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Lost in Austin — In a Second-hand Bookshop

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*What waits me on these shelves? I cannot guess,
But feel the sure foreboding; there will cry
A voice of human laughter or distress,
A word that no one needs as much as I.*

*For always where old books are sold and bought
There comes that twinge of dreadful subtlety —
These words were actual, and they were thought
By someone who was once alive, like me.*

— Christopher Morley

Christopher Morley is no longer alive, either, but when he was, he was a great champion of books and bookstores. He was mercifully spared the demise of bookstores and books, too, if we are to believe all we read about hard times in the industry.

I admit to buying second-hand books via the Internet but my record of purchases at two of the **Half-Priced Books** locations in Austin admit me into, I am guessing, a small but solid group of readers who contribute hundreds of dollars a year to the used-book trade. I buy new books, too, but all of my favorite authors have long since departed and are no longer writing.

There is nothing like a well-stocked book shop, new or second-hand (a much more respectful term than used-books, a term that is tawdry by comparison). It is more fun than television or the movies and healthier, too. I am not only walking around or standing for prolonged periods of time but I am exercising my mind or letting my mind wander into a state of relaxation and otherworldliness that compares favorably with meditation, a recommended way to help reduce blood pressure and stress.

Many of us love bookstores, purveyors of new and second-hand books but how many would drive 560 miles round trip just to visit a second-hand book store? Admittedly, it is easier to drive that far to go shopping when you live in one of the western states or a southern state as large as Texas (how large? About half the size of Alaska, it's that big).

Our original plan (my wife went along for the ride *and* the books) was to drive to Archer City, spend a few hours browsing, and then spend the night, browse some more in the morning, and then head for home. We finished early (more about that later) so we decided to drive back home when we considered the advantages of sleeping in and waking up in one's own bed. Besides, Texas highway 281 is one of our favorite roads.

When I lived in Norman, Oklahoma, my parents were still alive and well in Canyon Lake, Texas. I could drive straight down Interstate 35 and turn right at FM (Farm to Market) Road 306 and head for Sattler, Startzville, and Canyon Lake or I could drive over to Lawton, Oklahoma and Ft. Sill where **Geronimo** is buried and take TX281 past Blanco and turn left at TX46 and then over to Startzville and Canyon Lake, going a bit out of my way but avoiding Dallas and Austin and enjoying not only less traffic, but more interesting (and not so ugly) scenery.

But back to Archer City, hometown of **Larry McMurtry** and the Last Picture Show now that we are off Hwy281 (we turned left at Windthorst and took TX25).

We were going to visit **Booked Up: Fine, Rare & Scholarly Books**, **Larry McMurtry's** second-hand book shop housed in four buildings, two of which adjoin one another with another directly across the street and the fourth down the street near the public library and the water tower (we didn't visit that one). (Go to [\[pac.com\]\(http://www.bookedu-pac.com\) for photos and more information. Be sure to read the *Important Announcement* and be happy that the store is still there.\)](http://www.bookedu-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

By **McMurtry's** own account (p. 111, *Books*), "Our own store, **Booked Up**, now contains remnants of the stock of at least twenty-six bookshops. Most of these purchases are sorted, repriced, and put in their proper section, but knowing as we do that some book buyers resent too much organization, we leave a couple of long walls, containing maybe 120,000 books, unsorted, with books that range in price between \$10 and \$40."

I could not have stated his case better or with such authority. I can attest to the unsorted books and it is fun but one would take days and we didn't have days. I was looking for books by my favorite authors, authors whose works I collect. They happen to be writers of fiction so I was in luck because much of the fiction is in reasonable order but not all because in those 120,000 unsorted volumes one is likely to find novels next to a work of history or travel or literary reminiscences.

I found, in the unsorted areas, some books that I would like to own but that were overpriced. I could have bought the facsimile first edition, in slip-case, of *The Grapes of Wrath* at another store for half of what **Booked Up** was asking but even the less expensive item was overpriced so I didn't buy that one either. That is a minor criticism. If I lived close enough to **Booked Up** to visit regularly, I would soon run out of shelf space even as I ran out of money.

I found four books by **Christopher Morley** that I didn't own (one was a variant) and **Philip Wylie's** *Finnley Wren* in fine condition with dust jacket, each purchase costing either \$10 or \$15. And to make things even better, my receipt is on **Booked Up** letterhead with each title and price neatly written by hand.

Several hours after we entered the front door of **Booked Up**, it was still daylight and I wanted to leave while I was ahead, so we hopped in the car and headed home.

I would like to return to Archer City and stay in the local hotel so that I could be at the door when **Booked Up** opens at 10 a.m. and stay until it closes at 5 p.m. I would spend more time on the ladders so I could properly explore the top shelves in what used to be, I think, a commercial garage. I was reminded a bit of the **Northern Regional Library Facility** in Richmond, California including the chilly temperatures that are healthy to books and not so bad for humans, either, if you wear a sweater.

There is a rare book room across the street but there was no staff there and I didn't want to fetch anyone (the sign says to go ahead and fetch) but I did visit the room containing review copies and galleys of books. I found one I wanted but I needed to fill up with gas in Windthorst so I demurred. Maybe it will still be there when I return. 🐾

Papa Abel Remembers from page 83

of the Plan had taken two years to get to this point of utility.

I strongly wish to make unambiguously the point that several competent people spent a great deal of time, hours of examination and thought, and substantial financial resources to bring the Plan and its procedures along this far — that is up to the summer of 1965. A handful of people advanced the opinion that the Approval Plan was little more than an enlarged Farmington Plan. However, the Approval Plan was not the relatively easy straight-forward system employed by the Farmington Plan. In

this latter case, the booksellers' job was a little more involved and complex than collecting a copy of all the new titles published in a single country in some stipulated period of time, dividing them among the participating libraries along broadly defined subject categories and billing/dispatching these groups of books periodically. That, of course, is the consequence of the fact that the two systems had vastly different objectives: the Farmington Plan to assure at least a single copy of every significant title published overseas was held in the US. The Approval Plan objective was two-fold; to get a copy of every title published in the US, initially, into the hands of scholars as soon as available and secondly to significantly reduce the costs to the libraries of acquiring such titles. 🐾