"the stirring of indifference," but for many of us, the answer is that it matters a great deal, not as the ultimate source of literary meaning but as one part of a complicated field of producers, consumers, and all of those involved in the infrastructure that helps writing circulate (230). As Nick Jardine puts it in his afterword to *Books and the Sciences in History*, reports of the death of the author have been greatly exaggerated (400). Borrowing from Chartier and McKenzie, Jardine argues that the author may be dependent on and constrained by a multitude of pressures, and fragmented by the different jobs that comprise any book as physical object, but ironically, the "un-dead author" is more interesting than ever for having been stripped of the socially transcendent privileges claimed by predecessors (400). What the *Reader* does best, perhaps, is insist on the field of book history as a group of debates between a range of positions, rather than offer a set of orthodoxies designed to settle questions in any final way.

How much is ultimately at stake for our understanding of the history of books in insisting on the importance of the various social contexts that reflect people's sense of what they were doing as they engaged in the business of writing, disseminating, and reading texts? A recent letter from MLA President Stephen Greenblatt on behalf of the Executive Council (28 May, 2002) asked academics to cooperate in responding to a very different kind of crisis in the academy than the disciplinary rebellion mentioned by Darnton. This one, Greenblatt explained, has been created by universities' insistence that new scholars publish one or even two books as a condition for tenure at a time when economic constraints are forcing scholarly presses to scale back. Encountered in this more jarring light, references to a "book" have very different connotations than those which interest critics focused on the material realities of textual production or, their mirror opposite, in deciphering the meaning of the words contained within them. Accommodating these broader contexts may eradicate all hope of arriving at objective conclusions, but however nebulous they may be, these sorts of considerations have an importance that far outweighs the inconvenience of not being able to reduce them to verifiable data. Like so many historical analyses, these books about books are most interesting as part of an ongoing dialectic of past and present crises in our relations of knowledge and of labor.

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Got the Cat, and Much Else Besides

Marjorie Swann. *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Pp. viii + 280. $49.95 cloth.

Barbara M. Benedict. *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Pp. x + 322. $45.00 cloth.

In 1697, Sir Robert Sibbald, whom Bishop Burnet called "the most learned antiquary in Scotland," donated his natural history collection to the University of Edinburgh. Sibbald had assisted in starting the Edinburgh botanical garden as

well as in founding the College of Physicians there, and in 1682 he had been appointed physician to Charles II. In conjunction with the gift, Sibbald prepared a catalogue of the collection which the University published under the title *Auctarium Musaei Balfouriani, e Musaeo Sibbaldiano, sive enumeratio & descriptio rerum rariorum, tam naturalium quam artificialium; tam domesticarum quam exoticarum* [etc.] (Wing S3722). Sibbald lived on until 1722 (he was 81 when he died), and in the following year his extensive collection of books and manuscripts was sold at auction, most of the material going to the Edinburgh Advocates' Library. Among the manuscripts was a volume of "Adversaria" which included a transcript of Drummond of Hawthornden's now well-known record of conversations with Ben Jonson. Although Sibbald's copy was once misjudged a deliberate forgery (by C.L. Stainer, in his 1925 book *Jonson and Drummond, Their Conversations: A Few Remarks on an Eighteenth-Century Forgery*), that accusation has been disproved. Sibbald also wrote an autobiography, the original manuscript of which (now lost) was once owned by James Boswell.

Marjorie Swann does not mention Sibbald in her book *Curiosities and Texts*, although to some extent he very much fits the mold of the collectors who figure in her study. Like the two John Tredescants, father and son, Sir Hans Sloane, Elias Ashmole, and others, Sibbald was of the "middling sort" (a favorite phrase of Swann's), and like them he built a collection of natural and man-made rarities (*tam naturalium quam artificialium*) which forms an important part of his legacy. Swann is at great pains to emphasize the inclination among collectors to use their collecting as a way of insuring a modicum of immortality, and the seventeenth-century literature on collecting—not to mention modern psychological theorizing on the subject—backs her up to some extent. Naudé himself, in the *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (1627), counsels his addressee: "si vous ambitionnez de faire esclater vostre Nom par celuy de vostre Bibliotheque, [. . .] pour donner un lustre perdurable à vostre memoire [. . .] pour viure & dominer dans le souuenir des hommes," then you must, he says, work hard to build a truly great library. Sibbald also fits Swann's view of the psychopathology of collecting because he did not marry and had no children. Swann takes the conventional view of the collection as a child surrogate to a new level when she proposes that Bacon's scientific theorizing is "potentially at least, rooted in sodomitical social relations" (68). The leap from natural history collecting to a metaphorical extension of the notion of collecting that includes research teams, geographical landmarks, and literary anthologies marks the developing central theme of this book, which is, in passing, focused mostly on the seventeenth century despite the longer span suggested by the subtitle.

Sir Robert Sibbald built a monument for himself with his natural history collection, but where his other collecting instincts found a focus—on books and manuscripts—he does not seem to have felt it necessary to act in a similar fashion. He let his books go under the hammer. It is notable—again despite her subtitle—that Swann does not deal much at all with the collecting of books and manuscripts. None of the main events associated with the building of private libraries in England in the early modern period is even mentioned: the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, or the introduction of the Dutch idea of book auctions to London in 1676, or (at the end of the period) the dispersal of the Duke of Roxburghe's collection in 1812. Sir Robert Cotton is mentioned, but rather for his interest in British antiquities than for his more famous accumulation of manuscripts. Swann is more interested in works than in books as objects,

and the concluding chapter of her study focuses on two seventeenth-century authors, Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick, who were the earliest self-consciously to "collect" themselves into a book. (In light of Swann's emphasis on the collecting instinct as an alternative to the instinct to reproduction, it is parenthetically convenient that Herrick died without issue and that Jonson's four children all died before he did.) "As a material display of personal identity, the collection [of objects, or of literary artifacts] does not simply reflect a pre-existing self, but rather functions as a technology through which selfhood is simultaneously constructed and represented" (169). The analogy drawn here between the psychodynamics of artifactual collecting and that of the creation of a book embodying a lifetime's work (as Herrick's *Hesperides* was and as Jonson's 1616 *Works* was taken to be) is a fascinating one and very much at the heart of *Curiosities and Texts*.

It is an odd (not to say curious) fact that the word *curiosa*, which has a specialized meaning as a euphemism for erotica, seems not to go back much before the early twentieth century. The OED cites Pisanus Fraxi, as one might expect, but only with the use in an 1877 book title of the word *curious* as an Anglicization (as in "curious books") of *curiosa*. The word in its Latin form (but used as an English word) does not have a citation earlier than the 1920s, when, appropriately enough, it is invoked in the context of Lawrence's *The Rainbow* by its publisher. The Latin form was used about books as early as the seventeenth century, but only to mean unusual or scarce, as in the title of an auction catalogue for a London sale in 1697, *Bibliotheca curiosa, or, A Choice Collection of Books in English, Latin, French* [etc.]; and indeed this sense of the word hung on despite the growing association of *curiosa* with pornographic books, as we see in a title like Lewis Carroll's *Curiosa mathematica* (and the title of Part 2 of this work, *Pillow-Problems Thought Out During Wakeful Hours,* has strictly to do with math as well), or even such oddities as Lewis Winant's *Firearms curiosa* (1955) or George Eberhart's recent *The Whole Library Handbook 3: Current Data, Professional Advice, and Curiosa About Libraries and Library Sciences*. So this rather intriguing linguistic evolution of "curious" and "curiosity" came too late for Barbara Benedict's attention, which, in her book, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*, is focused mainly on the long eighteenth century. But it would fit perfectly into Benedict's view of the subterranean meanderings of the two words, where she finds sex pervasive and perdurable.

That is as one might expect, given the paradox of sexuality's being at once universally important in human affairs and mostly hidden and discussed (or written about) in a huggermugger sort of way. Although Benedict defines curiosity in several ways, of which the most basic is "the pursuit of information by empirical means" (23), the more sophisticated definitions involve wonder ("curiosity is conceived throughout English literary culture as an appetite for it" [13]), ambition ("the longing to know more" [23]), and rebellion ("the purest form of insubordination," quoting Nabokov [245]). Even limited only to the literary sphere, sex is reified through all of these instrumentalities, and it is Benedict's ambition to trace that reification in the literature of England from Pepys and Shadwell through Pope, Defoe, Swift, Haywood, Walpole, and others, up to the Regency with Jane Austen and *Frankenstein*. She does not limit herself to literary texts alone, and has much to say about collections of objects and their catalogues, the circus, and other sites where curiosity played a major role both in the creator and the audience. Most intriguing perhaps of these non-literary expressions of curiosity is a series of weird events that Benedict calls "curiosities of artful nature": the case of

the Bottle Conjurer, the case of Elizabeth Canning, and the case of the Cock Lane Ghost—all of them events which might well have been evoked in the Gothic novels which Benedict sees as lying in the same developing line of curious happenings.

The Bottle Conjurer was supposed to be a person who could escape into a bottle, but it was in fact only an example of theatrical fraud, much like the one perpetrated in *Huckleberry Finn*. Benedict makes a great deal out of this scandalous one-night wonder, but I am not convinced that it had in its day the kind of social and metaphorical resonance that she locates in it. Was the audience who went to see the act and was hoodwinked really "tutored by eighty years of *Philosophical Transactions*"? Did the genie in the bottle really "[enact] a prohibited form of sexuality"? And did the trickster really "[offer] the disenfranchised classes," who had nevertheless apparently read the *Philosophical Transactions*, "the chance to co-opt elite curiosity and literally play with another man's body"? The Conjurer, Benedict claims, "promised to bring literature to life; to reverse power relations; to incarnate onanism; to make monstrosity—the transgression of physical boundaries—humorous. Instead, he made the audience fools of their own desire. When balked, furthermore, this unleashed desire turned violent. The explosive result revealed the danger of unmonitored curiosity" (164). I get the feeling here that more is being made of this occurrence than was really the case. Like the audience at the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, the people who had paid to see a conjuring trick had been duped and were angry enough to damage the theatre. Desire, self-pleasuring, and the bringing of the literary genie in a bottle to life probably had little to do with the ensuing riot. The half-life of the Canning and of the Cock Lane Ghost affairs was much longer, and in interpreting these events Benedict is, I think, much more justified in reading into them broader social and metaphorical significance. She reproduces an extraordinarily interesting ballooning print from 1784 towards the end of the book, the text of which alludes still to those two events, as well as to Mary Toft the Rabbit-Woman—an example of the culture remembering instances of public curiosity over a very long term.

Curiosity as a trope and as a social force comes into prominence with the rise of empiricism and the age of discovery, both geographical and scientific, but it brings with it, in this context of utility and individual progress, a heritage of immorality and self-indulgence. Obviously the founding myth in Western culture of curiosity is Eve's trespass, and the emblem books tended to treat Curiosità with evident disdain. The rise of collecting and the establishment of the Royal Society were early instances of the transformation of curiosity the bad into curiosity the good, at least in England, despite the opinion of conservative writers like Swift, whose *Gulliver's Travels*, in Benedict's view, is an indictment of curiosity as much as of anything else. Pope despised the sort of curious man who collected things for reasons that are still used to excoriate the collecting impulse: that objects are removed from the public sphere and that objects are bought without discrimination or taste, and are admired for reasons of extrinsic rather than intrinsic value. Benedict states it succinctly and boldly when she concludes a chapter by saying that "Curiosity fragments identity even as it defines the modern human" (117).

Benedict's book is highly sophisticated in reading various early modern English literary texts for aspersions and aspirations where curiosity is concerned, and she has used the libraries well and turned up a number of fascinating extra-literary documents that give a solid underpinning to her literary criticism as such. She is not always easy to read and sometimes goes so far out on a limb—propositional or linguistic—as to be perched in mid-air. What does the final sentence of

Chapter Three mean, for example? "By the end of the eighteenth century, female curiosity, especially as it was manifest through literary consumption, represented a hazard to social convention. It pushed sexuality before spirituality and identified the flesh beneath the fine" (157). That final word may be a typographical error, but even so, the contention seems implausible at best. There are other, more minor mistakes too, such as the confusion of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* for Aldous Huxley's *Island: A Novel* (49), or the use of the tautological phrase "teratological monsters" (110), or the mistaken reference to leaf [A2] of Manley's *Court Intrigues* (1711) as a "flyleaf" (132). (Flyleaves are always blank and, if front rather than rear, precede the title-leaf).

It would be very instructive to continue to trace the centrality of curiosity to literature and related subjects through the nineteenth century, for if it is true, as Aphra Behn said, that "where there is no Novelty, there can be no Curiosity," then the Romantic quest for novelty in so many spheres surely dragged curiosity along as a concomitant inclination. It was not Barbara Benedict's assignment to explore curiosity much past 1815, but her highly suggestive study will surely encourage others to pick up where she has left off.

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The Protean Frances Burney

Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill, eds. *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997). Pp. 207. $60.00.

Janice Farrar Thaddeus. *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* (New York: St. Martins, 2000). Pp. 224. $45.00.

As a young writer, Frances Burney fostered a dramatic secrecy around her writing, corresponding with printers in a disguised hand, instructing her sister, Susanna, to steal paper, and, for purposes of copyediting, only allowing her aunts to read her manuscript. With the renewed interest in Burney, the very privacy that she so deeply cherished is but a young girl's dream. Her own pasting over and blotting out of her journals and letters near the end of her life only causes biographers to dig more deeply in pursuit of the 'real' Frances Burney. The result is a rich assortment of perspectives through which to interpret her vibrant and vexed literary career. Janice Farrar Thaddeus' *Frances Burney: A Literary Life* and an edition of *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*, by Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill, are both indispensable additions to these perspectives, emphasizing the complexity of Burney's character and encouraging a rethinking of her works.

Over a recent three-year span four biographies of Frances Burney were published. Hester Davenport (*Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George*, 2000) centers her attention on the five grueling years in which Burney served in the court. Claire Harman (*Fanny Burney: A Biography,* 2000) and Kate Chisholm *(Fanny Burney: Her Life, 1752–1840*, 1998) rely more heavily on Burney's letters and diaries. Yet, Thaddeus is distinct in two important ways. First she insists on using Burney's full name, "Frances," to maintain her professional-