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sotto voce - Seeing Beyond Problems

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The July 31st edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education includes an interesting article about the rising, and complex, problem of non-university members invading libraries to gain access to the Internet. As those of you who are already dealing with this in your libraries know, this problem exists in a number of layers: the number of outsiders using library computers is keeping students and faculty from having access for “legitimate” use related to their research and studies. (Will we someday watch a movie about how the cure for a particularly nasty disease was missed because the potential discoverer could not access a library computer to complete his/her research?)

Some users, mainly young males, are viewing, and sometimes saving as wallpaper, pornographic images. (And we’re not talking about reproductions of the Birth of Venus either.) If you think that we can all agree that this type of access is probably not something that most universities will find appropriate, the article points out that some librarians have been accused of exercising unacceptable censorship for chastising boys, some as young as nine years old, for viewing adult sites on library computers. There is mounting concern that libraries will be held liable for corrupting these young boys when their particular use of library computers is discovered by parents. From a public relations standpoint, it seems that we may need to do more to make it clear that these computers are for academic use only.

One interesting case in point was described in the Back Talk column from Against the Grain, in June, 1998 (vol. 10, no. 3, p.94). In that column, Stewart Lillard, of the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, compared a list of Yankee Book Peddler’s best-selling Physics titles to his collection, and found that his library already owned thirty of the fifty best sellers. In an editorial note at the end of the article, Katina Strauch describes the reaction of her Physics liaison at the College of Charleston, who saw the list and said, “Order whatever we don’t have!” Katina asks: Are bestseller lists important selection tools? Librarians would probably agree that, in many ways, they are. Are approval plans best seller lists? Not at all — though vendors may wish, from time to time, that they were.

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Academic Book Trends
from page 73

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Oregon Trails
from page 74

A New Introduction to Bibliography. Philip Gaskell's A New Introduction to Bibliography was not in the box and is not on my shelves, nor is it in the box. If you are wondering about books by Fredson Bowers, I never owned any and probably never will. There might have been a time, but now he is just too clinical. I do wonder, however, what he would make of all this electronic stuff.

For some reason, most of the books in this box have some personal association beyond just being a favorite book, although one of my favorites, From Here to Eternity, happened to be in the box, too. But I am talking about something like my copy of R.L. Stevenson's Silverado Squatters, printed by the Grace Hoper Press and for sale at the Silverado Museum in St. Helena, California (Napa Valley). My copy was given to me, along with a tour of the museum, by a library school classmate, Steven Corey, who along with Norman H. Strouse, the museum’s benefactor, and Ellen Shaffer, long-time curator of the museum, put the collection together. Sadly, none of the three are with us any longer, and Steve passed on way too soon but not before showing a discriminating taste in rare books and fine printing. His collection was offered for sale in a special catalog issued by the Brick Row Book Shop but after Franklin Gilliam had sold the shop and moved away.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>