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Booklover -- Blindness

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**Interview — Sameer Shariff**

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**ATG:** Why should libraries be interested in Impelsys and iPublishCentral?

**SS:** With iPublishCentral removing the cost barriers for transitioning content online, publishers of all sizes are now able to market and promote online content. Libraries can take advantage of this by being able to discover content which was not easy or available earlier. Using publisher book widgets, libraries can promote readership on certain titles and subject matters.

**ATG:** This is a powerful and innovative technology. Can you tell us how you plan to develop it in the future? What are your plans for 2009 and the rest of the decade?

**SS:** We have a 24-month roadmap to further develop iPublishCentral, wherein we are planning to add features that will help publishers leverage their core asset, content, to deliver both on online and mobile platforms. We also plan to give them the ability to maximize the returns on their content by allowing them to sell in a flexible manner — by bundles, by chapter, by subject matter sets, as complete databases, and offer individual and institutional access, backed with different pricing models.

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**Booklover — Blindness**

**Column Editor:** Donna Jacobs (Research Specialist, Transgenic Mouse Care Facility, MUSC, Charleston, SC) <jacobsdf@musc.edu>

First, *The Joy Report*. Joy is my Caribbean bibliophile friend and email correspondent introduced in my last column. Currently the temperature in Eleuthera is in the mid 70s with sky and ocean competing for the finest palettes of blue. At the Glass Window Bridge in North Eleuthera you can assess both the Caribbean and the Atlantic blues simultaneously. The season is in full swing, but Joy still finds the time to send me book recommendations from her notebook. She has a chronological list of every book she has ever read and can find any individual entry with the speed and accuracy of a computerized library catalogue. Her most recent book recommendation is *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Soon I’m on Upper King Street in downtown Charleston. I’m on a crusade to scour the Middle East Section of Blue Bicycle Books for any sign of “Infidel.” It’s not a case of my being unaware of the convenience and certainty of ordering books on the Internet. Amazon.com and Alibris.com are wonderful Websites and easy to navigate. It just seems a poor substitute for actually feeling the texture of the paper, luxuriating in the cozy environment of a good bookstore and most of all, enjoying the adventure of the hunt. And at Blue Bicycle Books you always have to stop and pet the store cat. True to the historical tradition of crusades, mine is in vain but the hunt is not unrewarded. “Hypocrite in a poufy white dress: Tales of growing up groovy and clueless” by Susan Jane Gilman is my delightful, if somewhat unlikely consolation. The title suggests a starkly contradictory theme to “Infidel.” However, the humorous approach to humanity and its realities was a refreshing breath of fresh air from the more ponderous world of Saramago’s most recent “Nobelist” read “Blindness” by Jose Saramago.

A few years ago I embarked on what will probably be a life long project to find and read at least one book by each Nobel laureate in literature. I’m not even sure if all the authors have books available in translation but with over 100 recipients to choose from, it will be some time before this is a limiting factor.

My frequent treasure hunts at Blue Bicycle Books for the masterpieces from my Nobelist literature list end in enchantment every time I discover a new book for the collection regardless of subject matter. This brings me to “Blindness.” Even writing this now, it is difficult to know where to begin or what perspective to use. Should I speak about the delicate and exquisite shades of gray that define us and how these are magnified and reduced so that the reader experiences the horrors of swimming in the belly of the monster called humanity? Crisis divides the river, removes the gray hues and leaves us blind with only black and white. Saramago deliciously intrigues the reader with the white blindness phenomenon that is overtaking the community. Next thing you realize you are confronting the mouth of a monster. Swimming in the belly of the beast is not my idea of a good time. My first three attempts to read this book faltered, as every time I would reach the monster’s belly I would inevitably fail to return to the story at all. Finally determined that the book had to be finished, I was relieved to discover that I had already tackled the worst of the story. Once finished I was glad that I had persevered. The story is beautifully written and maybe in the end one can find hope. It was but a few days later I was awaiting the feature film at the local cinema. The previews were rolling and suddenly there on the silver screen was the belly of the beast. I saw the monster — yes a movie based on this book starring Julianne Moore. No, I decided Saramago’s words were going to have to suffice. I was not anxious to revisit that particular vision played out on a giant screen.
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At Eastern Book Company, we’ve spent more than half a century shaping our unique brand of service. The first step is fulfilling our customers’ orders with unmatched speed and accuracy. Then we custom-fit our operations to our customers’ needs, allowing libraries to streamline processes and maximize budgets. And finally, we cultivate next-generation technologies to help our customers build the libraries their users need.

From the Reference Desk
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merely on people and movements. Articles are also devoted to places and events, ideas and ideologies, the arts, film and music, as well as books and other publications. Even consumer products and illegal substances are covered. As such, readers will find entries on topics as diverse as Greenwich Village, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, Abolitionism, Pseudoscience, Feminism, Freemasonry, Easy Rider, the Beat Generation, Gangsta Rap, Gonzo Journalism, The Liberator, Marijuana, Absinthe, and the Volkswagen Beetle. The length of the entries reflect the importance of the topic and the writing is straightforward, factual and accessible. There are short bibliographies for each entry and “see also” references are employed throughout. Each volume has an individual table of contents as well as a thematic index or topic finder for the whole set. The third volume also has a collection of 24 relevant documents, a cumulative bibliography, a filmography and a useful general index.

American Countercultures: an Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History offers readers a unique reference that pulls together disparate elements of our historic nonconformity. By doing so it helps provide clarity and definition to how deeply countercultures are woven into the American fabric. In addition, it is one of those references that, while being useful and fact-filled, is also fascinating to read and fun to browse. While most of the contributors are academics, this reference is well suited to general audiences and public libraries will want to consider it along with undergraduate libraries. This encyclopedia is a strong compliment to another M.E. Sharpe reference entitled the Encyclopedia of American Social Movements (2003, 978-0765680457, new copies available from Amazon starting at $412).

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As a final note of gratitude to my long-term friend, Jim, who found the words that I needed to round out this presentation. — DJ