

CROSSFIRE

JUL 1989

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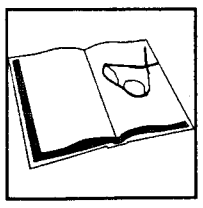
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HOW MANY BOOKS IS ENOUGH? By Ralph W. Hansen

In the New York Times Book Review for March 26, 1989, Arthur Krystal has written a provocative article titled "On Writing: Let There Be Less." His theme is that we have lessened the value of the written word by the proliferation of books and periodicals to the extent that it is probably impossible for the scholar to keep up with his/her field and the average person is probably even more confused as to what to read, if they even read. Since Krystal's polemic is erudite as well as informative, extensive excerpts are presented for your edification.

Krystal writes that "if you were to read 135 books a day, every day, for a year, you wouldn't finish all the books published annually in the United States...[now] you'll appreciate the amount of lucubration that finds its way into print." Only a few of these books will turn a profit according to the author. "The rest, as Calvin Trillin put it, have 'a shelf life somewhere between butter and yogurt.'" Krystal observes "as one leafs through these miscellaneous books, a surprising fact emerges; most are competently written. The other thing one



soon notices is that very few arise above mere competence....good books abound, pretty good books are routine, great books are not only scarce, they don't seem to be expected anymore. Is it possible that the absence of greatness is a function of books' multiplicity? I, for one, believe that it is. And so a modest proposal: let's cut back on this furious literary activity and keep the numbers to a reasonable limit."

While the author's recommendation is serious, he is not sanguine that anything will come of it. As a matter of fact he goes to great lengths to point out that the quality of the written work has distressed learned folk throughout the ages. The modern problem came with the introduction of moveable type in Europe in 1436. "In the 16th Century alone," writes Krystal, "100,000 different books were printed" and with the introduction of the typesetting machine "books were coming in and going out of print with such regularity that it became impossible to keep track of them." But quality Krystal notes "is a condition of quantity. For this reason alone, one might worry that too much gets written and too much is written about what gets written. Who reads - who could read - all this stuff? A proper

response might be: what do you care? If writers want to write and publishers publish what business is it of yours?" Krystal's answer is that "For someone who reads as a matter of course, for whom books...are the truest expression of the human condition, there is a fundamental need to scan, savor, and study words on a printed page. But more and more the printed page is treated like a commodity, something to be bought, used, and discarded, something whose identity is bound up with the publishing industry's advertising campaign." Washington Irving's response to the proliferation of the printed word was to prophecy "before long, a man of erudition will be little better than a ere walking catalog."

Another problem raised by the author is how one could identify a good book from the rest. He states "that there seems to be nothing special about books: certainly we do not await books with the same eagerness as the reading public of the 19th Century." Of course not every book has to be a masterpiece. "We read," says Krystal "for a variety of reasons - pleasure, curiosity or simply to pass the time."

Montaigne, Horace, and others suggested ways to stem the flow of the written word, with no success. Krystal has no allusions that his plea for a limitation to the paper flow will be given a hearing. He doubts that many readers share his feelings. And writers for all the propaganda that we read about how poorly the profession (or art) is paid continue to reach for a star. Krystal does not feel sorry for writers but rather their labors; "the accumulated pages that await untouched, unread, unknown in libraries and secondhand bookstores around the world. Every year, according to Books in Print, another 70,000 titles go out of print; and among them, undoubtedly, are buried

worthwhile books. Does anyone care about this except St. Jerome, the patron saint of libraries? Or has he too finally broken down and bought himself a VCR?"

"It's hopeless, I know," writes the author, "but perhaps writers might think twice and ask themselves: do I *have* to write this book? Will the world be better for what I write? Wouldn't everyone, including me, be happier if I were in another line of work? Failing that, perhaps they'll take pity on us. We have enough to read for a while."

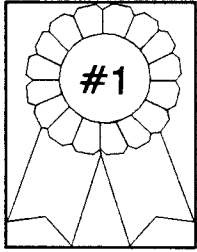
MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS REACH HIGH POINT

From an anonymous source, on the Random House letterhead, we received the following: "Random House has entered into an agreement with the Vatican to acquire the Catholic Church. Founded by 12 poor Galileans in the early years of the millennium, the Church has grown into a multinational organization with more than 100 million members worldwide, an organization rivaled only by American Express/Shearson-Lehman in size. With its vast real estate holdings and its virtual monopoly in Afterlife Insurance, it has made itself a perennial presence in the list of Fortune 500 conglomerates. It has achieved great success as a publisher. It has launched the careers of many major authors, and its backlist includes works by Hans Küng, Thomas Aquinas, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. 'We feel this is a very good pairing,' a spokesman for Random House stated. 'Over its six decades, Random House has published many important works: Joyce's Ulysses as well as the works of Dr. Seuss and William Faulkner. We don't expect to tamper with the Church's management team,' the spokesman continued. 'The Church will operate as an independent division within Random House, and the Pope will report directly to Si Newhouse.'"

From Publishers Weekly 12/2/88 pg 12

OUTSTANDING CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE HONORED

By Beverly Miller

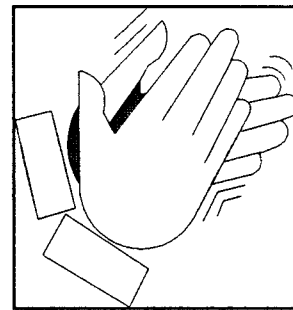


Gwen Pittam was one of two staff members honored by the BSU Association of Classified Employees (ACE) at their annual general meeting and luncheon on May 2 as an Outstanding Classified Employee for 1989. After the awards, ACE President Sarah Saras observed that they emphasize "the hard work and dedication of the classified employees under oftentimes not so ideal conditions be it work space, insufficient staff, and/or demands by several supervisors."

This certainly describes Gwen's efforts during the past year. After relocating Interlibrary Loan to the second floor storage area last spring, and celebrating with receipt of a new fax machine and attendant obligations, Gwen saw ILL requests soar in the first six months of the '89 fiscal year: faculty requests increased 38.2% while student requests jumped 75.3%. Beginning in early autumn, the student assistants available to process these requests diminished, from three, to two, to one; with no relief available from Student Financial Aid. A temporary half-time Records Clerk position was created to shore up operations, but the first two people hired for the job quit after two weeks each, leaving us shorter-staffed than before. To top it all off, Reference was missing a librarian, which required the remaining staff, including Gwen, to work extra shifts in order to cover the desk.

By all reasonable expectations, the Library should have suffered a serious service crisis in ILL this past year but thanks to Gwen's heroic efforts, we did not. She patched together what staff she

could beg, borrow, or steal; improvised, reorganized, expedited; worked overtime, took work home, and worked through lunches and breaks; and somehow, got us through the fall semester with our reputation intact. All those BSU faculty and students who depend on ILL to obtain the materials necessary for their research -- especially those who turn in erroneous and incomplete citations, the ones who allow a week to get something from the East Coast; and those who call us six months after the fact to find out the name of that orange book they borrowed back in July because the bibliography is due at the publishers tomorrow morning -- should have been out of luck. However, Gwen's dedication, perseverance, and commitment in a time of severe institutional stress, saved the day, and we are very, very grateful.



Congratulations Gwen!

"This is the final test of a gentleman: his respect for those who can be of no possible service to him." - William Lyon Phelps

This Spring the Special Collections Department has acquired two good sized manuscript collections: the script collection of screenwriter Barry Shipman and the papers of Idaho author Gerald Grimmett. Barry Shipman is the son of Idaho silent film maker Nell Shipman. His credits include episodes of the serials Lone Ranger, Flash Gordon, and Durango Kid, and many television Westerns, including Death Valley Days. When processed, the collection (which includes scenarios, scripts, and shooting scripts) will be of interest to communications and film students. A film historian working on a history of Republic Pictures has already made use of the collection. Gerald Grimmett, a resident of Idaho City, has published poems and magazine articles. His papers will form part of the Idaho Writers Archive.

Both the BLM and the Forest Service have used the department's photo collection during the past month. Two photos from the Robert Limbert collection appear in the BLM's new brochure on the Wees Bar petroglyphs; and the Payette National Forest will use several photos from the Frank Church collection in a forthcoming exhibit on the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. A professor of ecology from California ordered photocopies of Robert Limbert's Bruneau River photos to document the habitat of Idaho's endangered endemic hydrobiid snail.

Researchers for the Television History of Idaho, a series to be produced by Idaho Public Television during the Centennial year, have utilized both the manuscript and photo resources of Special Collections. Mary Carter recently completed organizing the film archives of Channel 27 (the University television station), and Alan Virta attended a

seminar on records management sponsored by the Boise Chapter of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators.

HAPPENINGS IN THE LIBRARY

There are three new faces in the Library. Jo Smith is a welcomed addition to Serials as are Julia Franklin and Susan Watkins to Circulation.

Jo is an Idaho native who is married and has two children: Sharren, 15 and Christa, 13. She likes the outdoors, does some gardening and is trying to do some mountain biking.

Julia is "a Jewish, Ovo-lacto vegetarian, liberal Democrat, attending Boise State University with a double major in Theater Arts and General Business." She lives at home with her parents, a cockatiel named Bogart, a gerbil named Ginger and an aquarium of assorted fish. Her current project is building a waterfall for her mother in the back yard (and if anyone has rocks they are dying to get rid of she will gladly take them off of your hands). She has lived in the Boise area most of her life. She attended BSU for five years before moving to Portland for three years and returning to Boise to attend BSU last July.

For the most part, Susan grew up "leaning against the wind in Idaho Falls." She attended BSU for 3 years and then spent 6 fun-filled years in Pocatello, first as a nurse, then as a public utility employee. In 1983, she moved back to Boise and has since acquired a family: her husband Dan and her three year old son, Tanner.

SUMMER FUN IN THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

By Adrien Taylor

The reference staff has been busily engaged in a weeding project since the latter part of finals week. The collection was divided into areas as closely related to the subject assignments of the librarians as possible. Each librarian examined the titles on the shelves and determined whether to keep the book in reference, relocate the book to the circulating stacks as a non-circulating item, relocate the book to the stacks as a circulating item, or withdraw the book from the Library's collection. On May 22 the last book truck was filled and awaiting record processing. A total of 11 book trucks (5 three-tiered and 6 two-tiered trucks) have been pulled.

The second phase is for Katherine Ultican, who has charge of the KWIC catalog of the reference collection, to pull the KWIC cards for the title. Next the trucks pass along to Liz Cardinale to make sure that her retention records match the new or changed decision regarding any serial titles involved and then they pass along to Susan Henggeler of the Catalog Department. Poor Susan, as we all think of her these days, must cope with the official changes of the records so that the WLN (and thus the COM) records reflect what is the fact. After Susan has worked her magic on the records the books themselves must be processed. Then, naturally they end up in Circulation where they'll have to be fitted into the upstairs stacks.

This project is a perfect example of how something done in one area impacts all other areas and why the timing of such a project is so important -- if Department A has time now, does Department B; and what about the patron demands on Department C and when does the COM run get made, anyway?!

Susan is the official statistics keeper

but Janet Strong's general guideline is that a two-tiered book truck holds 100 books and the three tiered trucks hold about 150. Thus we're dealing with approximately 1,350 books in the project (fewer titles, since several of these are multi-volumed sets), a significant impact on every area.

The space created by such a project is never where one wants it to be. So the final phase for the Reference Department is to shift the books remaining so that space gained is where space is needed. All of this is naturally very labor intensive in nature and a wonderful example of "what do you do in the Library when there aren't any students for you to help?".

All of the above is happening at the same time we've received a new set of the Encyclopedia Britannica and the new edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. The new edition of the O.E.D. will sit next to the better copy of the previous edition, near the reference desk. The other copy of the previous edition will go to mending for general t.l.c. then to the circulating stacks as a non-circulating item.

Larry Kincaid has prepared a comparison of the previous and present version of the Encyclopedia Britannica; it makes for some interesting reading. A copy is attached.

CROSSFIRE is published by the Boise State University Library. Contributors to this issue are Julia Franklin, Ralph Hansen, Larry Kincaid, Beverly Miller, Jo Smith, Julie Stubbers, Adrien Taylor, Alan Virta, and Susan Watkins. Comments should be sent to Julie Stubbers, editor.

The editor would like to thank everyone that contributes to the CROSSFIRE, especially those that contribute to every issue.

To: Reference Staff and others.
From: Larry Kincaid.
Re: The newly revised 15th edition of Encyclopedia Britannica.

Recently the library replaced an early version of the 15th edition of Britannica with a substantially revised 1988 version.

If you use Britannica occasionally, or direct students to it, the following brief comparison of the old and new versions of the 15th edition may be helpful.

* * *

When the editors of the 15th edition first presented the significantly restructured Britannica, they boasted of its novel design. This design served two distinct purposes.

First, it provided quick, alphabetical access to the many thousands of subjects.

Second, and more importantly, it offered more serious students a way to use the set to acquire a truly comprehensive and systematic understanding of the major "departments of knowledge or fields of learning".

In fact, the 15th edition was two essentially distinct, but inter-related, sets of encyclopedias. One set, the MICROPEDIA, consisted of 10 Roman numbered volumes that provided brief, "ready reference" information on tens of thousands of subjects arranged in alphabetical order.

A second set, the MACROPEDIA, consisted of 19 Arabic numbered volumes that provided, "knowledge in depth" on just over 4,000 topics, also arranged alphabetically. If, after reading the brief MICROPEDIA article, students wanted still more information on that topic, references at the end of the article guided them to the appropriate volume and pages of the MACROPEDIA. Thus the MICROPEDIA served as a (cumbersome) index to the MACROPEDIA.

Another, very differently organized index to the MACROPEDIA also was provided -- a single, separate volume called the PROPEIDIA. This volume contained a 750 pp., 10-part outline of human knowledge. All of the outline entries were keyed to volume and page numbers in the MACROPEDIA. Thus, the outline became a comprehensive, topical study guide to all of the information contained in the MACROPEDIA.

Evidently this structure has been proved to be very unpopular with Britannica users. It has been much modified. The principal changes are these:

I. The INDEX.

1. A separate, 2 vol., alphabetical INDEX has been added, to serve as a guide to both the MICROPEDIA and the MACROPEDIA.

Instructions to consult this INDEX first are now scattered throughout the MICROPEDIA, which now includes almost no references to the MACROPEDIA.

II. The MICROPEDIA

1. ...has increased from 10 vols to 12, and now contains about 3/4 of the shorter articles originally published in the MACROPEDIA.
2. ...contains few references to the Macropedia, many to other related articles in MICROPEDIA.
3. ...vol. numbers are no longer distinguished from those of the MACROPEDIA. The two sets together are now numbered consecutively from 1 to 29.

III. The MACROPEDIA

1. ...has been reduced from 19 vols. to 17.
2. ...has been thinned from 4,200 to 680 articles, which have been expanded and supplied with up-dated bibliographies.

IV. The PROPEDIA

1. ..."Outline of Knowledge" has been shortened from 780 pp. to 520, and made easier to read and follow.
2. ...references to the MACROPEDIA keyed to each individual outline entry have been deleted.
3. ...references to relevant articles in both the MACROPEDIA and MICROPEDIA now are grouped at the end of each of the nearly 1000 sections of the outline.

* * *

Though the two sets are now consecutively numbered, they actually are less integrated than previously. The existence of two separately alphabetized sets seems less justified. The changes in the PROPEDIA make systematic study much more difficult, and the long lists of articles at the end of each outline section make such study with this set much less appealing.

In fact, unless you just love to read outlines, you have very little reason ever to look at the PROPEDIA outline.

Finally, many of the articles included in the MACROPEDIA seem to have been chosen quite arbitrarily. At this point, nothing seems logically to preclude the complete integration of the two sets. Certainly this step would make the entire set easier to use.

In sum, it seems to me that as a result of its recent revisions, the editors of Britannica has sacrificed the benefits the new edition was designed to offer, without satisfying the complaints that apparently prompted these changes.