Lost in Austin

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Leaving the Books Behind
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ethic, as well as the skills I knew. She also wanted to verify that this had not changed
over the years. As a result, she found that I was even more impassioned about library
work today than I was years ago, but perhaps with better direction.

The onsite interview is crucial to your be-
ing employed. Some institutions require you
to do one day, others require two, or multiple
visits. Generally, they start with a short tour
of the institution, or at least the parts that
interact with your prospective job placement.
Then, you have a combination of sections/ groups, individuals, and the direct supervi-
sor of the job. When I applied for a Serials Librarian job, I met with the Technical Ser-
vice staff, the Associate Directors, the Di-
rector, the Reference staff, the Staff involved
with media and other services, and a critical
time with the Technical Services head, where
I was asked to talk about a specific journal
title they had cataloged locally and comment
on fields used, other fields that were possible
to use and how I would change the emphasis
of the cataloging. This last session was a little
scary, but I decided to be direct and honest.
I think that is the only way to approach
such a request. Right or wrong, I became very
defensive of the local cataloging before
OCLC radical upgrades and suggested we go
into the record and change it back. It led to
my discussion of strengths in consistent au-
thority work and adherence to cataloging
rules. I also elaborated on further access
points we could use to help the patrons and
reference staff. Whew! Had to take a deep
breath and settle back in the chair, hoping she
would agree. There are sometimes risks you
must take, but I always feel secure in stick-
ing to my ethics and the cataloging rules. You
may want to watch for institutions which re-
quire you to present a subject to the staff in a
twenty minute segment. Generally, they tell
you about it when you are scheduled for the
onsite interview and the preparation time can
be two hours or less. If you haven't done
many presentations, this could be stressful,
but they generally want to get an idea about
your ways of teaching and leading. I think they're fun, but that's just me.

Remember, anything you write in your cover
letter and résumé can be questioned! From the
most significant to the least, they have the right
to ask you about it. Be truthful, realistic and try
to draw conclusions about your experiences that
others can see easily. I was quizzed about pres-
ervation from a statement about a church library
experience, asked to explain statements in an
article I had written, identify an article where I
discussed specific aspects of management and
change, expound on the most important event
of my thirty years of experience, explain how
to gain conference experience without money
or support from the library, and talk about
staff development and motivation. I feel as
if my interview turned into a family visit and
I enjoyed it immensely.

On August 22, 2005, I will be gainfully
employed as the Serials Librarian at Embr-
ry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona
Beach, FL: a product of long hours of study
in the MLIS program, many years experience
in the profession, preparation for presenta-
tions, writing for publication, and an active
involvement in the library world. For what-
ever you wish in life, you must work to
achieve it. I will always remember this time
in my life: the people who have helped make
this possible, the belief of professors, cowork-
ers and family, and the providence of a life
filled with trials and tribulations. I have en-
joyed writing this column through my years
as a student at USC and now pass the baton
to a new generation of professionals in train-
ing.

Heidi Hoerman will be using this col-
umn to help her students understand the inte-
gral part publications play in their own
professional development. Katrina has asked
me to move to a different column, so I will re-
main with you as I search for my place in the
professional world. I will also attend the
Charleston Conference in November, so look
me up, say hi, and let me know what you would
like me to explore in the new column. Thanks
for continuing to read with us!

Lost in Austin

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“In literature as in love, we are astonished at what is chosen
by others.” — Andre Maurois

In my last column, I mentioned that I had
volunteered to read religious fiction for
ForeWord: Reviews of Good Books Indepen-
dently Published. When I wrote about the box
of books that arrived one afternoon when I had
come home early, I said that there were eight
books in the carton but there were, in fact, a
dozen. I still had them all read and rated by
the end of March but by that time, another carton
of books had arrived. The person in charge of
the project confided that a Sci Fi reader had
dropped out and asked if I could help. There
were only eleven books in that box but before I
could finish them, a small package of three
books arrived, three works of translation. My
job was to rank the three finalists for the trans-
lation award.

As I write this on a sunny, breezy, and cool
Sunday afternoon in Austin (perfect weather
anywhere), I have just finished reading the three
works of translation after finishing the reading
last night. The winner, in my estimation, was a
book called Amanu (Scala House Press), by
Vladimir Bartol (1903–1967), “one of
Yugoslavia’s leading intellects and the author
of plays, short stories and theater reviews”
(jacket blurb) who wrote the book in 1938. He
was criticized for not writing about his own
country instead of Iran, the Iran of around 1092
C.E. If you read the book, in a smooth transla-
tion by Michael Biggins, you will understand
why modern readers will find it interesting, even
gripping at times, especially as you begin to
realize why three young warriors are allowed to
enter Paradise while still alive, the Paradise
where heroes are greeted by virgins in a Gar-
den of Eden.

The work of translation that I did not like
had nothing, as far as I can tell, about the qual-
ity of the translation. The problem was the
material. The book, Sebastian’s Arrows: Let-
ters and Mementos of Salvador Dalí and
Frederico Garcia Lorca (Swan Isle Press) con-
tains some of Lorca’s poems and color plates
of works by Dalí. Lorca and Dalí will be re-
membered for their art and not for their corre-
spondence. How could such renowned artists
write such boring, pedestrian letters?

My opinion of the religious fiction has not
changed since I last wrote about that genre as
represented by my carton of books. The good
books were good reads. None of the books will
be remembered as worthy literature but that
applies to most of what we read, even for those
of us who try to choose with care. What a loss
if all we had to choose from were the novels
listed on the syllabi of teachers of literature.
Some of my favorite reading has, most likely,
ever even been mentioned in a formal class. I
had some difficulty selecting the order of my
four favorites from the religious fiction but I
was finally successful. What separated those
four books (only three got ranked) from the
other eight was that it was the human condition
of the characters and plot and not religion. But
the religious angle was what drove the authors
and although a couple of the endings were a
little too pat, ending a novel satisfactorily, from
the reader’s viewpoint, may be more difficult
than the beginning.

The most recent work of science fiction that
I read before agreeing to be a Sci Fi judge was
William Gibson’s Neuromancer more than ten
years ago when I was still enchanted by all
things technological and BITNET seemed so
necessary before it morphed into the Internet
and became ubiquitous. The Internet and the
Web are not passé but they are nothing more
than work tools for me now, work tools that have
probably made me more productive but I still
miss those telephone calls and letters with in-
teresting letterheads and stamps. The telephone
is still used, thank goodness, so that there is still
a personal element left in our business world.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Optimize the true value of your books. Let us sell your discards and donations.

www.betterworldbooks.com  library@betterworldbooks.com

Email has sped up our written communication but it seems less personal and it has added an element of urgency to our correspondence that wasn’t there when we relied solely on the U.S. Postal Service. I try to remember what it was like to put thought into a letter before neatly typing it, proofreading it, and folding it carefully into an envelope. No, I am not a Luddite, not yet, but a romantic that misses some aspects of our work of a quarter of a century ago or more.

But I digress. I was simply noting that it has been a long time since I read a work of science fiction, not counting the tons of hyperbolic praise and promise about the aforesaid Internet and World Wide Web. I had read some Ray Bradbury and others as an early teenager but it was never really my bag. And after reading the carton of Sci Fi sent to me for review, it is still not my bag and probably never will be given that my lifelong list of books to read contains a mere handful of science fiction titles and those, such as Brave New World, transcend classifications (science fiction, dystopian, sociology, belles letters, etc.).

I have digressed again. What I have been trying to do is suggest that some of the science fiction (really a catch all for fantasy, science fiction, and others) books that I read were good reads and good entertainment. My favorite of the eleven that were sent to me was The Monastery, by Seeth Miko Trimpert. When I finished the book, I wondered if it deserved a category all its own. The book is and yet is not about time travel, it is about reincarnation but with a twist. The woman protagonist in the book is not appreciated in her 20th century life (we are still living in the 20th century despite the calendar and closing in on the 21st century socially and economically) so she begins a new life in the 14th century. She is brutally raped and left for dead, by a soldier with a conscience, at the gate of a monastery. To make a long story short... No, if I tell you any more it would spoil the book. It is not exactly Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs but it does have to do with a damsel in distress and a monastery full of monks who care for her and nurse her back to health. But while she is beginning this life within the monastery, she is still alive but in a coma, but with full mental powers, in the 20th century and the two women separated by six hundred years, are struggling to see which one lives and which one dies. Had I been the editor working with Ms. Trimpert, I would have removed the monastery section of the book and published it as its own story, for that is the interesting part of the book to me. If you believe in reincarnation and communication with yourself in past lives, you will enjoy this on a different level.

The others that I liked could be seen as religious or ethical allegories, one, The Pocket and the Pendant, by Mark Jeffrey, being ever so derivative of Philip Pullman’s Dark Materials: The Golden Compass: The Subtle Knife: and The Amber Spyglass. I sort of enjoyed The City Ball of Starships, by Meredith Sue Willis, a story o’ good versus evil for the control of a colonized planet, although I sometimes, even at the end, could not tell who was good and who was evil. A better story about colonizing space was Shivering World, by Kathy Tyers. There is a lot of science (how good I cannot tell) as the colorists and the stakeholders debate the planets viability. Singularity, by Bill Desmedt, is as much an espionage thriller as a work of science fiction. The Planet of Mortal Worship, by Donald I. Templeman, is more religious allegory than science fiction – it is the Devil versus God. The bad people are depraved and used depraved, sexual, and scatological slang to show how bad they are. The longer the book went on (358 pages), the more tendentious and tedious it became but by that time, I was too far along to quit.

Good Books, Independently Published is the subtitle of the sponsoring magazine for this book competition and I take it to heart. If you prefer reading to, say, Television, for your entertainment, take a look at ForeWord’s Website (www.forewordmagazine.com) and sign up for an free (to librarians and publishers) subscription. There are a lot of good books being published outside of New York, just as there are a few not so good books coming from Gotham City. One of our duties as librarians is to make available the right book for the right reader. Do your duty and acquire a few of those good books independently published.