

אדם





אדם

(Adam)

The word literally means "first blood"

A collective of artists involved or affected by Eastern Idaho, specifically Rexburg, Idaho.

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ADAM

You know, is a Hebrew dream of a pit that I had in which some folk were speaking in a room about nostalgic things of my generation—floppy disks and cartoons on Nickelodeon. They weren't speaking about anything important really but it was there. They nodded off to sleep in boredom, and dreamed they were really in Idaho, in Rexburg and putting on war paint right before a camp & and hike night and evening near the Tetons. You have to drive several miles of farms and fields and grass and pastures and land and landscapes in order to get out there. Sometimes people like to believe that the mountains are closer than they really are, but it's hardly a bother that it takes longer than you want. Unless you're an agoraphob, there's charming clear skies and different kinds of music playing in your head. I first noticed it with Bill Baird's Bright Blue Dream. Now it's a love affair.

-Z.A. Mercado-





Im this ome

Erica Rascon

has photographed landscapes of Idaho seen on pages
Cover Photo and Pages 4, 5, 16 and 19

Andrew Doub

writes an essay about places where one purchases books that have already been read (or at least handled) by others called
“Gutenberg’s Peddlers: The Decline of the Independent Bookstore”
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Peter Fillerup

has created two monoprints on ink paper found
Page 13 and 24

Kira Jacobson

graces us with her skill writing prose in “Playmates” on
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Chad Carr

spans different mediums of art, creating a new playful minimalism
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Eric McClean

Stuns with his prose in short story format
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Garrett Sherwood

generously shares his magnificent talent of performance poetry, stripped down to just the written word
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brings us to a tough day
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Drew Grella

illustrates his own world as well as previously contemplated ones
Page 15 and back cover

TWO CIGARETTES

Eric McLean

“Which one of you smoked my cigarettes?”

We stood in a line with our chins touching our chests, careful not to look into daddy’s eyes. He flicked the half-empty pack of Lucky Strikes on the dinner table and crossed his arms across his chest. I didn’t dare say a word and I knew that Troy or Brenda wouldn’t either. At least that’s what I was praying inside my head since technically I was the one who took them. But we were all guilty as far as I could tell.

“Y’all don’t have nothing to say for yourselves? The pack’s lighter than it was this mornin’ and I know your mamma wasn’t sneakin’ my cigarettes.”

We stared at the wooden floors. I could see every knot and hear its groaning protest as momma shifted in her cherry wood chair at the dinner table. Her head was propped against her hand and she was biting her bottom lip. She absently picked at a crease in the top of the pack of cigarettes with her other hand and looked at daddy as if to say, I can’t help you this time. Troy was crying, Brenda kept tugging at her sports bra, the one she didn’t really need, and I reached deeper and deeper into my pockets, hoping I would fall in.

“Ya’ll need to tell the truth,” my mother said, in her gentle and soft as silk voice. She didn’t smoke and she didn’t let daddy smoke in the house. I think worse than daddy being mad at us and most likely getting a good whippin’ was the tired and creaky door weariness that was in her voice.

No one said a word. The sticky breeze drifting through the open dining room window even seemed to hold its breath.

“Alright, that’s fine. Ya’ll wait right here.” Wait right here. I just assumed the he was going to get his belt and whip us all which wasn’t so bad unless he made us pull our pants down. Instead of heading towards his room though he headed for the kitchen. The fragile screen door creaked and then slapped against its wooden frame. I could see him walking towards the barn through the open window and wondered what it was he was doing.

A few hours earlier, I had stolen three cigarettes out of his case while he was in the shower. I knew he kept them in the inside pocket of his plaid-lined jacket. I think it was the only jacket he owned and I had never seen him in anything else in the eleven years God had given me on this earth. I also don’t remember him not smoking. The idea to steal the cigarettes was Brenda’s, but don’t let that persuade you from thinking that I was any less at fault or forced into it. I wanted to smoke them. When daddy smoked, he looked so romantic, like those cowboys on t.v. They were always rolling tobacco up in their own paper and flicking their matches against the heel of their boots in a way that made a dancer’s gracefulness look like a baby learning how to walk.

Every night after dinner, daddy would get up from the dinner table, push his chair in, and kiss momma on the forehead. He never said anything but he didn’t have to, at least I didn’t think so the way momma would smile with the corner of her mouth like no one could see it. I could see it. She would tell us to scrape our plates and help wash the dishes and in the background the screen door would groan and then slap back against the frame angrily like it didn’t want to be opened. I could always see him sittin’ out there on the front porch with a pipe clenched between his teeth as natural as the sun comin’ up every day. We would wash the dishes and I would watch daddy, trying to catch a trail of smoke over the soapy water. A night when this didn’t happen was a strange thing in our house.

We ran through the tall grass that reached out for our legs and left them itching from chigger bites. The red beads from their bites was something we were so used to that we didn’t bother wearing long pants out in the fields anymore. I refused to wear a skirt even though momma always told me I looked nice in them. I wore cutoff jeans shorts and tank-tops instead. We huddled around the backside of the barn whose



paint was peeling away in flakes that clung to the wood, afraid to be separated.

“Did you get them?”

“Of course I got them. Did you get the lighter?”

Brenda reached into her jean pockets that hugged her pale, freckled legs comfortably and revealed daddy’s silver zippo. The grease from dirty hands and years of rubbing it for good luck had stained a rainbow of oil into its silver polish, making it look like those puddles that drip underneath cars. The Army Air Corps symbol was raised in its side, reminding us that our father had killed men in the war and would probably do much worse to us if he caught us. I handed out the cigarettes and looked to my older sister for instructions.

“How do we do this?”

“What do you mean how do we do this? You light it and then smoke it, dummy.”

“Yeah, but, you know, there’s deep breaths you take, like when you go under water, or shallow breaths when you’re tired from running, or just breathing into your mouth when something smells bad. Which one do we do?”

She sat there for a moment, rolling the crumpled cigarette between her nail-bitten fingers.

“Deep breath, like you’re going under water.”

She flicked the top of the lighter open and rolled her thumb off the tiny metal wheel. It lit easily and the flame reached out from the dimpled metal box like a tongue. “I’ll go first and then light yours.” She placed the cigarette to her lips and brought the lighter to the edge of the cigarette. At first, nothing happened, but then the end glowed like a lightning bug slowly coming to life, glowing a little bit only to disappear as quickly as it came. She lit ours while she held the cigarette in her left hand, squinting from the smoke that climbed towards her face.

I took a deep breath and immediately regretted smoking and decided that after this cigarette, I would never smoke again. “Oh—my—Gosh—” I sputtered in between my coughs, trying to fill my lungs with anything but smoke but only coughing more. I felt like a balloon that had been full of fresh breath only to be let go, sputtering hopelessly through the air. Troy was also coughing, his glasses bouncing off the frame of his nose with every renewed convulsion. When I caught my breath, I looked up to see Brenda leaning calmly against the barn with her cigarette perched between her fingers, looking like a devilish cross between Grace Kelly and Clint Eastwood.

She smiled at me, taking another drag and picking at the flecks of red paint with her free hand. “It gets better.”

Not understanding what she could possibly mean, I asked, “What do you mean, it gets better. This is disgusting!” The tin rattle of Troy’s inhaler as he shook it back and forth seemed strange as he still held the cigarette at the edge of his fingers, trying to get away from it.

“Are you okay, T?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m okay.” He took a shock of air into his lungs. It was strange to see him holding an inhaler in one hand and a cigarette burning in the other.

“I think we need to go. We are going to get in so much trouble if momma catches us out here.” I felt like my veins were buzzing with electricity after taking only a few drags of the cigarette. I wasn’t coughing nearly as much, but it burned like that homemade medicine we would get when we got a bad cough. Only I knew this wasn’t going to help us.

“Oh, come on. Stop being such a baby. T is fine and you know that momma doesn’t call us until supper.” Brenda slipped the cigarette between her puckered lips and inhaled, trying impossibly hard to look cool.

Brenda was tall and beautiful, with strawberry-blonde hair that had given all of its fierce red to me instead. Brenda never hesitated to punch the boys in the nose if they were getting too rowdy with her and she was loved and feared by them at school. She was about as tough as they come, but this wasn’t really about being like her. Daddy was always sitting on the porch at night, smoking his pipes. They sat on top of the hearth and smelled like cherries and stale wood. It wasn’t immediately a pleasant smell, but the kind that you grow used to.

His no-color-green work jacket always smelled like cigarette smoke. He worked at Phillip-Morris and they allowed them a carton a week just for working there. He never raised his voice at our momma. I don’t remember a harsh word ever being spoken between them. I also knew that he wouldn’t hesitate to discipline us if he caught us out here doing something he would disapprove of, even though he has been smoking since he was twelve.

The screen door creaked and then slapped against the house. We three turned our heads simultaneously, like a bunch of deer in the woods. Brenda spoke up first. “What was that? Did someone come outside?”

We slid along the side of the barn, Brenda in front and Troy bringing up the rear, all of us still clutching our cigarettes awkwardly in between our fingers. We moved closer to the corner that was protecting us from the view of the house. Brenda leaned out in slow motion and then jerked backwards into us, knocking Troy over. “Put those out!” She crushed her cigarette like a cockroach against the barn, the ash smearing across the red paint like a curse, and then slapped the cigarette out of my hand and stomped on it. Troy had already shed himself of his evidence, probably when he realized he couldn’t breathe. “It’s momma!” Brenda hissed at us.

She grabbed my hand and I grabbed Troy’s, running like a line of baby ducklings following their mother. Brenda cracked the barn door open on the opposite side of the house and we joined the horses and cows who were all staring at us, judging us, I’m sure. I knew we were in trouble when I couldn’t look any of the cows in the eyes because I felt so guilty. We danced on our toes to the other side of the barn and peered through the slits in the warped wood of the broken barn doors. Momma was just standing there with her arms crossed the way she did when she was thinking real hard. It was hard to tell if she was angry or just thinking. And then daddy walked out behind her, throwing the door open not too gently.

“Kids! I know you can hear me and if you know what’s best for you, you better come out right now!” He stood there with that pack of cigarettes in one hand and the other supporting himself as he leaned against the porch column.

I could feel the tears start to force their way up from my chest and into my eyes. I started to open the barn door when Brenda grabbed me by the arm.

“What do you think you are you doing?! We can’t go out there.”

“Brenda, they know. We can’t stay in here all day.”

Her eyes looked like a hissing cat, ready to attack but scared and backed into a corner with nowhere left to go. I shook my arm free and walked out of the barn with Troy trailing behind me and Brenda following after him.

And so we stood with our heads bowed down in the dining room. I knew I couldn’t lie so I just kept my mouth shut, but I wasn’t sure how much longer I could do that. It was like having an itch in a place that you couldn’t really scratch, but it itched anyway and made everything else more miserable than it was to begin with. I needed to say something. I had decided to tell daddy when he came back what we did.

I heard the rusty swing of the storm door open. “You kids come out here, right now.” Daddy sat us down on the edge of the porch like we were on the other end of a firing squad.

“Daddy—”

“Robin, you need to shut your mouth right now. Your chance to talk is over.” I started to cry, embarrassed that he had cut me off when I was trying to tell him sorry. Momma had walked out behind us and was rocking back and forth on the porch swing. I was always afraid that it was going to fall right out of the porch ceiling the way the wood wheezed with every back-and-forth motion.

Daddy had three cigarettes in his hand. “I know that ya’ll took my cigarettes—”

“—I didn’t take them, it was Robin! She took the ciga—”

His look was enough to cut her off. She lowered her head like a scared dog.

“Now, I know ya’ll took my cigarettes. I don’t know what possessed any of you to think that this is okay. Not only did you steal from me, but you are too young to be smoking.”

I never really understood why he thought we were too young when he had been smoking since he was 12. It was one of the things about my dad that didn’t make sense and I could never quite put right with

the way he was.

He hunched down like he was sitting in an imaginary chair and stuck all three cigarettes in his mouth. Then, he looked at Brenda and stuck his hand out, staring her down, waiting for her to give him what was his. She sighed and rolled her eyes, reached into her left pocket and slapped the zippo lighter in his hand, careful not to look at him. He lit all three cigarettes and then handed one to each of us. I had no idea what was going on and apparently neither did my mother.

"Al, what are you doing?" She was leaning forward and the swing had long since stopped its dance. He didn't even look at her, instead looking at us as he placed a lit cigarette in each of our mouths.

"Ya'll want to smoke? Fine, let's smoke." He crossed his arms, looking more like a marble statue than a man.

Something was wrong. The cigarette was burning like before, but it hurt more. It tasted like...burnt popcorn. No, burnt hair. We were all coughing and Troy was crying again. Momma stood up.

"Al, I think this is enough."

He replied robotically, "You let me take care of this." She sat back down at the edge of the swing, barely sitting, and intertwined her fingers, rubbing them together.

Troy was the first to start throwing up, followed by me, and then Brenda. We were all bent over the edge of the porch, puking up the remains of our lunch. I thought my throat burned before, but now the sting of stomach acid felt like it was ripping through my insides. My cigarette had rolled off the porch and into my vomit, still smoking and smelling like what I imagined burnt flesh to smell like.

My mother was up quickly, kneeling behind us, rubbing our backs and pulling my hair back. She rubbed my back gently and smoothed my hair against my head in the way only a mother can. Troy was taking a puff from his inhaler and Brenda sat with her arms wrapped around her knees. Momma looked at daddy with her eyebrows in quick folds, asking him what he had done without saying a word.

He walked away from her into the kitchen and filled a pail of water from the sink. He came back out beside us, pouring the water over our vomit to try and wash the smell away from the house. "I pulled a horse hair through the cigarettes so that they will never smoke a cigarette again in their lives."

A horse hair. A long, brown, nasty hair from the mane of one of the horses in our barn. Daddy stomped out the three cigarettes with the heel of his crusted brown work boots and knelt down in front of us again, almost stepping in the vomit in the washed out vomit and mud. "If I ever catch any of you smoking again, I will make you smoke the whole pack."

Later that night, after we had all bathed and Troy and Brenda were snoring next to me, I heard the screen door open and close gently. I slid from under the covers and tiptoed down the steps that seemed to creak even louder in the night, like they didn't want to be disturbed from their sleep. As I moved through the kitchen, I could see the outline of daddy sitting in the rocking chair on the back porch.

"You can come out now. I can feel your eyes back there."

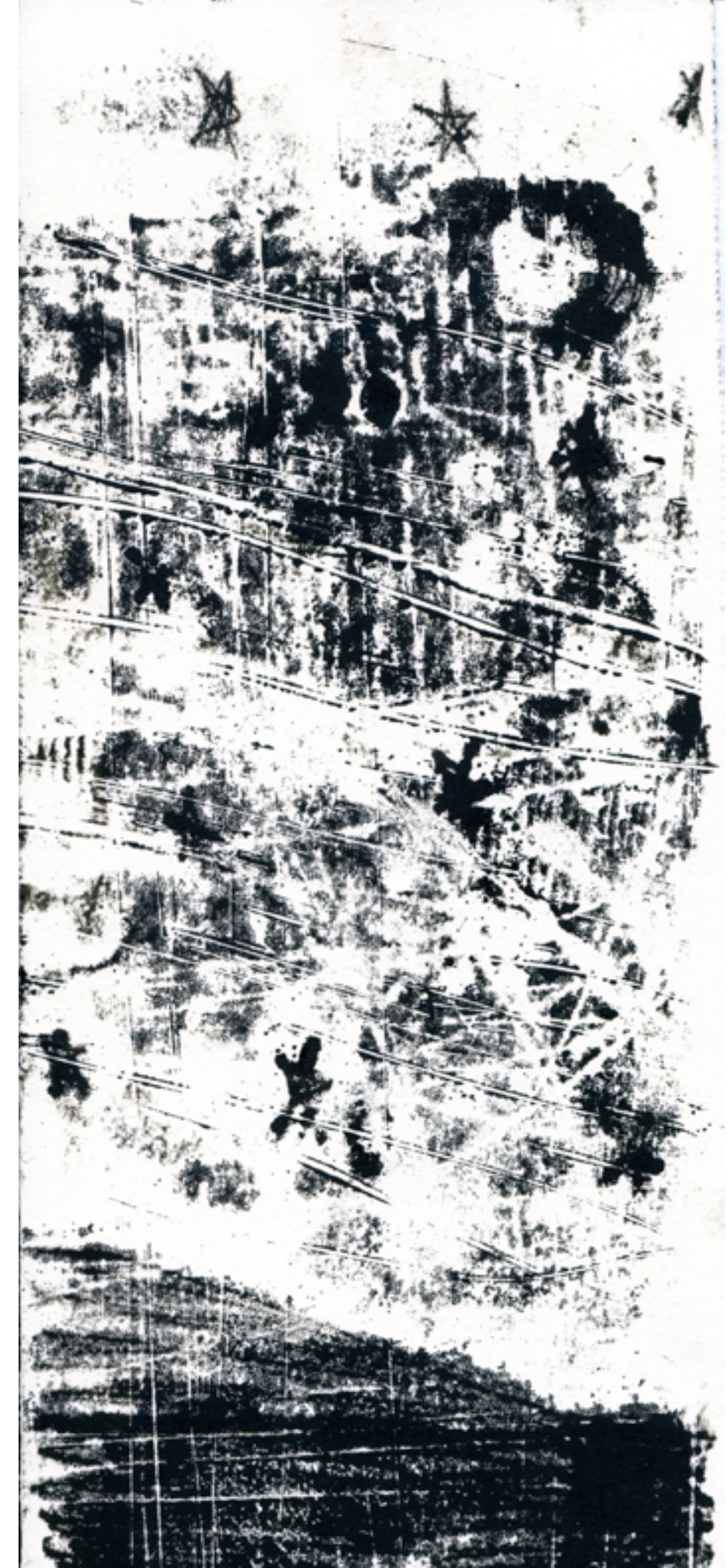
I walked out on the porch barefoot, my gown almost scraping the ground, and sat down, pulling my knees up to my chest under the gown. We sat in silence for some time, listening to the thousands of critters and bugs that roamed in their giant forests that seemed like small brush to us. The smell of his pipe was strong and pleasant. Some people wouldn't understand why I like that smell so much and I reckon I don't understand why either.

I worked up my nerve to apologize. "I'm sorry, daddy." I wanted to say more but couldn't seem to open my mouth any more.

We sat together for another few minutes, still listening to the sounds of the cicadas and crickets making their warm calls, the up-and-down rise and fall of their cries. The night seemed to be pierced by their songs. Daddy continued to rock back and forth to their rhythm, the smoke falling out of his mouth and nose like the chimney on a cold winter night.

"I just wanted to be like you."

He continued to rock back and forth slowly, deliberately, the embers of his pipe still glowing bright.



PLAYMATES

Kira Jacobson

Their fam'lies shared a pew at messe;^o
Gigi looked cute in Easter dress.
Their mothers felt the priest did well;
Their fathers hoped the Blues gave hell.
The parents sipped wine, the children played,
And in her green gown Gigi stayed.
She was eight and Luc the same,
And Revolution was their game.
"Marie Antoinette! Time to die!"
He crowed as he swung the birch stick high.
Gigi knelt, her neck on a stool,
But Luc's papá thought it too cruel:
"Do not kill so jolie a thing!
Love her, my lad, she is your queen!"
The blood-cheeked boy helped the girl to stand,
And had the urge to kiss her hand—
But simply said adieu and ran.

mass



GUTENBERG'S PEDDLERS THE DECLINE OF THE INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE

Andrew Doub

A plume of dust drifts towards my face as I slide an ancient volume off of a bowing bookshelf. The front cover creaks open revealing an ornately designed title page: "Bibliophily or Booklove by James F. Willis, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co. MDCCCLXXI." My experience in dealing with archaic Roman numerals tells me that by adding all of those letters up, you get the year 1871. I slide my fingers across each neatly printed character, feeling a slight indentation caused by the inked bite of 19th century letterpress plate. Pages in a book from this era almost have a three-dimensional look and feel. Somehow, this small but sturdy hardback made its way from the offices of a long-defunct New England publisher to the walls of a 21st century used bookstore, only two states away. It hasn't traveled very far. I let a random page fall open and begin reading: "Throughout the history of the printed word, there have always been those among us who are particularly enthralled with the care for and handling of books. In their minds, the written word is deemed so valuable that it holds a place as near to their hearts as their faith." Coming across a book like this is something that can only happen in a used bookstore. You won't see it displayed on the formica laminate racks at Walmart. Barnes & Noble doesn't offer it as a part of its backlist. Rare and used bookstores, often privately owned, have been providing shelf space for out-of-print titles since the days of Shakespeare. Books, along with the stores that sell them, are admired by readers with a shared passion for culture and knowledge.

A loud thud interrupts my thoughts, and as I look over, the proprietor of my favorite institution is struggling with a large pile of grocery store paperbacks. Bill Earley has been the owner of Twice Read Books since 1994, but he has been buying and selling books ever since he can remember. He once told me an interesting story about the time he spent selling a limited selection of classics and textbooks out of the back of his Volkswagen minibus. At first, he seems to have a distant and spacey personality, probably the consequence of one too many music festivals during the late-Sixties, but beneath this abstracted impression lies an incredible intellect. Bill got me into reading the Beats: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Lucien Carr. He didn't have to tell me about all of these authors individually; everything was right there on the floor. A simple nod towards one of his sections is often the only advice he will give when you inquire about a genre (Bill seems to prefer self-discovery). It is interesting to note Ferlinghetti, aside from being an outstanding poet, is also co-founder of the infamous City Lights Booksellers & Publishers, one of the most well-known independent bookstores in the United States. Authors often have a special relationship with the places that sell their wares, but occasionally they go into the business themselves. Bill's shop might not be as famous as City Lights, but it is every bit as hip.

Twice Read has always been, and will always be, my shelter from the storm. To lose track of time and spend a period of six or eight hours in the stacks is an easy accomplishment. Bill has spent years going to trade shows and garage sales looking for unidentified rarities: a first edition Dickens haphazardly marked with a one dollar price sticker, pamphlets produced by the American Communist Party in 1917, or a signed copy of *The Grapes of Wrath*, mistakenly thought to be a reproduction. You never know what jackpot might lie at the bottom of a pile of James Patterson novels and Oprah Winfrey Bookclub editions. Occasionally, Bill misses a few gems himself. This only adds to the appeal of searching through every last stack in his rather large store. Books line the walls from floor to ceiling, and each shelf is packed to capacity. Eventually, your eyes train themselves to decipher faded gilt lettering and a variety of antique font treatments. One can move along a row of books with some speed once you develop the needed skills. My last major find was a 1925 Patriots' Edition set of the Life and Works of Thomas Paine. The magnificent engravings and illuminated lettering make this a cherished addition to my collection, not to mention the academic value of owning every last word ever printed by a man whose ideas, originally presented to the masses in pamphlet form, lit the fuse of two of the world's most important revolutions.

Only In a Bookstore

Discovering rare or uncommon books is not easy to do without an outlet for their sale. There has to be an opportunity for a reader to interact with the title. Despite modern innovations, nothing can replicate taking a book off the shelf, feeling its weight, and leafing through the pages to test for paper quality. When walking down the aisle of a bookstore, you have the ability to find books that you would have never thought to look for otherwise, all thanks to the convenience of having them right in front of your nose. The adventitious procedure of book browsing in a particular store makes it a totally unique experience; how else would you discover your previously unknown passion for Bonsai trees, all thanks to that out-of-pint book hidden under a pile of remainders in the gardening section? Independent booksellers aren't bound by the restrictions placed on chain stores. They can stock the most obscure or commercially unpopular titles without worrying about what their publisher's rep might say about how they choose to use their display space. The owners of independent stores are often well-educated, passionate book lovers who have had years of experience in the trade. When you go to an independent, you learn about that owner's unique perspective through his or her selection of stock. In order to have a variety of ideas in the world, there needs to be a variety of books—more than what any New York Times Bestseller List or “Amazon recommendation” can offer.

The experience of standing in a dusty bookstore before a host of unknown and undiscovered volumes is one that I will always cherish, but now the very existence of a place that exclusively sells books is being threatened, and, along with it, the diversification the book market in general. While the methods used to write, print, and publish, books have gone through one progression after the next, the way books have been bought and sold remained the same for hundreds of years. Today, booksellers are entering into a new era dominated by dot-com booms, big-box stores, and E Ink e-readers. The same wave of high-tech wizardry that radically advanced our personal computers, phones, and music players has started to wash over the world of books, dragging many of the industry's most cherished traditions out to sea. Over the past ten years, major innovations in the field of electronic reading and online book selling have caused drastic changes in the market that seem to be leaving many independent stores in peril.

Lewis Buzbee recently authored a bookseller's history entitled *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop*. His work describes the trade from its inception to present day, providing the reader with an excellent overview of its procedures and traditions. His depictions of nomadic book merchants setting up stalls outside of the Library at Alexandria, and in Renaissance-era town squares, are absolutely fascinating. Throughout the beginning of *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop*, the story of how books were sold always involved a cunning, independent businessman and his desire to earn a living through the spreading of knowledge. A small printing press would set up a shop in a well-traveled area, and customers would drop in to browse over tables covered in unbound book blocks. When a title was chosen, the book binder would be called and the type of binding selected. Books were custom made, on-demand for their readers. Over time, the printing and publishing side of the industry separated off, leaving stores that operated solely to sell books. Book merchants would purchase stock and display it on handmade shelves and in the windows of their stores. If people wanted to buy books, they went to their local bookseller. Options were limited.

In more recent history, advances in printing made books easier to produce and more affordable. The number of independent bookstores skyrocketed as reading became an integral part of changes in American culture. Stores like Cody's Books in Berkeley, California; Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon; and Kepler's Books in Menlo Park, California, became magnets for disgruntled students, working-class intellectuals, and seditious radicals alike. Anyone interested in learning was welcome. The bookstore became more than a place where you could buy novels, it became a center of public discourse and community outreach. Fred Cody started his store with \$5,000, including a \$1,000 loan he took out on his life insurance policy. Between 1954 and 1965 he was able to expand to three different locations, quadrupling the size of his store space. The tumultuous Sixties caused a surge in trade paperback sales. This was a time when ideas were important, and the stores that sold them seemed to be at the center of an academic universe. The nation was dotted by thousands of small, privately owned, and independently run bookstores, and reading experienced a surge in popularity. A good bookstore had a large clientele of loyal customers who supported the business end of

things. A good bookstore owner saw it as his responsibility to keep up with the times and seek out a greatest titles he could offer. It was an intimate relationship between buyer and seller.

The Chains that Bind

Buzbee, who worked at two of California's most prominent independent bookstores, Upstart Crow and Printers Inc., began to notice a change in this format during the early 1980s. Crown Books was opened by the Dart Group in 1977. Crown's business model was based on the same one used by the corporation's food and drugstores. They opened dozens of Crown Books locations across the United States, entering into direct competition with the smaller independents. Crown was one of the first real booksellers (department stores were the only ones who would stoop this low in the past) to start significantly discounting backlist titles, and offering new, popular books at thirty percent off the suggested list price. Barnes & Noble, which started out as a New York City independent, and B. Dalton Booksellers were quick to adopt this profit-driven approach. These large chain stores began to take up a larger portion of the print market, ending the era of the highly profitable independent bookstore. People started slipping away from their cozy downtown independents in search of a better deal. The total commodification of books had begun as they became just another item to push. Aside from the price slashing, readers can actually lose more by shopping at corporately-owned bookstores than they might think. Chain stores are often the first to capitulate when a book or author is challenged. Censorship is most effective when the threat of boycott or profit loss can sway decisions of whether or not to stock a book. Publishers pay for the placement of books in key positions throughout a bookstore, meaning that the books you see prominently displayed by the entrance might not be the best ones available, but they are definitely the ones you are “supposed” to enjoy. This tactic has blocked many promising and important authors from getting their work noticed and in circulation. Buzbee admits



that you will occasionally see an “employee picks” section at a chain store, but you will never find it by the entrance.

Back at Twice Read, Bill continues to plow on against all odds. The profit margins on books are so low that, for most independents, a loss in sales of five or ten percent can put a store in danger. Unfair business practices on the part of major book publishers (who have been sued by the American Booksellers Association for giving the chains more favorable deals) have forced Bill to stop carrying brand new books. He has chosen the route that most fledgling main street bookstores have taken by focusing on the rare and used category. Giant shelves filled with leather-bound county records and dusty Civil War history books are featured prominently in his store, with hopes of attracting the business of local hobbyists and senior citizens. A glass case by the register reveals Bill’s true passions. A row of small-press Beat poetry booklets, all individually wrapped in cellophane, are some of his most beloved items. There’s also a nice first edition of *East of Eden*, and a complete set of Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway’s works. Bill is always polite with passersby, and he treats the elderly women and drunks, who come in for an hour or two a day just to browse, with great respect. But his greatest joy comes from helping young guys like me “get into the greats” as he puts it. Bill doesn’t get this opportunity too often anymore.

Getting Lost in the Amazon

Waldenbooks, Crown, B. Dalton Booksellers, and Barnes & Noble did their damage to the independents over the years, but a new enemy would emerge that would threaten the survival of every brick-and-mortar bookstore. The 1999 edition of *Time Magazine’s* Person of the Year features a cover photo of Jeff Bezos, with his head sicking through a cardboard box filled with books and packing peanuts. According to the article, Amazon.com was started by Bezos in 1994, all in an attempt to stake a claim in the “Internet gold rush” of the early nineties. The idea was to become “the world’s largest bookstore” by creating a virtual book distributor that could stock an unlimited number of books in warehouses across the country. A website was set up where customers could browse through a massive selection of titles, receive recommendations from computerized interest matches, and read customer reviews of the books they are interested in. Due to lack of overhead costs (for things like a nationwide network of store locations, utilities, and employees), books could be sold at the lowest prices new books had ever been sold for. An average \$25.00 - \$30.00 hardback sells on Amazon.com for \$15.99, or less.

Bezos intensely marketed his services throughout the late 1990s, and he expanded the business to include music, movies, toys, household items, and eventually, everything under the sun. The plan for all of these other items was the same: offer goods at the lowest prices possible, and sell as much as you can. Profits soared as Americans fell in love with the idea of getting all of their Christmas shopping done without ever leaving their homes. As other items began to earn more money, Amazon turned the sale of books into something called a “loss-leader.” The website attracts customers by offering books at prices where Amazon makes almost no profit at all (they basically sell them for only a few pennies more than what they pay), then, as you click around the website following your book purchase, you find that \$500 weed whacker that you have always wanted. This product is still expensive, but you will save a few dollars by ordering from Amazon, and hey . . . it ships for free! Amazon shamelessly draws you in with low-priced books in order to sell their greater profit margin items.

Jeff Bezos is no friend of Bill’s over at Twice Read. Bill has already stopped selling new books as a result of chain competition, but now, Amazon.com has set up the Amazon Marketplace, where used books are listed right along with their new counterparts. If you search for a copy of *Oliver Twist*, Amazon gives you the option of buying it new from their warehouse, or, getting it for .01 cent from a Marketplace seller. Anyone with a pile of old books can now make a few dollars by selling them off on the biggest book site in the world, all by setting up an Amazon Marketplace account from home. In the past ten years, a copy of *Of Mice and Men* has gone from \$14.99 in a store, to \$9.99 on Amazon, to one penny through the sellers at Amazon Marketplace. More websites would follow Amazon’s lead. eBay, Abebooks, and dozens of rare and used auction sites are active in the market today. Bill has had to swallow his pride by setting up an eBay account, used to supplement his store income as best as he can.

Bordering on Defeat

With online retailers edging out the chain stores, the collapse of many formerly large names in the book business ensued. B. Dalton, Walden, and, most recently, Borders Books & Music have all gone under or have been sold off to Barnes & Noble, the last major chain capable of hold out. In 2008, the fabled owner of B&N, Leonard Riggio, sent an open email to all of his employees warning about the hard times to come. According to Riggio, an “economic Tsunami” was brewing in the form of a massive recession and changes in the habits of book buyers, all of which had the potential to cripple the book-selling giant. More customers were getting their books online, and chain stores were now perceived as being overpriced and inefficient for the modern shopper. Riggio vowed to move forward and adapt, but made no promises as to the future of his business. Barnes & Noble began selling books through their company website, eventually developing an e-store similar to the Amazon.com and Amazon Marketplace model.

The bankruptcy and liquidation of Borders was a major event for those in the book selling community, and a lot can be learned from the mistakes that they made made on their way out. Peter Osnos detailed the collapse of the chain in an Atlantic article shortly after the first stores started closing. When Amazon.com began hurting brick-and-mortar sales, Borders tried to outgrow the situation. They started an international division that opened a large number of stores in the United Kingdom, and in exotic places like Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. More emphasis was placed on selling DVDs and CDs, but by the mid-2000s, a push towards digital media had stifled those sales as well. Borders also tried to mimic Amazon by entering into the online arena, but arrived much later than any of its competitors. By 2007, many of their stores still didn’t have Internet access. The Borders management team, which hired and fired new corporate officers every few weeks, made a number of blundering decisions. At one point, they hired a slew of upper-level grocery store managers to overhaul their stores and business model. By the time e-books, digital music, and e-readers became apart of their inventory, the company was drowning in debt to publishers—\$455,000,000 worth. Defaulting on a payment that large could have crippled the entire industry. No outside investors wanted to buy into the book business, which was by now seen as a black hole for money. In 2011, a number of bids and acquisitions made by the Books-A-Million chain and helped to divi up this massive sum. Publishers were eventually paid off, and the collapse of every major publishing house in the United States was avoided. This was a very close call.

With the loss of Borders and other major chains, more people have turned to online booksellers to get their print materials. Amazon projects that they will hold “fifty percent of the overall market share of book sales by the end of 2012.” In 2007, that number was estimated at only around seventeen percent. The incredible growth of Amazon has left a bitter taste in the mouths of many small business owners, not just book sellers. The e-commerce mogul has basically declared war on Main Street through questionable business dealings. Accusations of improprieties and favoritism on the part of distributors have raged from a number of different sources, but the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association and the American Booksellers Association have been some of the most outspoken critics. Various press releases put out by both groups accuse Amazon of manipulating the market by strong-arming publishers into giving them preferential treatment. Just recently, the Independent Publishers Group became the second major publisher to engage Jeff Bezos in a dispute over contract terms. Amazon, wanting to offer e-books at lower prices, offered IPG unfavorable margins in renewal negotiations. When the publisher refused to accept the changes, Amazon pulled all 4,443 IPG titles from its website. The “add to cart” buttons just disappeared from their listing pages. A similar dispute with Macmillian, one of the largest publishing houses in the world, occurred only a year before this. Amazon again wanted to streamline the price of their e-books, charging only \$9.99 for all Kindle titles. At the release of the iPad in 2010, Steve Jobs made publishers a better offer, starting Apple’s e-book prices between \$12.99 and \$14.99. When Macmillian attempted to force Bezos into a higher price range, all of their books, both physical and e-books, were pulled from the Amazon’s virtual shelves. The ABA and NCIBA point to these two incidents as proof that Jeff Bezos and the executives at Amazon will do anything to ensure they are getting the best deals in the business, even if it means sacrificing their own sales to do damage to a wayward publisher. Bad publicity and public opinion

forced Amazon to capitulate to Macmillan, but one wonders how many times Amazon has pointed to these incidents and “suggested” that publishers would be best served if they just went along with the plan. As publishers are forced into deals with Amazon, independents are worried that pressure will be placed on them to leave other book sellers out to dry.

Another complaint levied at Bezos & Co. has to do with their skirting of U.S. sales taxes. Amazon’s corporate headquarters is located in Seattle, Washington, but they operate a number of warehouses and shipping centers throughout the nation. Sales tax rules state that if a company has a physical business location within a state, that company must pay a tax on every item it sells within that state. Since Amazon is technically only located in Seattle, all forty-nine other states in the union are not required to collect sales tax from them. This means that purchases made from Amazon.com are automatically five to ten percent cheaper than they would be if you ordered from a local business. This is yet another advantage Amazon holds over brick-and-mortar retailers. The NCIBA recently sued the State of California to force Amazon.com into paying sales taxes. Their argument was that the corporation owns a number of warehouses within the state, so because they have a “physical presence” there, they should pay taxes. In the past, Amazon has lobbied the legislature for special treatment in this area. Promises of building expansions and jobs for out-of-work Californians placated the economically bereft government for quite some time. Bezos has a lot of money to throw around, and he has a way of making Amazon’s excesses seem like good business. After a great deal of protest on the part of independent bookstore owners and their supporters, a new law will be enforced starting on September 15, 2012. Amazon will now be required to pay sales tax, just like everybody else. A small, but important victory for California independents, who state that they only want a level playing field.

Taking a Stand

Bookseller activism like this has received a lot of attention in the past few years, but there have been groups fighting for fairness and opportunity in the marketplace since the early 1800s. Buzbee mentions that printers and book sellers often formed guilds in order to protect the intellectual property of their authors. It was through the influence of these types of groups that the first copyright laws were instituted. Laura J. Miller’s study of American book selling, *Reluctant Capitalists*, provides insight into this period. When mail-order catalogues began to offer books at low costs, directly to readers, effective boycotts were imposed against the publishers. An 1892 editorial in *Publishers’ Weekly* indicated that the unscrupulous practice of “evil discounting” could be quelled by unions of booksellers who would work together to resolve fairness issues. Amazon’s idea of attracting customers with low-priced books turns out to be unoriginal. Miller cites an early discounting controversy revealed in a 1935 *Publishers’ Weekly* article:

During the first half of the twentieth century, the most notorious price-cutter of all was the New York department store Macy’s. By discounting popular titles, Macy’s was able to attract prime customers, and in the process, sold enormous quantities of books. Macy’s and other department stores invested heavily in newspaper advertisements that triumphantly proclaimed their discounted prices. Not only potential customers, but other booksellers took note of these sales, and periodic price wars would break out. Independent bookshops that could not match the department store discounts would be forced out of business, and publishers would find themselves with even fewer book outlets than the already small number that currently existed.

Here we have one of the first examples of a large, cash-flush business attempting to monopolize the book market through price manipulation. To many booksellers, the idea of using books as some sort of patronage bait is disrespectful to their nature. Any business perceived as doing such was immediately disqualified from being considered an acceptable enterprise. The difference between buying a book in a department store, rather than from a cozy bookshop owned by an intellectual might seem silly to some, but this is the book culture that has been built up around the trade since its earliest days. Books are supposed to be sold by people who love them and care about the viewpoints they represent. Fine literature must go hand-in-hand with fine book selling.

Book Culture in the Trenches

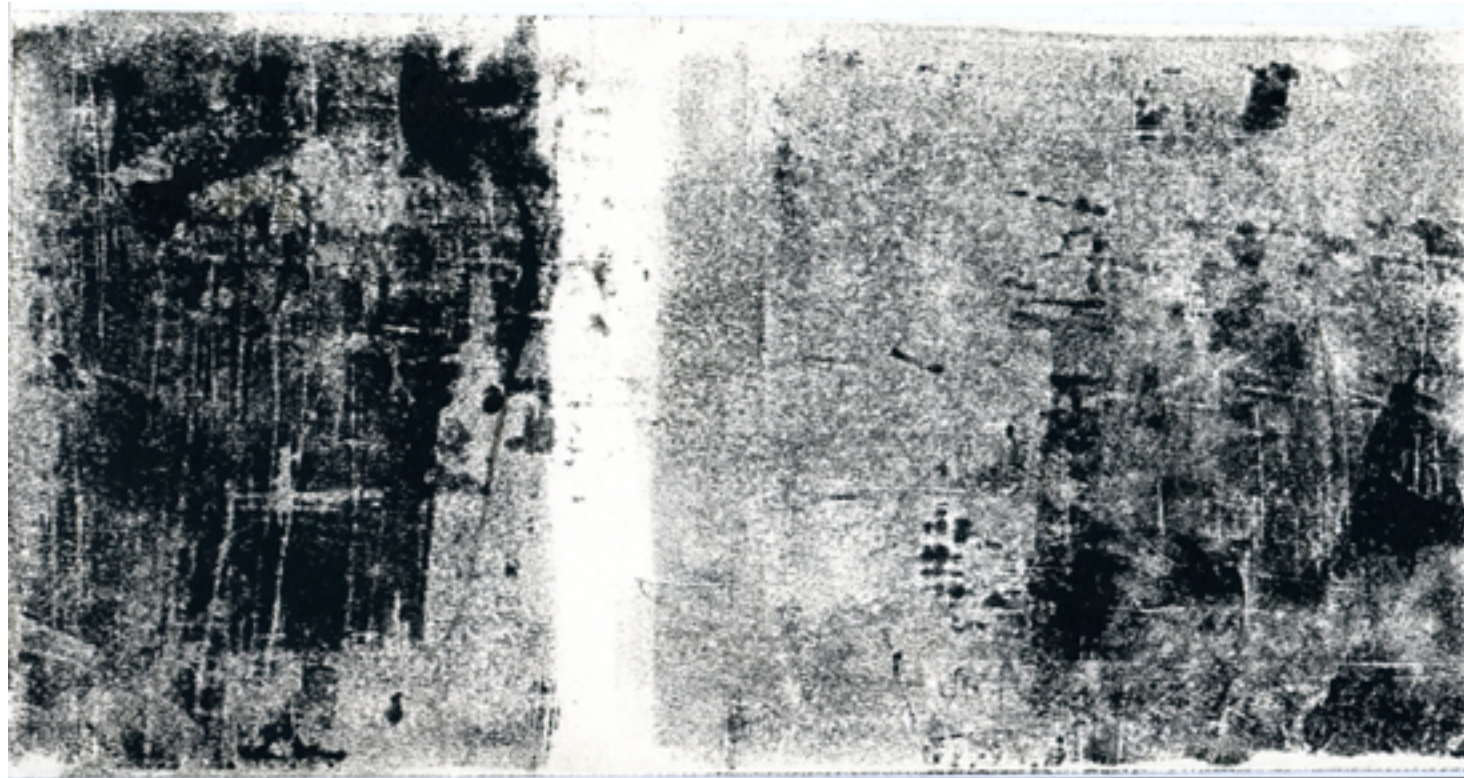
The development of what I have termed “book culture” really began in the bohemian 1960s. Counter-cultural movements based in San Francisco put down their roots with the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. UC Berkeley officials wanted to prevent students from passing out anti-administration flyers and organizing Vietnam protests, and the students responded by going on strike. The FSM was formed to combat a ban on setting up flier distribution tables in the main traffic centers across campus. They proceeded to stage a number of well-attended sit-ins, and, in its most heated moment, thousands of bodies filled Sproul Hall and the protestors had to be forcibly removed by baton-wielding police officers and fire hoses. Students were becoming passionate about politics, philosophy, and cultural history, and books on these subjects fueled the flames of dissent. The “Paperback Revolution” was taking place during this time, providing hungry minds with affordable books. In the past, the classics, and books in general, were quite expensive in their hardback form. “Quality paperbacks” had just hit the market, replacing the disposable and unsuitable pamphlets of the past. Publishers like Signet, Double-Day, and Penguin produced cheap softcovers that could be sold for .25 to .50 cents a piece. The works of Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy were no longer trapped in costly multi-volume leather-bound sets. For the first time, people could exchange few bucks for a towering pile of books. As one bookseller phrased it, “they could become intellectuals for literally dollars.” This economic factor caused a surge in book sales and self-initiated scholarship. Publisher Malcolm Margolin was a close friend of Fred Cody, the founder of the iconic Cody’s Books in Berkeley, mentioned previously. Margolin recalls the atmosphere that permeated Berkeley and the FSM during the Paperback Revolution:

“There was in the early days an almost intoxication to it all. That you could come in [to a bookstore] with a rather small sum of money, and you could walk out with great literature and great ideas. And I think it was a revolution in book selling, because booksellers were afraid of paperbacks—they were afraid of how low-priced they were, they were afraid of the low margins. There was a sense of electricity, there was a sense of freedom, and Cody’s was at the intellectual center of it all. They had radical sections and freethinking people. Books had an important place in the culture. To be an educated person, there were certain books you had to have read; you had to know the thoughts of people like Marx and people like Freud. And there was always a sense of a surprise that you were going to come to that table covered in books and you were going to find something that would change the world.”

Cody’s became the hub of Berkeley radicalism and the heart of the “New Left” movement. Bookstores became community centers where people could gather to express views, discuss literature, and experience a new life based on truth-seeking and the pursuit of knowledge. Fred Cody was one of the first bookstore owners to popularize public author readings. He invited writers from all genres to come read from their works in a makeshift auditorium connected to the store. These intimate readings caught on and eventually became standard for independent bookstores across the nation. The chains would steal this idea at a later date. Independent bookstores became salons that were embraced by avid readers, but most importantly, those readers bought books.

Independent booksellers pride themselves as defenders of the freedom of speech. Whenever I step into a privately owned bookstore, I know that there are no punches pulled. I will be able to find a copy of the Torah, just as easily as I can find *Mein Kampf*. As Clark Kepler of Kepler’s Books said in an interview, “all ideas are welcome,” especially the unpopular ones. I don’t have to agree with everything I see, and I shouldn’t; this is the beauty of plurality. Writers write books, and booksellers often end up in the position of protecting and defending their right to be sold. Betsy Burton, owner of The King’s English in Salt Lake City, Utah, discusses the problems of battling censorship while trying to run an honest bookstore:

“Censorship is an issue every bookseller deals with almost daily in one way or another. School teachers and librarians, counselors and parole officers question the age-appropriateness of this title or that one constantly, since one person’s standards of “age appropriate” material can vary so radically from another’s in terms of both language and subject matter. Parents question books, too. A story one parent feels to be an ideal vehicle for dealing with a difficult matter—race relations, for example, or divorce, or something as dark as child abuse or the holocaust—will horrify another. And although we have never suggested that



it is our job to be the arbiter of such decisions, we do feel, strongly, that it is not only our job but also our duty to make choice available, provide knowledge of the various choices, so that responsible parents and teachers can make informed decisions. What we at TKE hate and fear, what all booksellers hate and fear, is the attempt to limit choice, or, God forbid, eliminate it.

The suppression of literature is a high crime in book culture. Every independent owner sees it as his or her duty to provide an outlet for books that might be brown-bagged or pulled from the shelves at chain locations. One of the most notorious examples of this has been given the ominous moniker, “the Rushdie Affair.” Indian-born Salman Rushdie wrote a lengthy book called the *Satanic Verses*. The title is borrowed from an incident that supposedly occurred in the early days of the Muslim faith. The Prophet Muhammad made a deal with the Devil in order to please those of his followers who preferred to worship a multitude of Gods. In exchange for loyalty to the Prophet, Muslims would be permitted to pray to a couple of extra local deities, along with the one and true God. The characters in Rushdie’s book reenacted this incident in the story, much to the displeasure of Muslims around the world who have tried to forget this embarrassing incident. Copies of the Qur’an that contained the “Satanic Verses” sections were destroyed hundreds of years ago, and reopening this old wound during a time of fresh unrest in the Middle East was not a wise decision for the author, but one he had the right to make. The Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian Revolution and former captor of 52 American embassy hostages, was desperate to find another issue on which to look tough. After learning of the unfavorable part the the Prophet Muhammad played in Mr. Rushdie’s book, he issued a fatwa, or an official Islamic edict, on February 14, 1989:

“I am informing all brave Muslims of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses*, a text written, edited, and published against Islam, the Prophet of Islam, and the Qur’an, along with all the editors and publishers aware of its contents, are condemned to death. I call on all valiant Muslims wherever they may be in the world to kill them without delay, so that no one will dare insult the sacred beliefs of Muslims henceforth. And whoever is killed in this cause will be a martyr, Allah willing.”

His statement, broadcast to the world in farsi over a static-drenched radio channel, would result in the deaths of numerous people. Hitoshi Igarashi, the book’s Japanese translator, was stabbed to death on July 11, 1991. Ettore Capriolo, the Italian language translator, was critically wounded after a knife attack in the same month. William Nygaard, who published the book in Norway, was shot by a sniper in 1993, but lived to tell the story. Everyone associated with the production of the *Satanic Verses* lived in fear. Rushdie was

taken into hiding by England’s secret services, and he would be forced to live a life under the watchful eyes of armed bodyguards for over ten years.

When British and American Muslims inundated their local bookstores with anonymous threats, guess who blinked first? Burton remarks:

“In America, Barnes & Noble and Borders took the books from their shelves—the censorship of terror responded to by the politics of corporation. The King’s English, along with independent booksellers across the country, put *Satanic Verses* in its front windows. We didn’t call each other, plan a response. We did it independently, instinctively. Not out of disrespect for Islam but out of respect for the First Amendment.”

Independent bookstores, around the world, were the only places in which this radioactive book could be found. They held public readings of it and promoted its sale, despite the threat of death or destruction of property.

In Berkeley, the staff of Cody’s Books held a meeting to determine what their decision would be with regards to carrying *The Satanic Verses* on their shelves. They voted unanimously to display the book. On February 28, 1989, someone threw a firebomb through the store’s front window. Damage was limited, and the staff were a little shaken up, but the book remained out for sale. About a month later, a pipe bomb was discovered hidden by a shelf. The bomb squad had to do a controlled detonation, leaving a large, six inch shrapnel scar in the ceiling of the store. An employee later scaled a ladder and wrote the words “Salman Rushdie Memorial Hole” next to the damage. A total of seven independent bookstores were firebombed in the months following the fatwa. In every case, the booksellers were undeterred.

E-Reading and E-Shopping

It seems like innovations have stopped helping those in the print book business. Along with the advent of online book selling, a new technology has given consumers different options when it comes to how they read their books. E-readers, once considered clunky and ineffective, have been introduced into the mainstream by Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Sony, and Kobo. E Ink Pearl screens are not backlit, and, to the eyes, they look and feel just like reading paper. Books can now be downloaded directly to these devices via wireless communications. Smart phones and tablet computers are also equipped with e-reading applications that will do the same. If a reader finishes a book while taking the train uptown, he or she no longer has to wait to get to the nearest bookstore for a new read. The old-fashioned paperback is now viewed as an endangered species. Some, like Wired magazine editor-in-chief Chris Anderson, have gone so far as to predict the “death of print” by 2015. The businesses the formerly filled our needs for physical books really began to suffer, most of all, independent bookstores. When Johannes Gutenberg was modifying an old wine press in order to churn out the first printed Bible, he probably never considered the possibility that computers would one day make his methods obsolete.

In 1971, Michael Hart invented the e-book when he typed the Declaration of Independence into a massive Xerox Sigma V computer mainframe at the University of Illinois Materials Research Lab. Hart discovered that anything typed into a computer hard drive could be copied and reproduced any number of times. The Declaration was then sent to all of the computers linked into his mainframe, and with that, the very first e-book was distributed over a network. An avid preservationist, Hart became excited with the notion that even if all the books in the world were destroyed by some horrible fire, computer tapes could store and reproduce every last volume, and the books could be electronically shared between multiple mainframes. And thus, Project Gutenberg was born, an organization that would go on to become one of the most frequented free e-book providers on the Internet. The site has carried on Hart’s legacy, and thousands of volunteers are busily scanning books into their (much more modern) computers at this very moment. Now, almost all public domain classic literature can be had for no cost at all, and read on a variety of platforms. The experience of going into a bookstore, chatting with a few new friends, and smelling the paper of your newest find is replaced by a sterile click of a mouse or tap of a finger.

Although e-books have been around since the early ‘70s, they were considered a novelty, and the market essentially stayed the same as it was at the turn of the 20th century. When Amazon released the

Kindle in 2007, the device sold out three times within the next year, despite its \$450.00 price tag. øe B&N Nook, Sony Reader, and iPad have popularized reading again, but not print media. Some independents have started offering e-books on their websites, but none have the infrastructure needed to promote this new form of reading so as to compete with the larger corporations. Readers now have even greater incentive to do all of their book buying online.

Requiem or Rebirth

Reputation has helped many independents earn a living during the economic ups and downs of the past few years, but the long-term prognosis doesn't look good. The number of independent bookstores in the United States dropped from about 6,000 in 1990 to 2,200 today. Cody's Books, Tattered Cover, and A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books, nationally recognized landmarks, have all closed their doors. Kepler's closed for a month, then reopened after community outcry and an influx of investments and donations. A movement of support is growing, but the numbers are still small. Popular books and documentaries have been published, reminding readers of the cultural importance of keeping their independents around. Bookseller associations are working to publicize the issues that lead to the collapse of stores. Sadly, most people don't realize that buying a few books on Amazon can do irreparable damage to their favorite bookstores. øe "read globally, buy locally" motto has never been more true. Andy Ross, who purchased Cody's after Fred and his wife retired, quit his job and left the dying bookstore after more than thirty years in the business, losing his entire life savings in the process. When "store closing" signs went up on Cody's windows, a shocked reporter asked Ross why Berkeley's favorite bookshop was closing. He starkly warned: "If customers abandon their bookstores, then their bookstores will abandon them."

Unless independent bookstores experience a phoenix-like resurgence in the next few years, it is hard to tell what will become of them. øe stores that people assumed would "always be around" have started to board up their windows, and trends in the business do not look good. As I stand in the deep foyer that leads into Twice Read, I wonder how many more times I will get to have this experience. I have enjoyed buying and selling books as a part-time hobby, but I know it will never be my career, no matter how passionate I am about what independent bookstores represent. How can something so valuable have such a bleak prospect for the future? øis is the nature of business in general; if you have a product that sells, you get to keep your shirt. Without the support of customers who spend money, bookstores have no other option but to close. A few enthusiasts and cultural recognition simply can't keep back the tide.

I have learned a great deal from the bookstores that have taken me in. My love of literature, my respect of public discourse and political action, and my love of the First Amendment all stem from the knowledge I have gained from independent booksellers. People like Bill have made incredible sacrifices in their personal lives to provide a public service. When past-due notices fill thick binders, and when every technological and industrial innovation seems to cut against them, booksellers stand their ground, and continue to fight for what they believe in. Battles are lost, and the war is far from won, but the struggle continues.

There is nothing like spending a sunny afternoon among old books, every one with a history and a story behind it. The book has a sturdy reputation. It has been around in one form or the other for over 1,000 years. But there may come a day when we will lose one of the greatest traditions that helped ensure the permanence of reading. Without our bookstores, we lose more than just a place to buy books; we lose a part of literary history. øe authors of the Lost Generation hung out at Shakespeare & Co., the Beats had City Lights, and some of the greatest journalists in Washington D.C. have Politics & Prose. Would the facilitation of ideas be as easily accomplished between contemporaries without the presence of bookstores? Many questions remain unanswered in my mind as I stroll down the street, walking past Twice Read's sign as it creaks in the wind.



