

“Todd, I did read your memoir, first, and found it gripping from beginning to end. I had no idea that your life had been so adventurous and enterprising, from the very start.” (Joscelyn Godwin).

Todd Pratum’s Memoir

Dark Impressions – 35 Years as a Dealer of Books on the Occult. Contained in: **OCTAGON II, The Quest for Wholeness**,

Edited by Hans Thomas Hakl. Gagnenau: Scientia Nova 2016, 1sted, glossy picture boards, 456pp, sewn signatures, illustrated with photographs, new book, 300 copies only, autographed. This is volume two of an ongoing four volume series that documents the history and practice of esotericism as seen through the lens of the largest occult library in private hands, The Octagon, located in Graz Austria. It contains my 67 page memoir ‘*Dark Impressions*,’ plus 21 other essays and papers in English by some of the most respected authorities on esotericism (see list below). Volume one—the German language texts—has already been published and is in stock (\$100.00), volume two, just released, contains the English language texts. The third volume will contain the French texts and volume four the Italian texts. An historic publishing event, nothing like it has ever been done. My memoir includes descriptions of some special rare books, libraries I’ve purchased and sold, my seven bookshops and my extensive catalog business, and accounts of noteworthy customers (good & bad) and their collecting predilections; other occult dealers, book hunting in exotic lands, battles with the FBI, and how the gods forced me into the book business in the first place. With a postscript on ‘Collecting Books in the Internet Age.’ This four volume series will not be distributed in North America. Besides volume one and two I can also supply volume three and four.

\$100.00 nett, post paid in the US.

Dark Impressions

35 Years as a Dealer in Books on the Occult

Dee manuscripts, digital delusions, armed IRS agents,
evil aliens, naked customers, a cyanide ring and a car crash –
With a Postscript on Book Collecting in the Internet Age

A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.

(Franz Kafka)

Nota Bene

This memoir sketches some highlights that could later be expanded if there is any interest. It is written for book lovers, book collectors, fellow dealers and those curious about the zeitgeist of a California based occult bookdealer. To save space I've left out a lot of later history because origins always seem more interesting. A few things to remember while reading. 1.) Though I sell books in many languages and have hunted books in dozens of countries this memoir refers mainly to the English-speaking world of book dealing and book collecting c.1981–2016, and I've focused on what I know best, the California scene, thus all locations mentioned are in California unless otherwise specified. 2.) The term 'occult' is almost impossible to define and the word – in popular use for only about 100 years – is practically useless for the scholar. Here it is used in the widest possible sense as a catch-all term for anything deemed secret, esoteric, supernatural, mysterious, unknown. The subjects of alchemy, magic and witchcraft are obvious, but I also use the word to include the study of unidentified flying objects and anomalous phenomena ('Fortean'), spiritual philosophy, folklore, alternative healing, psychic science, Spiritualism, mysticism, hypnosis, primitive ritual, the mysteries of science & history (e.g. animal navigation, the identity of Shakespeare, Tesla), etc. & etc., and though 'Hermeticism' and 'esotericism' have now become precisely defined terms (see Yates, Ritman, Hanegraaff et al.), these subjects are included here as the 'occult' for simplicity's sake. Finally, I hope readers can excuse all the superlatives. I'm a naturally enthusiastic person and it has been difficult to write about my passion without using so many of them.

Contents of **Octagon II**

- Hans Thomas Hakl: There once was a young man who left home in order to buy lots of books, and even as an old man hadn't got any wiser and still diligently kept buying them ... The History of a Library and the Personal Reflections of a Collector.

- Wouter J. Hanegraaff: 'Ad loca secretiora': Rejected Knowledge and the Future of Libraries.
- Hereward Tilton: The Urim and Thummim and the Origins of the Gold- und Rosenkreuz.
- Peter J. Forshaw: Unexpected in the Octagon: Heinrich Khunrath's Presentation Copy.
- Henrik Bogdan: The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the George E.H. Slater Collection.
- Joscelyn Godwin: A Walk through the Speculative Music Section.
- Christopher McIntosh: Searching for the Gods in the Octagon
- Aaron Cheak: The Alchemy of Desire – The Metaphysics of Eros in Renè Schwaller de Lubicz (A Study of Adam l'homme rouge).
- Konstantin Burmistrov: Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Order of the Asiatic Brethren.
- Roberto Fondi: The Holistic Factor in Biological Evolution.
- Riccardo Bernardini: The Historiography of Eranos: An Homage to Hans Thomas Hakl.
- Mac Linscott Ricketts: Glimpses into Eliade's Religious Beliefs as Seen in his Portugal Journal.
- Jeffrey Kripal: How I Came to the Study of Western Esotericism: And Why I Think It Is So Important.
- Andraž Marchetti: Dharma.
- Giuseppe Baroetto: The Illusion of Reincarnation.
- Arthur Versluis: Parahistory and Madame Blavatsky's Progeny.
- Alexander Bruce: Arcana Arcanorum: From the Rituals of Egyptian Freemasonry to the Kremmerzian Corpus.
- Alexandra Nagel: The Enigmatic Mentalist Wolf Messing.
- Gregory Shaw: Archetypal Psychology, Dreamwork, and Neoplatonism.
- Frank Julian Gelli: Julius Evola and I.
- Christian Giudice: 'For a Spiritual Understanding of Life' – Arturo Reghini's Theosophical Years (1898–1907).
- Todd Pratum: Dark Impressions – 35 Years as a Dealer of Books on the Occult

**Order from Todd Pratum. 263 Athol Avenue, No.8
Oakland California 94606. 510.835.1766 (24 hrs),
books@toddpratum.com
Exclusive US distributor.**

Thanks for reading!

News flash, my memoir has just been brilliantly described and summarized by James Fergusson in the latest edition (Winter 2016) of the esteemed *The Book Collector*. It begins on page 19, [link here](#).



Todd Leif Pratum
Pratum Book Company
Pratum Literacy Services
Pratum Children's Library

Attended:
Kenya Science Teachers College
Sorbonne-American Art School
University of San Diego
San Diego Mesa College
College of the Desert
College of the Siskiyous
City College of San Francisco
San Francisco State University
Never matriculated!

Antiquarian & Scholarly Bookdealer
Literacy Consultant
Oakland California
www.ToddPratum.com

Dark Impressions. 35 Years as a Dealer in Books on the Occult.

*Dee manuscripts, digital delusions, armed IRS agents, evil aliens,
naked customers, a cyanide ring and a car crash.*

With a Postscript on Book Collecting in the Internet Age.
Oakland California, 2016

“A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.” — Franz Kafka.

Nota Bene

This memoir sketches some highlights that could later be expanded if there is any interest. It is written for book lovers, book collectors, fellow dealers and those curious about the zeitgeist of a California based occult bookdealer. To save space I've left out a lot of later history because origins always seem more interesting. A few things to remember while reading. 1.) Though I sell books in many languages and have hunted books in dozens of countries this memoir refers mainly to the English-speaking world of book dealing and book collecting c.1981-2016, and I've focused on what I know best, the California scene, thus all locations mentioned are in California unless otherwise specified. 2.) The term 'occult' is almost impossible to define and the word--in popular use for only about 100 years--is practically useless for the scholar. Here it is used in the widest possible sense as a catch-all term for anything deemed secret, esoteric, supernatural, mysterious, unknown. The subjects of alchemy, magic and witchcraft are obvious, but I also use the word to include the study of unidentified flying objects and anomalous phenomena ('Fortean'), spiritual philosophy, folklore, alternative healing, psychic science, Spiritualism, mysticism, hypnosis, primitive ritual, the mysteries of science & history (e.g. animal navigation, the identity of Shakespeare, Tesla), etc & etc, and though 'Hermeticism' and 'esotericism' have now become precisely defined terms (see Yates, Ritman, Hanegraaff et al), these subjects are included here as the 'occult' for simplicity's sake. Finally, I hope readers can excuse all the superlatives. I'm a naturally enthusiastic person and it has been difficult to write about my passion without using so many of them.

In Humble Appreciation

Where are the great occult libraries today? And what of the great occult libraries of the past? The latter question has never been examined in detail and though I could, there is no space for that here — suffice to say there have been very few. However, throughout my career a major concern has always been to connect with any currently living, breathing occult libraries large or small. There must be quite a few, right? I've spent decades contacting hundreds of libraries by sending them my catalogs: Theosophical libraries, Masonic libraries, Spiritualist and psychical research libraries, psychological and religious libraries of all kinds, and great research libraries like those of Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard. The catalogs included friendly letters, offers of credit and my book searching services. I asked about their collecting goals, their parameters for buying; I made offers to buy their duplicates and rejects, and was always willing to bill them according to their budgetary needs, but the vast majority never replied or did so briefly and then disappeared. There are of course existing occult libraries but most are not living, curated libraries. They are not filling in gaps, keeping up with the latest publications, or holding events, and maybe not even available for use except for a select few. Nearly all the great occult libraries of today — the few that exist — are little used calcified fossils and this has been a great disappointment.

Besides institutional libraries I courted every possible group, society and scholarly entity and for decades devoted enormous amounts of time and money to mailing tens of thousands of catalogs looking for serious collectors. I pondered every possible directory, rented mailing lists, and sent catalogs to astrologers, Fourth Way groups, Neoplatonic societies, tarot readers, artists, places like B.O.T.A., Esalen, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, numerous museums and historical preservationists. Sometimes the most improbable would become customers. For example, the American Chemical Association bought lots of

books on alchemy, but only for a little while and then . . . ‘poof!’ they were gone, passion lost, funding lost — who knows? All this work certainly put me in touch with thousands of small occasional buyers but over the decades Thomas Hakl has been the only one to collect widely and deeply and regularly, and with such erudition and vision. You could not say this of the Ritman Library (limited to Hermeticism and esotericism), nor of the now defunct Golden Rule Library, and certainly no other collector, and though I’m sure there are a few large living libraries in Europe, I never encountered them. For 27 years, beginning with Catalog 12, Thomas has bought from almost every catalog and placed uncountable special orders, and has always been the most generous, trusting and kind customer. He is truly unique. To be a part of The Octagon, in my little way, has been a blessing and an honor.

It’s not that people don’t care about this printed heritage. Everybody “loves books” but the vast majority lack the necessary romantic, idealistic, and preservationist spirit essential to power and guide a collection over a long period of time, not to mention the space and finances. Surprising and disappointing as it is, I have never met a dedicated long haul collector of any of my specialties: Hermeticism (with Ritman as the sole exception), Buddhism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, magic, magick, Kabbalah, folklore, mysticism, cosmology, psychical research, or any of the other subjects I have always cataloged. Yes, I’ve known many ‘smaller’ collectors, usually lasting two or three years but 10 years? 20 years? Almost never. It is for these reasons (and more) that the Octagon Library must be preserved.

It is however interesting to note what subjects and disciplines do conjure up a devotion (however fleeting) to library building and preservation. For example Freudians are passionate collectors and first editions of Freud are now traded at astronomical prices, but Jungian collectors are almost non-existent, (Steve Martin of the Philemon Foundation is a rare exception). Why this is I cannot easily say! Of course Freud has been considerably more influential, but you cannot say that Jung’s influence is all that much less. Every dealer in the occult quickly learns that Aleister Crowley is the most popular author by far, but usually it is only Crowley’s magic that engenders dedicated collecting, not his research on yoga, or the I Ching, or his politics, poetry etc. This seems a very myopic approach. Crowleyites have been the most disappointing of all collectors, so frequently unlettered, uneducated and ill funded, often rude, and occasionally untrustworthy. Every used bookdealer knows to keep Crowley related books behind the counter as they will be the first stolen (and for this reason I no longer bother with anything but the most important works associated with him). What’s remarkable about Thomas’ vision is the way he can see beyond the usual and the easy, going deep to gather and connect so many disparate but vital elements, from sexology to folklore, fascist Freemasonry to nondualist Hinduism, with a rare understanding of the importance of periodicals, bibliographies, bookdealer catalogs, ephemera, art, letters and diaries. And who collects books that are hostile, condemning, discrediting? Thomas brings it all together into one magnificent panorama for the future. His spirit is not just the collector’s spirit but like a noble calling, answered so beautifully.

I’ve known a number of collectors with important libraries who wished for their labors to live on in some kind of perpetuity after their death, and in almost every case, no matter what the provisions, this has not come to pass. But surely there has been no library I’ve known that deserves immortality more than The Octagon. People who believe that the preservation of this literature is of critical importance should do what is necessary to see that The Octagon is preserved and not scattered to the winds. I will do all I can.

Standing on the Shoulders of the Generous

Many have helped me in my business, and along with Thomas I must pay homage to three dealers who without their munificence I would just be another garden-variety bookdealer. The first was David Park, my initiator. David had the unique position of being manager of Holmes Book Company, established in 1894. This shop, in the heart of downtown San Francisco was the definition of a classic old world bookshop with beautiful storefront windows full of rare volumes and finely bound author sets, and tables

outside full of 50 cent bargains. Inside the spacious rooms with floor-to-ceiling shelving were thick oak tables laden with recent purchases. This was where David Park spent 13 years as the maestro, handling the great family libraries being liquidated at that time, (the 1970s and 1980s). He was the only dealer to let me in his back room, to politely tell me when my books were overpriced, to share the secrets of how to preserve crumbling leather bindings. He was a man who wore an apron every day. He was the only dealer to visit my first bookshop and offer advice instead of silently buying the underpriced plums. David later struck out on his own to specialize in one of the most improbable fields possible, that of dark politics (rare and suppressed books on secret governments, assassinations and brainwashing), issuing some of the most creative and erudite catalogs. (He said the CIA was almost certainly one of his best customers though he could never tell exactly which buyers were the agents!). One of his most memorable publications was the “long lost poetry” of Lee Harvey Oswald, David’s clever and thought-provoking forgery. David believed in the sharing fraternity of bookselling, as few dealers do.

Richard Hackney, owner of Fields Book Store, the finest occult bookstore in America (see below) also took me under his wing and shared his knowledge of the business. Many bookdealers are misanthropes, and if not starting out that way it’s easy to become one if you don’t enjoy serving the great unwashed masses. Richard loved serving, answering questions, and dealing with his eclectic mix of customers, Yoruba priests, Satanists with head horns, church ladies and New Age masters in white robes. Richard did such favors as lending me the splendid catalogs of Nick Schors (a revelation to me then), and who first introduced me to R. A. Gilbert, the greatest occult dealer in England. Richard died an early death from AIDS but thankfully made careful plans to ensure the survival of his legacy.

Ian Jackson is my greatest book-hero and inspiration. America is home to hundreds of brilliant, highly educated antiquarian bookdealers whose knowledge is often wider and deeper than all but the most premier scholars, and among this lofty world Ian is unquestionably the most knowledgeable. He will cringe when he reads this because instead of parading his accomplishments, he quietly does it all for self-knowledge, though shared so generously with me! I was fortunate to meet him early in my career and get to know his unparalleled library. Ian’s humble tutelage and friendship changed everything for me. His exemplary, often revelatory book catalogs, meticulously composed and annotated, taught me there is nothing wrong with using half a page on a \$10 book if you cared about it, to eschew puffery and always be honest, even when it costs you. Nobody has more to give, and nobody has given more, I am deeply grateful.

A Brief Summary

By abandoning my youthful efforts to become a professional abstract painter, and by converting my San Francisco storefront studio and gallery, The Cave Wall, I opened my first bookshop in 1981, The Mantic Hands Book Gallery. For 35 years since I’ve been a full-time dealer in books on the occult and related subjects, always located in the San Francisco Bay Area which was, (and may still be) the world’s largest and most diverse book market, with a long history of occult bookshops. I’ve founded seven new, used, and rare bookshops and worked in half a dozen others, issued 94 catalogs, (89 of them printed, now emailed as PDF’s). I’ve operated giant websites, edited manuscripts for publication, reprinted a few classics and published a unique edition of the *Golden Chain of Homer*, written articles and introductions, traveled the world buying and visiting libraries and customers, built a large reference and bibliographic library, built other specialized libraries for customers, corresponded with hundreds of authors, scholars and researchers, brokered and liquidated large libraries, published a magazine, *The Open Mind*, attended and displayed at numerous book fairs, studied book binding, book repair and the history of the book, designed unique shelving and ladder systems, been a literacy consultant and tutor to hundreds of homeless children, visited innumerable bookshops on four continents, and had the edifying pleasure to know customers from India to Israel and their astounding variety of interests. For most of my adult life I’ve lived with a constantly evolving personal library of 10,000 to 20,000 books on everything from hermaphroditism to herbology and kept an idiosyncratic stock ranging from 5,000 to 35,000 books. This

has been my odd destiny, guided and driven by some veiled teleology that compels against all logic and often against my own will. I've never owned anything but books and bookshelves, never driven a nice car or had health insurance. I would have been better off as an academic or a shoe salesman but nothing has kept me from this craziness, ("You have to be crazy to live in an insane world." James Hillman.)

I've also kept an embarrassing amount of memorabilia relating to this business, partly because it was always easier to box up unsorted papers and bury them in storage than to actually go through them, (perhaps you can relate) and partly because I have a visceral attachment to almost anything on paper, and so without any conscious design I now have a rather detailed record of this peculiar business that hopefully is entertaining and maybe even useful to some.

My shops have been general used and new bookshops, selling everything from cheap novels to fine press publications, in all subjects and periods--anything that has been printed. I want to know about and promote the entire universe of knowledge even when it includes Tijuana porn, anti-Semitic tracts, or self published crack-pot nonsense. On the other hand my catalogs are limited to the printed records of occultism and spirituality. It took awhile to realize my catalogs could conveniently be organized under three loose classifications: Pagan Culture; Religion & Philosophy; Mind & Body.

Under these rubrics I've cataloged about 70,000 books that at the very least help us understand the outer edges and lost clues, if not the very soul of the 'the occult': books on the spirituality of preliterate cultures, especially their folklore, mythology and rituals; the traditions of the ancient literate civilizations of India, China, Egypt, Mesoamerica, Greece and Rome; books by and about great thinkers who have pondered the esoteric, e. g. Bacon, Blake, Blavatsky; the mysteries of the mind as revealed in Mesmerism, Spiritualism, psychical research, hypnosis; and the mysteries of the body, the medical sciences of Ayurveda, Daoism, alternative sexologies and the anomalies and curiosities of biology. Since Day One I've had a hostile (and perhaps unfair) antipathy to the New Age (why do we capitalize this?) and never stocked these misguided books, except the occasional examples of brilliance, or those showing how delusional (even dangerous) these ideas can be.

Memoirs by bookdealers are almost uniformly boring, even to serious bibliophiles and collectors, but there are remarkably few by occult specialists. Those by Timothy D'Arch Smith and James Wasserman come to mind — along with Michael Houghton's semi-fictional account. I therefore hope my own memoir will contribute to a better understanding of this tiny though influential world. In writing this I've tried to remember the questions asked over the years by customers, neighbors, relatives and curious delivery men. "How did you get into the book business?" "Where do you get your books?" "What makes a book rare?" "Who are your customers?" "What's the oldest book you have?" "What is your favorite book?" And more recently, "Why would anybody collect books when we have the Internet?"

People also ask . . . so I will answer: I am not a Freemason, astrologer or alchemist, nor a member of any religion or esoteric society. I have no guru and have never been remotely expert on anything but this business. What I am is an incurable, insatiable bibliophile relentlessly curious and consumed with the history and acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. Nature is our first and best source--the experience of being in the world—but second only is our printed heritage, the records of that experience. When I am not directly experiencing the wonders of life I am reading, always reading and when there is nothing around to read I will read cereal boxes and scraps on the bus, things left in bathrooms, road signs and old lottery tickets. I am omnivorous and voracious, and yet after all this reading I don't know much, but I do know a lot about what I don't know. "The more you know, the more you don't know." Aristotle

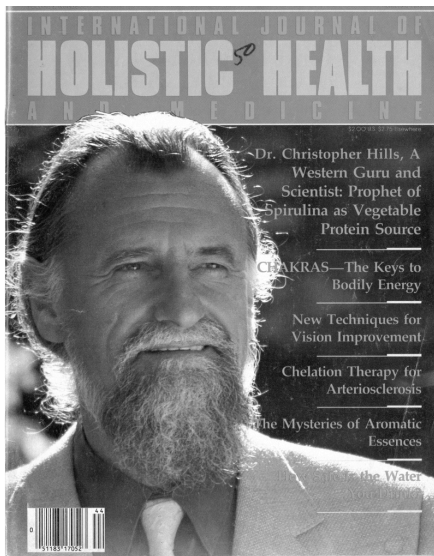
I entered this business after looking at careers that might satisfy my unrealistic need, not to 'know everything,' but to know 'about everything.' As a kid I was in love with books and reading, and a serious

book collector at age seven. I naturally thought being a librarian was the obvious choice. But even as a kid I saw librarians as unhelpful, restrictive and not particularly knowledgeable, and after attending school on three continents, and getting to know those librarians, I saw modern library science as a primitive system, trapping all kinds of sincere bibliophiles in an endless hamster wheel of technology, record keeping, and worst of all the branding of books with insulting marks and plastic straight-jackets, books whose eventual fate was to be consigned to the city dump or pulped to make phonebooks. I decided that working with books and living as a general new, used & rare bookdealer would provide the greatest access to this precious history. Only later was I aware of an exalted high state of librarianship — that of the archivist and rare book librarian — and if I could do it over again that probably would've been a better fate as the mercantile spirit does not run deeply in these veins.

One can roughly generalize and divide the world of occult students into the 'scholarly doubters', and the 'unscholarly enthusiasts.' The doubters don't practice anything, but they love history and ideas; the enthusiasts usually have little use for either, they want to know how to 'do it'. I belong to a smaller tribe, that of the moderately educated preserver and promoter. Without a degree, I confess for much of my career I've felt terribly inferior (and I suppose jealous) of the multilingual, classically trained scholar, and overly sensitive to their innuendo. I've now embraced this particular fate, born out of the beaches of Southern California, of surfing and psychedelics, mountain climbing and utopian communes, wild thinkers and wilder ideas. The coastal edginess of my homeland is imprinted on my soul — that region where some of the last Indian wars took place, where Zen crashed into a Calvinist suburbia of palm trees and rock & roll, where seekers the world over have gathered to freely form their own unique spiritual and visionary ideas, building and then usually losing their living labors to the records of history that I have struggled to preserve.

Prelude to the Book Business

Pedestrian as it is to start chronologically I don't know how else to do it. In the late 1970s I was bent on becoming an 'artist', not for fame or fortune but to discover the secrets of creativity. Among my heroes were Jackson Pollock, and Henri Michaux whose retrospective I'd seen as a teenager at the Pompidou a few years earlier on my 'grand tour' of Europe. I rented a large abandoned storefront in San Francisco for an art studio which became a hangout for a lot of characters. Most of us were influenced by our LSD experiences and four subjects occupied me most, divination (hence my shop name "Mantic Hands"), the shamanistic art process, (e.g. Tibetan sand painting, cave art, symbol meditation); the mysteries of the origins of civilizations (diffusionism, diasporas, Greece's Golden Age, Atlantis, etc); and the mysteries of light and color. Regarding the later, it was Goethe, Rudolf Steiner, Faber Birren, and S. G. Ouseley that were memorable, but one writer I was blessed to meet many years later influenced me profoundly. Christopher Hills (1926-1997) is a nearly forgotten genius whose magnum opus, *Nuclear Evolution* became my bible. Hills was an English businessman, a multi-millionaire who, at age 30, retired to Santa Cruz with a large metaphysical library, mostly purchased at Samuel Weiser. Wikipedia nicely documents his life which includes a who's who of such improbable friends and associates as Elizabeth Taylor, Nehru, The Mother, and Lyndon Johnson. He spent 30 years studying the mysteries of light and color and wrote extensively on the subject.

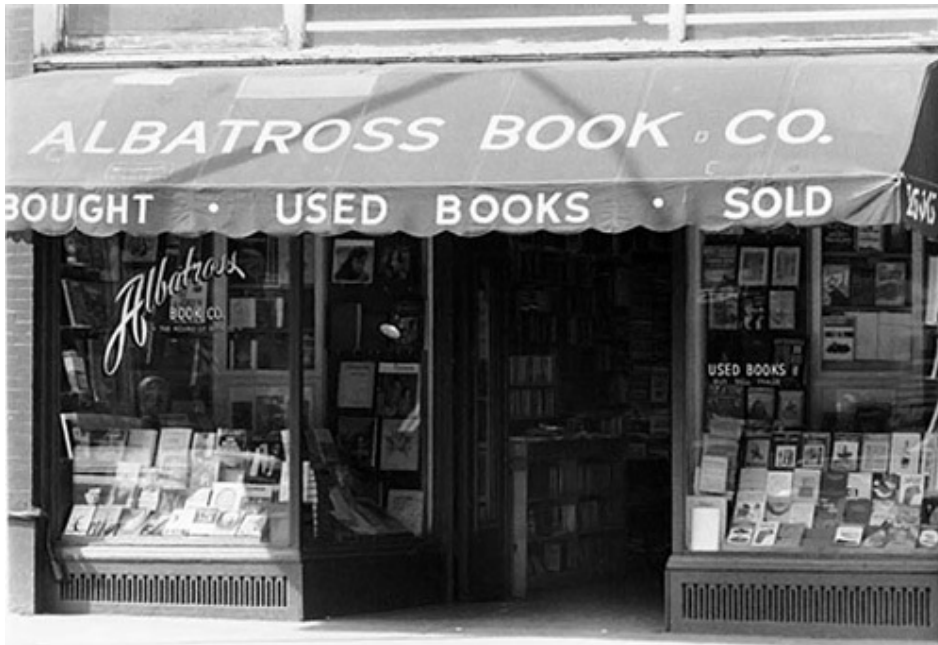


Christopher Hills

Though originally a hippie I became a serious fan of punk rock music and saw practically every punk act that came through Frisco in the late 1970s: Deborah Harry, Devo, Johnny Rotten et al. I was looking for rebellion, oblivion and enlightenment and thus many of my friends were musicians and alternative folk. During this time the Jonestown Massacre occurred (1978). Jim Jones had recruited most of his 900 victims from my neighborhood and after the massacre it was paralyzed with funerals; businesses closed; cars double and triple parked; sad people in black wandering around in grief and every church was ringing with gospel music morning, noon and late into the night. Outside my window I later witnessed ‘White Night’ (1979) when the former police officer and city supervisor who assassinated Harvey Milk-- America’s first elected gay official--escaped a murder conviction with the notorious “Twinkie defense.” I remember tear gas, burning police cars, total mayhem — it was exciting!

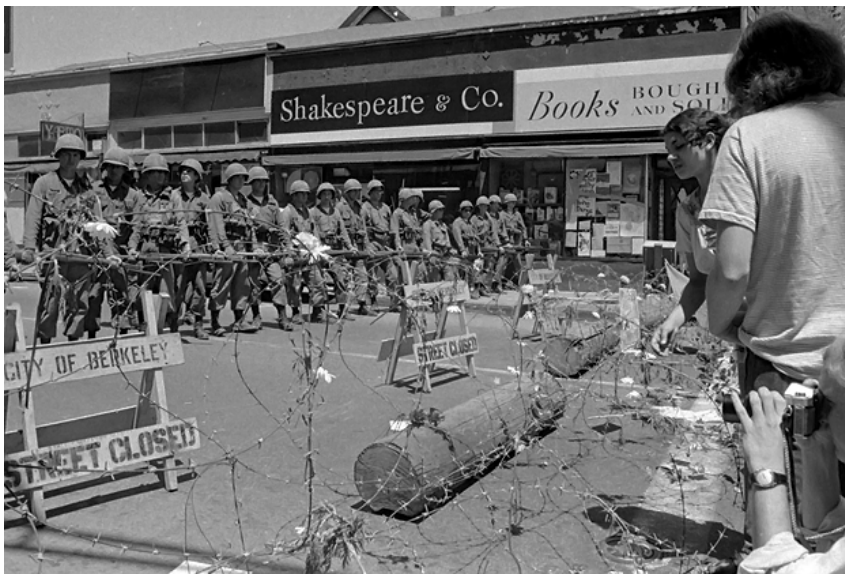
Among the big bookshops in San Francisco was the world famous City Lights Books in the heart of North Beach and stripper row, and the Albatross Book Company (where I later worked for a time). The Albatross was like a dinosaur even then, the kind of old inner city bookshop with two cavernous floors and tables and tables of unwanted old magazines, romance paperbacks, and high-up shelves with forgotten leather sets, picked-over ephemera and deadly dull 19th century novels, basically anything printed, and a lot of it “junk.” But many great libraries ended up there and it was the kind of place where old San Francisco institutions like the Bohemian Club disposed of their duplicates and rejects. The Albatross was located in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, the city’s most impoverished and scariest neighborhood where flea-bag hotels and street people predominated as now. The entire city block on which the Albatross was located was abandoned and boarded-up except for a gay strip club and the Greek American Social Club which was a front for some kind of mafia, where one day I saw a carload of long-guns being unloaded. I also remember walking to work along the piss trenched sidewalks, stepping over yet another passed out drunk who days later turned out to have been dead. There were a number of other bookstores in the Tenderloin, all capitalizing on the cheap rents necessary to stock massive quantities of books, but one must go down in history as the most insulting and ugliest of them all, McDonald’s Bookshop, on Turk Street. Founded in 1926 by a Canadian Marxist, it had been a venue for his politics but then degraded into a unsavory and rude junkyard of rejects and trash books, a massive two story jumble advertised as containing one million books. Upstairs, passing the mildewed books on unreachable shelves you would navigate around piles of pure crap to reach the uppermost levels, whose floors were layered a foot deep with dead books you were forced to walk upon, sacrilege. And proof that shit floats, this bookshop became famous and somehow gained designation as a city landmark. Towards the end of its days the nearby neighborhood was gentrified, and a very large pretentious bookshop opened

with an idiotic name, “A Clean Well Lighted Place for Books.” This was emblazoned upon a theater-like marquee above the shop. Itzhak Volansky, the cantankerous new owner of McDonalds then renamed his shop “McDonalds, A Dirty Poorly Lit Place for Books” Yet it was in bookshops like this that I found my rejected knowledge, the books no other shops wanted.



Albatross Book Company, late 1970's

Across the Bay Bridge was Moe's Books on Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley. (Berkeley is still known as 'the city of books' as there are said to be more books per capita in Berkeley than anywhere else on the planet). Moe's had (and still has) four floors of used and rare scholarly books, one of the world's largest and a must for any serious reader. Next door was Cody's, the kind of bookshop that when vandals broke their windows because they were displaying a copy of the *Satanic Verses*, they replaced their windows and then filled them with nothing but copies of that book, Rushdie's contentious novel that frightened away almost every other bookshop in the Bay Area. Across the street was Shakespeare's Books, only recently closed, a ramshackle used bookstore that witnessed, as the rest of Telegraph Avenue did, the 60s revolution firsthand.



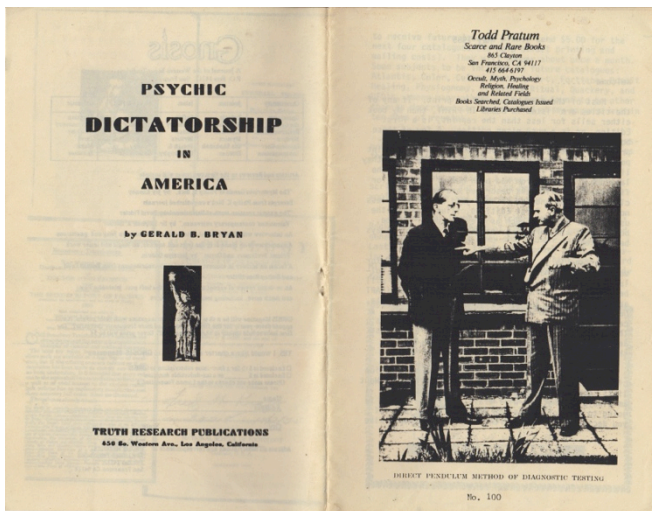
Telegraph Avenue c.1968

Well before I opened my first shop I loved nothing more than visiting these bookshops and any library, esoteric or spiritual organization I could find. When first I moved to San Francisco in 1977, aged 20, there were over 150 bookshops listed in the phonebook, (now about 40). I got to know most of them and for the next 10 years my love of books (bibliomania if you prefer) required a visit to at least one or two shops a day and before long I had a large collection. I haunted the legendary Metaphysical Town Hall Bookshop and Library, took their astrology classes and had my palm and face read. I became intimate friends with the card catalog at the San Francisco Public Library. Another library friend there was the *National Union Catalog*, the largest and heaviest book ever printed, (how could I imagine that today I would own a set!). I stayed at Esalen and soaked in their cliffside hot tubs while lusting after the beautiful women and visited the Big Sur home of Henry Miller and the nearby Tor House of Robinson Jeffers. For one weird day while I was wandering around downtown San Francisco I was naïvely recruited by the Moonies and had dinner with them at their communal house. They never said who they were, and even if they had I wouldn't have heard of them anyway, but their idealistic talk was quite entrancing. I ate vegetarian meals with the Hare Krishna people in Berkeley, I joined B.O.T.A. (Builders of the Adytum), the Los Angeles Kabbalistic society founded by Paul Foster Case, and took their mail order lessons. For three years I attended weekly Golden Dawn "psychic development" classes (Regardie's system) from Tamara Diaghilev, niece of Sergei Diaghilev, Nijinsky's cruel master. Around age 20 I was briefly suicidal. I had broken up with my first real sex positive girlfriend and my father insisted I do weekly Freudian analysis. I don't remember the analyst talking much and when the session was up, instead of saying so he would simply shuffle his foot a little and I knew it was time to go. Later I was an habitu  of Harbin Hot Springs, the 2000 acre nudist resort and New Age center founded in the 1860s (and tragically burned to the ground recently) where I took workshops on Tantric sex and did 'ecstatic dance' in a room full of New Age seekers. There I experienced the profound healing that comes from being naked for weeks at a time. The *I Ching* (in the Wilhelm/Baynes/Jung edition) was my constant companion. Using yarrow stalks I bought in Chinatown, I threw them so many times I had most of the trigrams memorized, while furiously taking notes and checking them later to see if anything had proved true, (Jung's introduction on 'Ting' was all I needed to believe).

First Shop, Waller Street

With shelving culled from thrift shops my art studio was reborn as a general used bookshop on Waller Street in the historic, (then boarded up) Haight-Fillmore neighborhood. It was stocked with whatever I could lay my hands on. I had no money at all, my parents cut me off after I rapidly dropped out of eight

colleges and universities. I was 23 and had no idea what I was doing. At the time the neighborhood was all but abandoned. One of the few open businesses was a liquor store where the door had been replaced by plywood with a little slot you could push your money through and buy cigarettes, booze and drugs. But it was going through a rapid gentrification. Decrepit old Victorian houses were being torn down or renovated and the contents thrown out on the street. By some agency books keep finding their way to me and the treasures I found then, on the street and in dumpsters, were quite remarkable. One lucky find stands out. Climbing up and poking my head over the edge of a dumpster I saw a mass of old red lacquer shelving and furniture, the remains of a Chinese herbalist's shop, and at the bottom, hidden by all the wood and trash, were hundreds of books in Chinese and German on herbal medicine, martial arts, nutrition and old anatomical charts, all dating from the 1920's. Much later I learned that Chinese imprints pre-dating Mao's communist revolution are the exceedingly rare survivals of his mass book burnings and executions of 'bare foot doctors'.



Pratum Catalog No.1, back & front covers.

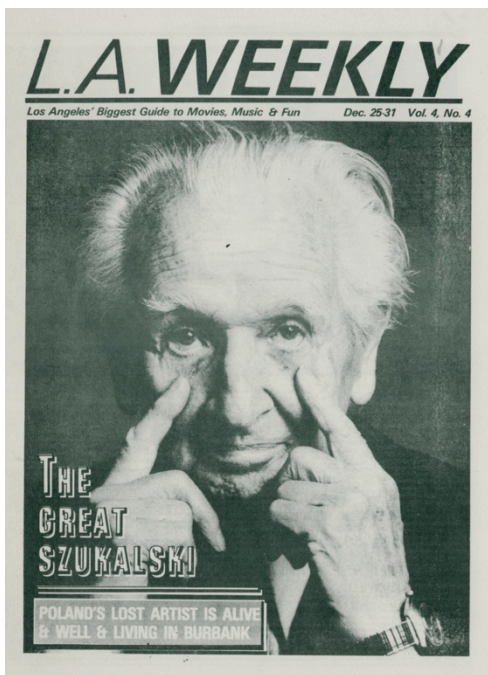
After his sudden and early death, I had the bittersweet fortune of inheriting my father's medical library just after I opened. He was, successively, a general practitioner, surgeon, psychopharmacologist, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and finally a neurologist who opened one of the first biofeedback clinics. During the war he was stationed in Nagasaki just after the bomb as a surgeon treating both Japanese and Allied commanders. Later he did research with Linus Pauling and our home in La Jolla was the scene of many parties attended by my parent's eccentric collection of La Jolla neighbors, Theodor Geisel ('Dr. Seuss'), Jacob Bronowski, Jonas Salk, and Carl Rogers were memorable. My father's library spanned the typical medical and psychological subjects plus good cloth editions of those classic authors every literate person of the time was expected to read, Tolstoy, Dante, Proust, etc. With my weird assortment of found books and my own collection of books on Shamanism, Dada and occultism, it made for quite a peculiar bookshop. Being a total novice and ignorant of the necessary mercantile rigor I sold very few books. Making matters worse was that concurrent with the gentrification all around me, my neighborhood was ground zero for the crack epidemic that later swept the inner cities of America in the 1980s, there was terrible crime and horrible human degradation and my bookshop was a real anomaly. I didn't understand what gentrification really was then or the antipathy of the black community. My naive goal was to have a beautiful bookshop for anybody and everybody.

A block away from my shop was the Holy Order of Mans, co-founded by Murshid Samuel L Lewis, "Sufi Sam" (1896-1971) who is easily one of the most interesting spiritual people California has ever produced and may in fact be the first human in history to be initiated into Zen, Islamic, and Christian orders. Its members practiced Gnostic, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and studied the tarot (publishing their

own deck). The predominantly black community thought they were bonkers as ‘HOOM’ members walked around the neighborhood in ostentatious pseudo-Catholic garb. Like most orthodox believers, they adhered to their own tiny interpretation of spirituality and none of them ever darkened my door to buy a book, except one, and she will always hold a special place in my heart. Beverly Barton was, as she described herself, a midget, not more than three feet tall. The first day she walked in I knew I had met a kindred soul. What commenced was a five hour nonstop coffee-and-cigarette fueled conversation about every kind of occult, esoteric, and spiritual tradition including much I knew nothing of. She introduced me to so many different books and authors and over the years we became improbable book hunting partners, with me (six foot three) giving her tiny bent and painful body a boost into my car, up stairs, up ladders, with whiskey and cigars later as we gloated over our finds. May the Gods bless her soul wherever she is.

Within months of opening I wrote my first author fan letter to David Tansley, the radionics pioneer whose books I was fascinated with. The idea that you could remotely heal somebody with a simple blood spot or hair sample made a lot of sense to me. To my surprise I received a chatty letter that initiated a small correspondence and thus began my habit of writing to authors and annoying them with naive questions. In one letter I bemoaned my poverty and he wrote telling me to read Catherine Ponder’s *The Dynamic Laws of Prosperity* which unfortunately had no effect on me.

Perhaps most absorbing for me then was ancient history, the origin of language, writing, art, and Atlantis especially. The idea of a previous civilization that left only a few mysterious remains was irresistible then (as now). I quickly learned that the sober serious books were not only boring but didn’t adequately explain many of the most compelling mysteries, so I explored the experimental and creative thinkers and was willing to put up with a lot of wildly eccentric ideas to see what I could discover. But one bizarre book I discovered back then, in Mithra’s Bookstore & Unicorn Theater (La Jolla), still surpasses almost anything in that vein, Stanislaw Szukalski’s *Behold the Protong!* (1982). To this day it ranks as one of the most compelling, disturbing conglomerations of serious research, fecund delusions and preposterous theories ever applied to the subject of Atlantis, and that’s saying a lot! He wove in iconography (esp parietal art), linguistics, primatology, racialism, evolution, physiognomy and archeology to create a confounding yet weirdly unified fabric that is oddly convincing. Szukalski, another seeker who gravitated to California (Los Angeles and later Pasadena) was obsessed with Easter Island, and later developed a theory that the horizontal lines that ‘primitive’ people painted on their face represented an unconscious memory of the slime marks accumulated from floating in the muddy post-diluvian waters. But Szukalski’s singular distinction in this field is that as an accomplished artist, renown in his homeland of Poland, he illustrated his writings with fantastical drawings and sculptures. A few other books of his were published however his masterpiece *Zermatism* remains in manuscript, (I have a copy). For me, exploring the fringes of the book world, discovering unique authors like Szukalski, has almost felt like a privilege, and kept me inspired and vitalized all these years.



Stanislav Szukalski

Second Shop, Haight Street

A few months after I opened that first store I met somebody who shared my dream of opening a larger shop. Much could be said of this curious man, I'm not even sure of his real name now but he ended up bankrolling my second shop, which had three times the floor space. I soon learned he was a major LSD dealer in the 1960s, supplying the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane. He had a lot of money and gave me *carte blanche*. With him as a silent partner I opened The Bibliomancy Book Gallery, later renamed The Haight Fillmore Book Gallery, and renamed yet again as Diluvian Books, a 1600 square-foot bookshop on the busy corner of Haight & Fillmore with beautiful custom-made shelving, polished oak floors, a separate art gallery with monthly shows, and huge storefront windows. There I lasted four years, struggling every day learning the hard way and having the time of my life. With readings and publicity stunts somehow we garnered the attention of literary and political people. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gore Vidal, beat poets like Diane DiPrima and Jack Hirschman, the biographer Neeli Cherkovski and underground comic artists like Spain were memorable customers. John MacGregor, author of the pioneering *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton 1989), was an enjoyable customer and with him I could share the spooky experience of living with my father's collection of psychiatric art (by his patients) and reprints of Bosch and Breugel.



Diluvian Books, 518 Haight Street, 2nd shop, c.1988

I tried to develop relationships with librarians who would understand my catalogs. One who did was at the California Institute for Integral Studies, just up the street in the Haight Ashbury. Now famous, then they were little known and housed in an old nunnery and recently had received a million dollar grant from David Rockefeller — money to buy books with! David Ulansey, the Faculty Dean, was an old hippie, author of *Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (OUP 1989) later customer and friend. CIIS began in 1950 as the American Academy of Asian Studies, founded (with the help of Alan Watts) by Frederick Spiegelberg, the Stanford professor and religious scholar who studied with Jung at Eranos. As Watts wrote, “It was one of the principal roots of what later came to be known, in the early sixties, as the “San Francisco Renaissance.”. I hope they still have the great books on alchemy and symbolism I sold them though I’ve heard they later deaccessioned much of their library, perhaps replaced with digital sources.

Some of the most outlandish things happened in that bookshop. Memorable was the Loma Prieta Earthquake (1989) when for two days without power we guarded the store with candles and feared for our lives as gangs roved the neighborhood with baseball bats screaming ugly racist epithets —thugs who attacked my wife. Then there was the crazy day when a dignified old man, wizard-looking, with long gray hair and beard and gripping a carved wooden staff embedded with shells, walked into the store completely naked. He stood at the counter and spoke an incomprehensible mishmash of words and sounds, stoned out of his mind! We didn’t know what to do and for hours he firmly stationed himself next to the cash register, occasionally muttering an odd word or two and staring into space. I remember looking into his eyes to see if I could contact him somehow, and I swear there were pinwheels in them. The funny thing was that people were still coming in the store, shopping and bringing up their books to the counter and purchasing them as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. That was Haight Street then. So many people were disabled by drugs that the City of San Francisco had a special van staffed with social workers and psychiatric nurses that you could call instead of the police, and instead of jailing these lost people they would come and do what they could to help. Eventually the van came and took him away.

Being located on Haight Street, not far from the corner of Haight & Ashbury, we had access to an abundance of psychedelic books and hippie memorabilia which at the time had almost no retail value, but I seized upon this material and made it part of my specialty which continues to this day. Here I first met Michael Horowitz, proprietor of Flashback Books, the only dealer who paid serious attention to it. He cataloged for Warren Howell Books, one of San Francisco’s most prestigious rare bookshops, located near Union Square across from the Hotel St. Francis. Michael’s unique experiences as a bibliographer and cataloger of rare books and incunables enabled him to apply those exacting skills to the most unlikely of subjects: psychedelic literature. His catalogs are models of erudition applied to rejected knowledge; though others came after him, his catalogs remain the gold standard, and since he knew and lived the life

of his subject, his personal knowledge is unparalleled. Michael was a participant in the 1960s counterculture, raised his family on a Mendocino commune, became Timothy Leary's close friend and archivist, formed the most complete collection of his works (now at Harvard), and co-authored *An Annotated Bibliography of Timothy Leary* (1988), the only bibliography of a psychedelic pioneer. Getting to know Michael and his family a little, including his beautiful daughter, the actress Winona Ryder, was a real pleasure. There was also a lot of Black Panther memorabilia to be had for little and regularly old party members, hearing that a crazy white guy was buying it would visit with their pamphlets and posters. Today I'm still amazed these important chapters in history have been so maligned and misunderstood.

About this time I bought my first large--and certainly the most disturbing—library I've ever encountered. One remarkably successful way of getting books then was to run little ads in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the 'Books Wanted' classified section. We would get phone calls all day and I would drive out in my van, an old graffitied hulk with brakes that barely worked, where homeless people sometimes slept. These book calls were like buying lottery tickets, you never knew what would be there, it could be junk or something really special. One day a man called me, I drove up to Twin Peaks and met a flamboyantly gay couple in Hawaiian shirts who proceeded to proudly show off their library, of hardcore conservative books! Anti-Semitism and John Birch Society literature abounded. There was material on Hitlerism, all kinds of magazines and journals, private publications, foreign publications, serious books extolling the virtues of war, heroism, segregation, hateful books on the UN and many on "negro inferiority," dozens of books (often in duplicate) by Cesare Lombroso and the 'craniologists,' old anthropological books on Africa, loads of fundamentalist Christianity, scientific racism and eugenicist classics like Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* and first editions of books by conspiracy nuts like Nesta Webster, etc & etc. Then there was a huge wall of books just on economic theory, the Federal Reserve and the Rothschilds especially. Rounding out this bizarre library, and spread throughout their beautiful apartment overlooking San Francisco was a massive trove of early gay and bondage comic books, dirty joke books and framed prints. At first I thought these men had bravely collected this literature to study from a liberal perspective, but they believed it all! Foolishly perhaps I bought it, and spent days removing it all. My silent partner, who was Jewish and gay, was disgusted with me.

In the first year of business, and by pure serendipity I met Glen Houghton, later the manager of the antiquarian department of Samuel Weiser, (previously I briefly met Chip Suzuki, then Weiser's manager who I didn't get along with). We were on a book call, somebody had a collection of astrology books out in the avenues of San Francisco, and there was Glen, hunched over a box smoking one of his ever present hand rolled cigarettes (or a joint, he switched back and forth). We struck up a friendship that lasted for 20+ years until he was forced out of his position, unfairly I thought. Glen was one of those dealers who didn't read books and admitted so without any shame (points for honesty) and to my disappointment I later surmised that Donald Weiser was basically the same. This is not uncommon in the book business — in fact it might actually be the norm surprisingly — but they both had an encyclopedic knowledge of authors, titles, publishers and values and their warehouse in Maine was truly a wonder. Glen was a very astute dealer and best of all he knew how to price books attractively. How many thousands I bought from Weiser is impossible to calculate but it was one of the most profitable relationships of my career. They graciously hired me to write prefaces for two Weiser reprints, Pernety's *An Alchemical Treatise on the Great Art*, and the Russell translation of *The Alchemical Works of Geber*, (with Holmyard's introduction). Like all Weiser cloth reprints these had sewn signatures, alkaline pages and were manufactured in a union shop. Weiser Antiquarian Books, now owned and operated by Keith Richmond and Marilyn Rinn is one of the world's greatest occult bookselling firms, issuing intelligently detailed and illustrated catalogs on a regular basis, though mainly focused on Crowley and Company.

The first time I handled a book published by Heptangle I knew I had to find out what this was all about. I wrote the publisher and began a long correspondence with Daniel J. Driscoll that lasted until his untimely death from AIDS. Daniel, devoted to ritual magic, had taught himself the craft of letterpress printing and hand binding. By the time of our acquaintance he had published four or five titles but was very sad. His beautiful handmade books, priced at ridiculously low prices (even as low as eight dollars) didn't sell very well, and he was ready to throw in the towel. I did all I could to promote them in my catalogs but by the time he died he still had a large stock which I bought from his mother, including the unbound sheets of hundreds of copies, one of a kind printings with historiated letters in gold, and the manuscript of a still unpublished treatise on Agrippa.

I met Adam Parfrey on Haight Street. At the time he was operating as a very good book scout; he has now achieved fame as the founder of Feral House, one of America's most controversial and interesting publishers. One day he arrived with a copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the true first edition published by Sylvia Beach through her famed Paris bookshop Shakespeare and Company, and limited to 500 signed copies — he had found it in a thrift shop trash bin! I also met George Hubert, a very aged occult dealer then, 6 foot 7, a devout Christian Scientist, who had a small but absolutely astounding collection of 18th and 19th century Masonic books, almost all in spectacular bindings by Sangorski & Sutcliffe, “the one collection” he said that he could never sell, nor say where he got it. George, a retired insurance salesman who had made a good living investing in the stock market was a beautiful soul, really from another age. He took care of his disabled wife and had a patio with dozens of birdfeeders that attracted a cacophony of wild birds that fed from their hands. I can't remember what happened to his collection — it was probably donated to the Mother Church — but these little libraries are the unsung heroes in the quest for the preservation of knowledge. Even the smallest library matters, and the more conscious the selection the greater the chance of surviving. George and I had similar experiences with Manly P. Hall and we both knew the library of the Philosophical Research Society fairly well. George introduced me to the writings of W. D. Gann, the famous commodities trader who supposedly made a fortune using astrology. George gave me a rare copy of W. D. Gann's private library list, and to this day I still get customers looking for books on that list.

Jay Kinney was a customer then. When we met he was keen on getting a copy of Emma Hardinge Britten's *Art Magic*. His little apartment on 16th and Valencia, (junkie central at the time) was neatly book lined with two charming pugs rambling to and fro. He was about to release the first issue of *Gnosis Magazine*, unquestionably the finest ‘popular’ esoteric magazine seen in many decades, (not to be confused with *Gnostica Magazine*). *Gnosis Magazine* was a unique mixture of modern graphics (Jay is a famed underground comic book artist) and scholarly text that lured in both the *cognoscenti* and the uninitiated. Much to my pleasure he invited me to be a founding member of the Board of Directors. Jay also invited me to a monthly conclave, The Curmudgeons, presided over by Michael Crisp, a California original who was instrumental in the writing of what is arguably the best explication of medieval alchemy in English, Morris Berman's *The Reenchantment of the World*. It was the kind of San Francisco gathering where, surrounded by Michael's book collection, a half dozen scruffy amateur Egyptologists, psychedelic explorers and crackpot Kabbalists would gather over food, booze and cigars to talk, pontificate, gesticulate and occasionally break into thunderous arguments with neighbors pounding on the door — nothing better! For many years those monthly meetings nourished my lonely heart.

“Brian Street”

One of the first serious occult collectors I met was a man who went by the name of Brian Street, then as Patrick Clancey and later other names but these (he eventually revealed) were assumed identities, complete with forged passports and drivers licenses. Previously I'd heard through the dealer-grapevine of an old hippie who would walk into bookshops and casually buy large quantities of occult books with rolls of \$100 bills. During his first visit he bought almost every rare book I had and invited me to his house.

There I found thousands of hardcover and leather bound occult books, all neatly shelved and arranged, room after room, some contained in exquisite handcrafted glass cases. First editions of Fludd, Boehme, Agrippa, Dee, and 17th century books on the Kabbalah and alchemy he couldn't read. There were thousands of books on witchcraft, astrology, number theory, magic and magick, with a few shelves of pseudo-grimoires he insisted were "authentic" that held the center spot in his living room. He was not a critical collector and the whole place was decorated with a crazy assemblage of weird art and found artifacts. Brian was a devotee of Crowley, the Golden Dawn and occult symbolism, especially the tarot. He had written a full-length monograph entirely devoted to the fool card, the manuscript of which I still have. This was the first time I saw large quantities of Crowley first editions, including *The Book of Thoth*, *White Stains*, the complete *Equinox*, and the rare first edition of the *Book of the Law* among many others. Most he bought while living in Los Angeles in the 1950s. Brian and I became friends over the years and slowly he sold me his entire collection, including etchings, paintings, sculptures and silk Golden Dawn robes and regalia (supposedly owned by an associate of Yeats, name forgotten now). Towering over his living room was an outlandish life-size sculpture of St George the Dragon Slayer, I never knew why. He also had a box of letters, journals and manuscripts by J. W. Hamilton-Jones. One day he showed me a lovely manuscript copy of the *Golden Chain of Homer*, penned by Sigismund Bacstrom and supposedly once belonging to Percy Bullock. He had bought it either from Gilbert's of Hollywood, or the Cherokee Bookstore, LA's two best occult specialists back then. We immediately hit on the idea of publishing it. This was my first publishing venture and many naïve mistakes were made but we eventually issued a calf-bound edition of 550 copies in 1985. Brian was a WWII veteran who for decades had been a professional pot importer, driving cars, trucks and flying planes up from Guatemala and over the border but had now retired to read and study. We were improbable brothers of a sort: two crazy outsiders with overly cosmic ambitions. He was devoted to the writings of Alice Bailey and had a complete set, underlined throughout, supplemented by notebooks for each volume containing his observations, arguments, and corrections. He hated paperbacks and would only buy them if the text had never been published otherwise; he would then take the book to his binder for an archival cloth treatment. Once in casual conversation we figured out he attended the same high school as my mother and remembered her as the "hot one" he wanted to date!

Years later Brian phoned to say he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. All the time I knew him he wore a ring with cyanide in a crystal-like bubble so if you bit down on the ring and swallowed you would die, "instantly" he said with great emphasis. He explained this ring by relating that long ago he was busted coming over the border with a carload of pot. His method was not to conceal his load in secret compartments but simply cram his vehicle floor to ceiling with bales of pot and take his chances. He did all kinds of magical ritual to ensure his success but this time he was caught and arrested and jailed, but then accidentally let out on bail. He never returned to court and knew if ever arrested again he would be sentenced to prison for life, hence the "ring of death" (as he called it), because he would rather die than be incarcerated. With a cancer death facing him he sold me the last of his possessions including a lot of Mayan rugs, weavings and masks from his days living with the hill people of Guatemala, teaching them how to grow the best marijuana. After much meditation and astrological analysis he decided on a date to die by cyanide. I tried to talk him out of it but to no avail and one day we said goodbye. What was I to do? I really had no idea but I knew he was a man who believed supremely in his own will — nobody ever told Brian what to do. I mourned his death, trying not to think of him rotting in his remote house up in the woods of Lake County. Then to my utter shock he phoned a few weeks later. The cyanide was so old that instead of killing him he lay on his kitchen floor for five days shitting and vomiting. Eventually a neighbor found him and took him to the hospital. There he awoke with the doctors telling him it was a miracle he survived. "But what about the cancer" he asked? "What cancer Mr. Street? You have no cancer." Apparently it was either a wrong diagnosis or a case of spontaneous remission. Lying there thinking that somehow he had been redeemed by God he decided to confess. He called the police and told them he was a wanted criminal. They came to his room, took down all of his information and came back a few days later to tell him there was no warrant, in fact no record of his arrest at all. On that same day a

social worker came to see how he was. He told her he was a vet: she looked up his information and found he had decades of veteran benefits and full social security benefits coming to him — enough for Brian to never worry about money again.

In the early 1980s I was offered the library of George Winslow Plummer (1867-1944), SRIA Master and author. The dealer who owned it was in New York and asking outrageous prices. There was lot of interesting pre-1800s books on Rosicrucianism, Ashmole etc, but the list was obviously compiled by an amateur and it appeared they were in bad condition so I declined. But later I bought another lot of books from his library through another source so I never really learned what happened to that collection, or why the SRIA sold it.

A fascinating character who wandered into the shop was Slava Ranko, the pseudonym of Donald L. Philippi, author of the beautifully produced *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans: The Epic Tradition of the Ainu* (North Point Press, 1982, reprinted by Princeton University Press, 2015). After an hour or so of talking I was still unsure if this was a man or a woman. A complex scholar, Don was a professional translator, musician, and transsexual shaman in a tradition he learned while living in Japan. Hanging out at his house and listening to him play his experimental music on traditional Japanese instruments — well, you couldn't help but feel you were in medieval Japan or navigating the stars, or both.

I hesitate to mention Ed Peach, AKA 'Ophiel'. Was this who I met? A man came into the shop, a fat man with long greasy hair wearing what appeared to be pajamas. He introduced himself as Ophiel, who was the author of a number of surprisingly influential books on practical magic. He had heard about me and was looking for a few titles and proceeded to recount from memory the details of some very rare books, ones most people have never heard of, even specialists, like Forlong's *The Rivers of Life*, a magnificent 19th century work accompanied by an eight foot color chart illustrating all the religious and occult traditions, which I happened to have at the time, and *The Voynich Manuscript* — he claimed to know Voynich, the bookdealer who discovered it — and the titles, dates and even page numbers of private lessons by Max Heindel. At first I thought he was a nut, or perhaps a memory savant but he was so compelling that he convinced me to foolishly lend (lend!) him a number of rare books. A few weeks later he returned with the books. Only after he left did I discover he had used a yellow highlighter to underline passages throughout all of them, sacrilege! I didn't have any way of contacting him but a few months later he reappeared and I castigated and lectured him on the crime he had committed. Looking stunned he turned and left, saying he would pay for the books tomorrow, and sure enough the next day a polite young man arrived and paid for them all with cash, yet refused to take them. Afterwards we had an off and on friendship for a few years when he unfolded his story, that he was heir to a family fortune he had rejected, that his family had detectives looking for him and that while he wrote the Ophiel books he also used another pseudonym, 'Ed Peach' and that the phony Ed Peach had taken his phony pseudonym! NB: the public "Ed Peach" has no discernible biography, no history or any traceable past that I can find, but that doesn't really mean anything — so who knows?

Deep ecology and radical environmentalism became important for me after reading Edward Abbey, mainly *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and his journals. It was at this time, while still hanging on to Diluvian Books, that my wife and I used the shop as de facto headquarters for Earth First!, the environmental movement that fought to halt the clear-cutting of the last ancient redwood forests of Northern California for deck furniture and garden stakes. With huge color photographs of the destruction covering our store windows two men in suits and ties walked in one day. They were right out of a 1950s noir film. They handed me a paper claiming we owed the IRS \$25,000 and if we didn't pay in 10 days the store would be padlocked and sold at auction. The lawyer we hired, the top small business defense attorney in San Francisco, later told us these IRS agents were undoubtedly armed. For years after I was harassed by the

IRS. This is a well-known tactic by the US Government to suppress dissent, and today “the most dangerous” American organizations named by Homeland Security are “radical” environmental organizations. In the end it turned out we only owed them \$600 but our defense cost thousands and the lost time derailed my book work and the shop was now a mess from neglect. But they were not done with us, an *agent provocateur* tried to give us guns and “teach” us how to make bombs. Richard Held, the FBI man in charge of destroying Earth First! had previously masterminded the FBI’s COINTELPRO, these were very serious people. Years later Judi Bari, the leader of Earth First! was bombed by the FBI (as was later demonstrated in court) and died. When I visited her in the hospital she didn’t have a single angry word to say, her philosophy had always been nonviolent, a true American hero. (See Bari, *Timber Wars*, 1994). “Those that have the privilege to know, have the duty to act.” Albert Einstein.

Fields Book Store

For decades the only full service, serious Bay Area occult bookshop was Fields Book Store on Polk Street in San Francisco. There were a few good smaller ones like Shambhala Booksellers on Berkeley’s famed Telegraph Avenue but most were marked by a lack of discrimination that allowed them to stock the kind of crap published by the likes of Llewellyn. This sadly uneducated trash was infecting millions of good minds at this time, leading them away from authentic sources and monopolizing the “metaphysical” sections in Barnes & Noble and other chain bookstores. George Fields, who founded the store in 1932, only tangentially stocked esoteric books but was an early and serious student of Gurdjieff and J. G. Bennett, even following Bennett into his strange foray with Subud. Back then the store was a general bookstore with a mild spiritual focus. Then in the early 1960s George Fields brought in Ruth Hill Cooke who was instrumental in its transformation. Later Fields was presided over by one of the most gracious and dedicated dealers, Richard Hackney, who transformed a sleepy bookstore into a world-class scholarly occult bookshop, shelved floor to ceiling, every inch used to house serious books — only later was he forced to sell a few calendars and gift cards. At least during the 1980s it was a far richer store than Watkins or the Atlantis Bookshop in London, or Bernard Faverie’s Paris bookshop La Table d’Emeraude, or any of the other big shops I had visited then. One of the marvelous and unique aspects of Fields was that besides being a store that fully stocked every kind of serious occult, metaphysical and spiritual book, it still had small sections of classic literature, poetry, California history, language dictionaries and other general books. You were not shopping in a bubble of occultism! In 2001 David Wiegleb took over after Richard died, and on the 75th anniversary of the shop I consigned there about 5,000 of my finest books--one of the best collaborations in my career. But once again something so beautiful was not to last. The economy collapsed in 2008 and Polk Street devolved into a no-man’s land of seedy bars, nail salons and drunken youth who didn’t read, and so a street that once supported six bookshops was ruined.

When it came to selling your occult books Fields was the first shop Bay Area people thought of — and what glorious libraries flowed through there! The most remarkable was that of George R. Hall. George was a bachelor union printer who for decades dedicated all his free time to scouring bookshops up and down the Pacific Coast, and when his printer skills were rendered obsolete and he lost his job, George slowly unloaded his magnificent collection through Fields. There were thousands of old and rare books — so many in fact that to this day (20 years later) books with his name neatly penned to the flyleaf can still be found in shops here and even in England and Europe. If you have been buying a lot of esoteric books for a long time you probably have books from his library.

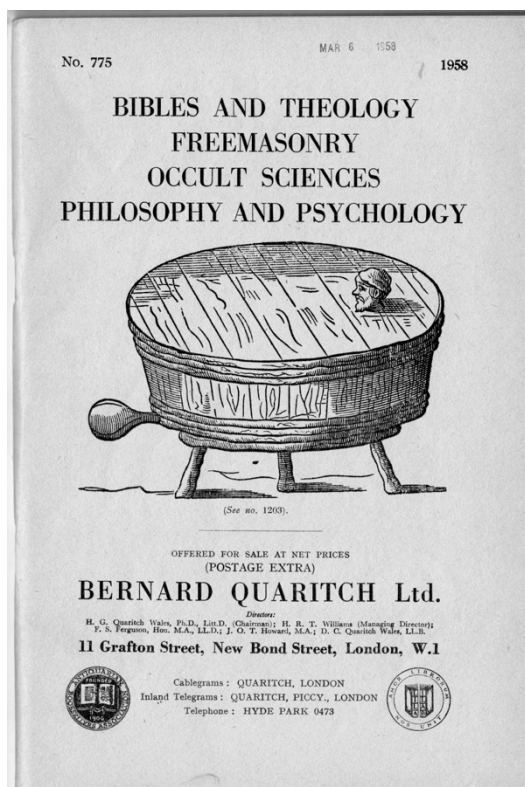
I met so many wonderful people at Fields and the best of them has to be James Clark. Poring over the same shelf of books one day we struck up a conversation and 25 years later we are still best friends and spiritual compatriots. Others might think this pathetic, but all we ever talk about is books, politics and books. Does Jim have rooms full of vellum bound masterpieces? No, he is a blue-collar man who buys two or three books every day, no matter what, to collect but more importantly to read. Jim reads in a way rarely done today. He will have (let’s say) an edition of Dante, or Blake, a fine volume to admire, but also

a paperback edition to underline and read while taking notes, to read while eating a dripping sandwich, to throw in the car, to take to the beach, and over and over again through the years he will re-read these classics and fine-tune his experience so that finally the paperback is underlined and highlighted in three or four different colors which then correspond to his notes in a companion journal, all the while leaving the fine edition untouched in glory on the shelf, known and preserved.

Around 1986 I met Michael Aquino in Fields. He is the famed (infamous) founder of the Temple of Set and former Army Intelligence Lieutenant. This was during the “Satanic Panic” and I was aware of the crusade against him but nothing could put me off then as I had dealt with numerous controversial characters like Stephen Flowers (AKA Edred Thorsson) and weird Christian Identity people mixed up with British-Israelism, and a certain LAPD detective buying all my books on Satanism who may have been a Satanist himself. We had a nice conversation and I sent Aquino some catalogs and he became a customer for a time. Once I had the temerity to ask if he had a list of Temple texts or books that he recommended and he generously mailed a lengthy bibliography with full citations and commentary along with some unnerving books on propaganda and brainwashing to trade.

Valencia Street Adventures

In 1986, after the earthquake, the crack epidemic, and the IRS, I wanted out of my shop. I was planning to sell Diluvian to my silent partner but he too became a victim of the crack pipe and was arrested while running down Haight Street naked claiming he was the “black messiah” (he was white). It took five cops to wrestle him into handcuffs. I never saw him again. In the end I was glad to sell Diluvian Books for just enough to pay debts and buy some books. I worked part-time in other shops like the Haight Street Bookshop (up the street in the heart of the Haight Ashbury district). This was a ramshackle used bookshop owned by my irascible friend John Quinn who had spent years in Morocco mastering the oud, (a medieval Arabic plucked musical instrument). As an illustration of how crazy the Haight Ashbury was, there was a time when John failed to pay (or couldn’t pay) the electric bill and for about a month he continued to keep the store open, no lights but with flashlights for customers who duly came in, found their purchases, and left without even mentioning the lack of light or working cash register — those were dedicated book buyers! But soon I was broke and ended up living in a cold water back room inside John’s other shop, the cavernous Valencia Books (27’ ceilings) and working in other bookshops on Valencia Street which then was a wretched neighborhood in the Mission district of SF (but now, according to those who know better than I one of the hippest neighborhoods in the world). Here I met and hung out with poets Robert Duncan and Jack Micheline, two precious lovers of literature who exchanged poems and paintings for paperbacks and a comfy chair. The Mission was a haven for underground comic book artists and I partied with S. Clay Wilson and lesser known wild men. Walking to work each day, I would pass by Maxon Crumb, brother of R. Crumb, begging on the street. I later visited him in his decrepit hotel room where he sat in a loin cloth on a bed of nails, rambling on about his horrible childhood. While working at Valencia Books, (then the finest ground floor antiquarian shop in SF), we bought the residual stock of Alta California Books which contained a massive collection of old Quaritch catalogs--the greatest scholarly bookdealing firm in history--and this initiated my ongoing pursuit to collect every one of their 1300+ catalogs.

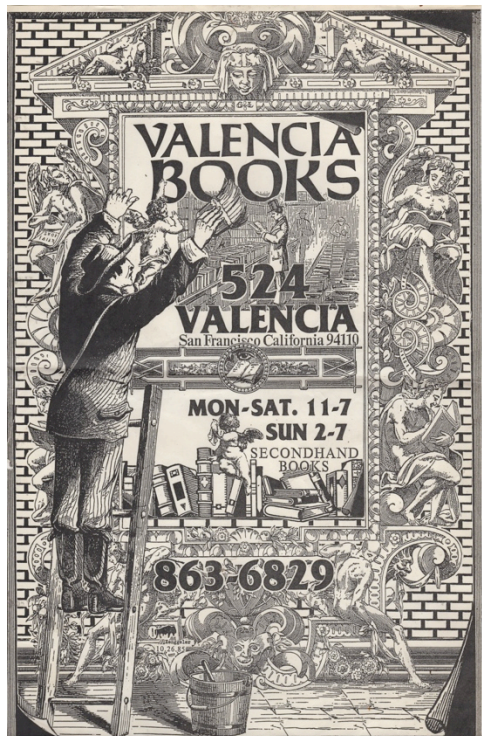


Quaritch Catalog No.775, 1958

Anybody who haunts large used bookshops knows they are frequently, if not usually located in bad neighborhoods and Valencia Books was in one of the worst. An occupational hazard of working in such a store is the regular stream of wandering schizophrenics, lonely pensioners, rip-off artists and drug addicts. For awhile we had a problem with a totally strung-out junkie who would brazenly walk up to the rare art book section and grab an armful of books and walk out the door. There was really nothing we could do, maybe tackle him to the ground but nobody had the gumption to do that. One day as he was leaving with another armful of books I couldn't stand it any longer. I approached him and demanded the books. He threw them to the ground and stomped out but for the next few months he would come back screaming at the top of his lungs about how he had knives and guns and people and how one day he would kill me and burn our bookshop to the ground. Over and over again he would do this. Calling the police was a joke then — they might come in a few hours or not at all. I felt powerless, yet again I couldn't stand it any longer. The next time he walked in, raging and frothing, I slugged him in the face as hard as I could, knocking him out cold. What would we suffer from this rash moment of violence? We never saw him again.

Valencia Books introduced me to Mark Smith, another totally eccentric book collector. Even as California weirdness goes, Mark's story is pretty special. One day as a Biblical literal Christian he was surfing on a beach in Mexico — yes, devout Christians surf here — when according to him a UFO landed on the beach and tried to abduct him. Mark knew these were evil aliens and when he got home he pledged to learn as much as possible about UFOs, Satan, Angels and the dark beings of other religions. He began a project, (in the 1950s I believe), to collect every single UFO book, pamphlet and magazine article he could find, plus every book that mentioned any kind of evil entity. When I visited his house, I found thousands upon thousands of them, all neatly shelved (in chronological order) with a card file and binders full of his notes. For some reason he later he began to collect everything on the Lost Tribes of Israel. Searching and supplying Mark with his wants, especially the hundreds of books on the Lost Tribes was a real education: there are thousands. For a time his favorite author was C. A. L. Totten, West Point

graduate, Indian fighter, and prolific author on Christian Zionism and the secret symbolism of the US Government, (for example Totten's remarkable two volume study *Our Inheritance in the Great Seal of Manasseh*, 1897).



Valencia Books poster, c.1989

Book Buying in Britain

How lucky I was then to have a loving wife who thought book collecting was beautiful and tramping around for books was the greatest of adventures. We spent a month travelling through the British Isles finding books guided by the uncompromising and sardonic B. C. M. Driffield (pseudonym) whose *Driff's Guide to All the Bookshops* (1986) is the greatest bookshop guide ever written! He also published many issues of his bullheaded magazine, *Driff's*, exposing dishonest auction houses while bemoaning the “wretchedness of hoarders masquerading as dealers” and condemning “cretinous collectors who can't read their books.” He rode his bicycle all over the British Isles writing scathing and yet somehow perfect reviews of nearly every little and big bookshop he could find. He compared the experience of entering Quaritch to that of “walking out on the dance floor for the first time” — that's how I felt! — and he did what every dealer secretly wished to do: he took the same box of books, some common, some rare, to a number of bookshops to see what they would pay, and then published the results. To this day nobody knows his real name or anything about his life. His devotion to finding every single bookshop, bookstall and accumulation for sale led to some funny misadventures. One day while scouting some small town he spied a building and through the windows he could see lots of books nicely arranged on shelves. He pounded on the door and when no answer came he walked in and began to shop. The prices were incredibly reasonable and he began to stack up his purchases when suddenly an irate man arrived and demanded what the hell was he doing in his house!

We scoured the original ‘booktown’ of Hay-on-Wye, an entire town devoted to bookshops — there are a dozen or so now — where we drank with the town's “king”, Richard Booth. Later we put on our best clothes and prowled the ritzy London shops, especially those on Great Russell Street (fantastic), and of course those on Cecil Court including Watkins, and the shops that still survived on Charing Cross Road. I

loved Foyle's, disaster that it was. We met an eccentric old World War II pilot who was a professional palmist traveling around the countryside in a little painted caravan and we spent a few days listening to his stories and getting our palms read multiple times. One story he told (over and over again) was that he was shot down and rescued five times during the war, more than any other British pilot. For some reason he refused his veteran benefits and lived in a dingy hotel and slept in a bathtub he painted red (I can't remember why). When I pressed him for details on his palmistry knowledge, which seemed quite accurate, he confessed he never studied it, in fact knew nothing beyond the basic lines, all he had to do was touch the person's hand and their life would flash into his mind.

It's funny what you remember 30 years later, while I must've visited at least a hundred UK bookshops on that trip, including R. A. Gilbert, Atlantis Bookshop, etc, one that keeps coming back to me is a tiny little shop on Flask Walk, just off Hampstead Heath. We had rented a room in somebody's house there for a week, and while strolling, visiting Freud's house, Kenwood House, the Pergola Gardens, we bumped into the kind of shop you dream of. The outside had windows that looked like the wheelhouse of an old sailing ship, and inside was your classic little English bookshop attended by an aged couple, and lo and behold it was full of antiquarian books at ridiculously cheap prices! The prize was Fergusson's *The Rock-Cut Temples of India*, (1864), the first edition illustrated with 74 mounted photographs, an uncut copy. They must've recently acquired a library, there's no other explanation for the bargains found there, but it was how welcoming and warm they were, that's what shines through. As with every shop we visited they were quite willing to pack and post our purchases and everything arrived in San Francisco in good order.

Home in California, with the book-fever still at a pitch we took another trip through central California, staying in Monterey and Ojai where we visited Krishnamurti's home and the Ojai Theosophical Society which was operated (in the words of Johnny Carson) by "little old ladies in tennis shoes." Like a lot of geriatric Theosophists back then they thought the old editions were inferior to the new ones and sold them outside the library for almost nothing. I still remember the feelings of guilt I had, as though I were taking advantage of them.

Noticed or not book synchronicities are everywhere I believe, and they have always haunted book people. While working at Maelstrom Books, (another Valencia Street bookshop) a very attractive woman was asking about Neoplatonism and ancient cosmologies. Trying hard to impress I informed her, probably in some kind of know-it-all pontifical manner, that she really needed to read John Michell, especially his *Dimensions of Paradise* when she casually mentioned that she, Christine Rhone, was living with John. (She later co-authored with him *Twelve Tribe Nations*).

One of my most thought provoking synchronicities involves my father, the skeptical Freudian psychoanalyst. In my teens, when I discovered Jung (in my father's library) I tried to converse with him about synchronicity, it seemed to make perfect sense to me, but to no avail. A few years later I discovered Fodor's *Freud, Jung, and Occultism* ((1971). I showed him the book and tried to engage him on subject but he was adamant, Jung had gone "nuts" and I was a fool to take this pseudoscience seriously. Then a truly synchronistic experience occurred. The very next day I read to him--from Fodor's book--Shakespeare's famous quote "There are more things in heaven and in earth Horatio than are dreamt of in your philosophy." My father thought little of it, but while reading the newspaper later that day he happened upon the very same quote and comically pointed it out to me, like it was just "funny." I said "Dad, that's a synchronicity!" "No Todd, that's just a coincidence." Then that very evening we were watching the national news on TV, and lo & behold Tom Brokaw ended his broadcast with the same quote from Shakespeare. A triple synchronicity about unknown possibilities! Perhaps needlessly to say, my father was still unconvinced, and me more than ever.

"Incredulity is given to the world as a punishment." -- Elias Ashmole

Glen Ellen

After 15 years in San Francisco and craving Arcadian bliss and small town living we finally left the city we loved so much and moved north to the tiny hamlet of Glen Ellen in Sonoma, population 600. A few blocks away lived Paul S. Williams, the great Philip K. Dick scholar and I enjoyed very much going through his strange archive and music library while he discussed Dick's Hermetic studies. From there I could also walk to Jack London's old home, now a state park, and there in a glass case was a dazzling assemblage of what must have been every foreign language edition of London's *Call of the Wild*. There were at least 60-80 different editions, in such languages as Arabic, Urdu, and Korean, some with the most eccentric and comical cover art. With just one look you instantly grasped the global appeal that London had, and how far away book designers had tried to convey the contents.

One day a bank manager called to say Fred Scharna, an old customer, had died leaving a house full of books they wanted removed "immediately", and "free" if I could get there "now." Fred left no will or instructions on what to do with his library and the only reason they called me was that when Fred died in his kitchen from a heart attack they found a letter in his coat pocket I had written him recently. Fred was another lovable bibliomaniac and a favorite memory is a meeting held in the house of Richard Hackney (of Fields Book Store), with Richard, Fred, Bob Gilbert, George Hubert and myself, five of the most dedicated occult book people gathered in one room! There is no question that Fred was one of the greatest collectors on the West Coast in the late 20th century. A German émigré, bank president and childless bachelor whose life was devoted collecting, with every weekend and holiday spent traveling up and down the Pacific Coast buying anything related to the occult. Most of this was done in the 1950s when the Pacific Coast, especially that of California held the richest selection of occult books for sale anywhere in the world. How can that be you ask? Just think of the waves and waves of seekers, utopian dreamers, eccentric crackpots, healers, alternative medical doctors, gurus, cults, imposters and adherents of spiritual societies that migrated here in the late 19th and early 20th century. Upon arriving, sad of heart, with a friend and the biggest truck I could rent, we found a large ranch style house in an ordinary suburb chockablock full of books: every room and every wall and basically all the floor space crammed with his collection. There were hundreds of first editions of Waite, Crowley, Carus, Steiner, Fortune, Hall, Spare, Yeats, Mesmer, HPB, Jung, etc & etc, these were reverently shelved in closets that looked more like religious alters. There were great German authors aplenty, sets galore and towers of antiquarian books stacked along the walls, some teetering dangerously. But what took up the most space by far — what invaded every room so there were only little foot paths through each one — was his massive collection of periodicals and journals, complete runs of *Lucifer*, *The Occult Review*, *Ambix*, *Quest*, *SPR*, *Zoist*, *Open Court* and so many Theosophical periodicals I'd never seen, nearly all in publisher's bindings, (often in duplicate and sometimes triplicate!). Then the thousands of pamphlets, ephemera, offprints, lesson plans and mail order teachings from an incredible variety of perspectives, stunning. Fred was interested in everything, and he knew it was all connected. He was a regular customer for a long time but I'd never been to his house and I was unprepared when I got there. Here I was, looking at a lifetime of passion and the largest private occult library of my career, but without Fred to show it to me I was sad, and yet it was all mine for the taking. But things are rarely easy when buying libraries. Amidst this wonderland was a strange man boxing up books as fast as he could. Fred had no living relatives that the bank could find but this man claimed, in broken English, to be a German relative of some sort and that the bank gave him permission to take all the books but since nobody from the bank was there it was difficult to believe him or know what to do and a decision had to be made on the spot: leave or battle. What transpired was a crazy chaotic clash between me, my helper and this "relative." In the end I was happy with what we wrestled away, a 16 foot truck packed to the gills which formed a large part of my stock at Valencia Books and all the books in Catalog 12.

Meeting Ralph Metzner and buying a large portion of his library was exciting. His house was just a few miles away from Glen Ellen. Ralph was another German émigré who in the early 1960's did pioneering psychedelic research at Harvard University with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (later Ram Dass) and co-authored the seminal *Psychedelic Experience*. His collection focused on entheogens, paganism, and Nordic mythology. There was plenty on alchemy but more interesting for me was his collection of books and journals on deep ecology. Ralph's latest book is *The Toad and the Jaguar: A Field Report of Underground Research on a Visionary Medicine*, (2013).

Boonville

My marriage dissolved and I moved to another ridiculously small town, Boonville, population 900, where I opened a bookshop right in 'downtown' near the Boonville Brewery where I tried to fill my 2000 square-foot space, mainly with the Alta California stock, thousands of Indian imports and the Wreden purchase (see below). Boonville is famous for having a unique folk language, 'Boontling,' and a few doors down from my shop was the only bar in town and there you could still hear people speak it. It was rumored Thomas Pynchon drank there and was writing a book about the area, and for all I know he bought books in my shop. The power in town would frequently go out and while drinking in the bar I discovered a charming tradition they had: when the lights went out people would run to the backyard, drinks in hand, and shoot pistols in the air. Another lights-out tradition was that the girls would take their shirts off and "trade them." I was befriended by some of the old 'back to the land' hippies of Mendocino County, most memorable of whom was Bruce Anderson, cantankerous publisher of the infamous *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, "the most radical small newspaper in America", and his cohorts like Alexander Cockburn the Irish-American political agitator who exposed the nasty dark side of American politics better than almost anybody. I lived in a little cabin 'off the grid,' with a phone but no power, and there I hammered out some of the nicest small catalogs I ever issued, by kerosene lamp on a manual 'Hermes 3000' typewriter.

A game changer came by phone there. Ian called to say there was a big collection being broken up: come on down now and bring a big truck! This was the massive stock of William P. Wreden, a Stanford man and famed Palo Alto antiquarian bookdealer, heir to an Oakland brewing fortune as I remember it. For sale was a stock of 50,000 books in the basement of his neocolonial mansion in Hillsboro, wealthiest town in America. Wreden had purchased important libraries including portions of those of Thomas Hardy and Havelock Ellis. In partnership with Ian, Peter Howard of Serendipity Books, (Berkeley) they had bought the entire basement for \$220,000 and I was there to "remove the rejects" which amounted to 350 boxes of the most wonderfully obscure, little wanted antiquarian volumes. Spiritualist periodicals, dated medical journals, defective 18th century books, inferior bibliographies, discredited anthropology, and massive quantities of old bookdealer catalogs. This is just the kind of material that sustains me better than anything, and I profited for years from that purchase which was sold to me for almost nothing, thanks again to the generosity of Ian.

Healdsburg and Catalog 33

Boonville was not to last. Perhaps I sensed something . . . Right after I moved, the building I was in burned to the ground. The catalogs had done well, yielding enough money to open a shop in the beautiful wine country town of Healdsburg, population c. 7,500. Healdsburg is in the middle of Sonoma County, beautiful rolling hills and old oak trees, a most handsome land blessed with a sunny Mediterranean climate. A few miles from Healdsburg lay the remains of Fountain Grove, home to Thomas Lake Harris and his Brotherhood of the New Life. Harris is easily one of the most unusual of all utopian 19th century American dreamers and his bizarre books could still be found in local shops. My place was on the second floor overlooking the town plaza with its gazebo, redwood trees, water fountain and strolling tourists. By this time I finally realized, sadly, that the vast majority of my customers were really only interested in the most recent scholarship and were not collecting old books or first editions. Yes, I knew my catalogs of

used, old and antiquarian books were definitely ‘interesting’ to them, and supportive customers struggled to buy ‘something’ and I knew they loved to ‘read’ about old books in the catalogs, but more than anything they wanted the latest scholarship. I didn’t blame them because I loved all the new publications myself, and this coincided with an explosion of scholarly books on Hermeticism and the occult. Big-name scholars and academics were finally discovering this ignored world and major publishers like Princeton, Yale and Oxford were publishing beautiful volumes.

I embarked on an ambitious plan to stock, or be able to order, any new scholarly book and offer them through print catalogs. Nobody was doing this. But dark clouds were already forming. Just before opening people were talking about something called “the Internet”, (huh, I didn’t get it) and not much later I heard of a company, “Amazon” that was selling computer books on the Internet. This was around 1994 and I was still using an IBM Selectric (which I loved) and had absolutely no interest in computers. The few times I had used one, I found it impossible to read anything longer than a paragraph before my vision would blur. Little would I know this bullshit company, backed by Wall Street venture capitalists, would conquer the entire book world, turning it upside down and nearly ruining a tradition as old as the printed word. Who would have thought their crude and ruthless business plan with their ugly website would become a dangerous monopoly whose long term effects are still almost completely ignored by the media? I didn’t. Just then a brilliant manifesto against Amazon was published by Andy Ross, owner of the noted Bay Area bookshop Cody’s Books. Titled *A Statement from Andy Ross on the Corporate Seizure of Bookselling*, it perfectly exposed all the myths of how great Amazon supposedly was, how in fact what Amazon was doing was to monopolize the business of books and help destroy Main Street in the process. Today Amazon controls 75% of all book sales in the United States, including, incredibly, the used, old and rare book market.

Always a slave to my dreams and certain of success I ignored the dark clouds. I had a beautiful new wife, a sweet little cabin in the woods, a staff of four enthusiastic women and thanks again to a large sale I was able to fund this plan. With perfect timing the library of Leonard F. Pembroke came to me, and like many libraries it came by pure chance. One day I received a mass emailing — apparently somebody had rented a mailing list I was on. The message read something like “I have a collection of books owned by my grandfather Lord Pembroke. I would like to sell it. Please contact me if you are interested.” I immediately wrote back to learn the library was in South Africa, and she was interested. I must have been the only person who recognized Pembroke’s name as nobody else had contacted her, but how on earth could I buy a library in South Africa from somebody that I didn’t know and who didn’t know me? There were 1000+ books with only a useless list to go by. I took a gamble and convinced the owner to ship the library without any money down, and once again the gods favored me. With truck and crowbar I picked up the crates deep in the Port of Oakland and sitting on the dock, tentatively prying open the wooden crates I could see this was an occult library of rare scope with everything from 16th century books to a hundred or so photocopies of early Rosicrucian and alchemical books that Pembroke (who turned out not to be “Lord Pembroke”) had made in the British library in the 1950s. It was not a collection of trophy books but a working library assembled by a laboratory alchemist and practicing homeopathic doctor whose main interest was in the healing possibilities of alchemy and spiritual states.

Another fine library came from an old customer who rashly decided to sell everything, later regretting it. This library required travel to the largest private ranch in Canada, a horse breeding operation outside of Edmonton, and in the dead of winter. I arrived at night and all around the cabin were some of the most stunning creatures, gigantic Norwegian Fjord horses all standing in the snow in sub-zero temperatures with icicles hanging from their heads and bodies — otherworldly! The snow so hard and the night so quiet that with each step you thought a gun had gone off. There in a very modest cabin with wood stove cranking was a library devoted to Neoplatonism and Christian mysticism, perhaps 1000 books including Christopher Walton’s exceedingly rare *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated*

Divine and Philosopher, William Law (1854), an incredibly useful though difficult to read book thanks to the eight point type. 500 copies were supposedly printed but few have survived. This library had to be crated and shipped entailing inscrutable customs regulations and one eccentric truck driver. Catalog 32 presented some highlights.

Meanwhile, and still oblivious to the impending doom, I labored to open credit accounts with over 200 publishers world-wide, tiny publishers like the Museum Tusculanum Press and RILKO, and all the big ones like Brill, Cambridge, etc. This was an exceedingly laborious task as many of the publishers were not used to dealing with a bookshop asking for discounts and credit terms. Sometimes I had to write them two or three times, and even then there would be discount mix-ups when we finally received the books. Amazon got around all this by just ordering the books at full retail price and then selling them at a loss, backed by their Wall Street cronies and never making a single dollar in profit for their first 10 years. I did not have this luxury. The second part of the plan was to write a magnificent catalog, the catalog of my life because everything depended on it. The whole process of opening the credit accounts, getting the books, reading them and then writing my descriptions took almost two years. When issued, Catalog 33 was the largest catalog of new scholarly books on the occult seen in decades, maybe ever, but I wanted it to be more than just a catalog. It would have been so easy to use descriptions cribbed from publisher catalogs and library reviews, which is exactly what Magical Child did with their crude and unreadable mail order catalogs. Besides my own commentaries and reviews there would be ones by select customers. I invited these guest authors and Joscelyn Godwin, Thomas Hakl, Michael Grosso, Christopher Bamford, Dr. Thomas Head and others came through with beautiful, thoughtful signed contributions. Besides the books were informative sections describing how books are made today, e. g. what is the difference between alkaline paper and acid paper, what is a sewn signature, and explanations of bibliographic terminology. On top of that we undertook to fulfill subscriptions to all the great periodicals, *Alexandria, Ambix, The Anomalist, Aries, Caduceus, Cauda Pavonis, The Cereologist, Gnosis Magazine, Mythos Journal, Spring* and *Theosophical History* among others. In the end was a unique illustrated 64 page quarto-sized catalog ready for the printer, (c.1996).

With the rented mailing lists of the above periodicals and similar organizations we mailed out the first 5000 copies and were stunned to receive an avalanche of orders from scholars, researchers and authors all over the world, from China to Iceland. Success! Today when I look through my old customer files they read like a who's who of Hermetic and occult research and authorship. And we didn't just get orders, we got hundreds of letters of appreciation, copies of books and author manuscripts, book notices from far flung publishers, gifts of chocolates, a love letter or two and a little poem by Robert Bly:

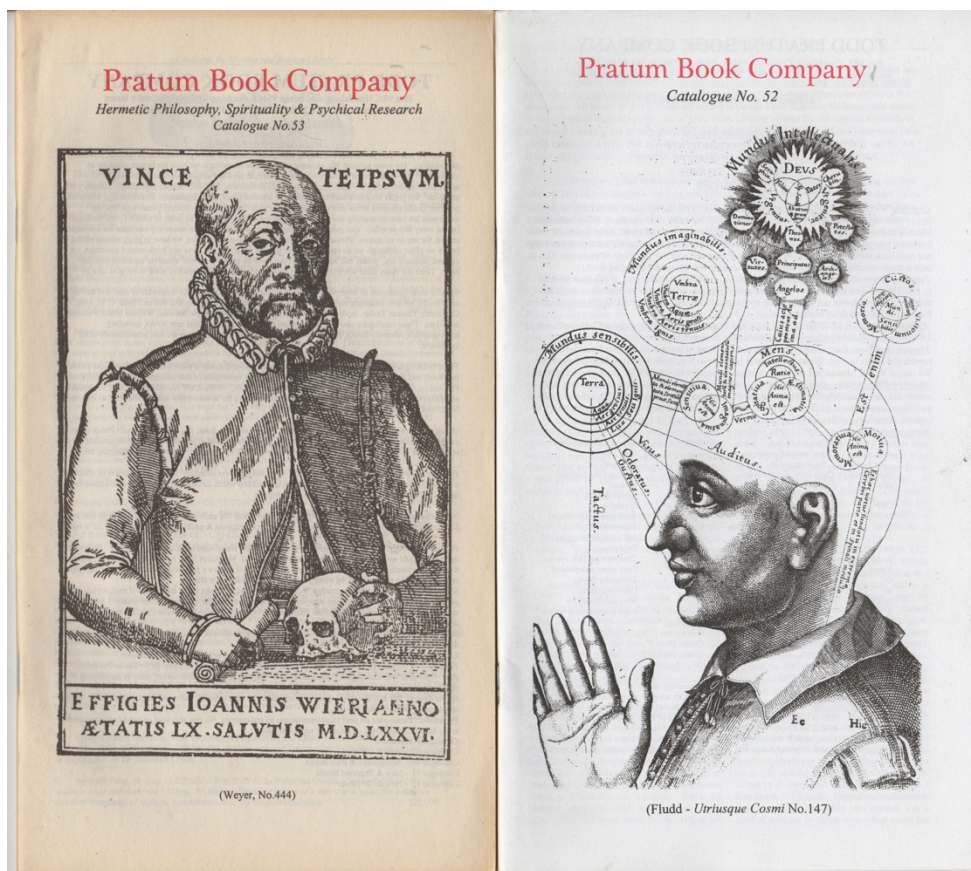
“The humble babel of the Internet and its Napoleonic relatives, the chains, are threatening the life of literature. It's time to make vows. I will order every book I need from Todd Pratum or independent booksellers of his kind”

Catalog 33 was even reviewed in a number of publications which is highly unusual for a mere book catalog. One that captures well what I was trying to do is Jon Hanna's review in his delightful 214 page *Psychedelic Resource Guide for 2004*: “The new, imported, scholarly, and antiquarian books offered by this company are the sort that I might expect to find on the shelves of poet Dale Pendell, artist Dave Normal, or the fictional X-Files character Fox Mulder. They generally deal in the areas of occult, hypnotism, tarot, tantrism, demonology, esoteric philosophy, lost books of the Bible, alchemy, magic, and numerous religions. What I like best about this catalog is that it is so well-written. Owner Todd Pratum is clearly an unabashed bibliophile, and he frequently rants or raves about the quality of a given book's binding or printing. It is refreshing to see such criticism of some of the books he is himself trying to sell, and it lends an air of believability to the praise that he heaps on other titles. Pratum also provides critical analysis of the content of the books he offers; it is quite clear that he has actually read the texts that he

offers, and that he has included them amongst what he sells because of a personal belief that they are important works (even on the occasions when their production quality is poor). His descriptions of some titles had me excited about books on topics that I previously had no strong interest in.”

To lend support, John Michell wrote this for publication in the next catalog: “Todd Pratum is a scholar of wide learning and interest, specializing in subjects which can be described as philosophical and esoteric. His regularly published catalogs of rare and out-of-print books are much valued by writers and researchers, not only because they list works which are scarcely mentioned in academic bibliographies and would otherwise remain unknown, but also because of the notes and evaluations which Pratum adds too many of his most interesting items. His business is not merely commercial but provides a unique resource which has been of great benefit to myself and other writers”

The plan had succeeded and the experimental, untested structure in place was able to fulfill all those orders with speed and proficiency. For the next three years that catalog was mailed to well over 60,000 people until we had about 400 regular customers. 34 further catalogs of old and rare books were also issued. Then the slow motion destruction picked up speed and by year 1999 Amazon had most of the books we worked so hard to offer, even tiny obscure titles, on their website at lower prices and though we never offered a book at more than the retail price and sometimes less, Amazon was offering most at 20% - 40% off. At the same time there was a gushing media frenzy about this “great and wonderful company.” I’ll never forget watching a TV commercial with Kurt Vonnegut extolling the virtues of Amazon and how we all should be “supporting” them — like they needed our fucking help! It was disgusting. Within a year sales were halved, and then halved again, and with tears in my eyes and my second divorce looming I was forced to close the shop, rip out all the custom shelving and retreat to my cabin. The end of the dream.



Pratum Catalogs No.52 & 53, c.1999

While still in Healdsburg I learned of the Zisska & Kistner Sale in Munich. There have been few really great individual sales of rare books on alchemy and the occult but the sale conducted by the German auction house of Zisska & Kistner, *Auction 32 Part Two*, (1998), comprising nearly 800 books of the utmost importance, easily contends as the single greatest sale of pre-1800 occult books of any era. Upon receiving their catalog, and after calming myself, I immediately set about the complicated procedure of communicating with my best customers to let them know about the upcoming sale, what books they might like, and possible bids to place while careful to not offer the same book to more than one person. I could not afford to attend personally but I would bid for them at the customary 10% commission. Thomas already knew about the sale and would be attending. Plenty of customers submitted bids to me but most turned out to be too low. Then a generous customer offered to fly me there and cover my expenses so we could attend the auction together, something I am ever so grateful for. We had a few days before the sale to visit bookshops, bars, museums, brothels and a blur of Bavarian churches and cathedrals. Thanks to all the schnapps and gin it's difficult to remember it all but vivid still is the little town of Rothenburg. By blotting out the tourists you might as well be in the Middle Ages, those Bavarian towns really touched my Teutonic soul. But top of our itinerary was to visit Thomas and his library. Finally I would meet him! I had only seen a few snapshots and so was completely unprepared for such magnificence. After handshakes and cordialities we entered and when the doors opened it was a thunderbolt, here, finally, was the library to crown all the libraries I had seen before. Thomas gave us a tour, casually presenting some incredible rarities, but with time running short and the auction just a few hours away we had to leave, down the autobahn at high speed.

During the pre-sale viewing I was nervous as a racehorse in the gate. We drank copiously and chain-smoked Gitanes while inspecting the best books and cementing our bids. Normally just to handle a few of these would have been an enormous experience yet over 100 books passed through my hands in just a few hours. The sale began and in a minute or two the hammer fell rapidly, over and over again and suddenly I realized the sale was conducted in German, which I don't speak! Somehow I thought it would be in English — ugh, I was out of my league, idiot! Here I was, hung-over in an ill-fitting Macy's sportcoat, bohemian dealer from California who sold books on UFOs, Atlantis, fairies and psychedelic drugs, surrounded by dignified and deadly serious continental scholars and collectors in Italian suits, and the auction house sat me in the front row next to Detlev Auvermann of Quaritch — yikes! To the other side sat my quadrilingual customer who took charge — whew! Antonio had the most exquisite taste and was hoping to get some of the heavily engraved alchemical books, fine copies in original bindings. We only bought five but among the best. As I remember it now they were the *Atalanta*, *De Alchemia*, *Musaeum Hermeticum*, *Rosarium Philosophorum* and the *Libavius*. All were absolutely exquisite copies and we spent well over \$100K. But then a terrible torment followed. I returned to my shop in Healdsburg and a few days later the box arrived in the mail, coming apart and smashed up so badly you could see the books through holes in the cardboard. They hadn't even been wrapped in paper — just stuck in a box! How could this be? It was every bookdealer's nightmare. I was enraged; my customer was enraged. I took photographs without opening the box and faxed them to Zisska & Kistner only to receive a haughty and dismissive reply--there was nothing they would do. Even when fully insured it is almost impossible to get a settlement for damaged rare books. My customer wanted me to mail the box back without opening it (we were certain they were damaged) and tell them to fuck off. If I opened the box I wouldn't be able to file a claim and I spent days staring at that box, using flashlights to see what I could see inside. Eventually I disobeyed my customer's instructions and opened the box. The gods had been with us; miraculously the books were completely untouched; the torment was over.

Around this time there were a number of other important auctions. One of the most important offered the remains of W. N. 'Nick' Schors' library, the renowned Dutch dealer in erotica and occultism, inexplicably auctioned by Bloomsbury in London (sale 451, 2003) instead of one of the German houses. According to Jose Bouman (of the Ritman Library) these were not the leftovers and rejects but special books that

Schors held back, all of them pre-1800, and most pre-1700, 657 choice lots. I bid heavily and got nothing. In the same year Sotheby's auctioned off the witchcraft and occult library of Robert Lenkiewicz, (London November 20, 2003, 344 lots). This was another sale I got nothing from, though many of the books seemed to be defective so I didn't feel so bad. Many people will know of the amazing collection of illuminated manuscripts that Joost Ritman sold through Sotheby's of London in a series of catalogs, c. 2000, and though mostly Books of Hours and biblical texts there were a number of amazing Hermetic manuscripts and early mystical books, all were beautifully illustrated and described in the catalogs. These big auctions usually attracted a lot of attention and rarely was I able to buy much, but by carefully monitoring the smaller auction houses I've occasionally found good bargains. One rather mysterious small sale took place at the Pacific Book Auction Galleries, (sale 64, 1994) which I attended. Of the 99 lots, there were many truly rare items like the final manuscript of the 1929 first edition of Crowley's *Theory and Practice of Magick* with 1500 autograph corrections by Crowley. It did not meet the reserve of \$15,000. I'm hoping and assuming Bill Breeze (OTO) had access to this in some way.

One of the last large collections I bought before closing the Healdsburg shop was the library of the John Dee Publication Project, brainchild of Clay Holden whose sigil graced each flyleaf. Clay lived in a tiny house in a forest outside of Santa Cruz. Soon as I got there he brought out sake and Japanese beer and we got pleasantly drunk. The whole place was dominated by books, including a large collection of books in Japanese. This was 1998, year of the worst El Nino in modern times, and driving from Healdsburg to Santa Cruz to buy a library of Dee rarities, through a powerful rainstorm and floods and road closures felt seriously Chthonic. Clay didn't have the resources to buy first editions of Dee but he did have one, *A True and Faithful Relation* and basically every modern edition of Dee including photocopies of many Dee manuscripts in the British Library. He also owned journal articles, bibliographies and almost all the books ever written about Dee in English, along with those by and about Kelley, Ashmole, etc. Clay was an independent scholar-collector, he read Latin and was well-versed in this history but also a practitioner of Enochian Magick. One of his unique accomplishments was to create software that analyzed the sigils, alphabets, and geomantic forms to produce delicately complex imagery. The John Dee Publication Project was a noble idea, born of true devotion that unfortunately did not come to full fruition. The last I heard Clay moved to Japan though some of his notes and imagery are still posted at John-Dee.org.

Purchasing a large library, say over 10,000 books, or just going through it to find what you want or what you might offer is a special skill few dealers have. I'm talking about libraries and collections that take days just to see how many books there are, profoundly large assemblages and accumulations of books in boxes, in piles, on high shelves, in dark rooms, stinking basements and cob-webbed attics, libraries containing books that are water damaged and now glued together by mildew, books rat-chewed and silverfished, books missing covers, falling apart from red rot, sets of books where all the volumes are scattered hither and thither, libraries that require a miner's lamp and a breathing mask to protect your lungs from black mold, accumulations where the senile owner follows you around shadowing your every movement while rambling on about good apple pie and how he never had sex in high school, storage units filled to the brim by hoarders who (in addition to books) collected everything from supermarket inserts to grandmother's old socks. Yet this has been how I've found many obscure books and printed matter. On one book call I found that the owner had been stockpiling books for decades in a parking garage underneath his house. He was very old and clearly could not smell anymore because the moment I walked into the garage the heavy scent of mildew and mold overwhelmed me. There were hundreds (perhaps 500) boxes stacked shoulder high. The top boxes were fine but once you got down to the second, third and fourth box every single one was completely covered in mildew, everything tragically ruined . . . Well, almost everything. I found good things to buy, salvaged with my weird skills.

America's Largest Occult Library?

Speaking of large libraries, Fred Scharna's was certainly the largest I personally knew, perhaps 20,000 volumes, but there was another I only tangentially encountered that might qualify as the largest 20th century occult library in private hands, that of Joseph A. Sadony (1877-1960), though because the world of occultism is so poorly recorded there can be no definitive way of claiming this. According to obituaries his library totaled about 30,000 volumes. Even though he lived his entire life in Michigan I have found hundreds and hundreds of his books here in the Bay Area and judging from other clues it must have been considerably larger, but even at 30,000 volumes few can compare in size. It was a library built by a man who bought anything that fit with his personal definition of the occult and whatever strange or unusual books that supplemented his vision. It was not a library guided by scholarly rigor yet this was the real genius of his collection. Once again the amateur trumps the professional, for what academic could see the relationship between the mysteries of the polar ice caps and the psychic powers of mediums? He thought there was (and who knows?) but Sadony was not afraid to investigate the possibilities and this can be how new discoveries are made. I've always assumed that he must have been a constant traveler like Fred Scharna, but according to Tom Nicely of Leaves of Grass Books, who published a catalog of books from the Sadony Library (*Catalog 20*, c.1994, with 1081 titles), almost all the books Tom encountered had the same bookdealer's penciled price, possibly the Chicago bookshop of Powner, a venerable occult bookshop in the 1920's. But that just couldn't explain everything, and so the mystery still lingers exactly how he could amass such a library. Sadly typical of a library like this when Sadony died in 1960 the books sat in a poorly ventilated building for 25 years — imagine! Many were damaged, eaten by rodents, lost, stolen etc, then they slowly entered the food chain, in bits and pieces over the years to the market of used bookshops and scouts through some haphazard sales. I can't tell you how many times this occurs with important occult libraries. Pity a specialist dealer wasn't contacted. Paul Hudson, the proprietor of Middle Earth Books, (one of the better known American occult bookdealers c.1960's – 1980's), once related to me the biggest blunder of his career. He was living in Michigan not far from where Sadony lived. He didn't know who Sadony was when he saw a brief advertisement in the paper that a library of books was going up for sale nearby. Paul would have known exactly what to do with a large library like that, but he decided not to go!

After the collapse in Healdsburg, and my retreat to the cabin, I bought more libraries. The Pavek Library of Biofield Research contained about 1,000 18th and 19th century books on Mesmerism, Spiritualistic healing and the laying on of hands which I sold *en bloc* to Rice University with the help of Jeffrey Kripal. Richard Pavek had spent much of his life building a library (improbably shelved throughout his three story houseboat in Sausalito) while attempting to prove or disprove magnetic healing and was particularly concerned with Valentine Greatrakes 'The Stroker' (1628 – 1682) who tried to cure Lady Conway of her migraines. Richard is one of the few who has applied serious research to this subject and eventually established a scientific healing modality, SHEN, which is now practiced the world over.

The library of Leslie Bigelow was formed in preparation for a biography of Dee that was never published. Like Clay Holden he had most everything in English along with one completely unique item, a reproduction in wax of Dee's "The Sigillum of Aemeth" or "Seal of Truth". This seal was used in the Enochian workings of Dee and Kelly in their communications with angels. In practice, the seal was placed directly beneath Dee's crystal ball, or in several places on the Holy Table during their scrying sessions (as pictured in Dee's *True and Faithful Relation*). In 1583, The Archangel Raphael dictated the Enochian alphabet and many charts were developed by Dee and Kelly into the 'Enochian Calls or Keys', which became the origin of Enochian Magick. The disk was made of 'perfect wax' and measured approximately nine inches in diameter (nine being the number of the Moon) and one inch thick (one being the number of the Sun). It consisted of inscriptions of pentacles, six pointed figures, and the names of God and of Angels, the figures and inscription lettering were minutely transcribed and accentuated using gold dust. The wax

seal was commissioned by Bigelow and professionally executed using the finest materials by a renowned London craftsman, a beautiful one-of-a-kind reproduction of the original disk in the British Museum, (pictured in Clulee's *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*, and a number of other texts). The entire collection went to a rather mysterious man I never heard from again.

I visited the forest home of Evanescent Press in the remote coastal town of Leggett, one of those forgotten old timber towns with a 315 foot tall redwood tree you can drive-through. John Stahl the proprietor is another original California Hermeticist. He wrote and printed letterpress commentaries on the *I Ching*, the *Tetragrammaton*, editions of the *Coelum Philosophorum* and the *Lapis Philosophorum*, and a book of cosmic jokes among other curiosities. He did his own English & Latin translation of the *Emerald Tablet* issued as letterpress posters and printed on what he said was the first legal use of hemp paper in the United States since it was outlawed in the 1920s. I treasure some of the private publications he gave me, including his comical four page booklet *A Concise History of the Cosmos From its Origins to the Present Day*.

Just before Adi Da died in 2008 I was invited by his librarian to visit the library housed at their Mountain of Attention Sanctuary in Lake County CA. Adi Da was the spiritual teacher first known as Franklin Jones, later as Bubba Free John and finally as Adi Da. With my girlfriend we toured his ambitious collection, (perhaps 12,000 volumes) of spiritual texts and commentaries, all organized under an eccentric system of “levels of purity”. I think there were seven levels subdivided into 11 sections, then subdivided again. Later we walked the bucolic grounds — it had been an old hot springs resort in the 1800’s. We met students and teachers and then frolicked in the lake. My girlfriend had been his private videographer and later one of his nine goddesses, living with him on his island in Tahiti and I was privy to some revealing inside stories illuminating this ‘Master’ of whom Alan Watts wrote, “It looks like we have an Avatar here. I can’t believe it, he is really here. I’ve been waiting for such a one all my life.” The library was partially cataloged and a version published as *The Basket of Tolerance*, (1989), a most unusual catalog from this most unusual man. Adi Da’s Stanford dissertation was on Gertrude Stein, and there he also took part in experiments with psilocybin, conducted by the University. He was a true spiritual explorer, and not from an armchair. He joined Scientology, and followed Muktananda and Albert Rudolph (“Swami Rudrananda”) before becoming a guru himself with a worldwide following. The quote by Alan Watts dates from Adi Da’s early years; later there were nasty rumors and eventually many followers left. Another California original.

Oakland

I attended a weekend workshop on sexuality at Harbin Hot Springs (imagine 70 naked people living and sleeping in one huge room for a weekend, yes I did that, four weekends in a row). I fell in love and moved out of my little cabin to her home in Oakland and there issued many more catalogs. With Maurizio Martino I reprinted two classics, Sir George Cornewall Lewis’s *An Historical Survey of the Astronomy of the Ancients* (1862) and James Hyde’s *Bibliography of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1906). In 2003 I started Pratum Literacy Services and spent five years tutoring hundreds of homeless kids (there are 500,000 in California) and building free libraries in their shelters and group homes, work I’ve rekindled recently. I rented a warehouse, partly as a ‘literacy depot’ for the kids, where I built shelving to the top of the 29 foot ceilings and began filling it with the stock of local bookshops going out of business, eventually selling most to Powell’s Books in Portland Oregon, one of the largest bookshops in the world.

After three good years my girlfriend and I split up; I moved into my warehouse (no kitchen, no hot water) and opened the Pratum Children’s Library, located in the middle of an eleven acre garden in Marin County. To create a beautiful library for children, with both old and new books (untrammelled by library brandings or plastic covers), and located in nature was a dream for me that briefly came true, but just after I signed the lease my little sister, last of my family, killed herself unexpectedly and I became lost,

devastated, unable to stay focused. I managed to build-out three rooms of gorgeous wood shelving and opened with 14,000 books, about half of them either on natural history or children's books, the other half my collection of books on the history of education and alternative learning. The library was based on the philosophy of free inquiry and self directed learning, a pedagogy I gained from years of personal study and work with the homeless kids, but after a year I closed it down, still too sad to keep it going. I put the books in storage (they're still there) and in 2006 moved to my present location, right off Lake Merritt, America's first wildlife refuge, (improbably located in downtown Oakland), to a spacious, creaky old flat with steam heat, high ceilings and room enough to live comfortably with 10,000 shelved books, It took seven professional movers and three trucks two full days and nights to get everything up the three flights of stairs. Afterwards they advised me that if I ever moved again to please not call them, in spite of my big tip! Here I live, single again, issuing catalogs, buying books and trying to be the person my dog thinks I am.

Owl & Company Book Shop



Old ~ New ~ Rare
Bought & Sold
All Subjects

Owl & Company Bookshop was my last big venture, located on the prosperous and hip Piedmont Avenue in Oakland, a 'concept bookshop' as they say. My thought was that since there were basically no large ground floor antiquarian bookshops in the Bay Area, and new bookshops, (the few left) were only surviving with constant pleas for community support, nonprofit designations and even crowd-funding campaigns, and since I had a large stock of really fine books, including the recently purchased library of David Fideler and the back stock of his Phanes Press, and sets and leather bound beauties galore, it seemed like a great idea. Instead it was a demoralizing lesson in just how poorly old books are valued now. I went into debt, once again building gorgeous shelving with crown moulding, a pulpit ladder, and a separate rare book room and event space. With my crew we spent months pricing, shelving and organizing, opening just before Christmas 2013. At first things seemed to go according to plan, droves of people came in, surprised and amazed that something like an old traditional antiquarian bookshop could still exist. They admired the shelving, the quiet handsome feel of the place, and the "smell of old books". Everybody would exclaim how grateful they were to have a bookshop like this in their neighborhood, and how much they "loved old books", then wishing me luck they would leave, without buying anything!

I hadn't had an open shop for quite a few years and yes I'd forgotten many of the negative aspects of it. I've always enjoyed answering people's questions and hearing about books they had read or books they were looking for, but what really drove me crazy, and what has always been so frustrating in my bookshops was the constant train of people who would come in, walk straight up to the counter, ask for a particular title and if we didn't have it leave without looking around. Many didn't even want to look for it themselves. I would point out the relevant sections but they would look at me expectantly like "can you find it for me please, it's so much trouble looking through all those books." I quickly started remembering at the Owl all the indignities and inanities you have to suffer running a bookshop, affronts to your literary sensitivities that can turn the sunniest disposition into muttering misanthropy, (hence the testy temperaments of a lot of bookdealers!). With so many people looking for one-and-only-one book I briefly added to our business cards the words "No we probably don't have your fucking book," and I remember the day I decided to do that. A lady came in to tell how for 20 years or so she'd been looking for an old children's book she read as a child, with the usual story about how important it was to her. I was unfamiliar with the author or the title, and the truth is for older children's books there are millions of possibilities and the chance we would have it are basically zero. And once again, instead of browsing for her discovery she wanted me to look for it personally, so reluctantly, knowing the odds, I went back to the children's section, but on the way I remembered shelving that book, and there it was on the shelf, and only priced a few dollars! With a rare sense of triumphant success I brought it up to the front counter, here I had fulfilled her cherished hope of childhood rediscovery. A momentary flash of joy crossed her face when I handed it to her, and while verifying that it was the book, she quickly said she would "think about it" and left. Last I checked that book was still there.

After a few months and thousands of 'supportive' sentiments and hesitant browsers I began to realize my folly. Oh yeah, everybody "loves" old books. After a year I was in more debt and finally sold it to the only person interested, (but who still hasn't paid for it). Look at the photographs on Yelp to see just how beautiful it was and read the rave reviews, it was something special. Yes I could still open another shop, I have about 400 boxes in storage, and libraries in queue to buy so I probably won't be able to resist if things looked right — but this time I want a partner with a better business head than mine.

Customers

In a certain way I've learned as much about books from customers as I have from reading books. Not just their orders or their long handwritten lists of 'books wanted' but also from the various levels of passion I hear when they telephone me, and from visiting them in their homes, meeting their families, having drinks and going to bookshops together. Some customers have lasted a long time, and through those relationships I've been privileged to learn what people find special and not so special, what bores them and why some purchases are more important than paying the rent. So who collects books on the occult? These days more and more my customers are academics and authors, but in the past the vast majority have been blue-collar and ordinary middle-class people, plumbers, electricians, waiters and waitresses, sex workers and psychotherapists, taxicab drivers and single mothers, people who may have had limited incomes but who always found a way to include books in the budget. Often times they are 'outsiders' of some kind, but the image of the black-robed practitioner of magic with Satanic pallor and candles has never fit with the people I've met, though I've dealt with them also. With a few exceptions my customers have always been incredibly polite and grateful people, who never ask for discounts or favors, who trust me and my descriptions, and so I've always trusted them and for most of my career mailed their orders without payment, credit card number or trade references. I've never been unpaid, not even once. In fact so trusting was I in the first few years that I didn't even write down what people owed me! Of course customers have occasionally been difficult or annoying, but the only ones that really got under my skin were the famous and wealthy people who tried using their position to intimidate me into giving them discounts and special treatment, (and I don't mean 'ingratiate,' that's a fine art). As a hero-worshiping romantic it was especially difficult to resist their pressure when they were authors whose books I greatly

admired. People usually understand my business is one of low profit and hard work but these people did not, or didn't care if they did.

Michael Richards, AKA "Cosmo Kramer" of 'Seinfeld' fame was one of the nastiest. Sometime in the late 1990s he called and ordered thousands of dollars of books as if it were nothing, we were elated and as usual mailed them down on approval. I had dreams of helping to build a great library for somebody who was "richer than god." A week or so later he called, "incensed and insulted" that we had sold him a lot of "worthless books," claiming that none were first editions because he "knew all about first editions" and that our descriptions were some kind of deceptive trickery and how he was going to "expose us." Over the next few days I kept expecting an apologetic call, maybe he was drunk or his wife kicked him out but nope. Later we learned what a reviled person he is in Hollywood, maybe some kind of racist even. Too bad because he was funny as hell on TV and I would have loved an association with him. Umberto Eco was rude and imperious, another famous wealthy man who demanded — not requested but demanded — a discount and all kinds of special treatment. Too bad, because I loved *The Name of the Rose*. James Hillman bought quite a few books from us. He was never very friendly but it was fascinating to see what this great mind bought, mostly books on Neoplatonism and British folklore, nothing rare but good used copies of ponderous scholarship. On the phone he said his most cherished reading experience was the *Enneads* of Plotinus, and I have ever since taken that to heart. Then out of the blue he called to berate me for my description of his book *Dream Animals* (1997). In a catalog I had criticized what I thought were the awful illustrations that accompanied an otherwise worthy book. He was really pissed, thought the illustrations were magnificent, that I didn't know what I was talking about, who did I think I was, etc & etc. He then returned a bunch of his purchases, some of them from years back, and demanding a refund. Anybody else and I would've told him to get lost but I revered Hillman's writings. One of the most important books in my life is *The Souls Code*, so we gave him a refund. Just a few weeks ago I related this story to Joscelyn Godwin who informed me the illustrator was Hillman's wife! OK — mystery solved, but how revealing that a man so well-versed in psychology couldn't see how blind his own ego was.

Catalog 33 seemed to attract a fair number of prima donnas, the peacocks my staff dreaded to deal with, like "Prince" Stanislaus Klossowski, who lived in Malibu. We didn't mind his pretentious phone calls, (always reminding us that he "only collected the finest"), but what really hurt was that he always asked for a discount just when he knew my Healdsburg business was under attack by Amazon and hanging by a thread. Every time I would tell him "I don't discount books to anybody," but he would persist. Though fabulously wealthy, he needed his little pound of flesh. When I told my staff his royal pedigree was probably made up, they giggled and dubbed him "The Pretender." According to some he directed the worst horror film ever produced in Hollywood, and the *LA Times* review is scathing: "There are vanity films, and then there are Vanity Films. Into this most emphatic latter category comes the mind-bogglingly vain "The Shining Blood." This low-budget boondoggle marks the debut of director, actor, writer and producer... of a jet-setting "playboy prince" whose wealth eminently qualified him to turn incoherent auteur." It's worth reading the rest, (online) but here is the finale: "So who is this gift horse that grateful golden-turkey aficionados probably shouldn't look in the mouth? [he is] the self-described "rock star, yogi, guerrilla leader, poet, racing driver, ruler of an island in the Indian Ocean, automobile manufacturer, alchemist and explorer. And, it's apparent, a guy with still way too much time on his hands.[The movie] bleeds into unwatchability considered as a narrative, but as an inadvertent study in human folly, it may actually offer something resembling a good time."

Another poseur was "Haven O'More" who was building "The worlds greatest collection of the worlds greatest books in the greatest editions" or something like that. He called to order the most expensive book in the shop, an odd volume of Taylor's *Aristotle*, only one of an eleven volume set but in an edition of 50 copies and with Taylor's presentation signature. Though he was unknown to me O'More wanted it mailed overnight on approval, (NB: Unless they need the books to stop a war, anybody who insists they be

overnight “at any cost” is usually the worst of snobs). I eventually declined, learning later this character whose ‘Garden Library’ was auctioned off by Sotheby’s in 1989, was some kind of impostor and that Haven O’More was really “Have No More”, whatever that meant. I could rag on about a few others but it’s not my style and as I’ve said before, the vast majority of customers have been a pleasure to deal with, but there have been a few whose understanding, appreciation and support went way beyond what I could have imagined, people like John Michell.

While browsing the venerable John Coles Books in La Jolla, and when I was still trying to make it as an abstract painter, I picked up a book that proved revelatory to me, *Natural Likeness: Faces and Figures in Nature* by John Michell, (published in Britain as *Simulacra*). For a psychedelic nature-worshipping young man the phenomena of forms in nature looking uncannily like vaginas, fairies and famous faces opened a door, an entrance into profound secrets of nature. I wrote him a rash fan letter that inaugurated an 18 year friendship and scholarly initiation. No other author has touched me more, and what a supportive customer! John always tried to buy a few books from every catalog, each order accompanied by a beautiful calligraphic letter, a little drawing or a joke, or an offprint, magazine article, notice of new books, and occasionally lists of books he wanted or was selling and I immediately began to collect (and continue to collect) every book and every publication, in all editions and translations (a “completist” collection) by this man who I eventually realized might be the wisest person I ever knew. By completist, I’m talking about collecting every printing of every edition, foreign translations, periodical appearances however small, even collecting--what I would learn over time—John’s favorite books by other authors. This has brought me so much pleasure that I’ve also collected the books that John illustrated in a painting that he did (John was an accomplished watercolorist) that was used for the cover of his *The New View Over Atlantis*, for example Davidson’s *The Great Pyramid* and Bayley’s *Archaic England*.

Another customer turned guiding light is Joscelyn Godwin, the wise scholar of esoteric musicology, forgotten spiritual theologies and Forteanism. I was not familiar with his books when I received his first order back in the 1980s but then I read his *Kircher*, and his *Fludd* (both 1979) and *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (1981), and wrote him one of my impertinent fan letters and thus began my beautiful friendship with this generous, humble and helpful man. Like John Michell he didn’t just send orders he sent letters — for you young people these are thoughts written in ink with your hand on paper and then mailed anywhere in the world with a stamp — and clippings, deferential corrections to my catalogs, supportive praise, connections to others and copies of his rare publications like the crazily designed Japanese translation of his book on Fludd.

Not many authors are interested in connecting with their readers beyond the requisite bookstore signings and press interviews and we are all that much poorer for it. A rare few understand the mutually nourishing and enlightening exchange that can happen. Jacques Vallee knows his books don’t just exist in our three-dimensional world, they exist in the beyond of Teilhard de Chardin’s ‘Noosphere’ and the hearts of his public. Like the above authors Jacques knows how crucial it is to connect with readers and bookshops. This one man’s thoughtfulness transcends being a mere ‘customer.’ Our meetings and collaborations are precious and so imagine the synergistic pleasure to have both Jacques and Joscelyn in my apartment just a few weeks ago. The new edition of his *Wonders in the Sky*, with color plates, ‘flying shield’, new facsimiles and additional research from Chris Aubeck’s Magoniex Project is a revolutionary wonder in itself, find it online.

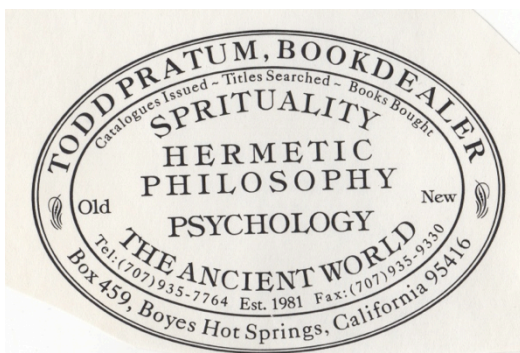
I could name-drop and list a lot of famous customers. The proxies of Prince Charles, and the Marquis of Northampton have bought. Sir Geoffrey Keynes purchased a few editions of Thomas Taylor the Platonist, saying he was beginning a bibliography of Taylor, (whatever happened to that?). Laszlo Toth, the Hungarian geologist who famously defaced Michelangelo’s Pieta, Madonna, Colin Wilson, John Frankenheimer, Anton La Vey, Stephen Skinner, Massimo Introvigne, Bill Breeze, Hans Nintzel, William

Burroughs, Arnold Levy (the NYC pornographer and publisher) Jacob Needleman, Morton Smith and Huston Smith have all bought. Kathleen Raine ordered a few books occasionally, always accompanied with a pleasant and thoughtful note. Not long before she died B. J. T. Dobbs sent a copy of *Alchemical Death and Resurrection*, her beautifully printed work on the Ripley Scroll with a wonderful folding extending facsimile in color. Getting orders from great classicists like Anthony Grafton was always a shot in the arm for my humble little operation. Meeting Frans Janssen (director of the BPH) in his suite of rooms at the Mark Hopkins and trying to hand sell him some manuscripts was a thrill. I could go on but I'd rather mention a few other special people.

Peter Tompkins was an enjoyable and fascinating customer. When he placed his first order I'd already digested his magnificent trilogy, *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramid*, *The Magic of Obelisks*. He was looking for copies of his first book, *The Eunuch and the Virgin* (1962), a study of primitive sexual customs. After he died I read his *The Secret Life of Plants* opened new vistas for me. Peter Tompkins introduced me to Christopher Bird who further introduced me to the writings of Sir Jagadish Bose who discovered the still unexplained phenomena of metal fatigue, demonstrating, (apparently), the living nature of the metal kingdom and an important phenomenon for any practicing alchemist. Later Peter's son Ptolemy Tompkins sent his book *This Tree Grows Out of Hell*, which continues some of his father's original investigations into Mesoamerican mysteries.

Swami Nijananda (Dr. John C. Whitacre MD) was like a spiritual father for many years. With each catalog he would telephone, place an order and we would have a long talk about books we were reading, how hopeless the world is without the awareness of God, and how beauty can be found everywhere. The message of his books, that "nothing happens to us in life unless God wills it so" brought me peace. He encouraged me to read the books of his friend S. H. Nasr, and Nasr's *Knowledge and the Sacred* is still one of my 'top ten' most treasured books. Dr. Whitacre was both an initiate in an ancient Hindu order, a practicing psychiatrist in a veterans hospital, and a ninth kudan in Judo. Some people want to take, others want to give. In 2000, when I was still trying to hang onto my Healdsburg Bookshop he said "what can I do?" and when I couldn't think of anything his foundation raised \$25,000 worth of donations. Long live Dr. Whitacre.

Georg Feuerstein (1947-2012) seemed to know more about the history of yoga than anybody; his *The Yoga Tradition* is a masterpiece. And his *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* revolutionized my understanding of history by conclusively demonstrating that India is by far the oldest civilization. His Yoga Research and Education Center was just a few miles from my house in Boyes Hot Springs where I also met his patron, a wealthy German lawyer whose library I bought from and who gave me three privately published pamphlets, Feuerstein's translations of secret yoga texts. Georg was another brilliant mind interested in everything, insatiable and always so helpful. It seems unfair that a man so deeply versed in the mysteries of the human body should have died at such a young age.



Business card c.1991

I only met Peter Kingsley a few times, and by total chance. I briefly had a bookshop in Point Richmond in a giant two story Victorian storefront whose future was quickly sabotaged by a conniving landlord. A slight young looking man walked in and while gazing at the mass of ponderous books on history and philosophy that lined the walls said without hesitating “You must have a deep need to show everybody how intelligent you are.” I was aghast but it was so damn true! I thought, who the fuck are you? His house was decorated with Arabic looking art and uncomfortable Moroccan furniture but he and his wife were gracious and Peter gave me some powerful counsel that still reverberates in me, as if he channeled it from the above, (another uncannily accurate observation).

My Catalogs

My early catalogs are still pretty embarrassing for me, full of misspellings, poor grammar, and tortured syntax. When I was young I had some kind of undiagnosed dyslexia and only through constant reading and writing was I able to overcome it, yet it still pops up here and there. In spite of this I do believe that over the years I’ve produced some noteworthy offerings. Catalog 12 was my first serious one on Greek and Roman esoteric philosophy and religion. Catalog 21, titled *Ancient Springs, The Spiritual Traditions of Primordial Man*, is pretty unusual in the book world with 883 books on the religious ritual and culture of preliterate peoples. I followed that up with a unique one, Catalog 22, entirely devoted to Mesmerism, Spiritualism, psychical research, and occult psychology, 721 books and serials all from the great library of Fred Scharna. At that time I got acquainted with Adam Crabtree and constantly consulted his magnificent bibliography, *Animal Magnetism, Early Hypnotism, and Psychical Research, 1776–1925, An Annotated Bibliography*, (Kraus 1988). Catalog 23 is unique in the annals of occult bookselling: an entire catalog devoted to bibliographies of occult and esoteric philosophy. Then came Catalogs 29 and 30, with 531 books most from the library of Joscelyn Godwin, many with his charming bookplates, hand drawn by him, a few others with the early signature “Jocelyn Godwin, Dragon Acres, New York.” Catalog 32 was quarto in size, on Egyptian religion, Greek metaphysics, and Hermetic philosophy with many 17th and 18th century books from the Canadian library of Kjell Bronson including first editions of Thomas Taylor, Joseph Glanville, Marsilio Ficino, Henry More, and a magnificent copy of Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy*, 1687. Catalog 49 is one of my favorites, there I attempted in one catalog to offer every single subject I specialized in, from the I Ching to homeopathy to Anglo-Saxon magic, 636 books. Catalog 53 (c.2002) took up where Catalog 33 left off with 462 new scholarly books: it was a failed effort unfortunately. Catalog 57 was just the opposite, with 1270 books, all used, out-of-print and antiquarian, my largest catalog ever and a big success. Catalog 70 is my only full-color catalog, with 57 books and manuscripts from the 16th through the 18th century, all on Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah, alchemy, and Neoplatonism. It was one of the most difficult I’ve ever attempted as I only had about a day and a half to catalog everything at the owner’s house in Dallas on his kitchen table. The highlight was a 16th century manuscript, perhaps by Dee, Daniel Moller (Muller), or Patrick Saunders (Dee’s servant) with a color painting of Dee’s Monas Hieroglyphica, an unrecorded manuscript from Dee’s circle. Some books went to Ritman, others to the British Library. This was the only time I ever dealt with a customer who lied and cheated me. Today my catalogs have evolved into small selections of mostly inexpensive volumes with occasional new books and usually a few first editions and rare volumes. Someday I’d like to return to print catalogs, possibly with new books again, but now I issue them as PDFs and post them on my website.

Other Dealers and Their Catalogs

The Internet, while decimating bookshops and making it nearly impossible for most dealers to issue catalogs profitably, has now paradoxically brought new life to old bookdealer catalogs. In the pre-internet age old catalogs were ‘dated’ because the books were long sold, and only the most spectacular old catalogs were of interest or utility. However now almost any serious old catalog can serve as a helpful buying guide to the Internet. With just a few good ones you can surf the web (use Vialibri.net, the best search engine), and find bargains and gems all day.

For 35 years I've tried to collect every single occult related book catalog; no expense has been spared in this pursuit. Thus I have long runs of hundreds of specialist dealers, from many countries in many languages. To learn about books you can read bibliographies and historical surveys, but if you want to see books through another glass you can read the catalogs of bookdealers. These unique snapshots can bring an entirely new perspective.

You can roughly divide this little catalog world in two types; catalogs by careful, observant and scholarly dealers who take the necessary time to accurately describe pagination, binding, editions and reprints while using bibliographies and book trade terminology, and the 'enthusiast dealer', who knows little of the history, terminology or bibliography but still provides the world with just as many catalogs as the scholarly dealers, if not more. What follows are some semi-random highlights from my collection, in no particular order. Almost all of these were issued during my career, 1981 to 2015.

Without question the finest English catalogs of rare books on Hermeticism and the occult during this period are those issued by the London firm of Bernard Quaritch Ltd. Since their founding in 1847, this world famous shop has always shown a particular interest in the subject, unlike most rare bookdealers who usually abhor the subject. Quaritch is a general old & rare operation dealing in all scholarly subjects. In the 1920s they began issuing occasional specialized esoteric catalogs. Then in the 1950s came extremely large specialized catalogs, with between 1500 and 1800 items each and divided into four sections: Bibles and Theology; Freemasonry; Occult Sciences; Philosophy & Psychology. Those were the days when you could buy a copy of the *Musaeum Hermeticum* for 100 pounds. Some of the best from this period are numbers 698, 706, 728, 762, 775 and 797, but there were a few similar ones before and after. Beginning in the late 1980s came their most beautiful catalogs. One of the first was *Catalogue 1134, Science and Hermetic Philosophy*, followed by *Catalogue 1148, Philosophical Ideas in Science and Medicine*, (which was heavily focused on Hermeticism), *Catalogue 1162, Science and Hermeticism*, *Catalogue 1194, Paracelsus*, *Catalog 1248, Books of Secrets: Alchemy, Pharmacology and Distillation*, *Catalogue 1235, Hermeticism, Alchemy & Theosophy*, *Catalogue 1264, Alchemy and Distillation*, *Catalogue 1300, Cryptography* (with an introduction by David Kahn), *Catalogue 1305, Esoterica*, *Catalogue 1322, The Art of Memory*, (with preface by Umberto Eco), *Catalogue 1384, Mathematics, Logic and Cryptography* and *Catalogue 1392, Science, Medicine and Esotericism*. There have been a few since I do not possess. Detlev Auvermann was usually my contact there and I was honored to be seated next to him at the Zisska & Kistner auction in 1998. These recent Quaritch catalogs are not just catalogs but unique historical records, beautifully printed with sewn signatures and gorgeously illustrated with meticulous descriptions and bibliographic annotations, such a rare and elevating treatment for our neglected fields. But even Quaritch can screw up. One day I received from them the first edition of Michael Maier's *Tripus Aureus* (1618), which was described as "a lovely copy in very fine condition," but closer inspection revealed that the genitalia in all the engravings, breasts and groins had been neatly razored out by a zealous censor! (a common practice in the 17th century). Of course they profusely apologized and scrambled to find another copy.

It can be argued (and I argue it here) that the most influential occult publisher and bookdealer of the late 20th century was R. G. Wilborn's Health Research, founded in 1952 and located first in Altadena then in Mokelumne Hill in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Gold Country. If we measure by number of titles printed and number of copies sold then nobody can hold a candle to Dr. Wilborn's output. Though Samuel Weiser could be considered, they remain a distant second. By 1955 Wilborn was already being prosecuted by the AMA who forced the US Post Office to deny him the ability to receive or send mail! He took them to court and won his case by proving that the AMA could not conclusively demonstrate his books were dangerous. I first got to know Dr. Wilborn when I was 24 and he was 93 but I had trouble keeping up with him. He was a chiropractor, iconoclast, contrarian, controversialist, anti-vaccinationist and hive of activity who issued hundreds of catalogs over his half-century career, sometimes offering old

and rare books but mostly his primitively printed spiral-bound reprints. He described and offered tens of thousands of old and forgotten books on every conceivable type of strange occult knowledge, Spiritualist phenomena, mystic seals, crackpot healing, secret number theories, “phallism,” water cure, Tesla, hollow earth, Duttonism, “throw away your glasses”, Lumeria and Atlantis, bad feet, teleportation, secrets of the human voice, Reichenbach, UFO’s and thousands of old alchemical, Masonic and Rosicrucian books, plus eye charts, acupuncture posters, color tests, etc & etc. Many of his catalogs were prefaced with his diatribes and mini-manifestoes. Wilborn’s invoices were always hand written in heavy green ink or pounded out on a manual typewriter whose keys were crooked. He never met an unorthodox book he didn’t like, and this is why he is so important! He is unfiltered and uncritical, certainly compared to traditional publishing concepts. He leaves it up to you to decide whether Nazi bases still exist or if iridology works and his prices were dirt cheap: \$4.00-\$8.00 for most, some for \$1.00. He even reprinted, in folio, Hartmann’s edition of *The Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians* in full (though crude) color for only \$6.00! When his business dissolved around 1995 many of the plates for his books were apparently thrown out — another great archive gone! The remains of the business were sold a few times over and are now incarnated in a much smaller way on the Internet. *Catalog 1-A* and *Catalog 2-A* were among his largest, together containing about 6,000 titles. Dr. Wilborn resurrected a lost world that once again is now mostly lost.

The scholarly catalogs of Bristol-based R. A. Gilbert are difficult to describe without using a long string of superlatives. Beginning in the 1960s and concluding with *Catalogue 100*, (c. 2004) together they contain the greatest collection of professionally described books on Hermeticism, the occult, Spiritualism, psychical research, folklore, Freemasonry and related theology issued in 20th century. Bob Gilbert was one of the very few dealers to bring these subject together in a serious way, to see how connected they are, who used exacting bibliographic knowledge and extensive personal research to brilliantly annotate and often acerbically criticize his own offerings. A Freemason and expert on A. E. Waite, Arthur Machen and the Golden Dawn, he applied a ruthlessly critical analysis when selling books on the occult was still the domain of rank amateurs and ‘believers’. His antipathy to Crowley & Company garnered him knee-jerk hostility among Crowleyites, yet paradoxically his scholarly knowledge of Crowley is almost unsurpassed. One of Bob’s great pleasures was to offer Crowley material with scathing and sarcastic condemnations then watch all the devotees buy it anyway. His own books on the Golden Dawn and Waite are written in a wonderful manner; he is a natural stylist in a field marked by deadly dull prose and naïve cheerleading. His bibliography of Waite is a model of how bibliography can be used to educate and enlighten. He dealt in everything from recent scholarship to incunables, rare manuscripts and private rituals, and issued a number of private publications — nothing was beyond his brilliant grasp. In spite of Bob’s crusty exterior (his initials ‘RAG’ became a friendly nickname) he is actually a very generous, thoughtful and caring man.

Brian Fleming of Uroborous Books, (Scotland) issued around 75 catalogs and was a major book source for me. Brian like myself loved nothing more than to get up in the morning skip breakfast and spend the day combing bookshops looking for bargains. Scotland was still a relatively undiscovered book hunter’s paradise, the land of James Young and John Ferguson! Brian was the opposite of Bob Gilbert. He didn’t care much about bibliography or doing research, or writing anything critical about his books; instead his catalogs are carefully constructed offerings covering the entire spectrum and at very reasonable prices. As with Bob’s catalogs, as soon as I saw one in the mail I would drop everything to read and order as fast as possible.

Emil Offenbacher, who supplied Duveen with many books was an early source for me. His books were meticulously described and well priced; a collection of his catalogs is something to prize. Though he mainly sold books on scientific subjects he had a personal interest in the occult, and rare books on alchemy and occultism populated most of his catalogs. One day Emil casually mentioned that you could still buy Warburg books new from the Institute and for about 10 years hence I bought a lot of landmark

Warburg Institute publications, some printed decades before, still at the old prices. They seemed forgotten in the basement of the University of London. Pingree's *Picatrix*, Walker's *Decline of Hell*, and back issues of the *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* all sold well for me and nobody else seemed to have them. Thanks Emil.

Three Los Angeles Dealers

In the 1980s and 1990s William and Victoria Dailey Ltd issued four or five spectacular catalogs. Bill Dailey is truly a bookselling genius, and the selection of books, the descriptions, the beautiful layout and typography of his catalogs are testament to this. *Catalogue 61, Alchemy and the Occult*, (circa 1993) is a real standout, with first editions of Robert Fludd, John Dee, Cornelius Agrippa, and first editions of the first books by Gurdjieff, Blavatsky and Waite. Bill hand printed—letterpress--the cover of this catalog on the same press that was once used to print the books of J. F. Rowney Press, of Santa Barbara CA, one of the earliest New Age publishers. Bill also issued the first scholarly rare book catalog devoted to psychedelic literature, *Catalogue Thirteen, Phantastica, Rare and Important Psychoactive Drug Literature 1700 to the Present*, with a forward by R. Gordon Wasson. The cataloging was done by Michael Horowitz, see below. One of his most intellectually daring catalogs was *Catalog 51, Arcana, Rare and Curious Volumes on Alchemy, Archaeology & the Ancients, Magic, Mesmerism, Philosophy and Forgotten Lore*, (c.1988). A wonderful concept catalog is his *Catalog 70, Return to Nature: A Catalog of Old Books on the Quest for Health and Happiness, Including Works on the Vegetarian Regime, Hydropathy, Alcohol and Temperance, Anti-Vivisection, Sleep, Hypnotics, and Related Topics*. Bill had a bookshop for decades on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles.

Michael Goth (The Globe Bookstore, Los Angeles c.1971-1979) issued six outstanding catalogs of rare books on alchemy and the occult, mostly pre-1800 titles, beautifully typeset with carefully annotated presentations of Ashmole, Fludd, Lull, Maier, Porta, etc. Michael also had a special interest in astronomy and cometology, thus offering many early printed astronomical classics. Rounding out this rich banquet were some select 19th and 20th century books, Mary Anne Atwood, Robert Graves, Gerald Massey, Arthur Rackham, including singular offerings like a collection of 70 a. l. s. by Arthur Machen to A. E. Waite. After these superlative catalogs, which are really some of the best of them all, he retired in 1983.

In the 1990s Krown & Spellman issued at least ten very large and important catalogs devoted to rare books on the occult. The late Frank Spellman was a friend and supportive compatriot; physically a giant of a man, Frank had the heart to match. His massive *Catalogue 38, An Occult Alphabet*, contained books from the famed library of Zoltan Mason, of Mason's Books in NYC.

The early catalogs of David Waxman, later operating as Estates of Mind contained a lot of rare Neoplatonism, I believe taken from his personal collection. He once offered me a nine volume set of the writings of Robert Fludd in beautiful contemporary vellum, with so many plates and woodcuts it was impossible to count them all. Unfortunately I couldn't find a willing customer and had to pass it up! Another unforgettable treasure trove I bought from David was a collection of all the books by Thomas Vaughan that were addressed to Henry More in their polemical theological battle which was conducted through a series of books such as Vaughan's *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650), and *The Man-Mouse Taken in a Trap* (1650). These little books, 12mo in size, were all in contemporary limp vellum bindings and arrived packed in a shoe box! I was working for The Albatross Book Company at the time and kept them in the back room, reading them on my breaks, heady times. They spurred me on to collect More's reciprocal publications, such as *Second Lash of Alazonomastix* (1651). This collecting project took almost 10 years and together I sold them all to The Golden Rule Library in Colorado. The More-Vaughan episode is nicely summarized in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007).

Few dealers have specialized in the history of psychology or the history of proto-psychiatry, e.g. Mesmerism, Spiritualism, psychical research, hypnosis, etc. John Gach Books was a pioneer, issuing over 150 scholarly annotated catalogs through the 1970s to the 1990s. Flatland Books was a rare specialist in Wilhelm Reich, alternative energy and dark politics. *Catalog 11, Mind Control* is unique.

One of the untrodden fields for many of my customers has been occult and speculative fiction, especially from the 19th century. This vast field is so poorly studied, but the crazily detailed catalogs of Stuart Teitler's Kaleidoscope Books, (Berkeley) will guide you through all kinds of hidden realms of thought and fantasy. For example his *Catalogue Number 30, Nightmares and Neverlands* contains the fiction of G. Stanley Hall, Ignatius Donnelly, Jack Finney, HPB, Edward Bellamy, Bulwer Lytton, and even a "Robert Flood" (a pseudonym). Stuart, whose real passion was 'lost race' fiction, described the contents of nearly every single book because he read them all it would seem — historic. Somewhere I have the catalog of his inventory compiled by Bill Matthews that Stuart sold to Serendipity Books when he retired just before his death in 2012.

The late Robert Girard of Arcturis books is another unrecognized bookdealer genius. How could one man over three decades corral basically every book on every aspect related to the study of unidentified flying objects? His extremely detailed and opinionated catalogs, each listing thousands of books for sale, are a better guide to the subject than most reference books. He built up a massive stock, not just books but back issues of nearly every single periodical in the field, from Romania to Yuma Arizona. When his health declined he tried hard to sell his massive collection. We approached numerous societies and organizations but alas none were seriously interested. His collection also included hundreds of antiquarian books on folklore, rare editions by Higgins and Calmet and Hindu astronomers. He died before we could arrange anything, and most of it remains in storage, but to illustrate how much he had, in the bitter end he was selling books by the pound — as I remember it a dollar a pound. I bought boxes and boxes of the wildest material.

For catalogs on folklore few can match the erudition and selection found in those issued by Elliot Klein of NYC, who I believe also operated in France under the name Wildman Press. One of the best is *Catalogue 6, Witchcraft, Magic and Folk Belief*, 893 scholarly and antiquarian books. And Upcountry Letters, of South Lake Tahoe, has issued many catalogs, entirely and reverentially concentrated on the Transcendentalists, including recent books, rare books, paintings, photographs and letters, even an early bust of Emerson, all with impeccable annotations based on extensive research and personal interest.

As far as I know the largest 20th century catalog (maybe ever) of new books on the occult and esoteric spirituality is Chris Popenoe's *Inner Development, The Yes! Bookshop Guide*, first published in 1976, then doubled in size in 1979. A quarto-sized 654pp monster issued by The Yes! Bookshop in Washington DC, containing approximately 13,000 titles, each with a paragraph of description, all superbly arranged with illustrations and occasional author biographies, a monumental achievement. An equally impressive companion catalog devoted to health and wellness was published separately. To look back at it now, it also serves as a kind of encyclopedia of the Consciousness Revolution, as it was known then. I have no idea how she did it but in her introduction she thanks Samuel Weiser for "considerable help" though all the descriptions were written by her and don't appear to be taken from publisher catalogs. It was co-published and distributed by Random House in America and the United Kingdom, serving as the ultimate trans-Atlantic guide.

The publishing world of India is more like a galaxy, but a galaxy I've tried to explore all these decades yet barely touched even 1% of it. I have hundreds and hundreds of catalogs from India containing an overwhelming multitude of English translations and commentaries on ancient religious and philosophical

texts, Hindu saints, Ayurveda, Tibetan arcana, Tantra and Yantra, etc. One of the most reliable and comprehensive is still the import-export firm of Biblia Impex, they act as distributors for many of the best publishers. It was from them I was able to buy sets of Gandhi's *Collected Writings* in 101 quarto cloth volumes for \$300.00. Another is the great firm of Motilal Banarsidass, the legendary publisher and distributor responsible for the fine editions of Arthur Avalon.

Besides dealer catalogs and bookshops there was another way I found a lot of books. For those growing up in the Internet age it can be hard to imagine how all the world's great collectors and libraries carefully built such extraordinary collections without the aid of massive book databases. Before the Internet, when bookshops and book catalogs ruled, there was another method of acquiring books: placing ads in little trade publications such as *Bookdealer* in the UK and the *AB Bookmans Weekly* in the US, both now defunct. It was a complicated process that worked beautifully. In your little ad you would cite the details of authors and titles you were looking for, and the subscribers--the thousands of bookshops and book scouts and ordinary people with book collections for sale--would read these ads and if they owned a book on your list they would reply by mailing you a little slip (I still have a box of these relics), citing the book details, the price with postage, and then they would hold that book for a short period of time, usually two weeks, allowing you to see what other offers there might be. You might get five or ten offerings of the same title and then pick out the one that looked best and order it. As a bookdealer who was helping a customer find something, I would forward the details of those slips to my customer and if they said yes I would then order it for them, and when received I would forward it to them. If upon receipt they didn't like it, they would return it to me and I then mailed it back to my source. It sounds so tedious and slow — and it was — yet millions of books were bought and sold this way and every serious collector and library used this or similar methods. But it was more than just finding books. By looking at other ads--and there would be thousands of them each week--you could see what other dealers and collectors were looking for. This is how I first learned there were serious collectors for books on numismatics and narcotics, Odd Fellows and orology, podiatry and perfume.

Teleology

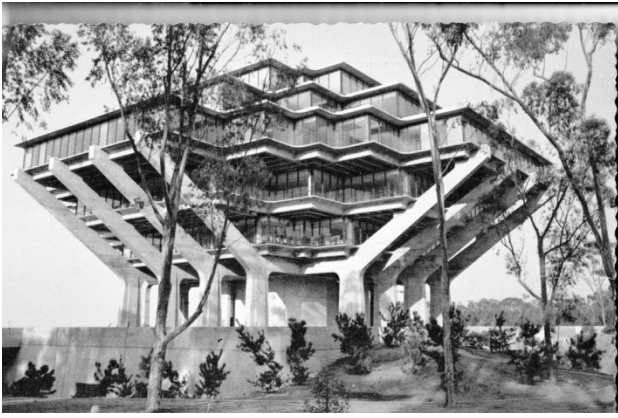
“The child is the father of the man.” (Wordsworth)

Perhaps it will be interesting if I try and explain what created this insane devotion to the world of books. Ultimately it's a mystery to me, but one thing I do know is that while there certainly were an unusual number childhood events which shaped this bibliophilia, those events did not 'create' in me a bibliophile; they merely awoke what was there already and helped prepare me for the teleology I had to follow anyway. To live as I have lived, so preposterously immersed in books, there must have been a pre-existing force. In his masterpiece, *The Souls Code*, James Hillman brilliantly discusses the mystery of how in childhood lie crucial hints to our fate and destiny. The questions of fate, destiny, and teleology are some of the most confounding areas of thought and have preoccupied and bedeviled so many great philosophers and now modern physicists contemplate it with their less elegant concept of “backward causation.”

Growing up in La Jolla I attended America's first public elementary school reserved for so-called 'gifted kids.' La Jolla was crammed with Nobel Laureates and brainiacs at places like the Scripps Institute for Oceanography, the Salk Institute and UCSD where my father was professor of psychiatry. When I was in the second grade there was a school bookfair, tables and tables for little kids, the books face-up with their entrancing cover art. After looking at everything I told my parents I wanted them all, and much to their credit we left with heavy boxes. A bit later I attended a series of lectures titled 'The Next Billion Years', where I listened to Jacques Cousteau, Margaret Mead, Carl Sagan and others who fired up my imagination and love of discovery and exploration.

As a little kid it was books on any kind of scientific discipline that most fascinated me, especially natural history, and even more compelling was learning about reptiles & amphibians. I dearly wanted to be a herpetologist and get a job in the ‘snake house’ at the San Diego Zoo. Somehow, at an early age I convinced my mother to let me keep the creatures I either caught myself or bought at La Jolla’s Village Pet Shop which I haunted daily, being a block away from the library where my mother dropped me off after school. I kept at one time or another: turtles, tortoises, newts and salamanders, rats and mice, gerbils and hamsters, worm farms, walking sticks and praying mantises, tropical fish, a cockatiel and a large green iguana, all in my bedroom. At night, with the cages and tanks surrounding me, with their sounds, heat lamps and hamsters exercising on their wheels I felt safe and comforted. Later I kept and bred the rattlesnakes that I kept catching, feeding them the babies of my pet mice. The phenomenon of a snake slinking on the ground was the ultimate mystery for me; I much later discovered the symbol of the Ourorborus and what the mystery of the serpent is to me: ‘life on Earth’. Books on shells, fossils, insects, astronomy, geology, electricity, magnetism and chemistry all captivated my reading life. Father was very indulgent: when I was in the third grade he gave me a chemistry set. I complained it wasn’t enough so we went to a scientific supply company in downtown San Diego and he bought me bottles of pure sulfuric and hydrochloric acid in thick opaque bottles, retorts and banks of flasks, beakers, cylinders and test tubes and here my future interest in alchemy was nourished. I had a giant telescope (way too advanced for me) and my parents took us to the nearby Palomar Observatory many times (the most important telescope in the world till 1992) where I built up my little library of books on stars, Einstein, Edison, planetary mobiles — basically anything they sold there! I didn’t want to just know, I wanted to own and collect it all.

In high school I was mesmerized by the UCSD library, (now the Geisel Library renamed after Theodore Geisel, ‘Dr. Seuss’) and many nights I took the short walk from my house to spend as much time as possible roaming the shelves, thrilled I could look at any book I wanted for as long as I wanted with no librarians around — it was heaven. At 15 I travelled to Kenya with a few schoolmates and my science teacher Ted Summers, the only teacher at my soul-crushing ‘elite’ private school who really cared. There I studied herpetology at the Nairobi Snake Park. Hiking alone, I caught Jackson’s Chameleons, five foot monitor lizards and green tree snakes, letting them run loose in my dorm room, every day venturing into the local fields outside Nairobi to find them food. When we left I carefully packed them all in my luggage and onto the plane back. When in route to London, to the horror of the passengers, a few escaped and we made an emergency landing in Malta where the authorities confiscated all my precious captives save for a four foot rock python I kept wrapped around my waist under an oversized jacket. While in Africa I met another kid who was obsessed with herpetology. He lived in North Carolina, and when back in the states we began to correspond and trade specimens by mail, I would send him horny toads and kangaroo rats and such, and he mailed me strange insects, an indigo snake (a real prize) and a few deadly venomous copperheads.



UCSD main library.

Back in La Jolla age 16 my headmaster placed me at the University of San Diego, a Jesuit school which I loathed and instead quit and got a job at Sea World. I didn't relate to adults very well but I understood the animal world intuitively. My parents loved to travel, and whether in the fiords of Norway or the deserts of Nevada, the most interesting place for me, besides the outdoors, was usually the museum bookshop. Father had an intellectual interest in things strange and curious, and mother collected Native American artifacts, so most weekends we packed into our giant Chrysler station wagon and traveled throughout the southwest of America stopping at every abandoned mine, roadside attraction, rock shop, historical marker and Indian powwow, with me always hiking off looking for petroglyphs, fossils, and any creature that I could catch.



Rosicrucian Park, Oceanside CA.

According to Robert Hine (*California's Utopian Colonies* 1966) California was home to the largest number of 19th century utopian experiments in American history, and spiritual seekers, UFO hunters, Zen monks and hot tub holy men still abounded in the back country of southern California. La Jolla was near Lomaland, Katherine Tingley's Theosophical headquarters in Pt. Loma, and Max Heindel's Rosicrucian Fellowship was in Oceanside; not much farther was Hiram Butler's Applegate headquarters. Alex Szekely, a high school classmate of mine was grandson of the Transylvanian utopian cosmologist Edmund Bordeaux Szekely (1905-1979, most famous for his dubious translation of various Essene writings he supposedly found in the Vatican). In 1940 Edmund Szekely established a healing center, Rancho La Puerta, in Texate Mexico, located on the slopes of Mt Cuchama where W. Y. Evans-Wentz had retired and wrote about it in his last book *Cuchama and Sacred Mountains* (1989). Wentz believed that the dormant volcano Cuchama was one of the "holiest places on earth" but when I visited Rancho la Puerta with Alex it had morphed into a haven and resort for Hollywood glitterati.



Lomaland, Point Loma, CA

When my high school finally expelled me for drinking off campus I moved away, naturally gravitating to Palm Springs where my parents always kept vacation homes. Nearby was the fabled UFO valley of Morongo, home to cosmic dreamers like George Van Tassel and his ‘Giant Rock’ landing port where I camped Indian style among the granite boulders of Joshua Tree National Monument. When 18 I voluntarily went homeless, vagabonding, riding the rails with hobos I met, experimenting with magic mushrooms and living in a cave in Palm Canyon (outside of Palm Springs) in an historic hippie commune with vegan German expats where Nat King Cole’s signature song ‘Nature Boy’ was composed, (see Gordon Kennedy’s *Children of the Sun* for a fascinating history of how the Wandervogel people came to America and helped start the hippie movement). In that canyon of palm trees and cool springs you could still find potsherds and petroglyphs. Somebody once said that America has a long history of not having any history, but southern California is a special place and when you get away from the cities and suburbs you’ll find the magic. Thirsty for more I hitched a ride to Mount Shasta and lived for a summer in a tent on the north slope of that magnetic mountain, taking acid and checking out every occult book I could find in the Shasta library, such as the weirdness of Frederick Spencer Oliver who channeled Phyllos the Thibetan (sic) and then through automatic writing composed *A Dweller on Two Planets* (whose manuscript I found 15 years later in a pile of ‘trash’ books at the Holmes Book Company) and where Guy Ballard cooked up his rotten ‘Ascended Master’ scam, still popular in New Age bookshops today. Reading at night by candle light and working as road flagger by day I became a serious skeptic of most modern occultism. In that little town library I also rediscovered books I read as a kid — books by Tolkien, Carlos Castaneda, Edgar Cayce, and Lobsenz Rampa, and new authors who would become important later, Krishnamurti and Rudolf Steiner especially. I visited the celibate monks in the Zen monastery of the Shasta Abbey and lived like a monk myself on peanut butter sandwiches and donuts while feeding my poor dog expired food found in the garbage behind the local grocery store. NB: Many of the places above are splendidly documented and illustrated with color photographs in *Visionary State*, by Erik Davis, (2006)

Tired of mud and New Age hippies I shipped out on the USGS Samuel P. Lee, a scientific research vessel and spent a winter voyaging throughout the Pacific and the Arctic. Nome Alaska was memorable, but tramping by myself in the Aleutian Islands through moss five feet thick was thrilling. I washed dishes for 50 scientists and sailors, surviving two of the worst hurricanes any of the sailors had seen, and read the boxes of books I bought at Kepler’s Books in Menlo Park while occasionally trying to convince a scientist or two of the possibility of Atlantis. The sailors took an immediate dislike to me--longhair, fu manchu beard, vegetarian--these were “red necks” but a lot of them were also serious book readers and they eventually took me under their wing. When we would come into port, like Honolulu, nothing seemed to give them more pleasure than initiating this cosmic hippie by taking me to their favorite dive bars and whore houses along the docks and backwaters, places most people never see, and teaching me obscure nautical drinking games and songs. We eventually tied-up in San Francisco and I quit, landing c.1977 on Haight Street, age 20. One of the first things I remember was attending yoga classes at the studio of Walt and Magana Baptiste, eating in their vegetarian café and doing zazen at the San Francisco Zen Center a

few blocks from my apartment. I was told the center had just inherited the library of Alan Watts, but years later I found books with his highly symbolic bookplate in local bookshops, so it must have been dispersed. Then a horrific car crash almost killed me and while laid up nearly a year in bed, reading was all I had. Some of the books I then read still resonate in me: Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*, and his *The Occult*, Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Agehananda Bharati's *The Ochre Robe*, Clarence Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, Bertrand Russell's *The Wisdom of the West*, and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Somewhere in storage I still have all the books I collected as a kid, the ones I bought in Europe, Mexico, Africa, Mount Shasta and the funny little books I bought during all those road trips throughout the southwest. Every few years or so I pull a box out and psychometrically touch-in with my youth, that land where we knew so much, yet didn't know how much we knew.

Book Collecting in the Internet Age

Who Collects Books?

"Book collecting is for fools", that's what many think, it seems anachronistic and maybe pathetic to them. Even my customers often believe this, though looking at the hundreds of books on their shelves must give them pause. Plenty emphatically tell me they are "not book collectors" as though it were a disease to avoid, yet when placing orders ask "Is it a nice looking book?", "Do you think it has a good binding?", "Is it of lasting quality?" I want to say, "Hello, you are a book collector!" When you move and get rid of good plates and pots, furniture and clothes but keep all your books, you are a book collector! Hollywood has not helped: many films perpetuate the misleading image of lonely old men pawing their prize trophies and drooling over leather bindings, or they conflate book collecting with hoarding — for those not sure of the difference, collecting is done with conscious attention, hoarding is monomaniacal. The truth is that collectors are everywhere and they are the first guardians of knowledge, not librarians, not museums, but all the individual self-directed under appreciated book collectors. This is especially true when it comes to collectors of 'rejected knowledge' and all the unwanted and 'worthless' books and subjects that only much later are collected by research libraries, once their value has been safely established as part of the canon. Though scholarly occultism has recently gained currency among librarians the more arcane matters remain ignored.

Book Collectors are Frontline Preservationists

Two very different examples should make this claim obvious. Possibly the greatest book collector who ever lived, Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), began to collect when he was six years old, his stated desire then was to have a copy of every single book in the world — a born bibliomaniac. Over the decades he bought tens of thousands of rare books and vellum manuscripts including manuscripts of Chaucer. He also owned the *Rochefoucauld Grail*, the earliest and most complete source we have for the King Arthur tales and the Holy Grail, (after a few owners it ended up in the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica). But Phillipps didn't just buy rare books, he bought almost anything that was printed, worthless books and even more worthless manuscripts and trash paper like old ledgers, recipe books, inventories of wheat and hay and the diaries of the unimportant. Today that would be akin to collecting old textbooks in thrift stores, back issues of *People Magazine* and *TV Guide*, old grocery receipts and the set-up instructions for your computer. People thought Phillipps was foolish, crazy, and perhaps he was, but because of his zealous and visionary devotion 200 years later there are huge swaths of history we only know from the singular examples in his collection, history thought trivial then, such as how poor people

lived, what they ate, their gambling games, witchcraft trials and bear-baiting. Incredibly the British Library refused when Phillipps tried to give them his entire collection and thus it was dispersed and after portions were purchased by smaller libraries, the 'residue' was sold to the firm of Robinson in 1946; thus began a series of catalogs and auctions that only ended in 2006.

Through another lens, that of Michael Horowitz, we can see how the preservation of a few maligned and ignored social movements have been promoted and preserved for future historians almost single-handedly. Who in the 1960s would have thought to collect illegal books on psychedelic chemistry, cheaply printed X-rated underground comic books, lurid sex and drug paperbacks, rock concert posters, headshop handouts, self-published LSD manifestos, hippie commune newsletters, old vinyl 45rpm drug songs, and reel-to-reel recordings of acid philosophers? While dealing books and issuing catalogs as Flashback Books, Michael Horowitz didn't just amass all this and more, including forgotten 19th century novels on cocaine sex and earlier texts on opium and ether; he spent money and time carefully documenting and storing it for decades waiting for the recognition to come and in so doing created The Fitz Hugh Ludlow Memorial Library, the largest collection of psychoactive drug books and related materials in the world, all the while suffering the side-glances and raised eyebrows of more 'serious' collectors, and thus we have a magnificent record of a period in time that could have been lost. Find his latest catalog online.

Many people collect first editions of modern novels, local history, cookery, rare books on medicine and science, World War II and the Bible (etc) because the importance of these subjects is so easy to apprehend, but the subject of occultism has suffered such derision and ignorance and just plain apathy that much is already unrecorded, lost and unknown, and thus the importance of libraries like The Octagon should be ever more apparent. Few people have the money that Phillipps had — money to walk into bookshops and buy the entire contents — and few own estates where they could salt-away their treasures, but this doesn't diminish the importance of our smaller collections. Like a big fish eating a small fish, our humble collections of carefully curated material will eventually — maybe not soon but eventually — find their way to the British Library or the Bibliothèque Nationale, if there is any significance to them. That is unless you die like Fred Scharna, without a will or instructions, or if one day after consciously collecting books on alchemy for a few years you decide railroading books are way more interesting and sell them off, or if you are unable to find an institution that will appreciate your labors. Yes, dispersed collections will enter the food chain again but without your curatorial efforts that make the sum larger than the parts. Clearly though, collecting over a long period is left to a select few, fools perhaps . . . but consider the words of William Blake, "If a fool would follow his folly, he would become wise."

The Delusion of Digital Knowledge

Nowadays people ask me, why collect books when we have the Internet, computers and the digitization of libraries? There are even scholars and educators proclaiming "the end of knowledge," asserting that since "all knowledge" is on the Internet (!) there is no reason to acquire personal knowledge. But the evangelists of high-technology never address, (and lie by omission) the problem of preserving digital knowledge. For those who care about future generations we must contend with these faulty beliefs. Books preserved as strings of zeros and ones are fragile, subject to sun spots, EMP bombs and the planned obsolescence of technology needed to read them. Even if your floppy disks are still OK, do you have a computer that can play them? How about your cassette recordings? And what of "The Cloud"? Without question books are the safest and most permanent way to preserve knowledge and information. They are a miracle of invention now under attack by corporate interests selling us a false paradigm of permanence and democratic accessibility — for profit. Don't get me wrong: I use the Internet every day to research books, but aware of the myths and informed by my knowledge of the old ways.

There is another disturbing aspect, that of the neurological differences between reading screen and reading paper: that is, taking in light that is *beamed* into your eyes versus taking in light that is *reflected*

into your eyes. The inferiority of screen reading — how it impairs comprehension and limits deep thinking — has already been proven over and over again. A good summary of the evidence is presented in the *Scientific American* article, *The Reading Brain in the Digital Age* (2013). There is yet further evidence that screen reading is literally turning us into idiots. We also must consider the ergonomics of using a metallic device, the corporate snooping, the effects both psychological and social on children, the radiation . . . it's multifaceted and ignored in the media. But if none of that bothers you, or if you don't believe it then let's ask these questions: Is the world more intelligent now in the Internet Age? Vocabularies improved? Knowledge and wisdom valued more? Nature safer? Mass extinction reversed? More beauty? Children happier? As a teacher I find the incontrovertible effects on children the most disturbing.

Time Machines

Another persistent paradigm I continually encounter is the misguided belief that old scholarship is usually inferior to modern. Why read something erroneous, dated and unreliable? Especially when the binding is stained, the paper yellowing, the prose "old fashioned". Yet so often the opposite is true, older scholarship is often superior! What a tragedy that so few know the unique and edifying pleasure of reading an old book, written in the manner and style of the time versus a modern book *about* that period. When you read an original edition of Newton's own writings on the chronology of the Bible you savor all the flavor and feeling of his time, real knowledge you can't get from reading a modern edited version or a book about Newton's biblical knowledge. For those accustomed to modern prose, old texts seem difficult at first, but persistence will quickly pay off in a most special way. Reading a facsimile edition, with all the curious spelling and odd typography can suffice, but there is one final step that brings you the fullest experience: reading an original copy in period binding, printed when Newton was alive, maybe a copy he handled himself! In this way old books are like time machines, living portals to history sitting right there on your shelf.

The Beauties of Browsing

As somebody who has operated many bookshops I've constantly witnessed how few shoppers know the pleasures of browsing or even the basic skills needed to find books. Typical is the collector who walks in saying they collect books on Egypt and the tarot. I point them to the sections on Egypt, and tarot, perhaps walking them over to pull out a few choice items. Maybe they find something or maybe they don't but so often they leave without looking around at the rest of the shop! Is that all they are interested in? Pity, but even if so they are still missing out on discoveries. I can't show them every possible book that might relate to their collecting interests, there may be books on Egyptian art in the art section, or books on medieval iconography in the medieval section, or books on the botany of Egypt in the botany section, or a book on Asclepian healing in the medicine section. Serious browsers and collectors know it takes time to study a good bookshop and browse with an open mind to find hidden nuggets that may surprise them, books that might disclose a new vein of gold, expanding their studies and collections. Now as bookshops continue to decline in quantity and quality, and with the lure of the Internet fooling so many, the old skills of browsing are being sadly lost. It's true that with a few keystrokes people can find books, but without the experience of serendipity and casual discovery, they are restricted to pursuing only titles they already know exist.

It's true that Amazon and other sites have found little ways to make suggestions based on your search criteria, (and based on every keystroke you ever made, recorded, organized, packaged and then sold) but anyone who has spent a lot of time in bookshops knows this is a joke compared to the experience of spending an hour or two browsing, wandering, talking with the clerks, seeing what other people are buying, attending events etc. If you are a sensitive person, who appreciates good typography, different types of paper and binding, who finds the quality of illustrations important, what you seek can only be

had by physical examination, or second to that by reading a catalog written by somebody else who is sensitive to these things and who has taken pains to describe them for you.

Showrooming

As if bookshops don't have enough challenges to their survival, there is now a new shopping phenomena, "showrooming," a popular cheat where people browse bookshops, look and decide what they want to buy, get tips from the clerk, then make mental notes or take photographs with their phone and go home and buy cheaper copies (usually not that much cheaper) on the net, or they use catalogs like mine as Internet shopping guides. This chicanery has been very destructive for bookshops and mail order operations like mine. We have payroll, rent, taxes to pay, people think we are some kind of publicly funded information source!

How Reliable is the Internet Anyway?

Personally I hold the heretical belief that the Internet is the single greatest force speeding up the degradation of humanity and the planet, and no book better demonstrates this than Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred*. I'll spare you a lecture on that, but if you are going to buy on the net, just how trustworthy is it? Today it is the unquestioned arbiter of book-fact for many collectors, yet the profusion of erroneous and incomplete book information is a huge problem. In contrast to the ridiculous honesty and scrupulous attention to detail of old time traditional dealers, we now have people who will do anything to sell their book. A lot of listings barely give you any details of the book at all, often the dates and bindings are unclear, but even what seems clear is not always true. Recently I was searching for a first printing of the first edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* by Iona & Peter Opie, (OUP 1951). In the first printing of the first edition only the date appears on the title page, but in all later printings the colophon states "First edition 1951", and then cite all the later dates of the subsequent printings, (e.g. "Second printing 1952" etc). Only because I know how the dust jackets have varied with each printing could I tell (if a scan was provided) that some online dealers were surreptitiously offering later printings as the first, by copying only the first line of the colophon and leaving out the following lines that describe later printings, 'suppressio veri.' For the unknowing or the uncaring this might seem trivial as all early printings are textually the same, and all are clothbound with dust jackets, but the first printing is larger in size, with thick paper jackets, crisp unworn type printed on superior paper with bright illustrations unmuddied by reuse of the printing plates. I could go on and cite lots of other Internet fallacies, but the following is of the utmost importance.

WorldCat

Anybody familiar with the original printed sources of the much vaunted WorldCat, the largest online catalog of books in libraries, will start cursing and groaning after a few minutes of research. Many of the original entries, those first recorded by professional librarians based on books in hand, were then transcribed for the Internet by low-paid hacks and people without a native command of the English language — the work was farmed out to Puerto Rico and the Philippines apparently — so there are many errors and omissions. Titles are misconstrued and even the names of authors are mistranscribed as titles! Perhaps most troublesome are the many misspellings of titles and authors, so if you type the correct spelling you won't get that listing. Of course with a lot of work and sleuthing you can find it — but beware! Until recently I questioned the utility of the many thousands of catalogs and bibliographies I've diligently collected over the decades when now one can supposedly find all this information on the net, but even when it is there, (and frequently it is not) it's imperfect. To use a legal term we must go "ad acta", to the source. NB: The printed edition of the *National Union Catalog*, the longest and heaviest book ever printed--in 754 heavy folio volumes weighing three tons and taking 130 feet of shelf space--remains the largest and most reliable printed library catalog and still includes many books not listed in WorldCat. You can see photographs and description of it on my website.

