



PHI BETA KAPPA

THE KEY REPORTER

WINTER 2010



WHY COLLEGE STUDENTS NEED
PROFESSORS WITH TENURE



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C'est la Vie

Belt-tightening at colleges and universities across the country has put a big squeeze on the teaching of languages. Programs and positions are being cut in institutions large and small. This is not simple philistinism. Good people have been placed in excruciating situations, with the survival of their institutions in the balance, and the regret they express is sincere. So we need to ask what irresistible forces, in institutions under duress, are squeezing out the study of languages other than English and Spanish.

America has been predominantly a monoglot country. Spanish is changing that fact, if unevenly. But English is global, and most Americans sit tight with English because we can, at home or abroad. So language study seems optional — decorative, but not practical.

Words like “practical” reveal a conception of the purpose served by higher education: It trains students for jobs, benefiting them and the economic interest of society as a whole. An invisible hand coordinates the private and public goods, justifying public support for the process. In this picture, everything else is incidental, except for the very few students whose aspirations lead them off along less-traveled, unremunerative routes.

The trouble with this picture is well known. Dickens nailed it in *Hard Times*, where Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. M'Choakumchild stultify their students by treating them as units of industrial production in a school modeled on gritty mills. Mark Taylor, in *Crisis on Campus*, explains the industrial conception of the modern university. On YouTube, Ken Robinson demonstrates how modern education is organized to accept a standardized input, manipulate it through linear processes and spit out a measurable product. Robinson shows why such a process will never achieve its own ends, let alone serve any other human purpose. The fatal flaw here is an incomplete vision of human well-being; there is more to life than the first job.

Dozens of books and articles, and dozens of theorists of education, from Rousseau to Montessori to Pestalozzi to Dewey, tell us that you can't get good results treating humans like widgets. Yet we continue to organize institutions and to fund education as if it were a manufacturing process.

Higher education must serve the economy and the vocational, professional aspirations of students. But must it be organized around a conception of those ends that is such a narrow, truncated product of the industrial age? Wouldn't it serve those ends more adequately if it were organized to aim at nourishment of curiosity, wonder, divergent thought, creativity, intellectual energy, and a taste for novelty and delight? Wouldn't that make it better at enlarging and enriching students' capabilities, opening them toward unpredictable futures, rather than inculcating the techniques for solving this year's puzzles?

Everyone knows that it would. These values are praised in theory even as they are trounced in policy. The fault lies not in the sentiments, but in the big picture that sketches in the humanities — language studies among them — as decorative blossoms, lovely but dispensable. In fact, they are more like the compost heap, easy to scorn, but necessary to the productivity of the whole garden. Where can we find the will to affirm, politically, that the humanities, including the study of languages, are not decorative but deeply practical?

Language studies deal with meaning, with value and with their collisions. They deal with how to understand other people, other cultures and how to understand ourselves. They are fields of exploration and contention; they unsettle, invite novelty and make things new. They embody the dynamism of life itself. We need education that celebrates this liveliness, rather than shunting it aside. Otherwise, even the purposes we intend to serve will die away for lack of nourishment.



John Churchill
Secretary

SPOTLIGHT



Jason Kilar (ΦBK, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992), CEO of Hulu.

There's no better time to be living, I think. I'm biased, of course, but we live in interesting times. And as a person that has this odd combination of technology passion and media passion, this is the best — this is the golden age of media, I think, because it's leveraging technology to make it better and easier to consume.

— Jason Kilar

Jason Kilar serves as the CEO of Hulu. Kilar joined Hulu after nearly a decade of experience at Amazon.com where he served in a variety of key leadership roles. After writing the original business plan for Amazon's entry into the video and DVD businesses, he ultimately became vice president and general manager of Amazon's North American media businesses, which included the company's books, music, video and DVD categories. He later served as senior vice president of Worldwide Application Software where he led an organization of hundreds of world-class technologists and reported directly to CEO Jeff Bezos (ΦBK, Princeton University, 1986). Kilar began his career with The Walt Disney Company, where he worked for Disney Design and Development. He received his M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he studied business administration and journalism and mass communication.

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ON THE COVER

Students pass by Old Main walking across campus at Knox College. Knox College is hosting the Phi Beta Kappa Traveling Exhibit from November 2010-March 2011. For more information about the exhibit at Knox, see the "Online Calendar" on the ΦBK Web site at www.pbk.org.

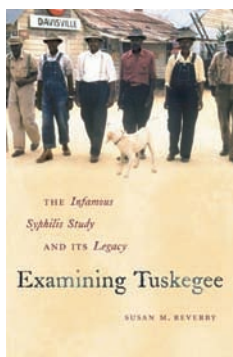
Photo courtesy of Knox College.

Our 2010 Book Award Winners

RALPH WALDO EMERSON AWARD

CHRISTIAN GAUSS AWARD

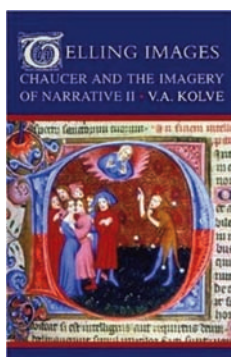
BOOK AWARD IN SCIENCE



Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy

by Susan M. Reverby

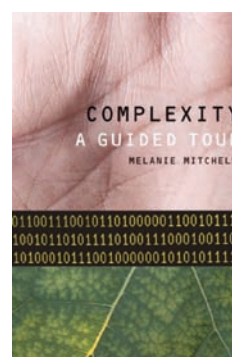
University of North Carolina Press, 2009



Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II

by V.A. Kolve

Stanford University Press, 2009



Complexity: A Guided Tour

by Melanie Mitchell

Oxford University Press, 2009

Read about these books, the authors and our upcoming awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. online at www.pbk.org.

ΦBK Lecture Series Events in New York City and Los Angeles

ELON MUSK

Jan. 8, 2011 ♦ Los Angeles

On Jan. 8, engineer, entrepreneur and philanthropist Elon Musk will speak on the subject of sustainability in energy production and transportation. The lecture will be held in Los Angeles.

Perhaps best known as a co-founder of PayPal, Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) and Tesla Motors, Musk has been fascinated by electric cars for two decades.

After earning bachelor's degrees in physics and business from the University of Pennsylvania, he worked briefly on ultracapacitors at Pinnacle Research in Silicon Valley to understand their potential as an energy storage mechanism for electric vehicles.

He planned to do graduate studies at Stanford in materials science and applied physics but put school on hold to start Zip2 and PayPal, now the world's leading online payment service.

Musk currently serves as the chair-

man, product architect and CEO of Tesla Motors, as CEO and CTO of SpaceX and as chairman of SolarCity, the nation's first full-service solar provider.

He is chairman of the Musk Foundation and a trustee of the X Prize Foundation which share an interest in renewable, environmentally friendly energy technologies.

NICHOLAS KRISTOF

Jan. 13, 2011 ♦ New York City

On Jan. 13, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof (ΦBK, Harvard, 1981) will talk about his book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. The lecture will be held in New York City.

In 1990 Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, won a Pulitzer for their coverage of China's Tiananmen Square democracy movement. Kristof won a second Pulitzer in 2006 for his work focusing national attention on genocide in Darfur.

Among those to initially raise doubts about WMD in Iraq, Kristof was the first to report that President George W. Bush's State of the Union claim about Iraq seeking uranium from Africa was contradicted by the administration's own investigation.

Kristof's books, all co-authored with his wife, include *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power* (Random House, 1994), *Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia* (Knopf, 2000) and *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (Knopf, 2009).

Global health, poverty and gender issues in the developing world are often the subjects of his columns. ■

TICKETS & INFORMATION

The ΦBK Lecture Series brings some of our country's most interesting and important public intellectuals to speak to members in cities throughout the U.S. For tickets and information, visit us online at www.pbk.org/lecture, or write to lecture@pbk.org or call (202) 265-3808.

2010 U.S. Professors of the Year

The U.S. Professors of the Year program honors the most outstanding college professors in the country — those who excel in teaching and positively influence the lives of students.

The annual Capitol Hill reception for the professors of the year, co-sponsored by ΦBK and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, was held Nov. 18 at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., a world-renowned research center on Shakespeare and on the early modern age.

“The inclusion of members of Congress at this event underscores our belief that a well-educated populace, particularly in the liberal arts and sciences, is the cornerstone of our democracy,” said ΦBK Associate Secretary Scott Lurding, who spoke at the event.

Among the U.S. Professors of the Year for 2010, the following are also ΦBK members:

Betsy A. Bowen

Professor of English, Fairfield University, Conn. (ΦBK, Colby College, 1976)

Lendol Calder

Professor of History, Augustana College, Ill. (ΦBK, University of Texas at Austin, 1979)

Andrew W. Kindon

Chair, Department of Anthropology & Geography, West Valley College, Calif. (ΦBK, Kenyon College, 1995)

Frances Tiller Pilch

Professor of Political Science, United States Air Force Academy, Colo. (ΦBK, University of Connecticut, 1963)

Deborah C. Stearns

Professor of Psychology, Montgomery College, Md. (ΦBK, University of Pennsylvania, 1988)

Kenneth J. Takeuchi

SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor, University at Buffalo (SUNY), N.Y. (ΦBK, University of Cincinnati, 1974)

Mike Veseth

Robert G. Albertson Professor of International Political Economy, University of Puget Sound, Wash. (ΦBK, University of Puget Sound, 1973)

Sponsored by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Phi Beta Kappa, the U.S. Professors of the Year program is the only national program to recognize excellence in undergraduate teaching and mentoring. ■

ΦBK Members Win National Medals of Science

On Oct. 15, President Barack Obama named 10 eminent researchers as recipients of the National Medal of Science, the highest honor bestowed by the United States on scientists.

Four of this year's recipients are Phi Beta Kappa members:

Stephen Benkovic, Pennsylvania State University, for his seminal research that has changed our understanding of how enzymes function, singly or in complexes, and has led to novel pharmaceuticals and biocatalysts. (ΦBK, Lehigh University, 1960)

Marye Anne Fox, University of California, San Diego, for seminal contributions to chemistry by elucidating the role that non-homogeneous environments can exert on excited-state processes, and enhancing our understanding of charge-transfer reactions and their application to such fields as polymers, solar energy conversion, and nanotechnology. (ΦBK, North Carolina State University, 1999)

Mortimer Mishkin, National Institutes of Health, for fundamental contributions to understanding the functional organization of the primate brain, including the discovery of the role of the inferior temporal cortex in vision, delineation of the selective contributions of medial temporal lobe structures to memory, and discovery of the neural bases of cognitive and noncognitive memory systems. (ΦBK, Dartmouth College, 1946)

Stanley Prusiner, University of California, San Francisco, for his discovery of prions representing an unprecedented class of infectious agents comprised only of proteins, which elucidated a novel paradigm of disease in which a single pathogenic process produces infectious, inherited or sporadic illnesses in humans and animals. (ΦBK, University of Pennsylvania, 1963)

The National Medal of Science was created by statute in 1959 and is administered for the White House by the National Science Foundation. Awarded



Photo credit: NSF

annually, the medal recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to science and engineering. Nominees are selected by a committee of Presidential appointees based on their extraordinary knowledge in and contributions to the biological, behavioral/social and physical sciences, as well as chemistry, engineering, computing and mathematics.

President Obama presented the awards at a White House ceremony on Nov. 17. ■

Why College Students Need Professors with Tenure

By Cary Nelson

Most Phi Beta Kappa college graduates were lucky to have college teachers with tenure, but over the last generation, the percentage of college and university teachers eligible for tenure has declined by 50 percent. Does it matter?

Fox News will tell you tenure protects radicals trying to indoctrinate students and urge them to overthrow the government. In truth it's hard to find any faculty member sending that message. No matter. It's a good scare tactic. But even the responsible press prefers to tell you tenure protects dead wood, preserves an aging professoriate and costs too much money. Each of these claims can be proved wrong.

Federal statistics tell us that, at four-year colleges, the percentage of full-time faculty members aged 55 or older was 28 percent. How many were 65 or older? Only 7 percent. Universities only spend one-third of their budgets on faculty salaries. Despite many years of education after high school, most people standing in front of a college classroom earn less than \$60,000 a year. Many earn much less. It's not faculty salaries that have grown so much. It's the number of administrators and their salaries — along with unnecessary building — that is breaking the bank. That's where your tuition money goes. Why? Because administrators set each other's salaries and pad their staffs. It would be better if tuition dollars went to support instruction.

As for dead wood? Well, the job market for faculty members has been extraordinarily competitive for 40 years. Colleges have been able to hire outstanding faculty members, people who work hard and stay current in their fields because they love what they do. The dead wood retired years ago.

"So what?" you may say. Your friends don't have tenure. Why should faculty members? Because tenure guarantees the quality and integrity of

higher education — by securing faculty members' intellectual independence.

College teachers need to be protected from capricious dismissal. If students are to be taught to think rigorously and creatively — which is their best route to success — they need teachers who can be rigorous, creative and courageous as well. Tenure doesn't guarantee that college teachers are courageous. But it protects those who are.



Teachers not eligible for tenure can be fired tomorrow or when their contracts expire. One complaint from a student, parent or politician is all it may take. Administrators who prefer to avoid controversy just don't send that teacher a new contract. Maybe the teacher offended a parent or preacher by teaching about evolution. Maybe the teacher expressed sympathy for unpopular religious beliefs. Maybe the teacher asked students whether the college needed that fancy new administration building. A professor needs to be able to voice controversial views and challenge students to question their assumptions and, at the very least, learn to define and defend them. Too many faculty members without tenure do not take the risk. Tenure doesn't protect bad teachers, but it does mean complaints need to be considered at a

formal hearing.

A college must be a place where students and faculty can freely question the beliefs many other citizens take for granted. They must be able to criticize the campus administration and the state and national government without fear of reprisal. Don't count on this principle of academic freedom being exercised if professors aren't eligible for tenure.

Tenured faculty are able to work together to plan the curriculum and deliver the best education. Faculty members not eligible for tenure are often not even invited to faculty meetings. They have no way to share their experiences, learn from their colleagues and help each other to be better teachers. Tenured faculty members also have reason to feel strong institutional loyalty and to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their students. The decline of tenure goes hand-in-hand with a decline in the quality of education. Poor teaching conditions produce poor learning conditions.

Your tuition dollars are an investment. If you want it to pay off, make certain your college grants tenure to its faculty.

The erosion of tenure means that thousands of faculty members are vulnerable to administrative, political or religious pique and whim. In many countries, college teachers do not have either academic freedom or job security. Education suffers as a result. Americans should expect better. ■

Cary Nelson is president of the American Association of University Professors. He teaches at the University of Illinois and is the author of No University Is an Island (New York University Press, 2010).

Why do college students need professors with tenure? Post responses to this article online and share your thoughts on this issue with us at www.pbk.org.

Vocational Training in Higher Education and the Loss of Civic Literacy

By Ellen Schrecker

In their rush to attract students with an ever more vocationally-oriented curriculum, America's colleges and universities risk producing a nation of civic illiterates. Propelled by the economic forces that have been restructuring American society for the past few decades, the academy has abandoned its commitment to the common good. Ever since well-paid, blue-collar jobs vanished overseas and higher education replaced the frontier as the main engine of individual mobility, an academic credential has become the ticket to the middle class. Of course, colleges and universities have always served an economic function; now, it seems, they serve no other.

From the Obama administration that wants to punish institutions that don't provide their graduates with the means for "gainful employment" to the undergraduates and their parents who demand to be slotted into jobs that will pay off their mounting student debts, the academic community is under enormous pressure to ramp up its vocational offerings. But colleges and universities are not – and certainly should not be – employment agencies. Whatever is wrong with our institutions of higher learning, transforming them into glorified vocational schools will not solve the problems.

To begin with, the narrow focus on job training will not help students adapt to their future occupations. Today's undergraduates will probably change their careers an average of six times before the end of their working lives. Many may never find secure full-time employment, but will bounce from one temporary consulting job to another, taking advantage of the volatile economy to carve out careers as what Richard A. Greenwald calls "micropreneurs." Moreover, tailoring their current education to a specific occupational niche could prove disastrous if the technology

these students are trained to use becomes obsolete or the positions they hold are shipped to Bangalore.

For our students to survive in the turbulent economy of the 21st century, they must obtain an education that emphasizes flexibility, creativity and the ability to apply what they have learned to new situations. It must enable them to situate themselves within the world around them not only by providing them with the lenses they need for under-



standing and appreciating its cultural diversity, but also by allowing them to fashion a meaningful sense of identity for themselves. Their education must open their minds by exposing them to the different ways of thinking that the basic sciences, humanities and humanistic social sciences provide. Above all, they need to learn how to learn, to realize that a complicated universe yields no easy answers.

Of course, some undergraduates are already getting that kind of education. They go to the elite private colleges and research universities that are still immune from the pressures for vocationalization. They major in physics, philosophy or history without worrying (too much) about what kinds of jobs they will ultimately land. The status and connections that their prestigious institutions confer ensure that the graduates of schools like Stanford, Michigan or Wesleyan usually obtain positions that

are more remunerative than those of their more narrowly trained peers. That they are intellectually, as well as socially and economically, privileged only underscores the increasingly undemocratic and hierarchical nature of American higher education (and the society that it all too accurately reflects).

There is, however, no reason why the millions of less fortunately situated students should be directed onto a narrow vocational track rather than provided with a more liberal education. Not only would that broader education offer them the tools for dealing with the fluid world around them, but it would also help them become more effective participants in their own society.

Here, finally, is where American higher education has gone off the tracks. By focusing so heavily on the narrowly economic benefits that a college degree confers, the nation's colleges and universities have abandoned their civic responsibilities. Some, it is true, boast of their involvement with their communities and the ways in which their students under-

take so-called public service. But such an undertaking, valuable in itself, is really social work, not education. What is needed is a commitment on the part of every academic institution to providing an education to all their students that will expose them to the entire range of human experience. Such a commitment may sound hopelessly utopian, but given the massive problems confronting the United States today, we can no longer afford to limit our students' minds.

Ellen Schrecker is professor of history at Yeshiva University and author of The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University (The New Press, 2010).

Post responses to this article online and share your thoughts on this issue with us at www.pbk.org.

What Are Books Good For?

By William Germano

I've been wondering lately when books became the enemy. Scholars have always been people of the book, so it seems wrong that the faithful companion has been put on the defensive. Part of the problem is knowing what we mean exactly when we say "book." It's a slippery term for a format, a technology, a historical construct, and something else as well.

Maybe we need to redefine, or undefine, our terms. I'm struck by the fact that the designation "scholarly book," to name one relevant category, is in itself a back formation, like "acoustic guitar." Books began as works of great seriousness, mapping out the religious and legal dimensions of culture. In a sense, books were always scholarly. Who could produce them but serious people? Who had the linguistic training to decode them?

In the sense of having been around a long time, the book has a long story to tell, one that might be organized around four epochal events, at least in the West. In the beginning was the invention of writing and its appearance on various materials. The second was the development during the first years of the Christian era of the codex — the thing with pages and a cover — first as a supplement and eventually as a replacement for the older technology of the scroll. The third was what we think of as the Gutenberg moment, the European deployment of movable type, in the 15th century. And the fourth is, of course, the digital revolution in the middle of which we find ourselves today.

When we say "book," we hear the name of a physical object, even if we're thinking outside the codex. The codex bound text in a particular way, organizing words into pages, and as a result literally reframed ideas. The static text image on my desktop is the elec-

tronic cousin of late antiquity's reading invention. When my screen is still, or when I arrange text into two or four pages, like so much visual real estate, I am replicating a medieval codex, unbinding its beautifully illuminated pages. Yet reading digitally is also a scroll-like engagement — the fact that we "scroll down" connects us to a reading practice that dates back several millennia. One of the things that book

two Frenchmen — Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin — brought out *L'apparition du livre*, or, in English, *The Coming of the Book*, a work of scholarship that became one of the signs marking the arrival of a new scholarly discipline. Book history's objective was analysis of the function of the book in European culture, and since the 1970s, it has continually expanded its scope, emerging as a trading zone among various disciplines, a rare scholarly arena where the work of librarians, archivists, and scholarly publishers can intersect with the work of traditional scholars and theorists, all members of what the economist Fritz Machlup termed the "knowledge industry."

In the long night of culture, we knowledge workers are restless sleepers. We need dreamers — in technology and science as well as the arts. Right now we are walking through two great dreams that are shaping the future of scholarship, even the very idea of scholarship and the role "the book" should play within it.

Great Dream No. 1 is universal access to knowledge. The cry to open the doors to information is heard everywhere. This dream means many things to many people, but for knowledge workers it means that scholarly books and journals can, and therefore should, be made available to all users. New technologies make that possible for the first time in human history, and as the argu-

ment goes, the existence of such possibilities obligates us to use them.

Great Dream No. 2 is the ideal of knowledge building as a self-correcting, collective exercise. Twenty years ago, nobody had Wikipedia, but when it arrived it took over the hearts and laptops of undergraduate students, and then of everyone else in the education business. Professional academic life would be poorer, or at least much slower, without it. The central premise of Wikipedia isn't speed but infinite self-correction, perpetually fine-tuning



William Germano, dean of the faculty of humanities and social sciences at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

historians study is the change in, and persistence of, reading technologies over time, and what those historians have demonstrated is that good technologies don't eradicate earlier good technologies. They overlap with them — or morph, so that the old and the new may persist alongside yet another development. Think Post-its, printed books, PCs, and iPads, all in the same office cubicle.

The book has a long history, but the concept of the "history of the book" is comparatively new. In the 1950s,

what we know. In our second dream, we expand our aggregated knowledge, quantitatively and qualitatively.

These two great dreams — the universal and the collective — should sound very familiar, since they are fundamentally the latest entries in Western culture's utopian tradition: Thomas More's *Utopia*, the Enlightenment's rational distribution of freedoms, Karl Marx's reorganization of labor. But their dark side — the troubling lump in the mattress — is the problem of books themselves, a problem always framed around the physical book and its limitations. The physical book takes up space, it may cost too much to buy and to make, it is heavy, only one person can read it at a time. Books deplete the greenery of our graying planet. Besides, the world and its technologies have replaced book reading with a quick dip into an electronic resource.

Against all that, there are classic arguments in favor of the book. Consider four.

The epistemological argument: Books are the material evidence of what we know. They are knowledge, and through them we discover what we know and who we are.

The cautionary or monitory argument: In their function as record-keepers, books transform history into the present and the present into history. Books cause us to remember and to prevent future generations from forgetting or misunderstanding us and the long collective story of particulars.

The technological argument: No predigital means of transmission has been as effective as the codex. Books don't need batteries. They're cheap in the scheme of things, and remarkably permanent. They travel well. The so-called invention of distance education, in the mid-20th century, was preceded at least 1,500 years earlier by books sent long distances from one early Christian community to another.

The autobiographical argument: Little else can demonstrate as clearly as a shelf of books (or possibly a refrigerator) who we are or imagine ourselves to be. This last argument has been given less respect than it might. Great and fancy libraries astound us, but it's the personal library where a

scholar's serious work begins. Lose the personal library, and we become less than we are.

Those are four good arguments. But they don't make my case for books.

In 2009, Robert Darnton, formerly a professor of history at Princeton University and now director of the Harvard University Library, published a volume of more than three decades of essays, titled *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (PublicAffairs). Perhaps more than any others, those essays have helped shape the current conversation about books and scholarship, their history and their future. In essence, *The Case for Books* has naturalized an argument that the Enlightenment's Republic of Letters — with its democratic vista lined with books available to all comers — may be reinvented in the 21st century. Darnton helps us see the connection between “a republic of learning” and a republic of *electronic letters*. His thoughtful case falls short — how could it not? — of proposing a solution to the competing interests of the market and the user. But we need visions, which by definition lack the fine print that makes the wonderful possible.

The Enlightenment's concerns with spreading light and learning are amply demonstrated in the Darntonian vision of a digital democracy. Both celebrate the luminosity of knowledge, shining forth through the written word. I'm struck, though, by the word “case” in the title of *The Case for Books*. In arguing his case for books, the author makes reference to cases of historical archives and to the various legal cases surrounding copyright protection.

But there are other relevant uses of the word “case.” One would have been familiar to publishers for the 100 years before computers reinvented first printing and then publishing. When the term “case” entered the book trade, at the end of the 19th century, it described what we today might call a binder. The purchaser could use the case to store issues of a journal or other periodical publications. (Twentieth-century English publishers developed the habit of referring to their hardcover books as published in cased editions, as if the

text were free-standing and the pages likely to wander off on their own.) Books had been bound in leather for centuries, but for 19th-century English printers engaged in mass production for a general audience, they were encased between what rare-book dealers and some publishers refer to as the top and bottom boards of a book. To the working publisher circa 1950, the case for books was not the Darntonian vision of the ultimate digital repository but a simple covering, a protective armature.

There are earlier uses of the word “case” as well. *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites an earlier case from an Elizabethan devotional tract that warned, “Every mans case is the skinned of a sinner.” The pious writer meant that we are not only sinners, we also are containers stuffed with sin — sort of sin sausages. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's Egyptian queen bids her servants leave Marc Antony's corpse at the Monument: “Come, away,” she tells them. “This case of that huge spirit now is cold.” Cleopatra's words confirm the distinction between the box that contains our life and the life within it.

Is the book the physical, printed text in its protective case, or is it the knowledge that the hidden text is always prepared to reveal? The answer, of course, is that the book is both. And because the book is and is not the form in which it is presented, it can do its work between boards of calf, or morocco, or Kivar, or from the booklike window of an iPad or a Nook.

So what are books good for? My best answer is that books produce knowledge by encasing it. Books take ideas and set them down, transforming them through the limitations of space into thinking usable by others. In 1959, C.P. Snow threw down the challenge of “two cultures,” the scientific and the humanistic, pursuing their separate, unconnected lives within developed societies. In the new-media ecology of the 21st century, we may not have closed that gap, but the two cultures of the contemporary world are the culture of data and the culture of narrative. Narrative is rarely collective. It isn't

Continued on page 15

The Boys Behind the Man of Steel

By Marc Tyler Nobleman

Even if you've never read a comic book, you know Superman's secret identity, what planet he's from, and the rest of the phrase "Look, up in the sky..."

What you probably don't know is who created this iconic figure (and when, and why). Yet, perhaps more than ever since Superman's 1938 debut, people want to know. And not just the comic book fanboys.

Just since 2004, we've seen no fewer than four high-profile books and one documentary about writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, both of whom had just graduated from high school in Cleveland, Ohio, when they dreamed up the world's first superhero.

Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book (Basic Books, 2004) by Gerard Jones led the pack and has become the unofficial biography of the industry, weaving Siegel and Shuster's story throughout a broader examination.

Jones feels some debt to *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning 2000 novel by Michael Chabon that focuses on a pair of fictional comics creators who bear some similarity to Siegel and Shuster. It got everyone from jocks to grandmas to read about costumed crime fighters and the guys who create them.

"I don't know that I could have sold *Men of Tomorrow* to a mainstream publisher had [Chabon] not demonstrated a larger interest in comics history," Jones said. "The curiosity of comics insiders about Jerry and Joe might have been the same, but I do think the success of *K&C*...increased the interest of the 'larger world.'"

While *K&C* may indeed have helped Jones land a deal, I don't think it inspired the average reader to pick up Jones' book, or any others on the subject. And it didn't make Siegel and Shuster household names (nor was it necessarily trying to). To comics people, *K&C* was an engaging new lens through which to consider the Siegel and Shuster story. To non-comics people, it was just a good read.

Brad Meltzer's *The Book of Lies* (Grand Central, 2008) is a murder mystery involving Siegel. Though fictional, it is partly based on actual events. *Secret Identity* (Abrams ComicArts, 2009) by Craig Yoe is a nonfiction exploration of the 1950s S&M comics Shuster allegedly drew (out of desperation, the reason for which is forthcoming). *Last Son*, a 2008 documentary by Brad Ricca about the genesis of Superman, has received stellar reactions on the film festival circuit.



Illustration of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster creating Superman by Ross MacDonald from *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman*.

My picture book for all ages, *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman* (Knopf, 2008), is the first standalone biography of Siegel and Shuster. It has been touching to arrive at a school where I'll be speaking and find that the kids have drawn pictures not only of Superman but also of Siegel and Shuster. Meltzer's book and mine were the catalysts for a 2008 *USA Today* cover story about Siegel and the creation of Superman.

A friend wondered if this surge in interest in Siegel and Shuster might relate to the litigation over Superman. Siegel and Shuster sold all rights to Superman for a startling \$130 and suffered through the next 40 years, trying tirelessly to lay claim to some of the profit. They first sued the company that became DC Comics in 1947. They lost, sued again in 1966, and lost again. They did get a settlement in 1975, but many feel it was too little, way too late. Shuster died in 1992 and Siegel four years later; the Siegels continue to take legal action against DC, and the Shusters may soon join them. While a

2008 ruling in favor of the Siegels did make *The New York Times*, this situation does not seem to stay on the radar of most people beyond the industry.

I think the spike in interest in Siegel and Shuster is at least in part because the need for preservation is growing ever more urgent. The Golden Age of Comics began, according to tradition, with the first appearance of Superman. The few remaining Golden Age writers and artists are in their eighties or nineties. Comics historians have been scrambling to document them while they are still around to speak for themselves.

The Siegel and Shuster interest may also have to do with the timing of the formative years of a certain generation. Many researching Siegel and Shuster today (including me) grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. The pervasiveness of superheroes in that period has had a distinct influence on what has been happening recently at DC. In particular, contemporary comic books take cues from the filmed media of our childhoods.

The 1970s were also the period in which Siegel and Shuster became known to a wider public. The 1975 settlement they won from Warner Communications made the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite. In 1976, their names were restored to all Superman stories in all media, starting with *Superman* #302 and culminating majestically with *Superman: The Movie*. They had begun to attend comics conventions as special guests and were invited to the movie premiere.

In terms of comics, mine is the first generation fueled less by the clinical nature of precedent and more by the emotional nature of nostalgia. We are creating superhero content by deepening the superhero content of our youth, and I think at a certain point, it's natural for that interest to extend from the fictional history to the real life history of these characters. ■

Marc Tyler Nobleman (*ΦBK*, Brandeis University, 1994) is a long-time contributor of cartoons to *The Key Reporter*. This essay is based on material from his blog, noblemania.blogspot.com.

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From Our Book Critics

By Svetlana Alpers



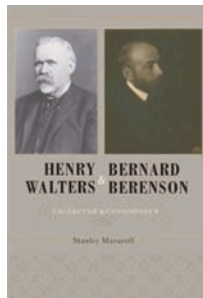
Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.
Aimée Brown
Price. Yale University Press, 2010. 485 pages, 2 vols. with slipcase. \$250.00

Collecting art proceeds in different ways, not all of them so nice. It can begin with the personal pride of high-end collectors who accumulate so much that they establish a museum. And it can end in despair as with the WWII seizures from Jewish collectors whose heirs have worked to retrieve art, often from museums where it ended up.

Collecting, at its most benign, is done between the covers of a book. Aimée Price Brown's magnificent critical study and *catalogue raisonné* puts before our eyes the often overlooked works of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898). He was born in Lyons to a wealthy family and lived in the haute bourgeois Parisian world frequented by the likes of Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet and Berthe Morisot. Reading this account of his life gives one a fresh angle on theirs.

Puvis worked outside of and against the grain of painting in his time: The small moveable easel painting was in, while he chose, with few exceptions, to make large murals for the walls of public spaces; while other painters courted sunlight, he shunned it. But his single-minded depiction of idealized figures set against cool landscapes in languid poses with no narrative purpose caught the eye of artists we now think of as advanced. Price is not the first to say that Georges Seurat in the array of his *La Grande Jatte*, Pablo Picasso in the figures of his Blue Period and Henri Matisse in his arcadian *Luxe, calme et volupté* were each taking off from something seen in Puvis. Knowing them, you know something of the Puvis look.

He is a curious case. Having his own money, he could paint large decorative murals for small fees. An independent, he was, I think, more “primitive” than classical: His dreams were of the Italian *Quattrocento*. And he was unaware of himself as the proto-modernist Price suggests him to be. To judge for yourself, take time with this book and then travel to the Panthéon in Paris or the main staircase of museums at Amiens, Marseilles or Lyons where you will be stunned by the magical proximity Puvis gives you to the famous rivers of the city — the fine-fleshed female Saône to one side, the rugged male Rhône to the other side of a door on the landing inscribed *Peinture*. Indeed!



Henry Walters & Bernard Berenson: Collector and Connoisseur.
Stanley Mazaroff.
The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 248 pages. \$40.00

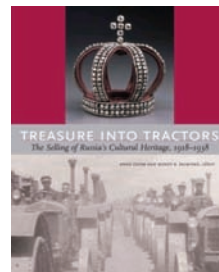
After the clarity of the “virtual” collection of a monograph, this book takes us into the murky waters of the real thing. Its focus is the 1902 purchase by Henry Walters, railroad magnate and founder of the Walters Art Gallery, of the art collection of Don Marcello Massarenti, priest and Papal assistant at the Vatican.

While other American collectors of the Gilded Age paid \$500,000 and more for one great Renaissance painting, Walters paid \$1,000,000 for 1,600 works including 520 paintings almost all of them not by the artists that were claimed — most spectacularly Michelangelo and Raphael self-portraits that weren't. While Isabella Stewart Gardner and Henry Clay Frick lived with and looked at the paintings they bought, Walters, who kept buying over a lifetime, hardly ever looked at a picture.

In 1907, Walters shipped the paint-

ings from New York, where he lived and was a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum, to Baltimore, where he built a Renaissance-style building to exhibit them. In 1910, Bernard Berenson, the famously wily, market-oriented connoisseur sought him as a promising client. Two-thirds of the pictures he recommended for purchase were mis-attributed. In 1914, a friend who entered the Walters Gallery reported that it looked as if “all the trash of the world had been swept up and dumped into that poor building.” Berenson was already deserting Walters for the dealer Joseph Duveen. He had promised Walters a catalogue that was never published. But Walters respected Berenson's scathing judgments and the collection, much diminished, survived as a gift to Baltimore. Winnowed down to worthy works, the Walters Gallery today is described as offering a fine survey of the history of Italian Renaissance painting.

The author's honesty about Walters' oddities and Berenson's chicaneries is admirable. But the book leaves a bad taste in one's mouth about collecting.



Treasures into Tractors: The Selling of Russia's Cultural Heritage, 1918-1938. Edited by Anne Odom and Wendy R. Salmond.

Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens, distributed by University of Washington Press, 2009. 400 pages. \$60.00

Much more attention has been paid to the Nazi and Soviet seizures of art during WWII than to the Soviet seizure of art following the Revolution. They are not comparable. The Nazi looting of Jewish possessions was racially and ideologically driven; the Soviet nationalization of all state, church and private property was a revolutionary political act. Nevertheless, in each case old col-

lections were destroyed and fed the new. Old masters from the new state Hermitage in Leningrad were bought up by Andrew W. Mellon. We see them now in the National Gallery in Washington. Fabergé eggs, icons and more from private estates and churches were bought by Marjorie Merriweather Post, wife of a U.S. ambassador (1937-1938) to Russia. They also can be seen in Washington, in Hillwood Estate, the museum made of her home .

It is Hillwood Estate that published this fascinating, well-illustrated book of essays in which international researchers describe the conditions under which the Soviet state organized and then sold off the cultural heritage.

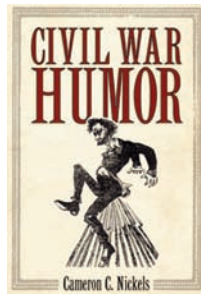
From 1918-1924, immediately after the revolution, was a time of preservation and experimentation. Imperial residences and estates were opened to the public. Museums of history and public life were organized. New techniques were developed to conserve icons seized by the state. But the first five-year economic plan (1928-1932) needed foreign currency which meant the establishment of a state apparatus to export art. It is astonishing to read that “to counteract sabotage by the intelligentsia . . . we have to put people who understand nothing about it in charge of selecting and selling the art.” They sold off a lot, but the proceeds did little for the economy.

An interest of this book lies in details — everything from the curatorial issue of how to make art of interest to the people (described as caring less for the Puvis on the wall than for how much it’s worth) to the chain of dealers through which Russian books made their way to Harvard College Library.

About collecting, there is no moral to be drawn. ■

Svetlana Alpers, an artist, critic and renowned art historian, is professor emerita of the history of art at the University of California, Berkeley and a visiting scholar in the Department of Fine Arts at New York University.

By M. Thomas Inge



Civil War Humor.

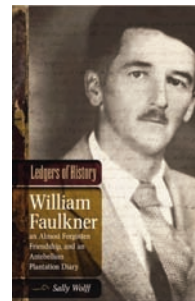
Cameron C. Nickels.
University Press of Mississippi,
2010. 180 pages.
\$28.00

Humor is one of those universal experiences which people take for granted. But it serves a valuable function in that it releases tensions and allows us to restore a balance to our view of things. Wartime humor, therefore, is especially interesting and provides an insight into our grace under pressure and threat of fire.

While a veritable library of books has been written about the Civil War, very little has been done to analyze and understand the part humor played during that terrible national conflict. Cameron C. Nickels, professor emeritus of English at James Madison University and one of the country’s senior scholars of American humor, has undertaken to fill that gap with his book *Civil War Humor*.

Examining newspaper sketches, sheet music, editorial cartoons, comic verse, funny valentines and other printed ephemera from the North and the South, Nickels divides his attention through separate chapters devoted to portrayals of the two presidents, humor on the home fronts, humor about war and depictions of African Americans. His long experience as a student of humor provides a wide range of insights, and his keen judgment as a critic allows for some new and provocative ideas.

He may be the only scholar I know who uses reader engagement and brings the reader into direct participation with the author as when he encourages one to sing along with him the opening lines of “Maryland, My Maryland.” Wisely he suggests that this is perhaps “best done alone.” But this is an engaging book for many other reasons, not the least of which is the wise, thoughtful and informative light it throws on the American psyche in a time of crisis.



Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Plantation Diary.

Sally Wolff.
Louisiana State University Press,

2010. 232 pages. \$35.00

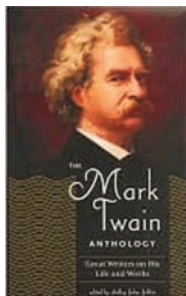
It is well known that in constructing his epic series of novels about the South, William Faulkner drew on his own family history, the history of his community and that of the entire region. Facts were translated into fiction, and the apocryphal became myth under his masterful hand, but a recent discovery casts light on exactly how that process worked.

Sally Wolff, who teaches Southern literature at Emory University, came in contact with a man who claimed to know Faulkner, Dr. Edgar Wiggin Francisco III, who grew up in Holly Springs, Miss. It turned out that his father had been a close friend of Faulkner’s who often came to visit him in his home. During these visits, the son watched them talk and remembered Faulkner being allowed to read and study the diaries kept by a great-great-grandfather from 1830-1862 about the family plantation.

Wolff was shown the diaries by Francisco, and she realized that here was a rich source of information about the realities of life on an antebellum Southern plantation. Even more, she began to recognize names and references that came from her years of studying Faulkner’s texts. What she was holding was the original ledger that inspired the one central to the plot of *Go Down, Moses*, but the model as well for any number of characters and events in other major novels.

Wolff carefully documents these sources and borrowings from the diaries, and then engages in a lengthy series of interviews with Francisco that must have been conducted over a period of time. It seems clear that the usefulness of this material has only begun to yield a small part of its riches and

that the information will prove invaluable to Faulkner scholars for some time to come. This book represents a major discovery in Faulkner scholarship and another key to understanding the accomplishment of a literary genius.



The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Work.
Edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin.
The Library of America, 2010.
518 pages. \$35.00

Mark Twain has emerged in this country's imagination as the white-haired and white-suited patriarch of American literary humor who voiced the spirit and character of the nation. His boyhood experiences in Hannibal, Mo.; his brief careers as a steamboat pilot, a miner and a newspaper journalist; and his rough-hewn appearance all contributed to his self-nurtured reputation as a wild man of the West, lately captured and civilized for the entertainment of Eastern audiences. Another side of his personality that has emerged more recently was one that aspired to respect from the genteel literati and recognition as an accomplished novelist and author.

It is to the latter Mark Twain that this volume is dedicated. Under the expert editorial hand of Shelley Fisher Fishkin, professor of English and American Studies at Stanford University and the country's preeminent Twain scholar, *The Mark Twain Anthology* gathers over 60 essays, reviews and documents by as many great writers testifying to the power and influence of Twain's example. From such contemporaries as Hamlin Garland, Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw, down to Toni Morrison, Kurt Vonnegut and Roy Blount, Jr., they all describe what they have learned from his work and the admiration they harbor for his character and thought. Even the regionalist painter Grant Wood and the great animator Chuck Jones tell how Twain taught them to describe the world and to fulfill their artistic visions. As Jones clev-

erly put it, beneath a sketch of Twain, "Mark my words, this is my dearest friend."

This is the latest volume in the magnificent Library of America, whose director, Cheryl Hurley, has seen into print over 200 volumes of definitively edited and handsomely produced collections of American authors. The library has begun to branch out into generic and thematic volumes, of which this is an excellent example. ■

M. Thomas Inge is the Robert Emory Blackwell Professor of Humanities at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va. He is an authority in American studies best known for his work in Southern literature and the art of the comics.

By Jay Pasachoff



The Six-Cornered Snowflake: A New Year's Gift. *Johannes Kepler.* *Paul Dry Books, 1611 and 2009.* *151 pages. \$12.00*



The Secret Life of a Snowflake: An Up-Close Look at the Art & Science of Snowflakes. *Kenneth Libbrecht.* *Voyageur Press, 2009.* *48 pages. \$17.00*

A most suitable book for any and all during the winter and holiday seasons is a reissue of a holiday present by the great mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler. While walking across a Prague bridge in late 1610, 400 years ago, Kepler started musing why snowflakes, as revealed to him on his sleeve because of his near-

sightedness, have six points.

The effort led him into a consideration of matters of tiling the plane and filling space with regular three-dimensional solids, the latter providing Kepler's conjecture for the packing problem that was a major mathematical 20th-century problem and that was solved only in 1998. Kepler's interest in the so-called Platonic solids had already been applied to cosmology in his 1596 *Mysterium Cosmographicum*, in which he tried to explain the arrangement of the planets. That book had helped him obtain a position with Tycho Brahe in Prague, eventually giving him the data that he used to find his first two laws of planetary motion, published in 1609 and now applied to over 500 exoplanets discovered around other stars in the last two decades.

Kepler had been looking for a gift of "nothing" to give to a colleague at the Imperial Court, and rejecting grains of dust or sparks of fire, snowflakes were satisfactorily close to nothing (Nix, in Latin, now also the name of a moon of Pluto, and easily noticed in the Latin reproduced from the original on the pages facing the English translation). The modern paperback includes not only Kepler's small masterpiece in English and Latin but also substantial descriptive and introductory pieces by Owen Gingerich of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and Harvard, and by Guillermo Bleichmar of St. John's College in Santa Fe. Jacques Bromberg of the Tuxedo Park School provided the felicitous English translation, and snowflake drawings and a snowflake poem from 1990 are also included, the latter typographically displayed in snowflake form on the pages. Even the endnotes in this wonderful little book are interesting and educationally fun to read.

Kepler's noticing of the six-sided snowflake shapes led him to "pursue the implications of this conjecture as far as possible, and not examine until later whether it is in fact true. Otherwise, the untimely discovery of a mistake could keep me from my undertaking, which is to speak about Nothing." His considerations led him to a list of possibilities that seems to me to be parallel to François Rabelais' Pantagruel consider-

ing, as published in 1532, a long list of methods of rump-wiping.

Kepler's musing led him to lengthy consideration of the hexagonal forms within bees' honeycombs and pomegranate seeds. He considered all the forms of regular solids and later went on to discover concave regular solids in addition to the known convex ones. But at the end of his 1611 book, he invokes the need for chemists to explain the snowflakes' shapes.

Though he may have called for chemists, he hadn't considered that it would be the lapsed astrophysicist Kenneth Libbrecht, a Caltech professor, who is the modern champion of snowflakes. Libbrecht has made beautiful color photographs of thousands of individual snowflakes and written several books about them. A recent brief work of his provides a selection of images as well as sufficient description and analysis for novices.

I not only saw fantastically detailed photographs of six-sided snowflakes but also saw a dozen of them to scale against a full-folio penny. I learned that "snowflakes are not frozen raindrops. Instead they grow from water vapor that comes from evaporating cloud droplets. It takes about 100,000 tiny cloud droplets to make a single snowflake that is heavy enough to fall to Earth." Libbrecht's Web site at www.SnowCrystals.com joins his other books in providing further information.

As I look at these snowflake images, I imagine that my view of the coming winter will be improved by my appreciation of their microscopic beauty. ■

Astronomer and author Jay Pasachoff is the director of Hopkins Observatory and Field Memorial Professor of Astronomy at Williams College.

ΦBK members and all other authors are welcome to submit their books for possible review in *The Key Reporter*. Mail copies to *The Key Reporter*, 1606 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009.

FSU Chapter Gives First Excellence in Teaching Award

Nancy Thomson de Grummond, the M. Lynette Thompson Professor of Classics, has been selected to receive the Excellence in Teaching Award by the Florida State University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. This is the first year that the chapter has given the award.

Nearly every summer since 1983, de Grummond has taken groups of Florida State students into Italy's Tuscany region to participate in archaeological digs at Cetamura del Chianti, a site once inhabited by the Etruscans and ancient Romans.



Professor de Grummond will receive the award at the chapter's fall 2010 initiation ceremony on Dec. 5.

Read more about the award and de Grummond's archaeological ventures with students online in the ΦBK Newsroom at www.pbk.org. ■

"What Are Books Good For?"

Continued from 9

infinitely expandable. Narrative has a shape and a temporality, and it ends, just as our lives do. Books tell stories. Scholarly books tell scholarly stories.

Storytelling is central to the work of the narrative-driven disciplines — the humanities and the nonquantitative social sciences — and it is central to the communicative pleasures of reading. Even argument is a form of narrative. Different kinds of books are, of course, good for different things. Some should be created only for download and occasional access, as in the case of most reference projects, which these days are born digital or at least given dual passports. But scholarly writing requires narrative fortitude, on the part of writer and reader. There is nothing wiki about the last set of Cambridge University Press monographs I purchased, and in each I encounter an individual speaking subject.

Each single-author book is immensely particular, a story told as only one storyteller could recount it. Scholarship is a collagist, building the next iteration of what we know book by book. Stories end, and that, I think, is a very good thing. A single authorial voice is a kind of performance, with an audience of one at a time, and no performance should outstay its welcome. Because a book must end, it must have a shape, the arc of thought that

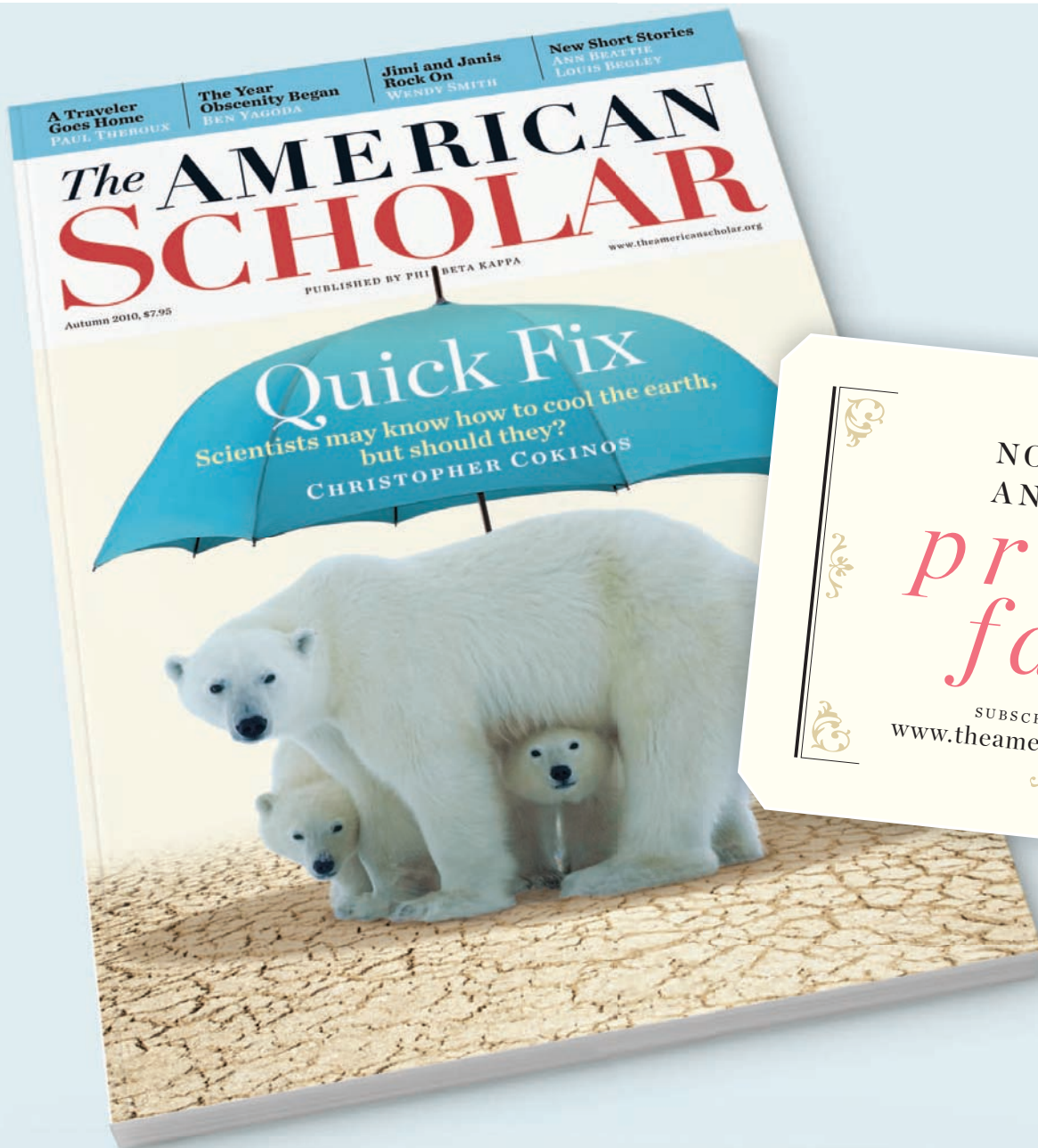
demonstrates not only the writer's command of her or his subject but also that writer's respect for the reader. A book is its own set of bookends.

Even if a book is published or disseminated in digital form, freed from its materiality, that shaping case of the codex is the ghost in the knowledge-machine. We are the case for books. Our bodies hold the capacity to generate thousands of ideas, perhaps even a couple of full-length monographs, and maybe a trade book or two. If we can get them right, books are luminous versions of our ideas, bound by narrative structure so that others can encounter those better, smarter versions of us on the page or screen. Books make the case for us, for the identity of the individual as an embodiment of thinking in the world. The heart of what even scholars do is the endless task of making that world visible again and again by telling stories, complicated, nuanced, subtle stories that reshape us daily so that new forms of knowledge can shine out. ■

William Germano is dean of the faculty of humanities and social sciences at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Presented as a talk at the annual meeting of the Association of American University Presses this summer, this essay was previously published in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

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