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Acquisitiong Archaeology-Competing Interest

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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 slyly 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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some of the developments in both CD hardware and software that will make them difficult to use, but concludes that “the creation of standards for compatibility...will result in some very innovative and very exciting new products available to the student, researcher, the homebody, the scholar, and the business professional.” In other words, who won’t be thrilled by the possibilities just beyond the horizon? (In hindsight, such optimism seems strangely misplaced.)

At the same time, **Eleanor Cook’s** take on developments in the pre-Web Internet is eerily prescient.⁴ Comparing the Internet’s ever-increasing integration into daily life (through functions like bulletin boards and distribution lists) to such mundane circumstances as wet laundry and overflowing toilets, **Cook** hints at the coming revolution (and ensuing banality that follows). Rather than optimism, however, there is concern: delayed emails, busy signals, and **Cook** even notes another user’s “real concerns about using the Internet for so many things.” Though the Internet seems ready to take its place alongside other routine and unpleasant household chores in a way that the CD-ROM is not, it is the complexity and, perhaps, intangibility of the former that makes it harder to see the Internet as the technology that would truly revolutionize information access in a profound way.

In the summer of 1992, I was a microcosm of the confusion preventing the future from moving forward, being even less aware of the Internet than average. My favorite song that summer turned out to be the **Cocteau Twins’** “The Spangle Maker.” While the song has an admittedly ridiculous title, obscured lyrics, and some rough edges, it is still a gem of early **Cocteau Twins** innovation and really quite good (once you get past the primitive drum machine that drives the beat, which was not so conspicuous in the early 90s). It had originally been released on vinyl in the UK as an EP, but was not distributed (as far as I can tell) in the U.S. Its transcription to CD did not help much: it was included on the freakishly expensive *Pink Opaque* compilation,⁵ available in the U.S. originally as an import only (assuming you could find it), and later included on the 2-disc *Lilliput* compilation of 4AD artists.⁶ The latter recording might have also been import-only.⁷ Matters improved somewhat with the release of the **Cocteau Twins** boxed set (“all the singles in a box,” I believe the sticker said) — improved, that is, as long as you wanted to buy all ten CDs that came packaged together (and assuming, of course, that you could find the set for sale in the first place — good luck with that).

Now you can search “The Spangle Maker” in about five seconds on **iTunes** and make a purchase by way of *The Pink Opaque*, *Lilliput*, or a third compilation, *Lullabies to Violaine, Vol. One*. And you only have to buy that one song, not the whole compilation. In 1992, I was *not* terribly aware of the Internet, but I was already frustrated with the limitations inherent in the CD. Yet I, like many others, considered the CD a breakthrough and could not imagine what might be beyond such a development. The idea of searching,

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And, here are **Greg Tananbaum’s** lyrics from the **30th Charleston Conference!**

*In olden days, book scans with Google
Were looked on as something frugal.
Now libraries know...anything goes.
Good authors, too, who once held copyright,
Now only keep it with a fight.
So researchers know...anything goes.
Our world’s gone mad today,
The fad’s iPad today,
Most books today,
Get Kindled and Nooked today,
Budgets are bad today,
And undergrads today
Are just twittering their prose.
And though I’m not a great thought leader,
I know you’ll shut your e-book reader
When I propose
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buying, and downloading music through an interactive, computer-mediated interface was well beyond the realm of imagination. I saw the CD as the future, and felt secure that I had arrived there.

And so we have a snapshot of a strange technological crossroads in the middle of 1992: despite the inherent limitations with CD-ROMs, this technology was seen as very promising; at the same time, the ever-expanding Internet was seen as uncertain, even overwhelming — which might have resulted in artificial limitation. I hypothesized in my previous column that — at least as based on scholarly communication as read in *ATG* — CD-ROMs were actually a red herring that distracted from investment in and, perhaps, development of the Internet. I am still not totally convinced that this is true. But it does seem that CD-ROMs, at least at this point, were riding on expectations that they could not meet while the Internet was failing to generate expectations that it would eventually fulfill.

Was this crossroads a setback or just part of the evolution? 🍷

Endnotes

1. **Compact Cambridge**. “Revolutionizing Access In Your Library.” *Against the Grain* v.2#3, p.8.
2. **Corrie Marsh**. “Electronic Publications Dominate PVLAR Talks.” *Against the Grain* v.2#4, p.9.
3. **Sandra K. Paul**. “Chaos: Multimedia Chaos.” *Against the Grain* v.4#3, p.29.
4. **Eleanor Cook**. “Drinking From the Firehose: Internet Collides with Reality: Housewife Hackers and Fuel For the Fire.” *Against the Grain* v.4#3, p.18.
5. Interestingly, the cover of *The Pink Opaque* is a black-and-white photograph. Presumably the title is intended to be alliterative rather than descriptive.
6. Intuitively enough, the 4AD label’s Web site is at <http://www.4ad.com>. If anyone figures out how the dial device on their homepage works, let me know. If you can get it to work, you will be able to access a lot of historical information hidden on this site.
7. I only found out about the *Lilliput* compilation when I keyworded “spangle maker” on **iTunes** a couple of minutes ago.