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On the Page...

"I Dream of Bookstores" by derek beaulieu

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On The Page #2

"I Dream of Bookstores"

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I dream of bookstores.

I dream of finding the perfect bookstore, the oneric storehouse of all the volumes which I knew existed just beyond my fingertips. When I explore corporeal bookshops, I always compare them (unfavorably) to my bibliophilic dreamscapes.

Like déjà vu or a faintly remembered conversation there are a few stores which hint at the possibilities. But these are merely appetizers for my yearned-for main course.

Jorge Luis Borges in "Poemes de los Dones" famously said that he "imagined that Paradise will be some kind of library." I agree with him though bookstores haunt my dreams. It not unusual for me to dream of nondescript doors that open onto disheveled stacks and shelves, piles of maps and chapbooks, garret rooms of obscure titles and rarely-seen folios. While Borges said "I cannot sleep unless I am surrounded by books," I often dream that books surround me.

But the bookstores of my dreams are not filled with the stock of your average retailer. Instead they inevitably contain eccentric books I've heard of but never held; fantastic tomes mentioned in literature; and unlikely volumes. All of these volumes are gathered in impossible bookshops that populate my dreamed streetscapes.

Parasitic Ventures Press has published 5 of those impossible texts—each tantalizingly out of reach. The Press's Lost Book Series consists of Edward Gibbon's *The History of Democracy in Switzerland* (destroyed after poor reception on initial drafts), William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour Won* (a known, but unfound sequel to *Love's Labour Lost*); Confucius' *The Book of Music* (a lost member of his "6 books" now considered completely fanciful); T. S. Eliot's *Literature and Export Trade* (edited into an unrecognizable shape) and Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism*.

Bakhtin's volume is the triumph of the series. At the outset of World War II the manuscript of *The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism* safely existed in 2 copies. Knowing that the working copy of the manuscript was protected at his Moscow publisher, Bakhtin repurposed his copy as cigarette paper, and dutifully smoked his manuscript. Unbeknownst to him, his Moscow publisher Sovetsky Pisatel—and the only extant copy of the manuscript—was destroyed in the 1942 battle of Moscow.

Of course, the ironic thing about dreaming of bookshops and impossible oeuvres is that it is impossible to read in dreams. In dreams books are merely the shells of themselves; they point to "bookness" but do not hold the texts for which my mind searches. In our oneric nighttime escapades, we are able to accomplish a myriad of impossible feats but we cannot read. Text is just beyond the threshold of

our mind's eye (the next time you recall your dreams, try to focus on any text you encountered).

Parasitic Ventures Press hasn't performed an unlikely feat of literary archaeology in republishing these lost classics however. The books are blurred beyond the threshold of readability. You can polish your glasses or tease out the range of your bifocal vision as much as you'd like; the texts are nothing more than horizontal layers of smoke. *The Matrix* may cast us into convincing landscapes but its ability for detail only reaches to a minimal level; text floats in a grey shifting field. Newspaper headlines may be needed for a realistic street scene, but the articles under those headlines are washed out.

Parasitic Ventures Press plucked a talisman from my dreams, a symbol of the limits of my own subconscious and gave it form, taunting me with the physical reminder that my dream volumes will always remain unreadable.

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I am also drawn to libraries.

Small or large, a collection of books will no doubt attract my eye. Whenever I am at someone else's house, I am drawn—like so many of my colleagues—to my host's bookcases and the evidence of their reading. Authors, scholars and academics are often socially awkward and I find myself discovering more about a host's personality from their bookcases than I do from their conversation. How are the books arranged? What subject matters (and authors) are represented? What periods are reflected? How are the books kept?

I have a friend whose library consists solely—as a means of limiting the size of his collection—of first editions. He does not loan his books and believes that they are best preserved for posterity under UV-protective glass.

Another colleague's books were re-arranged by his spouse from a random array into a more aesthetically pleasing arrangement based upon colour and height...the books soon wandered back to their original randomness reflecting his more idiosyncratic way of looking at the world.

My personal library threatens to overtake our apartment, and is arranged by genre, author's last name and then by height ... with a few nods to practicality (Joseph Campbell's indispensable *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork* is filed next to *Finnegans Wake*; *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* is filed between *Ida* and *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*). There's a bookcase for visual art; two for graphic novels and comics; four for fiction, poetry, drama and theory; and one for a further mix of additional visual art, graphic novels, typography, travel books, literary journals, and a hodge-podge of other genres (which oddly places *Blazing Combat* next to *The Holy Bible*)—and that doesn't include my daughter's growing collection, nor my partner's...