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A Tribute to Otto Rapp

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Oliver's Books

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As we went to press last issue, we learned that **Otto Rapp** had died February 1. Otto's smiling face, warm personality, and handlebar mustache will be greatly, greatly missed by all of us. This issue of *Against the Grain* is dedicated to his memory.

Remembering Otto Rapp - - Our Friend and Colleague

by **Oliver Sitea** (Oliver's Books)

I am not exactly sure when I first met Otto, but it was sometime in the early seventies during a meeting of the California Library Association. For a greenhorn in the library vendor business like myself, he was initially somewhat terrifying. A small dapper man with a vivacious smile and twinkling yet all-seeing eyes, an elegant mustache pointedly reminiscent of an imperial past, he commanded attention in any crowd, let alone one-on-one. But it was not only his appearance that received respect from me, it was also seeing the tireless ebullience with which he pursued his goals and the skillful diplomacy with which he conducted his business. No matter how charming, here was a man who was nobody's fool and you had better believe it. I was flattered that he paid me any serious attention.

We met frequently but it was not long, however, before I realized that his politeness was genuine, that he meant what he said, however disarmingly crafty it might appear, and that he paid attention and gave respect, I felt, to every one he met. And, in turn, if one-self paid attention, one was dealing with a kind, generous, gently skeptical, humorously friendly and intelligently concerned man. In a professional relationship one could hardly ask for more.

Now I wish that I had been able to persuade Otto to do just that — give some more — to sit down and organize and amplify those tantalizing bits and pieces of his past life and career that on occasion he was willing to reveal. Unfortunately, he was also a genuinely modest man and would be the last one to believe that his experiences had any meaning for, or was of any interest to, others.

On one of those rare occasions when he let me peek into his life, he told me that when he was growing up in Vienna his father employed him in the family bookshop as a delivery boy.

After wrapping the books in sturdy paper and then meticulously tying the package in such a way as assiduously to save string, he would set off for his destination on foot through the city streets. Oftentimes, his destination was the house of Dr. Sigmund Freud. Mysteriously, this anecdote, this fragment of a particular man's tiny part in social history, now that he is gone, moves me to tears. I shall always remember Otto as a young man walking the streets of Vienna, probably whistling, and dreaming of becoming a lawyer, lightly swinging by the crossed strings that held it together a package of "important books for important people."

by **Inge Valentine** (Pergamon Press)

We are deeply saddened by the death of Otto Rapp, who passed away on February 1, 1991.

It is hard to think of Pergamon without Otto Rapp. Anyone who had the privilege of meeting him will never forget him, and those of us who had the pleasure of working with him had nothing but admiration for him and were truly inspired and enriched by his expertise, unsurpassed knowledge, resilience, and his ever present good humor.

Otto was a true giant in our industry and throughout his many years with Pergamon in North America he be-

came and was known as "Mr. Pergamon." He was a rare person who brought a spirit of ebullient honesty to his profession so evident in his interactions with customers and colleagues. He will be remembered for being a colorful hardworking pioneer, always charming, ever elegant, resourceful and tirelessly representing Pergamon.

Otto Rapp was born in Vienna, Austria in 1919. He grew up among book stacks since both his father and mother owned and worked in a bookstore serving the many universities, libraries, scientists, students, and doctors in Vienna. As a young boy, he helped with packing, storing and delivering of books and later assisted his father with selling. In 1938, after the "Anschluss" with Hitler's Third Reich, he and his brother fled to Switzerland where he remained throughout the war years selling books and Bibles. Here he met Anne, whom he later married in the United States in 1951.

After the war in 1948, he emigrated to the United States of America and worked as a salesman for Stechert-Hafner (an international bookseller), Academic Press, and Walter J. Johnson Reprints before joining Pergamon Press in 1959. He was hired as the Eastern U.S. Sales Representative. By the early sixties, he was serving as a Director of various private Maxwell companies in the United States. In the late sixties, Otto became a Director of Pergamon Press, Inc., and retired as Senior Vice President and Director, Sales in 1989. Happily for us, his retirement did not mark the end of his association with Pergamon. Otto stayed on with true dedication as Senior Consultant.

In December 1990, he still traveled and visited customers. So it came as a great shock to all of us when we learned of Otto's sudden death on February 1, 1991, after only a brief illness.

Otto, we will sorely miss you.