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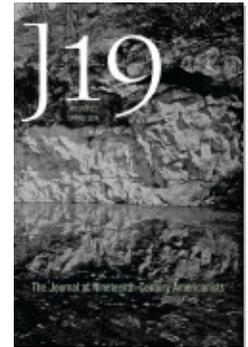
Lost Books and a History of Reading Them

Stephanie Foote

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shade, obviousness and mystery, fantasy and disillusionment, that animates the pastoral mode. Literature names a kind of tact that allows certain questions to be asked that cannot be answered: say, the meaning of “humanity.” Empson was sensitive to the pleasures of tone that accompany and convey this tact—and so was Melville.

Notes

1. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935; New York: New Directions, 1974), 114–15.
2. Ann Smock, “Quiet,” *qui parle* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 68–100, quote from 82.
3. Dan McCall, *The Silence of Bartleby* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 147.
4. Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” *The Piazza Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 642.
5. Leo Marx, “Melville’s Parable of the Walls,” *Sewanee Review* 61, no. 4 (Autumn 1953): 602–27, quote from 603.
6. Branka Arsić, *Passive Constitutions; Or 7 ½ Times Bartleby* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 128.
7. Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 362.
8. In *The American Woman’s Home* (1869), Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe extol the benefits of large screens on rollers. Milette Shamir, in *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), puts this work in a larger context. Kathryn Lofton has explored the progressive aspirations of Propst’s cubicle designs in “The Spirit in the Cubicle: A Religious History of the American Office,” in *Sensational Religion: Sense and Contention in Material Practice*, ed. Sally Promey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming).
9. Empson admitted that “taken widely” the pastoral “formula might include all of literature” (23), and Wolfgang Iser takes the mode to be the “paradigm of literary fictionality.” See Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), chap. 2.
10. Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, July 17, 1852, *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1960), 152–53.
11. “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” in *Uncollected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1154–5.
12. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Tony Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2.

Lost Books and a History of Reading Them

Stephanie Foote

University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

I grew up in a dilapidated but much-loved house out in the middle of nowhere. In the days before cable TV, Internet, and cell phones, my brother and I and my mother were often thrown back on whatever resources the house afforded. We had a television that got four stations if you counted public television (which we didn’t), and when my brother and I tired of squabbling over what to watch, one of us—usually me—would give up and find a book to read. This was not

always an easy thing to do. Although my family's term for people who liked to read was the wonderfully straightforward epithet "reader," an explanatory title that was often accompanied with a shoulder shrug as in, "Well, you know. She's a reader," and although my mother was pleased that I was "a reader," we didn't have all that many books. Or so I thought at the time. Unless I remembered to get something out of the school library or I saved or begged enough from my mom to get something from the Scholastic catalog, I would be thrown back on the same titles from my own small store, many of which I secretly felt I had outgrown, again and again.

And yet, when I look back on it, I see that I was wrong. I am now astonished at how many books we actually had in our house; I hardly counted them as "real" books at the time. I know how they looked and remember how they felt in my hand, where they were kept, why they had been acquired and saved. In retrospect the collection seems random but then it struck me as perfectly ordinary, and I don't doubt that it was very nearly the same as the collection of books you'd find in any other family of our particular era, social class, and region. We doubtless had those books because we were supposed to have them: they were designed for people like us, and we were found and categorized by them at the very moment we thought we were selecting them. And yet they did not fulfill their appointed office so neatly as all that; they branched out and suggested kinds of readings and interpretations that could not have been predicted by their publishers. They composed my first library, and I read some of them over and over, using them as placeholders that could help me make a kind of imaginary archive of other sorts of books I thought might be out there but that I did not yet know how to find. I read them eccentrically, practicing a kind of close attention to their prose on some days, and letting my eyes drift over the familiar pages on others.

A fair few of the books were quite prominently displayed; these were our household's tiny, idiosyncratic store of rare books—rare to no one but ourselves, and rare according to some calculus that had more to do with what the books looked like than what they contained. In pride of place was a full set of green hardcover Funk and Wagnall's encyclopedias from the late 1960s. These had been purchased because my mother, like many others of her generation, believed that it was necessary to have a set of encyclopedias at home so we could study. Having them might even convert a regular person into what was often referred to as "college material." Despite the fact that this particular set of encyclopedias arrived in 1967, roughly the same year my brother and I arrived,

and despite the fact that they would be almost comically outdated by the time we needed to use them, they were dusted regularly and carefully, and no knickknacks, gewgaws, or misshapen school art projects were thought worthy of sharing a shelf with them.

We did end up examining those volumes on occasion—some contained what my brother and I considered interesting if highly improbable anatomical drawings—but more fascinating to us were my mother's high school yearbooks. We looked at them a lot more than my mother did; she hardly seemed to remember they were there. When we were in grade school, we used to leaf through them, finding her pictures, picking her out in group shots, poring over the inscriptions written by her friends. Something about the combination of local and personal news, photographs of strangers (among whom we numbered our mother when she was seventeen), and the curlicued, ornate handwritten messages hypnotized us. They seemed to have some hidden meaning we couldn't quite grasp, to be narrating a life we could not access even though it was our mother's. We thought the artifact itself was quite beautiful, and we saw something of its magic—that its contents were both extremely personal and entirely generic—in its presentation of our mother as both comfortingly recognizable and yet disconcertingly strange to us.

We were as drawn to those old yearbooks as we were to a book that was in some sense exactly like a yearbook in its shape and in its narrative of commemoration for people who seemed to be both connected and unknown to us. *The Torch Is Passed* was a slender, solemn hardback that detailed, mainly in photographs, the last day of President Kennedy. That was the first time my brother and I saw stills from the Zapruder film, and the first time we ever saw pictures of Jackie Kennedy, President Kennedy, and Jack Ruby. In an age before reality television and the ubiquitous candid photographs of celebrities acting just like real people, the photos were shockingly raw. They seemed impossibly distant as well as horribly intimate; the more we looked at them the more it felt as though we might have known the people in them and were looking at their private albums. I remember very little of that book's text but I remember that the book itself was meant to be handled with an almost ritualistic gravity. We had to be very careful with it; we could only read it right next to the book shelf, we couldn't take it to another room or have any food near us in case we spilled anything on it.

Like most families, we also had a random assortment of novels and gift books. We had a battered copy of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in a Signet paperback with what looked like an oil painting of Vivien Leigh

on the cover. Even then the pages were yellowing; the book was so long the glue was disintegrating and if you picked it up or moved it, pages would fall out of it. It was not a valuable book of course—I strongly suspect that no one in the house had ever read it all the way through—but it was valuable in our economy because my mother knew that it was a work of “great art” and that it was a classic. It did not matter that it appeared in cheap paperback form; the text itself, because it was a classic, produced a spectral body more real and delicate than the damaged body it happened to be wearing in our house.

There were a few other things. We had some Harold Robbins novels (*A Stone for Danny Fisher*, which was written when Harold Robbins was still good, according to my mother, and *The Betsey*, the cover of which was an extremely lurid photograph of a woman’s open mouth); *Helter Skelter*, which also had photographs, and which mysteriously disappeared mere days after I was spotted with it in my hand. We had a lot of James Michener novels, many of which I dutifully made my way through, and some James Clavell novels that to my mind were worth their weight in gold because they were long and had bloated quasi-historical plots that could see you through a long summer. All of these were like the Tolstoy—the cheapest mass-market paperbacks, and all arranged neatly on a single shelf. On the very top of the bookshelf was a Bible and a rosary in a cedar box. Next to that was another collection of “special books”—books as strangely tiny as the yearbooks were large. These were gifts given to my mother by friends, and they included a host of Betsey Clark books with titles like *A Little Book of Love* featuring drawings of children with gigantic onion-shaped heads, skinny legs, and horribly oversized clogs. These, along with a few Peanuts cartoon books, occupied a place somewhere above fiction and below the yearbook.

The kinds of books we had in the house changed over time, of course. More were added, some were loaned to friends, or lost during various moves. I got more from school, from yard sales, and I got books each year for Christmas. One memorable year when I was twelve I got a record four paperbacks, all horror novels to which I was then addicted, and with which I scared myself stupid by reading alone in the house that very night when my brother had to go to the hospital for a burst eardrum. I had fair few from the Quality Paperback Book Club, in which I enrolled when I was thirteen to get the free books. I could never afford to get the mandatory books, which initiated a relationship to a new literary form: the dunning notice. My mother had joined the Book of the Month Club a little while earlier but gave it up because she didn’t like

any of the books. For the record, I got the collected works of Robert Frost, and she got Robert J. Ringer's *Looking Out for Number 1* (then very popular, and the first self-help book I had ever seen), and Evelyn Keyes' *Scarlett O'Hara's Younger Sister*, which was a very funny memoir of one of the actresses who had starred in *Gone with the Wind*. Each of these books was infinitely more interesting than Robert Frost any day of the week, and they had dust jackets and looked amazingly classy up there on the shelf. We were rather proud that we looked like readers, though irritated that joining these clubs seemed like a rip-off in the long run.

Though I felt growing up that we had no books at all, what is really astonishing to me now is that in a family in which reading was not a particularly prized activity, and book ownership not at all an economic priority, there were actually *so many things to read*. In part this is because there were so many kinds of books to be had, and so many ways of getting a relatively cheap book. We had bestselling books and we had gift books, books printed by the biggest paperback conglomerates in the world, and books produced by the most saccharine greeting card company in the world. We had books by "classic" authors, by name-brand authors, and by corporate authors like the AP wire. We had books meant for no one but us and books meant to tell us how we fit into the big picture of US history.

We were perfectly typical of our class and era because we were solicited by books in so many different ways it's hard to even think of the book artifacts we had as being in any way similar outside the logic of the exchangeable commodity—what makes a book that one gets at Walden Books, then the regnant book store in our part of the world, the same as a book that you get at school commemorating your high school? We used the books for different things, and we invested them with different meanings at different times. And while we had them, we made judgments not only about which texts were valuable; we made distinctions about which book artifacts were valuable as well. Sometimes the two forms of value were incongruous and we didn't know it (the ruined copy of *Anna Karenina*) but sometimes we did know it: my mother couldn't bear to get rid of her disappointing selections from the Book of the Month Club, because they were hardbacks with dust jackets. They were real books, even though she kind of hated them, and you can't destroy a real book.

Now, as an English professor, I am surrounded by books. I don't have enough space for them, and I don't really even know which ones I have. I have more than once bought a book I already own but couldn't

lay my hands on. I regularly get books to review for journals, and I am in a field in which the production of the book, no matter how obscure the topic or how few the number of potential readers, is still somehow perceived by the university (if not the publishers who must absorb the real cost of the fantastical economics of the humanities disciplines that still privilege it) to be an unmitigated good. Every year I must choose the editions of the books I want to teach, and when I am tired of reading for class, I usually read a novel. I listen to books on my iPod and in my car, and I think and write about the history of books, and the special relationship between texts and book artifacts. I could not get away from books even if I wanted to. My job requires me to think about books every waking minute of my life. I could hardly have imagined such a thing when I was a kid.

But I'm a different kind of reader now, one who knows how to put texts in the right order and books on the right shelves. My pleasures in them are predictable, not old or vitiated by any means, but they are less surprising because they are grounded by my knowledge of, say, how realism works, or what it means to posit a queer masculinity in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, the pleasures of reading now are very different; they are about figuring out webs of textual affiliations that have been sketched out by many other scholars. Even fresh or outrageous reformulations of much loved texts are almost always comprehensible to others in my field. I read more deeply, more skillfully, less randomly than I once did, but I read in a field, and sometimes it is the field that brings the pleasures and not the text.

But not always. Many of the books I work with and teach are in definitive editions that have been painstakingly researched by scholars, but many, many more of them are texts I have been able to reliably access in only digital form. Indeed, there is no way I could do my work without digital archives, which have proved more useful to me than I would have thought, given that I do not by any stretch of the imagination work on rare nineteenth-century texts. I work on late nineteenth-century realist novels of the sort that you can find in numerous different editions, and often, if you are lucky, the used ones (which are everywhere) will have marginal notes made by other readers. But I also work on what it meant to read those novels in a world filled with a million different print artifacts, many of which are hard to find and are critical for really seeing how the novels I love did their cultural work. As much as I love the codex, I need the ephemera that surrounded it, and I can get all of it I want digitally.

I won't go into the by now well-known diatribes against digital reading: arguments about the sanctity of the book artifact and how the digital version of a novel accessed on Kindle somehow harms the integrity of the text. I will note, though, that many popular laments about the death of the codex generally build their case by lovingly referring to the very tactility I have been describing. What a book feels like in your hands. How its smells, how it feels to turn the pages, its weight and heft, the proprietary way you hold it and mark it and make it your own. How you must find a place for it in your house, how you can look at it and pick it up and leaf through it. Essays in venues like Slate.com or the *Atlantic*, as well as innumerable blog posts, have essentially made the argument that it doesn't matter what a book's production history is. As soon as you own it and it's yours, it's a rare book. It cannot be replaced, and it cannot be replaced because the very act of holding it and reading it is as important as what you are doing when you are interpreting it. It's a kind of proprietary romance in which the book's function is to be a material sign of the feelings the act of encountering the text once gave you.

I am not above this feeling, of course. How else would I remember so clearly the collection of books that ultimately turned me into a nineteenth-century scholar? And certainly it would be difficult to imagine how a digital version of a text could resonate as strongly as its material incarnation in very specific circumstances. It would, for example, be hard to feel the cringeworthy pathos of the handwritten list of books Tom Corey makes for Irene Lapham in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* were he simply to buy an Amazon gift certificate so she could download a few choice titles to a Kindle and trust that Amazon would recommend other really good ones. The materiality of the books counts for her at least as much as the texts, but in part this is because, as my mother might have said, she's not a reader. And it is difficult to imagine that Amy March's destruction of her sister Jo's fairytales would have packed the same punch if she'd just hacked into Jo's account and deleted her blog.

Popular feeling against digitization casts the feelings we associate with the act of reading as properties of the book alone, but they are not. They are more complicated than that, produced by the encounter with the text in any form. Those pleasures are about the room we are in, the way we are sitting, the ability of the text to make us forget our own material existence at all, even though later, the sensuous details of that materiality might be evoked suddenly and sharply by our rediscovery of

that text. Those are pleasures that can happen with an iPad or a Kindle, which must also be touched and held, and which can bear the traces of our hand in the form of marginalia and underlining. Indeed, only with digital books do I have nearly complete access to the kinds of things that late nineteenth-century readers would have been able to find, and there is a strange kind of pleasure in being able to at least try to recreate those sorts of once-common and now forgotten household libraries, filled with ephemera and etiquette books, newspapers and magazines and cheap novels of the sort that we hardly ever study in classes and that Tom Corey would most definitely not have recommended to Irene. That is, only by digital reading can I get to a world of print that helped to shape the way that people felt about reading itself. That is a strange pleasure and one I had not anticipated.

It is at its heart about seeing and taking seriously a richer field of fiction, which means taking seriously the multitude of pleasures that even now-forgotten fiction and texts might have provided. In some sense, the intensely tactile memories I have of the books in the house I grew up in are not all that different from the affordances of the digital archives now so important to our scholarship. I could probably make a case that my love for realist fiction's formal properties can be traced to the intense close reading I ended up doing once I decided to finally open our fragile copy of *Anna Karenina*, or to how I learned to narrate to myself the process of reading it—a perfect example of how the novel form produces a solitary interiority as a function of its sociability. That all might even be true.

But it's more accurate to say that the odd assortment of texts I grew up with, the scattered way I approached them and responded to them prepared me to see how a material object can focus our attention on the scenes of reading and the heterogeneous, unpredictable ways we encounter and make use of books and texts. That in turn helped me to see the value of digital reading and digitized archives, for the kinds of digital archives I now use call to mind how many ways there were to be a reader, how many different kinds of pleasures have always been involved in assembling different kinds of "libraries" and reading practices. I am a historical reader when I use the digital archives to create a deeper and richer nineteenth century, a nineteenth century more unruly and incalculable than the one I knew when I first began in this field. I am a historical reader when I remember my own archive of books from my childhood; they historicize me even as I believe they individuate me. That archive seems to be mine alone and seems to be the repository of

all kinds of memories and feelings, but its meaning can only fully be understood when the scenes of interpretation it made possible are charted against a larger story about books and texts, the cultural moment in which I grew up, the specificities that made my family so much like many others from whom we would surely have distinguished ourselves.

The books I am talking about are lost to me: I don't have a single one any more, though I'm sure that I could get replacements for a fair few of them. I don't imagine that reading them now would make me feel any closer to the person I once was, any more than I imagine that having read a full run of the nineteenth-century issues of *Vogue* on my laptop made me into a late nineteenth-century woman. But the books that are lost to me and the texts that are preserved in digital form yield similar pleasures—pleasures built on excess and disorder and unregulated affiliations and connections, surprising juxtapositions and arguments. They are the material traces of lost histories of all kinds, even if those lost histories are ours alone, and they ask us to remember what reading felt like when we didn't always know how we were supposed to feel about the material in our hands.

Life during Wartime

Michael A. Elliott

Emory University

1.

If you travel by air in the United States, you have probably spent time in Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Even by the low standards of contemporary travel, it is a particularly unpleasant place to wait. The corridors are too narrow; the gate areas crowded with chairs and luggage; a CNN soundtrack and fluorescent lighting combine in an aesthetic of unbearable brightness. Yet thanks to my planning, my son and I have arrived at our gate with more than an hour to burn. Gabe is only seven, but he has already learned to bristle at the regular warnings broadcast over the loudspeaker about airport security, smoking, and the like. We haven't even really started our trip, and I am already wondering if I have made the right decision by bringing him.

We are surrounded by young men in fatigues. This will be another familiar sight if you are a regular traveler. You may even have clapped