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It was May, and flocks of terns had arrived, rising and falling with every wingbeat, and settling by the hundred on the sandy patches towards the shore. The stock from Muller's came down in two Carter Paterson vans, followed a week later by orders from the book wholesalers. For the rest, for the new titles, she would have to wait for the salesmen, if they would venture so far across the marshes to a completely unknown point of sale. Since the warehouse had proved unusable, everything had to be piled into the spacious cupboard under the stairs while Florence pondered the arrangement.

She drove back one morning from Flintmarket to find the premises full of twelve – and thirteen-year-old boys in blue jerseys. They were Sea Scouts, they told her.

'How did you get in?'

'Mr Raven got the key from the plumber,' said one of the children, square and reliable as a straw-bale.

'He's not your skipper, is he?'

'No, but he told us to come over to yours. What do you want doing?'

'I want all the shelves put up' she said, with equal directness, 'Can you do that?'

'How many hand-drills can you get us, miss?'

She went out and bought hand-drills, and screws by the pound. The scouts worked for two hours, went home for their dinners, and then knocked on again. By the time the shelves were up, the whole floor, and most of the books, were covered with a quarter-inch layer of sawdust.

'We could make it good later, and clear up this lot,' Wally said.

'I shall clear up myself,' she said. She felt overwhelmed with love for them. 'I'd like to give you something for your headquarters.' Scout Headquarters was the wreck of an old three-masted schooner, beached on the estuary.

'Have you got any morse codes, or *Pears Medical Dictionary*?'

'I'm afraid not.' They were both at a loss. 'I tell you what, Wally. I want you to take these hand-drills. They're no use to me, I don't know how to use them properly. If I want to make a hole in anything, I shall have to send you a signal.'

'Thank you. I daresay we could make use of those,' said Wally, 'but with every job we undertake we're obliged to contribute the value of twelve bricks to the new Baden-Powell House that they're building up in South Kensington.'

She gave him five pounds, and he saluted.

'South Kensington's an area of London,' he explained.

The scouts, over whom Raven exerted a mysterious but direct influence, returned to do the white painting, and then she was free, refusing any further offers, to arrange the stock herself.

New books came in sets of eighteen, wrapped in thin brown paper. As she sorted them out, they fell into their own social hierarchy. The heavy luxurious country-house books, the books about Suffolk churches, the memoirs of statesmen in several volumes, took the place that was theirs by right of birth in the front window. Others, indispensable, but not aristocratic, would occupy the middle shelves. That was the place for the Books of the Car – from Austin to Wolseley – technical works on pebble-polishing, sailing, pony clubs, wild flowers, and birds, local maps and guide books. Among these the popular war reminiscences, in jackets of khaki and bloodred, faced each other as rivals with bristling hostility. Back in the shadows went the Stickers, largely philosophy and poetry, which she had little hope of ever seeing the last of. The Stayers – dictionaries, reference

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50 books and so forth – would go straight to the back, with the Bibles and reward books, which, it was hoped, Mrs Traill of the Primary would present to successful pupils. Last of all came the crates of Müller’s shabby remainders. A few were even second-hand. Although she had been trained never to look inside the books while at work, she opened one or two of them – old Everyman editions in faded olive boards stamped with gold. There was the elaborate endpaper which she had puzzled over when she was a girl. A
55 *good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.* After some hesitation, she put it between Religion and Home Medicine.

The right-hand wall she kept for paperbacks. At 1s6d each, cheerfully coloured, brightly democratic, they crowded the shelves in well-disciplined ranks. They would have a rapid turnover and she had to approve of them: yet she could remember a world where
60 only foreigners had been content to have their books bound in paper. The Everymans, in their shabby dignity, seemed to confront them with a look of reproach.

In the backhouse kitchen since there was absolutely no room for them in the shop itself, were two deep drawers set apart for the Books of the Books – the Ledger, Repeat Orders, Purchases, Sales Returns, Petty Cash. Still blank, with untouched double
65 columns, these unloved books menaced the silent commonwealth on the shelves next door. Not much of a hand at accounts, Florence would have preferred for them to remain without readers. This was a weakness, and she asked Jessie Welford’s sharp niece, who worked with a firm of accountants in Lowestoft, to come over once a month for a check. ‘A little Trial balance now and then,’ said Ivy Welford condescendingly, as though it were
70 a tonic for the feeble-minded. Her worldly wisdom, in a girl of twenty-one was alarming, and she would need paying, of course; but both Mr Thornton and the bank manager seemed relieved when they heard that Ivy had been arranged for. Her head was well screwed-on, they said.

Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Bookshop*, London (1979) 1998 Harper Perennial

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Scenes from the Internet revolution in scholarship :

It is late at night, and I am at home, in my study, doing research for a book on the culture of war in Napoleonic Europe. In an old and dreary secondary source, I find an intriguing but fragmentary quotation from a newspaper that was briefly published in French-occupied Italy in the late 1790s. I want to read the entire article from which it came. As little as five years ago, doing this would have required a forty-mile trip from my home in Baltimore to the Library of Congress and some tedious wrestling with a microfiche machine. But now I step over to my computer, open up Internet Explorer, and click to the "digital library" of the French National Library. A few more clicks, and a facsimile copy of the newspaper issue in question is zooming out of my printer. Total time elapsed: two minutes.

It is the next day, and I am in a coffee shop on my university campus writing a conference paper. A passage from Edmund Burke's *Letters on a Regicde Peace* comes to mind, but I can't remember the exact wording. Finding the passage, as little as five years ago, would have required going to a library, locating the book on the shelf (or not!), and paging through the text in search of the half-remembered material. Instead, on my laptop, I open Internet Explorer, connect to the wireless campus network, and type the words "Burke Letters Regicide Peace" into the Google search window. Seconds later, I have found the entire text online. I search for the words "armed doctrine " and up comes the quote. ("It is with an armed doctrine that we are at war. It has, by its essence, a faction of option, and of interest, and of enthusiasm, in every country.") Total time elapsed: less than one minute.

It is a few days later, and I am in my university office. I have seen a notice of a new book on Napoleonic propaganda and am eager to read it. A few years ago, I would have walked over to the library and checked the book out. But this particular book does not exist on paper. It is an "e-book," published on the Internet only. A few clicks, and the text duly appears on my computer screen. I start reading, but while the book is well-written and informative, I find it remarkably hard to concentrate. I scroll back and forth, search for keywords, and interrupt myself even more often than usual to refill my coffee cup, check my email, check the news, re-arrange files in my desk drawer. Eventually I get through the book, and am glad to have done so. But a week later I find it remarkably hard to remember what I have read.

As these scenes suggest, in the past few years the world of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences has been astonishingly transformed by the new information technology. Above all it has been transformed by the amount of source material available online – some of it by paid subscription, but much of it there for the taking by anyone with an Internet connection. Google made news in December with its ambitious plan to digitize the entire collections of several major research libraries (or at least the proportion that is in the public domain) – but to a much larger extent than the journalists who covered the story realized, the future that Google promises is already here. As I sit writing these words on my front porch, I can call up, in a matter of seconds, the sort of riches once found only in a handful of major research institutions: every issue ever printed of *The New York Times*; tens of thousands of classic and not-so-classic works of literature; a large majority of the books published in English before 1800; a million pages' worth of French Revolutionary pamphlets and newspapers; every issue of virtually every major American newspaper and magazine going back a decade or more; every page of most major American academic journals going back half a century; most major encyclopaedias and dictionaries; all the major works of Western painters and sculptors. And much more is coming. Some of this material will remain available only in facsimile form. Much of it, though, is already entirely searchable. Name your keyword, and the Internet delivers citations to you with the force of a fire hose in the face.

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55 So far, most scholars have seen this transformation as a blessing – particularly those who do not have access to large, privileged research libraries. Indeed, its democratizing effects cannot be overestimated. Ten years ago, a historian whom I know took a job at the University of South Dakota. The entire library collection in her field ran little more than the length of her arm on the shelf, making real work on the subject effectively impossible, and she soon left. Today, a scholar in South Dakota, or Shanghai, or Albania – anywhere on earth with an Internet collection – has a research library at
60 her fingertips, even without access to the “subscription-only” content that makes up a large share of the holdings. The only protest I have seen against this democratization of information has come from Jean-Joel Jeanneney, director of France’s National Library. In a February op-ed piece in *Le Monde* that will long stand as a classic of unintended Gallic self-parody, he complained that the Google project, by drawing principally on American
65 libraries, would reinforce America’s “crushing domination” of online information – no matter that the project will vastly expand the number of French books available as well, and that nothing is stopping France from engaging in a similar project of its own.

70 But the Internet Revolution is soon likely to become much more controversial, and for a simple reason: scholarship is fast moving toward a bookless future. Physical books are expensive to produce and they are easily damaged and stolen. Shelf space costs money to build. Shelving and re-shelving books costs more. Stacks have to be kept at the appropriate temperature and humidity; they need to be lit, cleaned, inspected, and insured. Why, it is already being asked, should universities pay large sums to preserve
75 and circulate physical books if copies exist online? Just as physical card catalogues have been stored away or even destroyed, replaced by electronic ones, so physical books are likely to follow. Libraries, in turn, are likely to turn increasingly into virtual information-retrieval centers, possibly located thousand of miles from the readers they serve. They already serve this function in the physical sciences, where the revolution in question took place much earlier, and without much protest.

80 Writers such as Nicholson Baker, who eloquently objected to the disappearance of the physical card catalogues, are likely to greet this much larger change with despairing howls of anger. They will defend the physical book as a irreplaceable treasure, dwelling in covetous detail on every aspect of it: the paper, the typefaces, the binding. They will talk about its tactile pleasures, about the inimitable scent of dusty vellum and leather, and
85 compare these things to the unnatural, unpleasant, uncomfortable experience of reading on a screen. They will cite the famous line of Borges: “I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.” They will call the transformation another victory of soulless barbarism over true culture.

David A Bell, “The Bookless Future” in *The New Republic* May 2 & 9 2005

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The Inside of Shakespeare and Company in the Latin Quarter of Paris
theartofeveryday.wordpress.com, July 27, 2010