



PAPERBACK ISLAND

Street Bibliography
Essays

MARSHALL BROOKS

ARTS END BOOKS

FRONTISPIECE:
Shakespeare & Co. curbside remnants,
W. 81st & Broadway, New York, 1996.

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
Paperbacks from the
James T. Farrell Paperback Library.

REAR COVER PHOTOGRAPH:
A closed Borders bookstore,
School & Province Sts., Boston, 2011.

© 2013 by Marshall Brooks

ISBN-10 0-933292-31-7 pb
ISBN-13 978-0-933292-31-4

ISBN-10 0-933292-32-5 hard
ISBN-13 978-0-933292-32-1

An earlier version of "Paperback Island" appeared in
The Reader (University of Liverpool).

For information, write:
POB 441 W. Dover VT 05356 USA
www.marshallbrooks.com

PAPERBACK ISLAND

For my friend Liam O'Dell and myself, books helped shape a parallel universe beginning sometime in the late 1960s and on into the early 1970s, when we were schoolboys. The active book sharing, for that is what it was, lasted a little more than a decade until we were just out of our twenties. Besides symbolizing the excitement of what books can mean to people, especially young people who are in the process of formulating their own world, these books are all that remain for me of this once close friendship.

Liam read a lot. He read so much as a boy, in fact, that he had a reputation around the neighborhood. At about 14 or 15 he was, in everyone's eyes, the acknowledged local expert on history and warfare. (He may have already read all of Bruce Catton's books on the American Civil War at this point. No one would have been surprised by this fact if he

had.) Coupled with this precociousness was a kind of attractive maturity about him that comes to some at a very early age. People were inclined to trust Liam and, no doubt, found relief and reassurance in this.

It was also widely known that Liam's parents had given him a rifle for one of his birthdays, a bolt-action thing with a wooden gunstock as heavy and ungainly as a small ugly tree trunk. The rifle, a WWI vintage relic, would not have been out of place in the Khyber Pass, then or now. Liam never abused the impressive trust this gift represented (mind, few boys his age owned such weaponry in suburban Boston).

The gun, which hung on homemade scrap metal brackets down in his makeshift basement digs, was an impressive symbol of Liam's unimpeachable standing within the community at large. It was also a symbol of his absolute authority on the battlefield in boyhood games of war. Liam was not merely a precocious reader, but a young reader with all the fearsome drive of a Rommel and all the tactical acuity of a Montgomery. We were all in awe of him. His serious, not-to-be-questioned bearing hinted at some grave aspect of the world that we could only but barely imagine.

The other side of the very same coin is that Liam had read about Shangri-la in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*. He, in turn, christened a part of the Metro-

THIS WAY TO THE APOCALYPSE

*Sid Bernard's slavishly honed collection of personal journalism may well be without peer even within the no-holds-barred culture of the 1960s. The same could be safely said of Sid himself. And daring to go where many of the Big Apple's self-respecting editors, both over- and underground were not, Harry Smith gamely took on Sid's book, and Sid himself, with true publishing elan, the result being the wholesome whiplash of a book from the outer limits of space, time, and publishing. *This Way to the Apocalypse* remains a distinctive addition to The Smith's catalog of remarkable literary endeavors.*

The vital charm, though, of *Apocalypse* rests with its 86 pieces of utterly compact journalism. Most are

Paperback Island

only a few pages in length, and all, so far as I know, Sid assigned to himself from deep within the City Room of his soul. A former New York City reporter and rewrite man in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Sid, as a freelancer, resolutely refused to write on assignment for anyone, much to the disbelief and frustration of those editors predisposed to helping him. While the short-term disadvantages and challenges of this stubborn refusal are all too obvious to contemplate, one long-term benefit for us, as readers, is a book thoroughly lacking in the dictates and hidden restraints of money culture. *This Way to the Apocalypse* is almost dizzying for its lack of artificiality in this way.

Apocalypse, with no small amount of delighted curiosity, focuses almost exclusively on New York City culture and scenes, artistic, political, literary, and otherwise, a New York City not always familiar even to veteran New Yorkers themselves. Sit-ins, Be-ins, film festivals, Yippies, Fugs, Stokowski, Off Broadway, newspaper and garbage strikes, “grape and fish eyes” (Sid’s boffo jargon for party circuit wine and caviar), the Automat, and more. The masked, Depression-era, exhibition pool shooter, Irwin Rudolf (given half the chance, Sid was a passionate memoirist), and the Greenwich Village Judson Memorial Church’s “Hall of Issues” are, for example, among the book’s best pieces. What Sid achieves in his understated reporting on the Hall of Issues—“The

SUSANNA

Susanna Cuyler and I were discussing Tuli and other legends of the small press over \$8 bowls of soup one afternoon on Third Avenue as she casually demonstrated the versatility of the Stabilo 8008 write-on-everything pencil (paper-glass-plastic-metal) by scribbling on a hapless piece of crockery. Susanna had just located a supply of these scarce 8008s at New York Central Arts Supply just across the street. The gutsiest pencils going, in Susanna's view, unlike the soup, which she condemned as overpriced, sight unseen.

But Susanna did not know Tuli Kupferberg personally. She knew of him, though, through Sylvia Topp, Tuli's wife, with whom she once worked at the *Soho Weekly News*. This explains in part how Susanna and I came to run into each other at Tuli's funeral the

month before, after ten years or more lapsed contact. (“What is a memorial if it does not renew connections?” she wrote me a few days later.)

Before lunch—or soup—Susanna had just retrieved an armload of *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: Susanna’s Selections*, from nearby St. Mark’s Bookshop, where they had been on consignment—or, like Ovid, himself, in terrible exile—for a year or more. I offered to buy a copy of her book, new to me and ambitious production-wise by no-frills B. Rugged Books standards. (B. Rugged is Susanna’s small press.) Typically, she brushed the offer aside and we wound up talking about poet-translator Rolfe Humphries instead. Susanna is the only other person that I know of who even knows his name.

Susanna and B. Rugged go hand in glove much more so than is typical for a press, even a small press, and its publisher. Acquiring a B. Rugged title, for instance, is a little like knowing Susanna herself: something of an art form unto itself. In the 20 or so years that I have known her, I may have managed to purchase only one book from her. And it was certainly not a conventional book purchase.

You can only try and tease books out of Susanna. There are some 42 titles to choose from, or that you can attempt to choose from, to go by the B. Rugged website. Even if you are successful it will only be a matter of degree, as the books remain so resolutely a part of Susanna’s creative self. Who owns what,

The Bill Free Library

Bill Costley recently forwarded to me a newspaper clipping from the West Coast regarding micro-libraries. It seems that they are proliferating, perhaps in response to the disappearance of the neighborhood bookshop. People, the article suggests, like borrowing books from small specialized collections assembled by others with like-minded interests. I do not imagine that there is anything particularly new about this, although the literary landscape has changed so much of late that this activity stands out as noteworthy. The new micro-libraries remind me of the influential personal libraries that people have always generously made available to their family and friends in the past. And, famously, did not Abe Lincoln walk miles to return a book that had been lent to him by a friend? My suspicion is that micro-libraries of all sorts will continue to multiply in the future.

Paperback Island

My own legacy, if there is to be a legacy, will be largely in the form of the small libraries that I have either created, or helped to create, here around the farm (it is really a book farm). The Farrell Paperback Library is but one example. Another is the micro-library consisting of several hundred largely discarded books that have come my way as a result of knowing Bill Costley for nearly forty years: the Bill Free Library. Books picked up by Bill at Morgan Memorial and Saint Vincent De Paul charities, in junk shops, or at bookstore remainder tables.

In a disposable culture, culture is disposed of—its value difficult for the many to defend and always subject to attack or, even worse, summary dismissal. But as a defiant re-determiner of value and use, Bill is without peer. I have tried to keep the Bill books in something of the same order in which they were mailed or handed off to me (sometimes even from a passing subway, Bill being an appreciator of small dramas). The books look like our friendship must: a little frowzy—distressed, in the torn jeans fashion sense—but comfortable, recognizably habituated. Next to the Farrell paperbacks, this library is easily my favorite. How to put a long friendship neatly into words? But here it is in books, for all to see.

Microcosmographia Academica (Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician), F.M. Cornford's enduring satire on university politics, and *Bookbinding Simplified*, by Henry Gross, are two representative

THE JAMES T. FARRELL PAPERBACK LIBRARY

*As James T. Farrell was in thrall to the universe, so, too, remains this vestige of his paperback library. But its knit is intimate, even if its interests are broad. The books having been chosen with determinate care, nothing is extraneous. The unpretentiousness of the books, physically, enhances both their accessibility and presence. Many were bought used, but all, regardless, have been well-cared for and prized as a hungry student would prize his books. In hand, everything looks good to read, and all at once. Otherwise deadly-sounding titles can charm, e.g., **Trade Unions in the Age of Affluence** (a good, well-written book, as it happens).*



Paperback Island

I do not know how many titles were in James T. Farrell's paperback library in its entirety at the end of his life in 1979. The following catalog records but a portion of them. Various photographs of Farrell's library support this (see pp. 57 & 165). Jim probably owned a few hundred paperback book titles, at least, many of which are visible in the photographs. (Obvious, too, in the photos is the fact that he valued and regularly used these books.) Cleo Paturis gave away the paperbacks in French to Jim's son, Kevin, adept in languages. She also gave away history titles to a student with a penchant for reading same. Several other students had their choice of books, as well. We therefore are left to imagine what might have been the library complete. (Cleo cautioned me over the phone once that the remaining paperbacks did not do justice to the breadth and scope of the library prior to its dispersal. But the remaining titles complement well the contents of Jim's regular hardbound library even so, both in seriousness of purpose and range of subject matter, if you compare the two collections, as I have done.)

Note: *not all of the books that Cleo gave to me were paperbacks. There were several hardbound books in the lot, as well. Note has been made of these titles in the catalog that follows.*