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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations-Print

Bob Nardini

Coutts Information Services, bnardinia@couttsinfo.com

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Print

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services)
<bnardini@couttsinfo.com>

I'm sure it won't be too much longer before those of us who not only read books but don't own a digital reading device and so read them in print will be having to explain ourselves constantly, since we'll have come to seem a little curious if not completely odd. While we're not at that point yet, I might as well get going and start to think now about how I'll talk about print when that day does come.

I'm not anti-eBook, anti-online, none of that. In fact in my day job I spend a good deal of time trying to make it easier for our customers to buy more eBooks, so that their patrons use more eBooks, so that our customers will buy want to buy more...and so on. And I certainly spend my share of time online, both at work and otherwise, and know all about the pleasures of Websurfing, whether aimless or purposeful.

I'll probably buy a reading device one day. But an early adopter I am not, never was, not for microwave ovens when they came in so long ago, and not since for cell phones or smart phones, not for digital cameras, not for DVDs, not for GPS devices, not for iPods, not for much of anything.

I don't say all of that proudly or due to some matter of principle. Usually I do get around to trying out these things, eventually. I'm just not in a hurry. In the case of reading devices and eBooks, for example, first I'd like to read

more of the printed books on that section of my bookshelf where I line up the books I haven't gotten to yet, the "still have to read" area.

I do fall behind on them. It may take me a few months, a year, well, maybe ten years before I finally open one I placed on the shelf, usually with high anticipation. In the meantime other books come along and some of them jump the line. A couple of weeks ago I finished a book about the jazz pianist **Thelonius Monk** that had been sitting on the "to read" shelf for what must have been close to that ten years. I thought often about reading it — enjoyed the book when I finally did — but even over those years on the shelf it was a small pleasure many times over just to notice it now and again, and to think about reading it.

I've kept the **Monk** book, for now, but don't keep every book I read. I used to, but that got out of hand. I have hauled many boxloads of my own and my kids' (grown now) books to the public library, have sold what I could to local bookdealers, and for years have thought twice before buying a book in the first place. Today I just keep the ones I particularly liked. My bookshelves are crowded, but no longer ridiculous with books squeezed in on top of other books or somehow into spots not quite wide enough, or stored in boxes in some closet or basement.

So despite having hauled

them around during my twenties, my thirties, likely longer than that as I moved from one address to another across several states and one province, in and out of a series of apartments, flats, and houses, I don't believe I any longer own, for example, a single book I read in college as an undergraduate. I can remember a few of those books, but if the copies I owned still exist at all, they're on someone else's bookshelf, not on mine.

The book I do still own and have owned the longest, as I survey things, is one I read in graduate school, *Simple Justice*, a history of the famous 1954 Supreme Court case on school desegregation, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The author was **Richard Kluger**, a former journalist who, while an editor at **Simon & Schuster**, couldn't find an author willing to write about the case and researched and wrote the book himself. He began the work in 1968, according to his Website, and *Simple Justice* came out in 1976. The book was a National Book Award nominee. **Kluger** won the **Pulitzer Prize** for another he wrote, later on.

I read the book in the fall of 1980, when I had just begun an M.A. program in History at the **University of Virginia**. It was assigned reading in a class — or "colloquium," as **Virginia** listed the course, on twentieth-century American history. I can still remember our first session, when the professor, white-haired, toward the end of his career, introduced himself to about fifteen of us, all brand new grad students, as we sat at desks arranged in a square, with one side of the square open.

That's where he sat, giving us our reading list. He wore a tie not quite secured at the neck, and a rumpled seersucker jacket. He told us he was from Alabama, that one day he'd write a book about "what happened to his people." He told us his Ph.D. was from **Northwestern University** and that he'd written a biography of **John W. Davis**, whom I had never heard of. (**Davis** was the Democratic nominee for president in 1924, the loser to **Calvin Coolidge**.) He'd also written a biography of **Theodore Roosevelt**. In fact he had something about him of **Roosevelt**, or "TR" as he would usually say, with powerful shoulders and chest, glasses somewhat incongruous to his physical bearing, and a gruff but not really unfriendly manner. He told us he reviewed books for **The New Republic**, and that he had another book in the works, with **Oxford University Press**.

It was all a bit intimidating. But, exhilarating too, as we students settled into Charlottesville to begin this new phase of our lives. I had a sparsely furnished apartment on the edge of campus. I don't believe the apartment had a bookshelf, not one that I can remember anyway. I'd moved all the way from Toronto in a rented van and had left my larger possessions in my parents' basement in upstate New York. In Charlottesville I kept my books in piles, taller

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you off-guard and makes you laugh out loud as this passage did. I am glad that I was alone when reading it and not on an airplane. **Earl Peckham** our protagonist, is trying to win over and marry her for her money, a widow named **Nelly DeBelly**. When **Peckham** mentions having taught college in Wyoming, she offers this:

"Wyoming! I had a grandfather there. He was a minister in a Presbyterian Church. Preached the cowboys, going from ranch to ranch on horseback. In fact, he preached on horseback very often...."

Says **Peckham**, "Sort of the sermon on the mount, you might say."

Replies **Mrs. DeBelly**, "Well, I doubt he was that good. Hardly in the class with our Lord."

She doesn't get the joke, and that is what makes it laughing out loud funny and not groaning out loud funny, had **DeVries** offered us only the pun.

Peter DeVries (1931-1993) worked for *The New Yorker* for forty-three years. He also had an interesting life before *The New Yorker*, a life that contributed as much to his humor and characters as his life as a New York sophisticate.

Another writer that you might be more familiar with who used similar techniques and characters is **Max Shulman** (1919-1988). I can never think of one without recalling the other. **Max Shulman** was best known through his book and television character **Dobie Gillis**, as in *The Many Lives of Dobie Gillis* and *I Was a Teenage Dwarf*, but I first read him in high school beginning with *Barefoot Boy with Cheeks of Tan*, a book so popular in my high school that a group of juniors and seniors formed their own chapter of the book's infamous fraternity, Alpha Cholera. Years later when Animal House came out, it seemed like the resurrection of Alpha Cholera.

That is what I really wanted to say, **Peter DeVries** and **Max Shulman** make me laugh and smile, and laughing and smiling are good for the soul and are just what the doctor ordered to take my mind off my management style, or management by wandering around. I opt for book selection by roaming the stacks. 🐾

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piles on the floor, or for the books more active at any moment, smaller piles on a table, within reach. When I bought it for the class, that's what I must have done with *Simple Justice*.

Ever since Charlottesville, though, it's had a place, and has held its place, on a bookshelf. It was always easy to visualize the book because of the cobalt blue cover I've been looking at for some thirty years now, even though I doubt I've picked it up (other than on moving day) until now. It's the spine I've seen all those years, but as I handle the book today I see the cover I recall from reading it. The cover features a photograph of the nine justices of the Warren Court on which is superimposed a photograph of one of the school children from Topeka, Kansas who were the principals of the case, a girl in her best white coat, which contrasts with the justices' black robes. She's standing at near attention, hands behind her back, looking straight ahead with a determined but slightly anxious look, waiting.

It's a **Vintage Books** paperback, priced then at \$6.95. With 778 pages of text — not to mention appendix, notes, bibliography, and index — it must have taken me a little while to read. The book's still in good shape, although the pages have turned slightly brown and the paper has a faint smell of must to it. I inscribed my name, address, and phone number inside the front cover, and so could not have trusted myself to hang onto the book and not misplace it somewhere around campus. I'm sure I didn't want to spend the \$6.95 a second time.

I also wrote a few notes inside the book.

For example, I highlighted page 116, where **Kluger** recorded, in the course of writing about the social background to the case, that when the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated, black people had to stand in a special section, far away from the platform and across a road. But I really didn't write much in the book, since *Simple Justice* wasn't a dense scholarly work where you had to take a lot of notes to make sense of it. Instead, it was a narrative, the kind to which the words "sweeping" or "magisterial" are sometimes applied. I am sure I was too engaged with **Kluger's** story to bother with note-taking.

"From the start," he wrote in his first sentence, "the United States aspired to far more than its own survival." From there he told the story of how our nation was brought closer to its aspirations, in the area of race relations where it had fallen so far short, thanks, and against all odds, to a group of families in Topeka, and to a corps of black attorneys led by **Thurgood Marshall** who beyond winning their own personal battles for dignity, brought the Topeka cases forward and changed the course of American history. On the book's back cover, review excerpts from *The Nation*, *New York Times*, and *Harvard Law Review* attested to an "extraordinary research effort," a "thought-provoking work," and a "definitive account." *Simple Justice* is still in print, in a 2004 edition which **Random House** brought out on the 50th anniversary of the case.

I'll probably never read the book again, but I'm glad I kept it on my bookshelf all these years. I think when we read a book that's meant something to us, we like to believe we know something we didn't before, and maybe have been changed a little because of that. The book

itself, the physical book I mean, is a token of that, a sign that it might be true; my copy of *Simple Justice*, for me, but books more generally too, for many people. A shelf of books, or a wall of books, can be a hopeful sight, possible evidence that there's much about the world we could figure out, if we just took the time.

Also a pleasing and even a beautiful sight, with textures, colors, and shapes coming together into a pattern imposed by the shelf. A few bars and restaurants have always used furnished bookshelves to decorate their dining rooms, so that they resemble libraries or studies. Now, in an ironic decor turn, libraries themselves do the same thing — even as their services become more and more electronic and as books, so many of them seldom used, are digitized, de-accessioned, compacted, sent to storage — the newest buildings sometimes are designed to highlight rows of books in specially lit arrays presented from behind windows or walls of glass, showpieces visible from the sidewalk or from the building's ground floor, as if to say, "You know, it wasn't always all about Websites in here."

When I spot my blue copy of *Simple Justice*, I might recall what an heroic achievement **Brown v. Board of Education** was. Or, what an heroic achievement the book itself was, on **Richard Kluger's** part. Or, I might remember Charlottesville in 1980, or my apartment, or what grad school was like, or where I went from there. I am sure at some point not far off it will be more rule than exception that even a book like **Kluger's** will be experienced as an eBook. If I had read *Simple Justice* that way, though, I can't help wondering how much harder it would be, today, to remember anything at all. 🍷

Acquisitions Archaeology — Competing Interests

Column Editor: **Jesse Holden** (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>

After wandering around **ATG** volumes 2 and 3 in search of CD-ROMs, I was forced to arrive at the conclusion that the trail, though not stone cold, had indeed grown faint. I found signs throughout the volumes that CD-ROMs were still insinuating themselves in the background, but for the most part it was business as usual. This actually surprised me. One vendor — **Compact Cambridge** — informs us, for example, that databases distributed on CD-ROMs are "revolutionizing information access" and are a technology "winning overwhelming approval from patrons and library personnel alike."¹ In another instance, conversation is "dominated" by talk of electronic publishing² — and in this pre-Web world, CD-ROMs are obviously a significant component of this emerging e-publishing regime. Discourse about CD-ROMs, though, is not so "revolutionary" or "overwhelming" that it dominates the broader discourse of publishing, vending, and acquisitions.

So after a strong start, CD-ROMs have somewhat faded into the background as the 1990s start to unfold. Presumably, we are in the process of moving from revolution to workflow. As *practicality* starts to temper *potentiality*, CDs fade from the literature. This is probably not such a daring conjecture, but as far as I need go at this point: I am not so interested in where the CD-ROMs have gone as where they are going. Their momentary absence is just that, regardless of why they have all but vanished for the moment.

When I finally recover the trail, it is in the middle of Volume 4 (June 1992, to be exact).

The changing times are perhaps best shown in the new look for **ATG** in this volume — something very close to its present look. After several years of evolution and refinement, the graphic header is very similar to the one we see today. It has left behind its newsletter roots and embraced a

format immediately recognizable as a professional journal.

Keeping in mind the possible — and entirely unexpected — relationship between the development of CD-ROMs and the emerging functionality of the Internet, the fact that CD-ROMs are taking off in parallel with the Internet is a curious coincidence indeed. Here in June 1992, it is "Rumored" on the front page that **Blackwell** will start providing title and TOC service through the Internet. At the same time (and on the same front page), it is likewise rumored that **EBSCO** has released a new Serials Directory on CD. The changing nature of information is clear: the discussion of "full text online to take the place of hardcopy was under much discussion" at a recent conference.

Sandra K. Paul's column addresses "Multi-media Chaos" — especially that brought about by CD-ROMs.³ It is strange to see CDs suddenly erupting onto the acquisitions scene once again. Beneath the relatively placid waters (placid but not still, of course), complications with and around CDs have been multiplying. **Paul** traces

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