November 2010

I Hear the Train A Comin'-Anything Goes

Greg Tananbaum

Anianet, greg@anianet.com

"For a time **Shaw** shared the house of the young couple, but finding the situation too exacting, and lest he should be the cause of breaking the marriage," he vanished. But "the manage that had prospered so pleasantly as a ménage a trios proved intolerable as a ménage a deux … and the husband vanished too." Presently there was a divorce. "The beautiful one" **Shaw** wrote, "abolished him root and branch and resumed her famous maiden name." Forty years later **Shaw** was motoring through Gloucestershire when the spell of Kelmscott came upon him; he turned aside to visit the grave of **William** and **Jane Morris**, which he had not seen before. Then he was moved to knock at the door of the manor. It was opened by the terrifying **Miss Lobb**, and "presently the beautiful daughter and I, now harmless old folks, met again as if nothing had happened." **Basil's** last encounter with **May** came on a Bank Holiday in 1938. "We shipped our sculls at Kelmscott and made our way up to the house; I saw her at a distance in the paddock: she turned and gazed at us stonily as we advanced, looking very like dishevelled tripper, and I had a moment's anxiety lest she might not recognise us and speak words of rebuke which she might regret. I called out to her, and her manner changed (she admitted that she was about to chase us away deeming us to be a party of idle curious who had come by cabin-cruiser)."
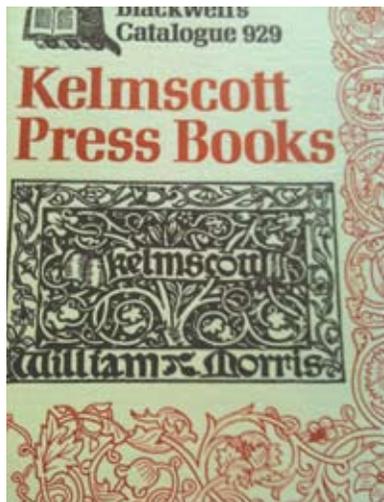
After a feast of home-made wine and home-made cake, **May** walked the **Blackwell** family back to the riverbank where their boat was moored. She told **Basil** that "she no longer cared to go out either to the front or the back of the Manor House; for the long peace of Kelmscott had been invaded by an aerodrome behind the village, and on the river the old wooden weirs and bridges had been replaced by concrete work, and rollers had given way to lochs for the benefit of motorboats."

"How much they miss," **Basil** commented, "these folk who lounge on the decks of cabin cruisers while they speed heedlessly above the stream, soothed (I suppose) by the tawdry music which normally invades their homes. Unknown to them the subtle music at the water-level, from swaying rushes, from the kiss of sculls precisely dipped, and the quiet mirth of little eddies as the blades are pressed home; unknown the deep content in healthy weariness and the sense of achievement at the day's end. Such joys were known to **May Morris** in the hey-day of life at Kelmscott, but are now almost forgotten on the upper reaches of the Thames. It is all part of the passing of an age. The noise and vulgarity of the world were pressing hard upon her, and I was aware of a weariness of spirit that day":

The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises; the roses are dun;

Basil's weariness must have been a premonition. "Before the year was out I stood at her grave. The chapter was finished and the book closed; **William Morris** had passed into legend."

Continuing the theme of **Blackwell** writing, the next instalment delves into the diaries of **Will King**: poet, Quaker, and a famous **Blackwell** antiquarian bookseller. 🌳

Endnotes

1. In his diaries (MBC) **Benjamin Henry** writes that his sole ambition is to "provide for himself, his mother and his apprentices," and his son never thought seriously of doing anything other than joining the family firm; the same went for the next two generations of **Blackwells**.

2. Notes from the Rector of Appleton, **Peter Wyld**; parts of these notes were published in the *Oxford Diocesan Magazine*, July 1984.

3. **Betjeman** at the celebrations for **BB's** 70th birthday.

4. This story has been published in many versions, one such by the **William Morris Society** – see also MBC BLK/3/6.

5. **May (Mary) Morris** 1862-1938.

6. **Fiona MacCarthy**, *William Morris A Life for Our Time*, Faber and Faber, 1994, p 677.

7. **Alf Button** is the character in a book of the same name by **W. A. Darlington**.

8. **Basil Blackwell**, *The Bookseller*, October 27, 1962, p 109.

I Hear the Train A Comin' — Anything Goes

Column Editor: **Greg Tananbaum** (Founder and CEO, Anianet) <greg@anianet.com> *www.anianet.com*

I am pleased to be attending the **30th Annual Charleston Conference**. The theme of this year's event is "Anything Goes," and, in honor of the great songwriter **Cole Porter**, I offer these few thoughts about the state of the scholarly communication industry — **De-Lovely** style. What will we be talking about in the hallowed halls of the **Francis Marion** this year? Let's appropriate the titles of some **Porter** classics to find out.

Too Darn Hot

The issue of what to do about research data is certainly boiling over. As I have written before on these pages, supplementary data have the potential to hasten scientific discovery. This is particularly true when data are presented in machine-readable formats that render meta-analysis feasible. However, the standards for how research data should be collected, curated, surfaced, and (possibly) monetized have not shaken out as yet. It is certainly true that cloud computing and other technical advances make the sharing of this type of information easier and less expensive than at any time in history. However, publishers are increasingly wary of their responsibilities in presenting these data in conjunction with the articles they publish. *The Journal of Neuroscience's* recent decision to stop accepting supplemental data turned up the heat on this topic. The editors argued that the current peer review process is strained by the proliferation of data associated with journal manuscripts. Authors are submitting more supplementary materials than ever, reviewers are digging deeper into these data to suggest additional avenues of research for authors, and the back and forth is causing friction and delay in the publication process. My purpose in broaching the *Journal of Neuroscience* decision is not to critique their stance but to lament that our industry has not crafted an intelligent path forward on research data. It is possible, of course, that if publishers determine that the issue of data is just "too darn hot," other mechanisms will arise to fill the void. Certainly, projects such as **Harvard's DataVerse** and **DataCite.org** offer promising approaches to the archiving and discovery of research data. However, given the close connection between raw materials (data) and finished product (journal articles), a truly effective solution will need to tie the two together seamlessly.

Night and Day

The Internet Era has thus far offered night and more night for the journal as a publication form. While the operational aspects of peer review have transitioned to a largely electronic process, the general publication pattern of submit→review→revise→publish remains a constant. There has undoubtedly been some experimentation. *PLoS One* is

an obvious example. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, a 60 year-old humanities journal, has made headlines in the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* by experimenting with the crowd-sourced review of submitted papers. The journal editors invited specific scholars to offer signed critiques that would be posted in conjunction with manuscript on the journal's Website. Registered members of this community were then able to add their own comments. This produced direct dialog between the authors and their prospective audience that informed edits to the manuscripts. The journal's editors ultimately reviewed the revised subsequent revisions and decided on their suitability for final publication. This notion of crowd-sourcing is but one way in which scholarly publishing could shine a new light on the reviewing process. The proliferation of online communities in specific disciplines certainly brings together the human capital in a manner that encourages direct interaction, discussion, and give-and-take. It would not be surprising to see more experiments spring up that leverage the virtual meeting posts these communities have become. Perhaps this will produce a new publication pattern that complements the traditional model, as night complements day.

From This Moment On

The past year has seen the public disclosure of some contentious library-vendor negotiations. In June, The **University of California (UC)** system threatened to boycott **Nature Publishing Group's** journals to protest what they saw as a hefty subscription price hike. This came to light via a letter that the **UC** libraries sent to **UC** faculty explaining both what they deemed an increase of "unprecedented magnitude" and **NPG's** subsequent "ultimatum." Two months later, the parties tried to turn down the heat by offering a joint press release updating the scholarly community on the positive tenor of subsequent discussions. The **UC-NPG** kerfuffle was not the only instance in which a university in effect said, "From this moment on, we refuse to quietly abide by market exorbitance." The **Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA)** announced this summer that it was cancelling its **Blackwell Synergy Journal Collection** subscription after seven months of negotiations. Again, the press release was an unusually blunt recitation of **VIVA's** grievances. Not to be outdone, the **University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)** issued an open letter to explain its cancellation of **Web of Science**, citing both a proposed 120% price increase and **UPEI** desire to create a free and open index to the world's scholarly literature "to ensure that scholars and members of the broader public are no longer disenfranchised by a broken system of scholarly communication." From this moment on, will we see similarly frank proclamations from institutions as they divorce themselves from what they perceive as bum deals?

Don't Fence Me In

…Or, perhaps more accurately, don't fence me out. This is the message that the general public is sending the research community as the citizen science movement grows. Citizen science refers to research-oriented tasks such as observations, measurement, and computation being performed by a formal or informal network of volunteers, many of whom do not have specialized scientific training. This may sound like a bad idea, and, indeed, tasking **Joe** and **Jane Sixpack** with discovering a cure for cancer doesn't make a great deal of sense. However, in many instances citizen science networks facilitate the data collection and discovery processes. Further, citizen science can promote public interest in and understanding of science. Citizen science is not new. Indeed, the **Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count** launched in 1900. However, there has been a proliferation of citizen science efforts in recent years. Technology is the driving force behind this momentum. Cloud computing renders data more accessible. A great example of this can be found in the **Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS) SkyServer** database, which represents a three-dimensional map of the one million brightest galaxies and quasars. A generation ago, the computing power to efficiently share this information simply did not exist. Another key technical development is the proliferation of consumer electronic devices that can record information. This expands the pool of potential data collectors. For example, Gulf Coast residents can download the **Project Noah iPhone** app to document the location and condition of distressed animals, with observations uploaded into a collective database covering the spill's impact on wildlife. This would not have been possible during the **Exxon Valdez** crisis. There are scores of projects in which citizens are contributing valuable information for the scientific record. A relatively new Website, **ScienceForCitizens.net**, serves as a clearinghouse for many of these initiatives, in disciplines ranging from astronomy to zoology. What is clear is that the general public, despite popular perception, does in fact care about science. Moreover, they are jumping over the proverbial fence to contribute to the advancement of human knowledge.

I Get a Kick Out of You

If you are coming to Charleston, do me a favor on your flight. Look around the plane and see how many people are playing around on their **iPads**. Users cannot get enough of this product — they simply get a kick out of it. And there is no doubt that it provides an enjoyable user experience. It turns on in a flash (pun intended), renders the online experience more visually pleasing, and expands much of what is enjoyable about the smart phone experience to a bigger canvas. However, the impact the **iPad** will have on scholarly communication remains to be seen. The **American Chemical Society**, for example, has launched an **iPad** app that provides personalized access across **ACS Journals**, a "Latest News" feed, hooks to **Facebook** and **Twitter**, and a handful of other useful utilities. Full-text article access can be configured via wireless or Virtual Private Networks for users at institutions that subscribe to **ACS** content. It will be interesting to observe both how this app fares and the extent to which it is a harbinger of other publishers' forays into the **iPad** space. The publishers with which I have intersected have indicated a reluctance to invest too much early energy in developing their own apps. This is due in part to the moving target nature of development for specific platforms. However, the reason more frequently cited by these hesitant publishers is that they are not at all certain that the **iPad** is used for much more than "kicks" by their audience at this point. 🐙