



2-2000

February 2000: Libraries as Camelot

Dacus Library

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/deanscorner>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dacus Library, "February 2000: Libraries as Camelot" (2000). *The Deans Corner*. 16.
<https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/deanscorner/16>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Dacus Library Publications at Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Deans Corner by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact bramed@winthrop.edu.

the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / FEBRUARY 2000/ NUMBER 12

Libraries as Camelot

***It seems to me
that in an age
that threatens
to undo all of
us with its bits
and bytes, we
do well to ponder
the more
important,
permanent
things***

Be near me
when my light is
low,
When the
blood creeps, and
the nerves
prick
And tingle; and
the heart is sick,
And all the
wheels of being
slow.

Be near me
when the sensu-
ous frame
Is rack'ed with
pangs that con-
quer trust;
And Time, a
maniac scattering
dust,
And Life, a
Fury slinging
flame.

Be near me
when my faith is
dry,
And men the
flies of latter
spring,
That lay their
eggs, and sting
and sing
And weave
their petty cells
and die.

Be near me
when I fade away,
To point the
term of human
strife,
And on that low
dark verge of life
The twilight of
eternal day.

These familiar lines
are from Alfred Lord
Tennyson's *In Memo-
riam*, a poem he wrote
in honor of his dear
friend Arthur Henry
Hallam's untimely and
premature death. Note
how Tennyson talks
about time, about life.
The image is nothing
if not memorable:
Time, a maniac scat-
tering dust/ Life a fury
slinging flame. If
you're over forty, you
understand this in a
way you may not have
when you read it at
twenty. And if you're
at forty-plus, you may
find something in
these lines that makes
summer in your veins.

I begin the *Corner*
in this manner because
I want to take just a
few moments to
remind us what makes
libraries so important,
why we need them,
why we *must* have
them (and why, of
course, your support
of Dacus is so criti-
cal).

It seems to me that
in an age that threat-
ens to undo all of us
with its bits and bytes,
we do well to ponder
the more important,
permanent things: the
song of poetry, the
majesty of science, the
befuddlement of
astronomy, the mir-
acle of biology, and so
on. As information

explodes everywhere
around us, and each of
us feels poignantly the
press and stress of
keeping up with it all,
we'd best remind each
other of the more
permanent wisdom
when we have the
chance.

One of my favorite
writers is G. K. Ches-
terton. Not only is he
wildly funny, but also
a devastating and
brilliant wit. During
one of his more
solemn moments, G.
K. was asked what
great books he would
want with him were
he to be stranded on a
deserted isle in the
Pacific. Other eni-
mentos had been
previously consulted,
so Dostoevsky's
*Crime and Punish-
ment* had been taken;
Flaubert's *Madam
Bovary*, already
eloquently commented
upon. Shakespeare, of
course, had heretofore
been noted. George
Bernard Shaw, G. K.'s
life-long debate
adversary, claimed he
wanted his own works
on that remote isle
(natch!). Picture the
scene: the enormous
G. K.- he topped the
scales at over 350
pounds before his
death and looked, as
he always did, like he
had been dressed on
the fly - paused,

scratched his chin, and said, “*Ship-Building Made Easy.*”

G. K. was nothing if not eloquent. He pegged for me what it is about libraries that attracted me to their service 20 years ago. No doubt it’s something like this which attracts you to them. When asked why he wrote so much (the new edition of G. K.’s complete works now exceeds thirty, 300+ page volumes) Chesterton said, “To aid the divine Gift of Language and Letters to outlive us all.” I do like that. One could devote a life’s work to it, eh? It is, if you’ll pardon the self-serving sound of it, a noble and a high calling.

Go back and re-read those lines from Tennyson. Or, if he is not to your liking, then another poet. Where else but in a library are you able to converse with all the living and deceased geniuses since time began? Where else but in a

library can you grumble or laugh (silently, of course) with George Will, fall into (muffled) gales of laughter with Balzac, smile knowingly at the enormous characters in Flannery O’Connor’s novels (many, no doubt, live in your neighborhood and mine), or muse thoughtfully at Godot and his wait? What other place offers you such headliners as Plato, Aristotle, Chaucer, Dante and Shakespeare?

Isn’t that, in the end, why we have libraries in the first place? They aren’t warehouses of just anything and everything, but repositories of the best that the brightest has been able to produce. In many ways, they are monuments, testaments really, to all that is good and noble and worthy about those creatures we call human. It’s easy to get depressed about humanity when you look about the world, what with its rampant ‘isms everywhere you

look. It’s easy to turn one’s back on humanity when yet another senseless murder occurs, another ridiculous war breaks out over yet one more ludicrous reason.

Before falling too downcast, turn your eyes on a library and open your mind to its treasures. Seine the depths of its masters in science, law, philosophy, literature, mathematics or astronomy. Of course the human condition will remain its dogged leopard self because it cannot change its spots. But there are bright exhalations of humanity at its gleaming best in the firmament of any good library. And for one brief shining moment, even if only a mere shadow of the thing itself, you really can almost see Camelot.

Mark Y. Herring
Dean of Library Services

the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / ROCK HILL, SC 29733
