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Books Are Us

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Books Are Us
by Anne Robichaux (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <awk.772@charleston.net>

Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. — AR

The UNC School of Library and Information Science listserv mentioned a delightful Website, Library Career Romances (www.jenn.org/home.htm) featuring career romance or career girl novels published during the 1940's - 1960's. Its author, Jen Wolfe, developed the site in part for the M.L.I.S degree (University of Washington). Most of the titles in this genre explore the more common place, female dominated professions of those years, including — you guessed it — library science. The site features thirteen examples of these novels, often written by librarian authors, starring heroines "who find love amidst the glamour of card catalogs, microfilm readers, and bookmobiles." There are descriptive, often humorous quotes from each title, plus a depiction of the cover art. Jen writes: "Though formulaic, dated, and varying in quality...the novels help document the evolving image of librarians in popular culture." She finds underlying the varying heroines' plights and entanglements that a true love of libraries and librarianship shines through. The site features a bibliography with links and sources, including Grant Burn's Librarians in Fiction. Jen sent an email that she has more books to add, so we have another source to view how librarians are depicted in fiction!

One of my friends from water aerobics, a retired librarian, told me about The Cruelest Month by Ha...
The narrator of the story, Mrs. Malory, is a writer of literary criticism who lives in the English seaside village of Taviscombe. She is temporarily staying in Oxford to research her current project. She admits that she has always "loved working in libraries," especially the Bodleian. She observes that the atmosphere of "accumulated centuries of learning had seemed almost a tangible thing, the cloak of history thrown round my shoulders." She enjoys inhaling that "marvelous library smell that seems to be equally composed of dust, books, and central heating." She provides further descriptions of both old and new parts of the Library, presenting an appealing picture of one of the Great Libraries and an unusual setting for a murder. Mrs. Malory is also a likeable, if sometimes bumbling, amateur sleuth, who eventually pieces together the mystery. Her sleuthing leads to delving into the past, including a painful reexamination of her own happy college days at Oxford, and the diaries of Gwen Richmond from WWII which evoke tragic memories of England during the war.

I sampled another Holt book and read Mrs. Malory Wonders Why (1995). While this story is not based in a library nor has librarians as characters, the Taviscombe public library is mentioned in one chapter. A science fiction writer (a friend of Mrs. Malory's son) has been invited to give a talk in the library. Mrs. Malory was invited the speaker to spend the night with them, as the library staff member who arranged the talk had made reservations for him "in a supposedly uncomfortable hotel with vile food and a surly staff." Probably speaks to the lack of funds in the library's budget for sponsoring these events. But on the positive side, the library is shown to be a respectable place where the speaker won't be at his usual panel in a smoke-filled room, with a less than sober audience, "where the amber liquid's been flowing pretty well nonstop all day." As he was told in a comforting tone, "there won't be anything like that in Taviscombe Library!" Perhaps more's the pity!

According to her Website (www.hazel tonight.co.uk), Hazel Holt began writing fiction at the age of sixty and has averaged one a year since. Specializing in crime fiction, her primary character is Sheila Malory and The Cruelst Month is the second title in this series.

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And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — Annual Conference of the Professional/Scholarly Publishing (PSP) Division of the American Association of Publishers (AAP)

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Open Access — Publisher Perspectives

Given the passion of those committed to open access, it can be challenging to achieve a balanced view that looks at the variables and options without being caught up in the moralistic fervor. The underlying question is where is the information chain should the costs be accommodated — at point of acquisition (by the library), point of use (by the user) or further up the chain by the author (at the point where it enters the distribution chain)?

Evidence at this early stage is anecdotal and opinions are based more on preferences and beliefs than real working models. The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP, a UK based organization) just commissioned a report to analyze and document experiences of publishers that have tried open access systems.

In February, the Annual Conference of the Professional/Scholarly Publishing (PSP) Division of the American Association of Publishers (AAP) was held in Washington, DC. Approximately 200 attendees from a mix of large society and commercial publishers focused on the topic of "Value in a Culture of Open Access."

The tone was one of inquiry with some loyalty to and defense of existing subscription models that are an integral part of the financial health of some societies and core to their mission.

According to Don King, Research Professor at the School of Information at the University of Pittsburgh, the decline in individual print subscriptions can be attributed in part to electronic access provided by the library. Tom Sanvile, Executive Director of Ohiolink, felt that a print archive was only needed if the print version was different than the online version. These trends require that many societies reengineer their publishing processes, creating the electronic version as the primary with print as a byproduct.

Usage Based

Author of Information Rules, Hal Varian, who has a joint faculty appointment in the School of Information Management as well as Business at UC Berkeley, recognized that “information is costly to produce but cheap to reproduce.” With high fixed costs and low variable costs, Hal concluded that information should be priced on its value rather than its costs.

Although the price of electronic journals is based on access, many agreed with Karen Hunter, Senior VP of Strategy at Elsevier, who

continued on page 71

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