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Booklover -- Politics & Religion

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terminology was a challenge. What exactly is an OpenURL? What does PHP stand for? What is a parse param and why should it be changed? AutoActive? AutoUpdate? Crossref supported? “What steps should I take to resolve this problem?” is a question **Angela** consistently asks herself. The user reported his/her problem, but now **Angela** must determine the “real” problem. Is it a publisher problem? A link resolver problem? A vendor problem? A subscription problem? An incorrect threshold? A user issue? She had to analyze the differences between what the user sees, which is accessible via a link in the electronic journal problem report, versus what she was seeing on the staff side. **Angela** had to learn how to communicate effectively with internal (users, librarians, staff) and external (subscription agents, publishers, vendors) customers.

One can definitely say that serials departments aren't what they used to be. Working in a serials department today is both exciting and challenging. As electronic resources continue to grow in libraries, they will change the traditional role and activities of staff who work with electronic resources. Libraries are redefining responsibilities and repurposing staff. Staff are learning and developing new skill sets and enhancing existing skills. They are being challenged in working with the complexities of electronic resources. At the **VCU Libraries**, serials staff in the Acquisitions Department are learning to manage the task of responding to electronic journal problem reports from users. The playing field is different, and staff have to put on their public services and technology hats. After interviewing one staff member in the Serials Department who responds to electronic journal problem reports, we learn that communicating effectively with customers, determining the “real” problem, understanding terminology and technology, troubleshooting access issues, and resolving the problem are the most important aspects of the job. There were no well-established training procedures when staff first began responding to EJPRs. A lot of the knowledge and skills had to be learned through trial and error. Staff had to take a problem report and develop methodological steps to resolve the problem on their own. Staff learned that each problem can have its own idiosyncracies. Building upon existing knowledge and skills has proven to be an effective method in problem resolution. Responding to users' questions has been intensive, but staff are developing new skills and keeping users happy. It has turned out to be a gratifying experience for all the players involved. 🌱

In 1993 I was given a small volume of selected poems composed by **Octavio Paz**, the Mexican writer who won the **Nobel Prize** for Literature in 1990. The sixty-seven selections were in English with the translations provided by a variety of individuals. I confess that I never took a close look at the work because I have learned that poetry is a form of writing that can completely disintegrate upon translation. Recently, I found not only another of **Paz's** works, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (*El laberinto de la soledad*) when I attended the **SC Book Festival** in May, but also the bilingual edition of his 1990 Nobel Lecture: *In Search of the Present* (*La búsqueda del presente*). Now I was ready to explore the writings and thoughts of this Nobel Laureate.

Octavio Paz was born in 1914 in Mexico City. From an early age he was influenced by the liberalism, intellect, and literary career of his paternal grandfather, and he began to write. Like many creative intellects, he became involved in politics and used his poetic talent to dissect the elements of humanity. As he pursued this dissection he began to change his viewpoints, and this led to a riff with his friends, **Pablo Neruda** and **Gabriel García Márquez**. At this observation, I stopped and googled “never discuss politics or religion.” There are 4,630,000 responses. The one that caught my attention is attributed to the character **Linus** of the *Peanuts* comic strip. Every year **Linus** waits for the arrival of the Great Pumpkin and thus is the subject of much abuse by his fellow comic strip companions. He muses: “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin.” **Paz**, like **Linus**, must have come to a similar conclusion, so **Paz** turned to poetry as a medium for expressing his ever-evolving thought process on politics. In 1976 he wrote: “Between what I see and what I say / Between what I say and what I keep silent / Between what I keep silent and what I dream / Between what I dream and what I forget: / Poetry.”

His writings, travel, and overseas study led him to a career in the diplomatic service in the mid 1940s. He was stationed in France when he began to explore Mexico and her identity in the series of nine essays known as *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Sidenote: On my journey to read one book by every Literature Nobel Laureate, I have discovered I have a knack for stumbling on just the right book to read for each one. One reviewer describes *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as **Paz's** poetic masterpiece. So I am in for a treat.

The first essay entitled “*The Pachuco and Other Extremes*” delves right into the self-awareness of the individual and thus a nation. **Paz** uses the pachuco, youths of Mexican origin that form gangs in Southern cities of the U.S., to micro-dissect this self-awareness, this solitude. As I read his words, I felt the poetry in his prose even in the translation. I could see the pachuco and his world on the streets of Los Angeles. His description of their language, and behavior, down to the details of their clothes, created vivid imagery and an understanding began to emerge. **Paz** considered himself and fellow writers “the guardians of lan-

guage,” and it only took a few pages to see that he took this responsibility seriously. “Even his very name is enigmatic: pachuco, a word of uncertain derivation, saying nothing and saying everything.”

In 1990, **Paz** was awarded the **Nobel Prize** for his “impassioned writing with wide horizons, characterized by sensuous intelligence and humanistic integrity.” And what an extra special present for me to stumble upon the small published volume of his Nobel Lecture, bilingual no less. He begins his lecture with the analysis of the word gratitude. He uses the words to grab us by the hand and walk with him in a garden of words as he discusses language, literature, ethnic identity, modern identity, poetic identity. It is delightful and refreshing, but **Paz** is challenging us to reenter the world and “search for the present.”

Throughout his career, which included being appointed as Mexico's ambassador to India in 1962, **Paz** was a prolific writer expressing his thoughts, criticisms, and perspectives on religion, history, culture, and politics. I confess that I finally took a peek into the selection of poems and I leave you three excerpts from the English translation of San Ildefonso nocturne:

*“The man who walks through this poem,
between San Ildefonso and the Zocalo,
is the man who writes it:*

*this page too
is a ramble through the night.*

*Here the friendly ghosts become flesh,
ideas dissolve.*

*Good, we wanted good:
to set the world right*

*We didn't lack integrity:
we lacked humility.*

What we wanted was no innocently wanted.

*Precepts and concepts,
the arrogance of theologians,
to beat with a cross,
to institute with blood,
to build the house with bricks of crime,
to declare obligatory communion*

*Some
became secretaries to the secretary
to the General Secretary of the Inferno.*

*Rage
became philosophy,
its drivel has covered the planet.*

*Reason came down to earth,
took the forms of a gallows
— and is worshiped by millions.*

*....Between seeing and making,
contemplation or action,
I chose the act of words:*

*to make them, to inhabit them,
to give eyes to the language.....*

*Poetry,
like history, is made:*

*poetry,
like truth is seen.” 🌱*

