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Books Are Us

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

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

Searching the Web for “librarians in fiction” resulted in several interesting Websites and also pointed to a bibliography of the same name: Librarians in Fiction, a Critical Bibliography, by Grant Burns (McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998, $29.95, ISBN 078640499X). The bibliography is fully annotated with descriptions that read more like short reviews of 374 novels, short stories, plays, secondary sources (indexes, theses, etc.) and “bibliographer’s choice: works not to miss.” Each description contains a “delightfully opinionated synopsis of the story and details how the librarian is portrayed.” (American Libraries). An assortment of reviews (mcfarland.com; amazon.com) recommend the title for librarians and library-lovers alike, commenting on the richness of the “unapologetically opinionated and nicely indexed” bibliography. Descriptors such as witty, entertaining, functional, “a good read from cover to cover” are but a few of the well deserved praises from reviewers.

In the book’s introduction the author notes “and this won’t surprise any of us” that Librarians “have been somewhat preoccupied with their image nearly since the inception of the profession. One of the major vehicles for the development and propagation of images of any group is fiction. Librarians are plentiful in fiction.” Mr. Burns writes that he had two purposes in mind in writing this book: first, to explore the images of librarians in fiction (originally written in English, or trans-
Innovations Affecting Us —
3-D Data Storage

by Norman Desmarais (Acquisitions Librarian, Phillips Memorial Library, Providence College) <normd@postoffice.providence.edu>

DVD superseded CD-ROM. Holographic data storage will eventually replace DVD. Demand for high-density data storage proceeds unabated; so engineers continue to search for ways to pack more data into increasingly smaller spaces. CD-ROMs packed 650MB of data onto a single layered disc. DVD found a way to put two layers on the same side of a disc. In addition to doubling capacity, it was the first three-dimensional storage medium.

In spite of the positive portrayals in the works included here, the author observes that more works represent fictional librarians in a negative way, leading him to suspect that some writers buy into old stereotypes or caricatures. The “dark side” list includes many descriptors that might lead one to believe that some novelists “suspect librarians of missing out on their fair share of amorous fulfillment. The professional virgin sharp-tongued desiccated sex-starved shapeless spinster librarian is a caricature that seems so extreme — as to be laughable, yet many writers have not been beyond indulging in some variation of it.”

The list of positive descriptors for the book itself certainly outweighed the list of negatives — in fact I found no “dark side” or negative comments.

In searching for more information about the author, I learned that he entered the book world over thirty years ago as a bookbinder and a rare book conservator, and was a reference librarian for over twenty years with the University of Michigan-Flint. He is currently Assistant Director of the Library, but continues his love of reference by taking a turn at the desk. He also has an alter ego who has an intriguing Web presence, “Uncle Frank’s Diary” in the Website Newpages.com. “Uncle Frank” plans to write “about issues in books, publishing, reading, and ancillary areas that excite, delight, baffle, or worry” him. The columns he has written thus far are worth a look — informative, interesting, opinionated and enjoyable. And in his words, Newpages.com (the work of his friend Casey Hill) “focuses on what could generally be called the alternative or progressive library and publishing world.”

While Uncle Frank is surfaced from time to time, Mr. Burns may consider a revised edition to Librarians in Fiction in a few years. Both Mr. Burns and Uncle Frank can be reached at <gfburns@flint.umich.edu>.

Fluorescent Multilayer Discs

One effort at holographic data storage uses fluorescent multilayer discs (FMD) developed by Constellation 3D Inc. (3CD) in New York. FMD technology uses fluorescent dye instead of the reflective and semi-reflective coatings used by CD-ROMs and DVDs. They can support up to ten information layers on each side of a disc and match the density and transfer speeds of DVD.

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