Talk of the Trade

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Oprah’s Perfect Solution

Oprah Winfrey’s wildly successful “Book Club” segment on her TV show made obscure authors famous and propelled their novels to the top of the best seller lists. But Pulitzer Prize author Jonathan Franzen doomed the gravy train when he dissed Oprah, saying he’d refuse to have his book, The Confessions, included in her club because her selections were not up to his literary standards. To the consternation of publishers and book lovers, Oprah took this withering criticism to heart, announcing she would no longer feature books on her show. Now she’s had a change of heart, but instead of risking more critical pronouncements from ungrateful authors, Oprah has come up with the perfect solution: Only dead authors will be featured on her show.

Academic Française Insists Gourmandise Must Wait Its Turn; Desperate French Petition Pope on Seven Deadly Sins

Even though the Catholic Church has downgraded the seven deadly sins to the venal sin category, a French pressure group sees no reason to feel the slightest tinge of guilt when indulging in their favorite pastime, eating. The problem is that the French dictionary, compiled by the Academie Française, translates “gluttony” as “gourmandise.” In fact, there is no precise English language equivalent of “gourmandise,” which irrigates French foodies—meaning practically everyone in France. They insist that this word exemplifies what is best about their food culture, a combination of “Athenian elegance, Roman luxury, and French delicacy” according to eighteenth century food philosopher, Brillat-Savarin. The six other deadly sins (pride, avarice, lust, anger, envy and sloth) translate accurately into French, but a coalition of food societies and food writers complains that “gluttony” should be translated as “gourmerness,” a more reproachful word. Led by historian Jean-Francois Fayard, they have demanded that the linguists who constantly revise and update the Academie Française-sponsored French dictionary, the official arbiter of the French language, immediately correct the flawed “gluttony”/“gourmandise” translation, substituting “gourmerness.”

However, the Academie Française linguists are now working on words starting with the letter M, and they refuse to disrupt their alphabetically ordered revisions. It could be years before they arrive at words starting with G. Mr. Fayard and his cohorts, refusing to take no for an answer,

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10. “Achieving institutional advantage.” This means, as the author points out, many things to different people. For some libraries they have long understood the need to build on existing collection strengths. This may be an area where we as librarians need to do some additional thinking.

11. “Transforming bureaucracy, culture, and assumptions.” This is, as is known in library circles, the “vision” thing. We are actively grappling with this. With one foot in the printed past and the other in the digital future, we are actively trying to figure out how to chew gum, hum, and dance at the same time. The author talks about the need for non profit colleges and universities to compete with for profit institutions.

For libraries, as the ultimate nonprofit but black hole consumers of funds, our challenge is to compete with the free Web.

My intent in this review of the eleven strategic challenges facing higher education has been to show how well libraries are doing. Yet, we still have some work to do: We need to

- get even closer to the communities in which we live. Especially for libraries associated with private institutions, we need to discard the “us and them” mentality that stops non-students from having some meaningful access to our holdings;
- make our libraries as easy to use for disciplinary specialist as non specialists;
- give our staff the freedom to try out new forms of technology without making them build their way through the committee structures that dominate many modern libraries;
- not lose sight of our need to bring users and information together as we satisfy our need to collaborate with each other in hundreds of organizations;
- work with other libraries to develop areas of true strength so that all of our users benefit; and of course
- be willing to detach our fingers holds on the ways we have done things in the past.

We have much to do, but I remain proud to be a librarian and pleased with how well we are doing as participants in the larger educational enterprise.

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They have pointed out that the Vatican maintains a vast wine cellar, and on a visit to Poland the Pope remarked that he loved the cream puffs he ate in Warsaw as a boy. Although no French priests have given active support to the petition, they have expressed sympathy, and the Papal Nuncio of Paris has told Mr. Fayard that the Pope himself is “not unsympathetic.” So it’s OK to hold onto these French dictionaries for awhile, but probably not a good time to purchase new ones.

Don’t Even Think About What He’ll Do With a Goat Next Year

It’s difficult to get kids to read books these days, what with all the diversions of competing entertainment formats. But that did not deter Donald Watson, principal of a Cambridge, Mass. elementary school. He promised to publicly kiss a pig if his 410 pupils read 2003 books during the year just past. The highly motivated school kids reached the magic number, and at a recent special assembly, the good Mr. Watson planted a big wet one on a rather uncomfortable pot bellied pig.

Literati Join Glitterati on New York’s Most Loathsome List

The lively, conservative leaning weekly tabloid, New York Press, recently published its first annual list of New York’s Fifty Most Loathsome Inhabitants. A surprising twenty percent are published authors. Barely making the list at number forty nine is Jonathan Franzen (The Corrections) who “loudly offers himself as the leading candidate to write another Catch 22.” Yoko Ono earns spot number forty six for being a “shameless, atonal publicity hag.” Clocking in at number thirty is Martha Stewart because “share dumping is her kind of crime, it doesn’t leave a mess on the living room carpet.” Rick Moody (The Ice Storm) won number twenty-six for saying that his writing “is intended to adhere to Aristotelian unity, where place and time exist without deviating from dramatic unity so the reader has no missed the top ten at number eleven because and the City author Candace Bushnell, mutation of the women’s lib movement” and tions.” Jonathan Safran Foer (Every- five for exemplifying “a disturbing lit- first novel.” Conservative pundit, head Ann Coulter is number four be- genocidal threats at foreigners and lib- promises jack boots and pepper spray” (Stupid White Men) whose public state- pions, while the “hardworking, intelligent association with him.” And the winner, Blanchard (The Deed) for his “border- believing that the men’s magazine he edits, substance and not a sheep-herding, post- entry-level corporate cogs.” And who says