An Alphabetical Fable
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"Open Access," lectured Book, "just means the universities or whoever hatched the articles pays the publication costs up front, instead of laundering the money through publishers and the campus library. Much more efficient."

"Isn't that vanity publishing?"

"Not if you take Peer Q. Review along."

"I don't remember Peer having a Q?"

"He added it — stands for Quantum Dot."

Chapter Eight: Social Networking
[to get your Tags into the Ubiquitous Zoosphere where they will be Found,
Even in a Quantum Dot]

"Peer is into Social Networking — hangs out on MySpace and Second Life," Book went on. "He heard Quantum Dots would be the Next Big Thing, so he added the Q. Thought he might attract more Tags that way."

"What?" enquired Article. "Are Quantum Dots? Tags?"

"Tags to float in the tag clouds. I’ll explain about the QDs later, but there is this new thing called ‘tagging’."

"Tagging isn’t new — we’ve had them since kindergarten yours come from the Library of Congress and live in big red books — and mine are in the Indexes — I suppose they’re in the computer now?"

"Yes, but these new tags aren’t decided between you and the librarians. Anybody can tag you with any word they want — and everybody else can see them and find you too — if they use the same words."

"Isn’t that dangerous? What if they don’t like me? Won’t everyone know it?"

"Yes."

"I see," said a resigned Article. "So what happens next?"

"Everything will get smaller and faster and smaller and faster — and the Tail will get longer and longer and thinner and thinner till you can hardly see it, but it will float like a balloon up into the Zoosphere. (excuse me, but you need to go to the end of the line.) Eventually, the whole long tail with all of us hanging on by our metadata will get so small it can curl up and fit itself into a Quantum Dot."

"With the brontosaurus? Or without?"

"I’m not sure about the brontosaurus, but the tail definitely fits. And you can put the whole thing on a Quantum Dot printed on the inside of a paperback or on a business card or wherever. Information will be Ubiquitous — it’s called Ambient Findability — try googling that — you might even find it in the library catalog."

What do we do with V?

This is a VERY silly story. That’s because librarians have no training in alphabetical fables and they are having a hard time adapting to this new world and just walking around mumbling over and over ‘People don’t like to read books on a screen.’

Chapter Nine: The Final Word

"It's your Words that make you — they’re the only thing that counts — if more people read you, why do you care whether it’s Times Roman 14 on vellum or stored in a Quantum Dot?"

"Words are the end of the story. The rest is just footnotes."

Footnotes:
X — is for a crossroads. Perhaps books and articles are at a crossroads — where they may go in new directions?
Y — If you have to ask what Y stands for, you are out of it to be reading this fable. (Y stands for YouTube.)
Z — Though not quite the problem Q presents for alphabetical tales, Z is nonetheless best relegated to a footnote. Only somehow it snuck in above out of order.

Colleagues have enquired as to why I wrote this story. I wrote it because my children had lovely little alphabetical tales called Ant and Bee when they were little. And because I have a collection of alphabet books. Now that I am fully cognizant of just how many letters there are in the alphabet, I will not be writing another.

The Library Marketplace

Column Editor: John D. Riley (National Sales Director for Eastern Book Company, author of “Else Fine: Little Tales of Horror from Libraries and Bookshops” and “The Parrot’s Tale and Other Stories” and co-owner of Gabriel Books) <jdriley@comcast.net>

Now Starring on Center Stage in the Library: The Book!!

At first glance there is a book renaissance going on. More books than ever are getting published and sold, self publishing has surpassed commercial publishing output, audio books are setting new sales records, print on demand (POD) is opening up new markets for obscure titles, out of print sites have given us access to just about any o.p. book we might want, live readings are bringing new life to poetry, book arts are hot (both artists’ books and binding crafts). So why the malaise in the book world?

I first noticed the tide turning when sessions at the Charleston Conference started addressing topics such as, “Wither the Book?” and “...Books (Remember Them?)” Books themselves were no longer the focus of discussion, replaced instead by licensing issues and other electronic product quandaries. In the face of an electronic information juggernaut Jack Walsdorf, Richard Abel and Matthew J. Brucoli continue to keep books and their value foremost in their presentations. Larry Portzline and his “Bookstore Tourism,” Nicholas Bashabes, Katina Strauch, and the indomitable Nancy Pearl are also great promoters of the book. Yet the actual topic of books in the academic library no longer holds center stage, perhaps rightfully so. There has been a sea of change in research tools in academic libraries with electronic products swiftly replacing books as the main source of current information. Book budgets at university libraries have been turned upside down with electronic products replacing books and print journals as the preferred source of information. Where books once made up 60% of the library budget, they are now closer to 30% and tumbling.

In this new environment we find the scholarly monograph on life support and university presses looking for ways to stay relevant. Print on demand may breathe new life into scholarly backlists, but sales still hover in the hundreds for new titles. Paperback editions once held the promise of getting those titles into Borders and Barnes & Noble, but that was a mirage, as those two dominant bookstores (the country’s biggest chain sellers) cut back on scholarly books. Now university presses are looking to eBooks for a revival under pressure from libraries that have run out of space and are doing more distance teaching.

As the owner (along with my wife Patty of Gabriel Books in Northampton, Massachusetts) the news of the fading place of books in the cultural landscape is a frequent topic of discussion with other booksellers. Bookstore closings are an almost weekly occurrence: Micaher’s, Wordsworth’s, Kepler’s, The Ruminator, Avenue Victor Hugo, Cody’s, etc, etc. Sometimes it seems that the more venerable a bookshop the more at risk it is of closing. Their deep back lists and the chances they take stocking quirky new books just don’t pay off anymore.

Online book sites are replacing brick and mortar bookstores while electronic products are replacing books in libraries. Bookstores and libraries appear to be in the same boat, rushing

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
down a wild river of electronic information, trying to stay afloat. It's enough to make a book lover throw out his reading glasses in despair. As a pre-obituary on the bookstore John Usher penned a screech denouncing the fate of books in the current market environment. He entitled it "Crepusculo." You can find it on the "Avenue Victor Hugo" Website which maintains its ghostly existence even after the passing of the bookshop.

Bookstores may soon morph into something more resembling gift shops, but libraries will always be at the center of any academic institution, or will they? With that question in mind I offer a few "Modest Proposals" for reviving the central place of books in academic libraries.

1) Make the “Learning Commons” into a book friendly space. Where now there are only rows of computers go ahead and ring the walls with topical, exciting books, all face out! Make the Learning Commons into a “book space.” Highlight the latest acquisitions.

2) Start thinking more about the “library as place.” Public libraries have been re-configured as community centers, while keeping books at their core. Bookstores discovered that letting people relax with a cup of coffee sold more books. Academic libraries have only recently jumped on this bandwagon and a cup of Joe is readily available in many now. In a further expansion of the “library as place” auditoriums and performance spaces are being incorporated into the newest library buildings. The College of New Jersey’s new library has an auditorium that is used for lectures and readings. They describe the new library as "an intellectual, cultural, and social center for The College." The Christopher Center Library at Valparaiso University even has a music performance space. Museums are sharing their works for exhibition in libraries. It’s starting to sound like the library at Alexandria is making a comeback.

3) Put books in the library café! Put current fiction and popular titles there. Let students get involved in the selection. Tisch Library at Tufts University reports high circulation rates for the books they place in their café. They use Barnes & Noble college stores’ best seller lists to find out what students are reading.

4) Select more books, depend less on approval plans. Selected books circulate more frequently because somebody actually wants them. Letting a vendor select books may fill a niche in the LC class, but who knows if the books are going to be read? With shrinking book budgets it only makes sense to choose exactly what you need and want. I like the dictum of the librarian who said that she orders anything that is requested. That way she knows that it will be read and used. With the increasing number of books published selecting books is getting harder, but it is the only way to ensure cogency, usage, and variety in collections. If librarians give up the selection of books what will be next, a library without librarians?

5) Buy more paperbacks. Not only can you buy three times more books than with hard covers, students prefer them. The paperbacks' lighter weight and colorful cover material attract readers. Black buckram is so 19th century! Many vendors offer bindings that preserve the cover material. Wert offers a "Picture Binding" that is light weight, acid free and preserves all cover material, including the spine. Librarians who use that particular binding agree that it increases circulation.

6) Put the work of preservation and binding out where people can see them. Think about putting a book binder or conservator right out on the main floor where students can see how books are made and repaired. Invite local book binders to demonstrate their craft. It is good advertising for them when graduate students want to get their theses bound. The binders might even find some new apprentices. There is a growing interest in the book arts, such as printing, binding, and paper making. What better place to enshrine it than in the library? University of Virginia has

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a rare books school and a letterpress, both in the library! The University of Utah’s Marriott Library has moved their university press into the library to create a synergy between what they collect and what they publish.

7) Set up a Hyde Corner for books. Put out books dealing with controversial subjects and create a space for discussion. Boxing gloves optional. (Check out the forthcoming article by Jack Montgomery from Western Kentucky University on how to deal with challenged materials.)

8) Follow what St. Mark’s Bookshop in New York, the Seminary Co-op Bookshop in Chicago and City Lights in San Francisco are buying. They consistently stock exciting academic and small press books AND they are still in business. Their selections could also liven up most libraries’ “Leisure Reading” collections. Libraries need to take up the slack that has been left by the closure of so many independent bookstores. Encourage small presses and exciting independent publishers.

9) Set up book clubs that can meet in the library. You provide the coffee.

10) Host more live poetry and author readings in the library.

11) Get the whole campus to read a book in common. This idea has been very popular in communities around the country. Fort Lewis College in Durango got their campus to read Folding Paper Cranes: An Atomic Memoir by Faculty Emeritus Leonard “Red” Bird. Check it out on their library Website. It’s the very model for a well-run common book read. My suggestion would be Google the Myth of Universal Knowledge: a European Perspective by Jean-Noel Jeanneney. Check out the “One Book” promotion by the Library of Congress, a source for current and past readings.

12) Start a collection of books about books. Keep them out front. Books such as Sixpence House by Paul Collins, A Pound of Paper by John Baxter and A Degree of Mastery by Annie Trennille Wilcox convey some of the excitement about books that students can identify with.

13) Create a permanent display about the history of printing and bookmaking. Put it where everyone can see it.


15) Buy more audio books. Not only do people like to listen to them in their cars, some English departments are teaching them as a separate art form. This could cross over with the drama department too.

16) Keep your book sale! And keep it in the library or at the entrance. Also keep a cart of books for sale near the circulation desk where you can sell books and make more money that should be dedicated to buying more books. Solicit more gifts. It builds a rapport with your community and the alums. Some library book sales net tens of thousands of dollars. Get a student group or Friends of the Library involved in managing your book sale. Local booksellers can advise you on pricing. Why sell books for a dollar when you can get so much more?

And now a few more random ramblings about books:

When a library buys a book they can keep it for as long as they want, loan it to whomever they want, with no need for licenses or renewals, and if kept properly, it will last forever.

If the book was invented now it would be considered a technological marvel. No back-lighting needed, no batteries either, rapid RAM, eminently portable.

Reading books online is to reading real books as smelling plastic flowers is to smelling fresh cut.

Digitized books are no longer books, just as digitized paintings are no longer paintings. Ceci n’est pas un livre?

The current plans for digitizing books envision books functioning as a vast database, as in Google Print. The book will be atomized into “information” and thus lose its coherence.

Reading was once equated with learning. We learned from reading thousands of books over the course of our educations and didn’t have to run to Google just to find out the lowest point in the continental U.S. or the highest.

Knowledge is not the same as information. Knowledge allows us to put information in perspective. Wisdom is up for grabs, but it most likely isn’t on the Web.

Having a favorite book is more important than having a favorite Website. (pace, Fork)

Think of books as a long term investment. As Matthew J. Bruccoli said, “A good collection of books will only grow more valuable over time and will become a magnet for research.” Think if you had collected books about Iraq and Afghanistan pre 2001. There would be nothing online to rival a solid collection of books covering the history, art, religion and politics of that region.

Invite professors to teach a class in the stacks where books relevant to their subject reside. Or have them teach a class in the special collections room and let students actually handle the books. Older books are better made than today’s product and can take gentle handling. If students don’t get to handle rare books how will they ever gain an appreciation for them?

Studies show the number of books that academic libraries buy in common is minimal.

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Rumors

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clip of innovation, our list bears at least a third, if not half, of the same names from one year to the next,” said EContent Editor Michelle Manafy. “To put this in a more positive light: Some of the truly great digital content industry players continue not only to survive, but to thrive... We carefully reconsidered last year’s

Some consortia report only an 8% crossover of duplicate purchases before entering into collective collection development agreements. Those duplicates are probably books that libraries want to have in their own collection. If libraries buy in their own interest they will be helping other libraries when it comes to ILL time.

Online reading comprehension is only 80% that of reading a book. Online reading is more like scanning or speed reading.

“Literacy experts and educators say they are stunned by the results of a recent adult literacy assessment, which shows that the reading proficiency of college graduates has declined in the past decade, with no obvious explanation. ‘It’s appalling — it’s really astounding,’ said Michael Gorman, president of the American Library Association. “Only 31 percent of college graduates can read a complex book and extrapolate from it. That’s not saying much for the remainder.” Could it be because they aren’t reading books?

Recently Ray Bradbury was congratulated on the continued relevance of his book “Fahrenheit 451.” Instead of accepting the kudos that were proffered Bradbury replied that his book was now irrelevant, “because no one cares about books anymore.” Is this to be our legacy, the firemen of 451?

Books are uncensored. Anybody can write a book and sometimes it seems as if everybody has!

Perhaps the focus is off. Maybe it’s not that books are in decline, but reading itself. In an era of email and blogs, reading and writing have become a kind of stripped down Morse code.

Maybe we’ve had a paradigm shift where reading and writing are now in the same category as classical music: much admired but kept alive by aficionados.

Perhaps the crisis is really about the death of reading. Without our attention books could slip away and libraries with them. Let us understand that the fate of books and libraries and thus librarians are all joined together.

Some will say that I am blowing my own horn as a book vendor, promoting books in my own interest. They are right. I am promoting my own interest, but as a reader and book lover, two things I was long before becoming a book vendor.