What makes a reader?

By Jasper Neel, dean of Dedman College

I’m not sure. But I believe — and this is a matter of faith, not science — that two things are required: Someone to model and inculcate the reading process, and a lot of books, and I mean a lot of books, no matter what sort of book piques that reader’s interest.

Like most parents, I am proud of my child, who is an 11-year-old fifth grader. Whatever else one may say about her, she is a reader. And in this case, I mean a reader. Dennis Foster, chair of the English Department at SMU, asked her one Saturday last fall if she had read any of the Harry Potter books. She had not heard of the books, so we stopped at a bookstore to buy a shrink-wrapped collection of all three. Early Sunday evening, she finished reading the third book. This is typical of her.

Eudora Welty wrote about growing up in Jackson, Mississippi, in a house only six blocks from the public library. Her daily pilgrimage to check out the two books she was allowed at any one time was the ritual on which her life centered. Welty explained how the reading process matures: from insatiable, nondiscriminating consumption to more mature, reflective evaluation.

When I was my daughter’s age, I read as she reads. Full speed ahead, get to the end, see what happens, and get another book. Nowadays, I read far less than one book a week. I probably read fewer than two dozen complete books a year. My daughter manages almost that many a month. Nowadays I don’t read much fiction. For some reason I can read only those books at which I have to work, books in which it takes a real effort to get to the bottom of each page. I can read A History of the Christian Church or a book on postcolonial theory. I can’t read Zarafa or a new biography on Caravaggio.

I worry that I have let time-management and self-improvement pervert my reading process, because I no longer like to read for fun. And I can already see my inclination to push my daughter away from one more Anne McCaffrey novel toward something requiring a little more reflection, at least Twain or Dickens. She is resisting. I am wondering whether to press ahead. I think of myself as a mature and sophisticated reader. I wonder how mature and sophisticated one is when one can no longer read anything that is not hard work.

Tyler, Texas, Black Film Collection reels in a new generation

The forgotten stacks of rusted film canisters lying in a corner of a warehouse in Tyler, Texas, offered no clue to their value. But their discovery provided a wealth of information about African American films produced in the 1930s and ’40s and a unique glimpse into African American life of the times. The films are part of the G. William Jones Film and Video collection in the Hamon Arts Library.

“Broken Earth,” a 10-minute dramatic film, is one of 19 films in the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection. It, “Juke Joint,” and other films from the collection were featured during a special screening in November at the African American Film Marketplace S.E. Manly Short Film Showcase at Raleigh Studios in Los Angeles. The film also was shown recently during “Art and Soul,” a series of sacred art and music events sponsored by SMU and the Dallas arts and religious communities. “Broken Earth” also will be included in the exhibit “Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant Garde Films: 1893-1941,” which will open in March 2001 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and travel internationally for five years.

The emotional story of a sharecropper’s prayers for his sick son, “Broken Earth” was directed in 1939 by Roman Freulich and stars African American actor Clarence Muse. Spirituals such as “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” provide the musical soundtrack. The Hamon Arts Library owns the only known restored 35 mm copy of this film.

For 40 years, independent filmmakers produced films for as many as 1,200 segregated theaters. Although the film companies were white-owned and most of the films were produced by white producers, the films often used the talents of African American screenwriters, directors, and actors and actresses.

The films in the Tyler, Texas, Black Film Collection were designed for entertainment. Romances, comedies, and crime stories were introduced by newsreels that highlighted prominent members of the African American community, providing continued on page 2
Texas Black Film continued from page 1


“The films preserve gospel, jazz, and blues music by unsung musicians,” says Rick Worland, interim chair of electronic media and film. “Filmmakers often used very polished and accomplished church choirs. These were the typical professional and semiprofessional groups people listened to, an important part of the rural African American culture of the South.”

As the civil rights movement began in the 1950s, production of the African American-cast films ended, Worland says. In the turmoil of the 1960s, the films were forgotten and denounced as “Jim Crow cinema,” he says.

A generation later, Worland adds, the enthusiastic reaction to the films at recent screenings indicates that they are being discovered anew.

The magic of libraries

In his column that began “I love libraries . . .,” Ross Murfin, provost and vice president for academic affairs, struck a chord with other library lovers. The column first appeared in the fall issue of Annotations and was featured in the editorial section of The Dallas Morning News on December 20, 1999.

Soon after the column appeared, Murfin began to hear like-minded sentiments from colleagues, friends, and readers via telephone, mail, and e-mail. “I knew, somehow, that the magic I spoke of is widely known, but I didn’t realize that its practitioners were willing to speak,” Murfin says.

Carol Lanage, secretary of the Renner Frankford Library Friends in Dallas, wrote, “The Board of Directors of the Renner Frankford Library Friends applauds you for your superb article in The Dallas Morning News on the joy you feel in the atmosphere of libraries. We, too, share your enthusiasm for the opportunity to visit a library and the serendipitous experience of discovery that libraries offer.”

Colleague Lonnie Kliever, professor of religious studies, said, “What a lovely reverie on libraries! You bring alive the memories and miracles that all of us have experienced in libraries.”

A friend, Bonnie McLeod, added, “Thank you for sharing your ‘Libraries Create Magic.’ It is so good to find a friend who so beautifully puts into words what we have so often felt in our hearts.”

The response confirms Murfin’s love of libraries. “Libraries have never been more precious,” he says.
Dedicated to rare books: Collectors value sentimentality over dollars


Some books were valuable for sentimental reasons, others because they were more than 400 years old, and others because they were rare. But each book discussed at the “Book Roadshow” had a story to tell.

“Most of the books were extraordinary,” Doyle Logan says. “I didn’t find anyone who wanted to sell their books, but everyone was interested in learning more about them.”

At the end of the evening, each book expert spoke about interesting finds. A book on medicinal herbs, dated 1552, intrigued Glick, as well as a Chinese-Portuguese dictionary, printed in a Macao orphanage during World War II. The Lost Cause, written in 1866 by Edward Potter of Virginia, offered what Holt described as an “unrepentant version of the Civil War.” A collection of Christmas books, published each year from 1931 to 1979, caught the attention of Logan.

But most interesting were the conversations among guests as they exchanged tips on book preservation, binding, and collecting. Family heirlooms, such as a collection of Hans Christian Anderson fairy tales published in 1867, were admired and discussed.

“The guests were very knowledgeable,” Logan says. “We all shared a genuine interest in books.”

Hit the road with Friends of the SMU Libraries

The fall foliage of Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley will be the setting for “Leaves and Literature, Chapter Three,” the third annual literary tour sponsored by Friends of the SMU Libraries. Participants will visit libraries and authors’ homes in Washington, D.C., and Virginia October 19-24.

A private tour of the Library of Congress, Edgar Allen Poe’s home, and Thomas Jefferson’s home, Monticello, are included in the itinerary.

Through a series of programs and tours each year, the Friends provide opportunities for book lovers to become acquainted with the resources of SMU’s libraries. The organization also has raised more than $300,000 to fund materials, library services, and special projects.

Members at the associate ($60 a year) and higher levels receive borrowing privileges at the Central University and Bridwell libraries. For more information about the trip or to join Friends of the SMU Libraries, call 214-768-3225.

Kudos to library publications

Two Central University Library publications received awards at a recent Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District IV conference. Annotations, the library’s biannual newsletter, received the award of excellence for newsletters. The Central University Libraries Annual Report, 1998-1999 received the achievement award for annual and president’s reports.

The awards were presented at the District IV annual conference April 4 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. District IV comprises Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. CASE is the international association of education advancement officers including alumni administrators, fundraisers, public relations managers, publications editors, and government relations officers.
SMU librarian receives new memories from an old friend

For Tinsley E. Silcox, a chance question by a researcher on the Central University Libraries’ Web site resulted in a surprise friendship with his late father’s World War II comrade. Silcox is director of the Hamon Arts Library and the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection.

“Like many World War II veterans, my dad was reluctant to talk about his war years,” Silcox says. “John shared stories about my father I had never heard.”

John Roberts* was studying the libraries’ extensive collection of World War II documents on the Web when he saw a familiar name in a library staff listing. He e-mailed Tinsley Silcox and asked if he was related to Roncie Silcox, his U.S. Army infantry buddy with whom he had lost touch after the war. Roncie, indeed, was Silcox’s father, who died in 1995.

“Like many World War II veterans, my dad was reluctant to talk about his war years,” Silcox says. “John shared stories about my father I had never heard.”

After the war ended, Silcox and Robert’s unit was bivouacked outside of Bomburg, Germany, awaiting return to the United States. Bored and homesick, the friends quickly stepped forward when officers asked for volunteers with film-projector experience.

“They had no idea how to run a film projector and burned their first film to a crisp,” Silcox says. “But they learned, and later also ran a club and a snack shop.”

In spite of his interest in film, Silcox never knew his father was a WWII film projectionist. Roberts also sent Silcox photos of his father as a 21-year-old soldier.

“Those photos are priceless to me,” Silcox says. “In this case the Internet brought people together.”

“The friend of Silcox’s father asked not to be identified.”

Out-of-print? Go online

Finding out-of-print contemporary Hispanic literature is considered part of a day’s work for Joel Eatmon, assistant collection development librarian. Miguel López, assistant professor of Spanish, recommended Arise, Chicano! and Other Poems by Angela De Hoyos and The Second St. Poems by Beverly Silva, along with many other titles, to supplement Fondren Library’s collection of Hispanic literature from North and South America. Eatmon found most of the books by using out-of-print book Web sites.

Used primarily by book collectors and librarians, some out-of-print sites enable browsers to post a “want list” of titles. If a book becomes available, the site contacts the browser via e-mail.

Out-of-print book sites

Advanced Book Exchange www.abebooks.com
Allows user to maintain and update a want list.

Bibliofind www.bibliofind.co
Large number of British dealers among subscribers; cannot maintain want list.

Alibris www.alibris.com
Contains news and features; can maintain and update want list; books are purchased from Alibris rather than from individual booksellers (consequently prices tend to be higher).

Out-of-print books megasearch sites

Bookfinder www.bookfinder.com
One-stop searching of all major Internet out-of-print book services, plus Amazon.com and Powell’s online bookstores.

AddALL www.AddALL.com
Slightly different list of search engines and stores from Bookfinder.

Other resources

Books and Book Collecting www.trussel.com/f_books
Includes links to many out-of-print book searches and sources, and provides “set maker” posting service for collectors trying to complete sets or offering odd volumes.

Did you know?

● Americans go to libraries three times as often as they go to movies.

● Reference librarians in the nation’s public and academic libraries answer more than seven million questions each week. The line of questioners, standing single file, would stretch from Boston to San Francisco.

● Federal spending on libraries totals only 54 cents a person — less than the cost of two postage stamps.

● Academic librarians answer about 112 million reference questions each year — three times the attendance at college football games.

● College libraries receive fewer than 3 cents of every dollar spent on higher education.

● If the cost of gasoline had risen as fast as the cost of academic library materials since 1980, it would cost $5.69 a gallon to put fuel in your car.

Source: American Library Association
Distance library services provide important link to library resources

The scene at the library at SMU-in-Legacy in Plano is common to university libraries. Students gather in a quiet place to complete assignments, conduct research, and compare notes on group projects. The walls, however, are not lined with bookshelves; in fact, there are no books at all. Instead, computer terminals surround the perimeter of the library, providing a link to multiple resources at SMU’s libraries.

Distance education librarian Bill Jenkins oversees the library at SMU-in-Legacy and coordinates library support for faculty, staff, and students who study off campus. He works at the Science and Engineering Library, spends several afternoons a week at Legacy, and will travel to SMU-in-Taos this summer.

"I build links to provide library access in a timely manner to the off-campus SMU community," Jenkins says.

For his first assignment in the newly created position, Jenkins opened the library at SMU-in-Legacy in September 1999. Located among far North Dallas corporate headquarters such as EDS and J.C. Penney Inc., SMU-in-Legacy offers graduate level and adult education programs. Cox School of Business M.B.A. courses, Master of Liberal Arts courses, engineering courses, dispute resolution training, and continuing education courses are taught at the facility.

Because most Legacy students carry briefcases instead of backpacks and attend class after working a full day, the Legacy library was designed to fit their needs. Comfortable chairs and tables provide places for study and group work. Six computer terminals link students to PONI, the SMU libraries’ information system.

At the beginning of the semester, Jenkins offers library research training to each Legacy class. "I help students identify resources," he says. "Most students are interested in the most current literature, so they study journals and articles."

Legacy students use databases that contain full-text articles, such as Expanded Academic, Business Index, and Periodical Abstracts, Jenkins says. When a student requests a book from one of the SMU libraries, he pulls the book from the shelf and mails it to the student or suggests another resource, the TexShare library card program. With this card, students may check out books from the nearest participating university library.

Jenkins plans to make library resources more accessible to other off-campus students. Undergraduates in the study-abroad program, SMU-in-Taos students, and distance learning students all over the world could benefit from the enhanced library access that Internet technology provides, he says.

"I like the combination of teaching, technology, and information. I try to bring them all together for people who need assistance."
DeGolyer’s resources support biography of ‘Father of Texas’

A new biography of Stephen F. Austin, known as the “Father of Texas,” portrays the character, motives, and personality of a man whom biographers have largely ignored. “The topic of Austin was one of the great undone modern topics,” says Gregg Cantrell, author of Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas (Yale University Press, 1999). He completed the research and writing for his manuscript during a year-long fellowship at SMU’s William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, with support from the DeGolyer Library’s collections.

Historians consider the last major biography about Austin, written in 1925 by Eugene C. Barker, to be a classic record of Austin’s achievements and significance to the founding of Texas.

“Barker’s book was strictly a public biography about the man’s works,” Cantrell says. “As was the custom in those days, Barker had no interest in trying to delve into Austin’s private life or into his psychology.”

In contrast, Cantrell’s 493-page biography paints a portrait of Austin as a complex man searching for order in a world filled with conflict.

“The portrait that emerges of Stephen F. Austin is that of an ambitious, almost obsessively driven man, who constantly fought an internal battle between his own personal interests and his feelings of obligation toward others,” Cantrell says in the introduction to his book.

Cantrell’s description of Austin’s ability to show kindness, forgive a wrong, and fulfill family obligations depicts another side of the Texas leader. For a better understanding of Austin’s personality, Cantrell read psychological theory, psychohistory, and psychobiography. “In the end, I eschewed formal theory in favor of a common-sense approach to understanding Austin’s personality and motivations, but I still benefited greatly from that reading,” he says.

Cantrell, the Rupert N. Richardson Professor of History at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, used documents in DeGolyer Library to better understand the settings of Austin’s journeys and to provide some of the illustrations for the book.

“The rare book collection at DeGolyer provided information such as travel accounts from the Missouri of Austin’s childhood. I was able to learn what life was like on the frontier and found physical descriptions of places where Austin lived and traveled,” Cantrell says. “The library’s holdings also were useful in providing background information about Mexico City during Austin’s two extended stays there.”

The DeGolyer Library’s strengths support the scholarship of Cantrell and others like him, says David Farmer, director.

“Our collection of 19th-century documents is rich in reports and publications that began to appear as the Texas Republic was formed,” Farmer says. “They create parts of a picture of the time and place where Austin lived and worked.”

Cantrell credits a unique feature of the Clements Center fellowship as critical to the success of his book. At the invitation of the center, experts on Mexico, Texas, and American frontier history read his manuscript and then came to Dallas to critique Cantrell’s work.

“The seminar helps raise the level of an author’s work because it invites dialogue between the author and the critics,” says David Weber, the Robert H. and Nancy Dedman Professor of History in Dedman College.

Cantrell dedicated the book to Weber, his “teacher, editor, critic, and friend.”

“My fellowship in the Clements Center for Southwest Studies was a wonderful opportunity. It’s safe to say that this book would never have been the success that it has been without SMU,” Cantrell says.

Solve a mystery

Some pieces in the Central University Libraries’ collections present more questions than answers. Each issue of Annotations will feature one of these puzzling pieces and invite the readers’ help in gathering information. The first piece is “Beautiful Indian Maidens,” a poster in the DeGolyer Library collection. David Farmer, director, says the color stone lithograph was produced in Victorian times — evident by the styles of the shoes and hats. But who were the Indian Maidens? Why was the poster produced? Who was the artist? Readers with clues to “Beautiful Indian Maidens” may contact David Farmer at 214-768-3234 or by e-mail at dfarmer@mail.smu.edu. Responses will be included in a future issue of Annotations.
Books of the millennium: SMU makes its choice

For book lovers, a high point of 1999 was comparing the greatly debated "books of the century" lists. Texas Monthly selected Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry. The National Review named The Second World War by Winston Churchill as its non-fiction choice. The Chicago Sun-Times compiled a list of children's books, with The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss and The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett as top contenders.

On a broader scale, the Fondren Library Exhibit Committee asked administrators, library directors, academic deans, and the student body president to name the most influential books of the millennium. Choices ranged from the King James version of the Bible, chosen by SMU President R. Gerald Turner, to Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species, selected by Student Association President Frank White. More than one academic dean selected Shakespeare's writings. Several of the books were published in the 19th century, but others were written long before Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1450.

The "Books of the Millennium" comprise a rotating display throughout 2000 in the Fondren Library Center. Each selection includes a written explanation offering insight into its choice.

"The King James Bible not only shaped the English language, as has no other book in history, but also influenced the writings of innumerable English and American authors such as Milton, Burns, Carlyle, Tennyson, Hawthorne, and Melville," Turner says. "Music, the visual and performing arts, education, law and the tradition of public service also reflect influences of the King James Bible."

Central University Librarian Gillian M. McCombs recommended Hamlet because "this particular play could well be judged to have generated the most controversy, discussion, and inspiration over the years."

Calling it a benchmark for understanding American society, Dean of Extended and Continuing Studies Robert A. Patterson selected Robert Bellah’s book, The Good Society. "Our everyday behavior is played out through our social institutions — the family, school, church, workplace, and government. The internal health of these organizations, whether they are local, state, national, or international, has a significant influence on our lives."

Dean of Research and Graduate Studies U. Narayan Bhat chose William Feller’s An Introduction to Probability Theory and its Applications, published in 1950. "It has had a major influence on many researchers in applied probability because it introduced probability theory not as a mathematical theory, but as a set of probability concepts that can be used to understand random phenomena."

Bridwell Librarian Valerie Hotchkiss recommended The Imitation of Christ, attributed to Thomas à Kempis. "This man-
Central University Libraries Exhibits

"Recognition of SMU Faculty Works Published in 1999"
Through May 20
Fondren Library Center

"Manuscripts at DeGolyer Library"
Through June 30
DeGolyer Library

"Charles DeBus: New Work"
Through Sept. 4
Hawn Gallery

"The Cattle Trade: An Exhibition of Rare Books from the Larry Myers Collection"
Sept. 15 — Nov. 14
DeGolyer Library

"Books of the Millennium"
Through Dec. 31
Fondren Library Center

This photo by Irwin Smith, courtesy of Larry Myers, will be part of DeGolyer Library’s cattle trade exhibit.

Library Phone Numbers
DeGolyer Library/Special Collections 214-768-2253
Friends of SMU Libraries 214-768-3225
Fondren Library — recording 214-768-7378
Fondren Library — Information Desk 214-768-2326
Fondren Library — Circulation/Reserve 214-768-2329
Hamon Arts Library 214-768-2894
Norwich Center for Media and Instructional Technology 214-768-1999
Science and Engineering Library - general 214-768-4444
Science and Engineering Library - reference 214-768-2282
Systems Office 214-768-3229

Web Sites
“Ask-a-Librarian”
www.smu.edu/cul/requestion.html
Electronic Resources
www.smu.edu/cul/electronic_access/
General Libraries
www.smu.edu/libraries/
World War II Materials
www.smu.edu/cul/memorial/memhome.htm