

2-2000

February 2000: Libraries as Camelot

Dacus Library

Follow this and additional works at: <http://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*. Book 16.
<http://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 Memoriam*, 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 scattering 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 critical).

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: the song of poetry, the majesty of science, the befuddlement of astronomy, the miracle 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. Chesterton. 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 Punishment* 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
