Oregon Trails-A Browser's Serendipity

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Psychology, the Handbook of the Psychology of Aging, and the Handbook of Clinical Child Psychology. 8-10

The social psychology handbook has evolved in a similar manner. First published in 1935, the Handbook of Social Psychology is now in its fifth edition. 11 Its two volumes provide comprehensive coverage of topics within the areas of social research methodology, social cognition, and individual and group behavior. High-quality subspecialty handbooks include the Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology, The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Psychology, and the Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology. 12-14

In addition to those works in child psychology and social psychology, high-quality stand-alone handbooks are available in most of the major psychological disciplines and subspecialties. Representative titles include the Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change, the Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics, The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity, Design and Analysis: A Researcher’s Handbook, and the iconic Stevens’ Handbook of Experimental Psychology. 11-14

To be included in the psychology section of RCL, a candidate handbook should meet several criteria. First, recognized subject-matter experts should have written all or most of the chapters. Second, the data or information contained in the chapters should have currency. Third, tables, figures, and a sophisticated indexing system should be included in order to facilitate the accessing of data and information. Fourth, the topics covered in the handbook should be representative and comprehensive.

One increasingly important criterion that few psychology handbooks meet is that of online accessibility. In contrast, online handbook materials are readily available in engineering (ASM Handbooks Online, ASTM Standards Digital Library), chemistry and physics (CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics), and biology (SpringerProtocols). Ever more, both researchers and students prefer to access information online, and electronic access has at least two advantages. First, it renders the content portable, thereby avoiding the need to consult and transport increasingly large and cumbersome tomes. Second, handbook revisions, when necessary, can be realized quickly and with minimal effort. The paucity of online handbooks in psychology is understandable if we compare published handbooks in psychology to those in other scientific disciplines. The most striking difference is that handbooks in psychology include proportionally fewer tables, figures, and equations to present data and findings. While this is less apparent in areas such as psychophysics, sensation, or perception, where data and findings are more firmly established, handbooks or chapters that cover the “softer” areas of personality, clinical, and some of the social psychology subspecialties, for example, contain a preponderance of text. Notwithstanding their scholarly excellence, is it appropriate to label these latter works “handbooks”? As users increasingly turn to mobile devices and publishers make electronic versions of handbooks more affordable and easier to use, perhaps handbooks will again become resources that can be conveniently accessed and “held in the hand.” Until then, academic libraries should ensure that the core psychology handbooks discussed here are either on the shelf in print or available online for researchers and students.

Endnotes


*Editor’s note: An asterisk (*) denotes a title selected for Resources for College Libraries.

Oregon Trails
A Browser’s Serendipity

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When I think about books, as I often do, my mind wanders to bookish memories and associations, an experience not unlike going through family photo albums and the ghosts that they invoke. One of my memory albums consists of places where I have bought books, most of which are bookstores, and as I write this, there is one bookstore, still fresh in my mind, that I want to tell you about.

It was not until the fall of 1961 when I was a freshman at Chapel Hill that I discovered a store that sold nothing but books. In other words, a bookstore. It was the Intimate Bookshop on Franklin Avenue, a glorious place to me but destined for an ignominious fate that it did not deserve. What a revelation to an Army brat who, up until then, had bought books in the Post Exchange or the book stall outside the Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof, a place that hawked Pan and Tauchnitz editions of British and American authors.

In my defense, I had never lived in a city large enough to have a real bookstore. Back then, the 1940s and 1950s, paperbacks (and not just pulp fiction) were sold off of racks in drug stores, a form of distribution that continued well into the 1960s. The PX on the military base in Karlsruhe, Germany, where I attended my last two years of high school, had racks of paperbacks that included my favorite publisher continued on page 89

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series, the Signet Classics. When I joined the Army in 1966, the two books that I had with me were Signet Classics, The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories and Jane Eyre. When in a second-hand shop now, I still gravitate to the Signet books when I am looking for good reading copies. Each Signet gem also contains an afterword (a good source of education for college dropouts) and a selected bibliography. As I write this, I have next to me my Signet copy of James T. Farrell’s Studs Lonigan. The heft and feel of that 840 page book urges me to stop what I am doing and read it.

Where do I find my Signet editions? Second-hand bookshops, of course. I am fortunate in that I have several such shops in my hometown and several more within easy or reasonable driving distance. If you, the reader, have a second-hand shop in your locale, I urge you to join me in my campaign, “Support your local book store.” Had that support been forthcoming several decades ago, the Intimate Bookshop might still exist, might still excite impressionable freshmen who have never seen a second-hand shop before, and there are some, just as there are always a few people, when I fly, who have never been on an airplane before. Every experience must have a first time.

You can go online to buy a book when you know what you want. If you visit a Barnes & Noble often enough, you know more or less what you will find there. But when you step inside a general second-hand or antiquarian bookshop, you have entered the land of the unknown book, the book that you have never heard of but that is waiting for you nonetheless. You are entering the land of Serendipity, the richest, wisest, most literate of all places on the earth. Ranganathan’s second and third laws apply most forcefully in this environment:

1. Every book its reader.
2. Every reader his or her book;

If you look long enough, you will find at least one book that satisfies both the laws, and you will then, upon purchase of said book, satisfy my unwritten (until now) law, “Never leave a second-hand bookshop without buying at least one book.”

In the August 12, 2012 issue of The New York Times, there was a story by John Williams called “Wanted, Dead or Alive: Used Books.” The play on words, of course, relates to Larry McMurtry’s westerns (think Lonesome Dove), but the story was all about McMurtry’s second-hand bookstore, four buildings in Archer City, Texas (think Last Picture Show). To get a better feeling for McMurtry’s true calling, read his Books: A Memoir in which he tells all (about books) and includes a list of book stores that he has bought in bulk from over the years.

The story in the NY Times is about McMurtry’s desire to reduce the four buildings to one and his book stock from 450,000 to 150,000, still a lot of books, not too many, mind you, but a lot. The auction attracted about 150 collectors and book sellers, among them, some young people wanting to make a cultural statement and contribute to their communities by opening second-hand bookshops. This leads me to another bookshop, among too few in this country, that makes me feel good about the future of books and those whose very sustenance comes from books — booksellers, collectors, scholars, and readers.

I have been to Booked Up in Archer City and to Powell’s in Portland and have two wonderful second-hand booksellers, in three stores, here in Eugene along with some smaller stores, including thrift stores, with a decent selection of titles. None of these stores have given me the pleasure that Browsers’ Books gave me before I even walked through its door, and mind you, I never step foot in any bookstore without feeling like a kid entering a candy store with a pocketful of money and a sweet tooth to match. The store is in Albany, Oregon, an agricultural and manufacturing city with a population about 50,000.

There, on a main thoroughfare of nonscript stores and businesses, sits Browsers’ Books, a treasure trove of second-hand books that defies description, but I will try anyway. Even as I approached the entrance to the store I could sense books beyond counting, perhaps because I could see so many through the windows crowding the walls as if ready to burst out. At first glance, the jumble of books on shelves too numerous to count seems random,
totally unorganized. But this gallimaufry is organized along broad subject areas and alphabetically by author within those classifications. They are kept in good order by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff who were busy shelving and re-shelving during my visit. A perplexed look as I tried to think of an author’s name brought an immediate concern, “Can I help you find something?” And they could and did without hesitation. There is no better way to learn a collection of books than by shelving them. My impression is that the staff loves working with those books. When I finally brought my discoveries to the register, the woman helping me, noting a particular selection, said, “Oh, I’m glad someone is finally buying this.” The book is a worn paperback titled World War II, by Roger W. Shugg and H.A. DeWeerd and published by The Infantry Journal in 1946. The book looks well-traveled but it has a good home now and some contemporaries to share its shelf with.

The owner of Browsers’ Books is Scott Givens, a young family man who also owns a store in Corvallis, home to Oregon State University. I salute Mr. Givens for his choice of profession, a low-margin business that depends on quantity sales and quality of stock and service. Some second-hand booksellers have grown rich through the book business. They are usually antiquarians who cater to a clientele of collectors that know what they want and will pay handsomely for the right item. But most second-hand booksellers are satisfied to make a good living, a decent enough income to pay the rent, feed, clothe, and shelter the family, and set aside something for a rainy day and not just those plying their trade in Oregon.

Scott Givens deserves the sobriquet Booksman, for it is clear, when conversing with him and exploring his store in Albany, that he has that love of books that is sometimes described as a mania, a madness, even a disease. It takes one to know one and the one who introduced me to Browsers’ Books was another Booksman and collector nonpareil, Jack Walsdorf. There seem to be bookshop owners, past or present, that Jack has not visited, including McMurtry’s original Booked Up in the Georgetown area of our nation’s capital. When Jack sang praises for Browsers’, I knew that it had to be a special place, and I was not disappointed, rather, I was exalted. It was love at first sight.

Here is a place that is reasonably organized but only to a point. Givens told me how he liked to mix classic literature with modern writing so that the browser could see the old and the new together and have more choices than had they been totally separated.

“Browsing and choices” is the very definition of a good bookshop, not unlike a good public or academic library. Browsing and choice as a philosophy are the mark of a good bookseller, the very character of the bookseller as artist, a retailer with a spiritual affinity with his ware, the codex, that most perfect technology for preserving and sharing the wisdom and knowledge and whimsy and adventure and all else of all ages.

A good bookseller, one that deserves the premier rating, must price the books fairly and fairly compensate those who sell stock to the bookseller. Scott Givens rates Premier on both counts. What impressed me most about what he bought from me was what he selected and what he left in the box. He left books that he either had enough of or knew he couldn’t sell. The ones he bought were books he knew he could sell and esoteric books that he was drawn to as a booksman, ones that he hoped he could sell. At the very least, some of his customers would find them interesting enough, too, and an interesting book will sell. But what impressed me most about Scott Givens was his integrity. A day after my visit to Browsers’ Books, I received a note in the mail along with a business card and a check that Scott included because, upon reflection, he felt that he had not paid a fair price for the items he bought from me. Diogenes would not need his lamp in Browsers’.

Any business has its risks, but Scott Givens exhibits a certain courage and optimism to have put his fortune and his future into the second-hand book business, but he is surviving and, I hope, prospering in an unlikely sort of town during a time when eBooks that you can’t really own, share, or re-sell are getting so much undeserved attention. So if you ever find yourself in Oregon on Interstate Highway 5, take exit 233 and follow along Pacific Avenue in Albany. Stop at the corner of Pine Street, park your vehicle, and plan to spend some time and money on bibliotherapy. Buy at least one book and drive away feeling better than you did when you drove in.

Random Ramblings — The Difference between a Great and a Good Research Library: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

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I’ve pondered many years about what makes the difference between a great and a good research library. I finally hit upon an operational definition that makes sense to me, at least for the past. I’ll start with an example. I wrote my dissertation at Yale University with access to one of the greatest research libraries in my field, French Literature. After less than a week spent in looking for a topic, I chose a niche subject, Dialogues of the Dead. This minor genre, popular from around 1680-1720 in several European literatures, was based upon one classical text written by the Greek author Lucian. I immediately started looking for the key documents to begin my research. I had no worries about the major authors, but I needed the only critical work on the genre, privately published in Paris, and a major text by Jungerman, a distinctly minor author. I found both in the stacks ready to be checked out. Along the way, I consulted the best work on Lucian, published in French in 1882, and a scholarly article published in Germany while the bombs rained down during World War II. The only document missing from Yale was a dissertation edition of Fontenelle’s Dialogues des morts, which I was able to borrow on extended interlibrary loan. I chose my subject and then found virtually everything that I needed in one great library.

The process would have been much different in a good library such as the University of Utah or Wayne State University. I know these collections well from my experiences as French selector. I would have needed to select my topic carefully if I wished to depend mostly on my institution’s library resources. While interlibrary loan would be an option, I would need to find some way to make print or, today, digital copies of any missing key texts that I would need to consult frequently. Visiting other libraries on research trips would pose the same issues for such documents. One last option would be for me to go live somewhere near a great library to make use of its resources. I have always suspected that many Wayne State faculty and students live in Ann Arbor because they have reciprocal access to the University of Michigan collections in another great library. As a doctoral student with a good library, I would have had to choose my subject carefully or find alternate ways to access key research materials.

What I described above for the past was also true for faculty research in many disciplines. In the same way as many STM (science/technology/medicine) researchers needed lab facilities, many Humanities and social Science researchers needed access to key monographic, research materials. As long as serials were available only in print, the same was true for STM. I remember a case study for my management class continued on page 91