runs to companies specializing in reselling them a page or article at a time, and we replaced them with incomplete and user-unfriendly microfilms. These acts, in turn, facilitated the commercialization/privatization of the library’s cultural/intellectual heritage preservation function.

4. Failed to comprehend that the intellectual experience of working with the originals is different/superior to working with reformatted reproductions.

5. Put the saving of storage costs ahead of collection development and preservation functions. We fabricated statistics about the rate at which library collections are used in order to make the need to microfilm even more justifiable.

6. Broke moral, if not legal agreements with donors by discarding the materials they gave or purchased for our libraries.

7. Supported/acquiesced to NEH’s fixation on filming in the name of preservation, instead of providing funds to repair and improve environmental conditions.

8. Minimized/falsely stated about the problems of microfilm: they fade; they make people motion sick when using them; and various kinds of film produce gasses that corrode boxes and cabinets, bubble/buckle/shrink/stick together, are easily scratched, and develop redox blemishes and fungi.

9. Lied about microfilming making money and conservation costing money when the opposite is true. Microfilming is expensive in the long and short terms if we take into account the value of lost access to information. Conservation, including the boxing of little used materials, on the other hand, costs little.

10. Used resource sharing as a guise to avoid collection development all in the name of preventing the need for new shelves. The goal should be providing content to users, not avoiding the cost of building library buildings.

11. Held on to the double fold (or three fold and tug) technique to determine if a volume should be filmed when this technique has little to do with the reality of how bound volumes are used. Volumes whose corners break off can have their pages turned hundreds of times without ill consequence and structurally unsound books can be boxed and used for long periods of time. Presumably these volumes that are used intensively are a rarity and can be selectively replaced/preservation photocopied. To treat everything as if it will crumble tomorrow is dumb and expensive.

12. We did all of this to communicate the “Slow Fires” message: Spend now on microfilming or lose the content forever. If we didn’t personally initiate any of these actions, we allowed ourselves to be herded to one degree or another by those who did.

13. Promoted the idea that digitized texts are more useful than the originals because they are fully searchable and because they are more accessible — while ignoring the equally important value of working with originals.

14. Supported digitization projects when we know that the use of OCR (optical character recognition) software to make these volumes fully searchable is a joke.

15. Promoted the scan from film scan to justify the original filming and destruction that had already been done. Since no one wants to scan from film, the original destruction is discredited.

16. Failed to understand the economic and intellectual value of doing nothing: Doing nothing costs little (boxing) or nothing and doesn’t result in the destruction of books.

17. Failed to learn from our mistakes: We destroyed texts in the failed microword experiment, we destroyed texts in the “Slow Fires” movement, and now we are destroying texts in the current rush toward digitization. At least our current Bookkeepers deacidification bandwagon doesn’t “appear to” be destroying the originals even though it is questionable that the money needed to be spent for materials that are mostly just definition little used.

My general reaction to these accusations is to simply admit that I/we are guilty of many of the acts as charged. But to admit guilt to these acts is a bit like admitting having done all sorts of dumb things while a teenager: Yes, we put the band teacher’s VW bug on top of the gymnasium in 1959, but no, we have not done it lately.

Yet, I don’t want to minimize the seriousness of what has been done in the name of library preservation: We did hype the wood pulp movement including making the double fold test part of the library culture, supported the disembedding/discarding of bound volumes, sold off printed volumes replaced by film, minimized the cost of working with the original formats, spent a fortune with cost savings at the expense of user access, and went after and accepted the money NEH was willing to give (although we did get them to at least pay replacement/repair costs as part of the cost share). Most of these acts, however, are past practices. We were confronted with what we accepted as a problem, we did our best, and made mistakes.

Some of these acts, however, are still current and these deserve additional serious thought and reflection: I am personally left looking for answers to three questions:

1. Should we continue to seek/take NEH reformating money?

2. Should we give deacidification any time or attention?

3. Should digitization efforts be instead of, or in addition to, providing access to printed materials?

My answers are no, no, and a qualified no. No, shouldn’t continue to spend one’s money on reformating materials unless there is truly no other alternative including inexpensive protective enclosures for all but the rare volume that is at the corn flakes stage. At Columbia we put away the preservation microfilm vacuum approach at least 15 years ago — and many would dispute if we ever really used it (well, maybe it was used for 30 or 40 feet of books).

I have always thought it was curious how reformating could only be used for books no one was interested in: books for which there were no other editions including reprints available, too few copies had been printed in the first place to permit purchase on the OP market, and preservation photocopying couldn’t be justified on the basis of expected use. Books that passed each of these tests could be filmed. Paying no to NEH money, however, is easy for me since I am now in Hong Kong and can’t take the money.

No, we shouldn’t give systematic deacidification any time or attention. This is a tough decision since one of my last acts at Columbia was to allocate 25,000 annually to employ the Bookkeepers approach for new books coming from countries not printing on acid free papers. Deacidification is proactive, but I think the money spent on it would be better spent on my next judged no.

Should digital efforts be instead of, or in addition to the continued purchase of printed materials? Having spent the last five years as

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