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## The Book Bench

### Loose leafs from the New Yorker Books Department.

February 9, 2012

### In the News: Significant Shelves, Silver-Screen Shakespeare

Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

Another reason to read “The Giving Tree”: a new study finds a decreasing number of children’s books depicting nature.

Six Arab authors talk about what makes them write.

“Every great novel possesses a mysterious flickering quality, the on/off light of irony, that conceals and reveals its moment of

fidelity.” Douglas Glover on Thomas Bernhard’s “The Loser.”

Francesca Mari on famous authors’ shelving habits and what your bookshelf says about you.

The story of the “dignified but flippant” penguin and other publishing mascot animals.

Kaya Genc makes the case for resurrecting Conrad’s neglected memoirs.

All the world’s a screen: a top-ten list of Shakespeare film adaptations.

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February 8, 2012

## Olive Oil’s Dark Side

Posted by *Sally Errico*

In the August 13, 2007, issue of the magazine, Tom Mueller wrote about corruption in the olive-oil trade. By the late nineteen-nineties, olive oil—often cut with cheaper oils, such as hazelnut and sunflower seed—was the most adulterated agricultural product in the European Union. The E.U.’s anti-fraud office established an olive-oil task force, “yet fraud remains a major international problem,” Mueller wrote. “Olive oil is far more valuable than most other vegetable oils, but it is costly and time-consuming to produce—and surprisingly easy to doctor.”

Nearly five years later, fraud remains a problem. Mueller has expanded the scope of his article’s research with his recent book “Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil,” which focusses on the contamination of olive oil not only by seed oils but by the misuse of the label “extra virgin” on olive oils that don’t meet that designation’s standards. Mueller recently took the time to answer questions on olive oil and the risks involved in its trade; an edited version of the exchange appears below.

*Why olive oil?...Continue Reading >>*



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February 8, 2012

## Edward Abbey and the Grand Canyon Bottle Ban

Posted by *Ian Crouch*

This week's news that the National Park Service has O.K.ed a ban on the sale of small disposable water bottles at the Grand Canyon National Park, reportedly over the objections of the Coca-Cola Company, a major donor, put me in mind of Edward Abbey. Most news out of the parks does, since Abbey was such a trenchant and amusing critic of how the country's natural wonders are managed, beginning in the years following his brief employment as a ranger at Utah's Arches National Monument at the end of the nineteen-fifties, and extending to his death, in 1989.

During his two seasons as a wary government employee at Arches, recounted in the masterful "Desert Solitaire"—part memoir, part meditation on nature, part crusty and slightly mad cultural commentary—Abbey's trash-cleanup duties were a pleasant opportunity to muse:

By Sunday evening most everyone has gone home and the heavy duty is over. Thank God it's Monday, I say to myself the next morning. Mondays are very nice. I empty the garbage cans, read the discarded newspapers, sweep out the outhouses and disengage the Kleenex from the clutches of cliffrose and cactus. In the afternoon I watch the clouds drift past the bald peak of Mount Tukuahnivats. (*Someone* has to do it.)

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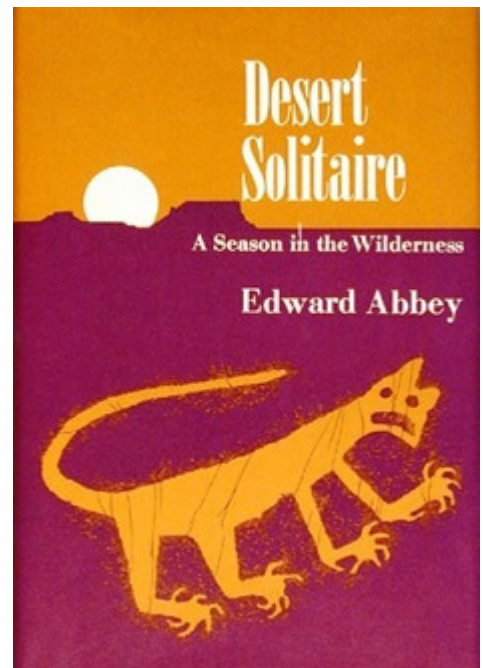
February 8, 2012

## In the News: Alluring Lists, Little Libraries

Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

"He was an honorable man in a nation where honor in translating is neither encouraged, necessary, nor profitable." The translator of a U.S. author's book has been jailed in Iran.

The magazines that published the founding texts of modernism are now available in PDF.



From Homer to Eco: Jillian Steinbauer on the urge to make lists.

The plot thickens: rumors that Amazon is planning to open its first physical storefront.

Welcome to Booklyn! A project to start a free library housed in a miniature brownstone.

Designing book covers for a day when books don't have covers.

Ruth Franklin on Wislawa Szymborska and the end of an era for Polish poetry.

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February 7, 2012

## Dorothea Tanning: Unfairly Overshadowed

Posted by *Dan Chiasson*

I suppose it was inevitable that the notices of Dorothea Tanning's death last week, at the age of a hundred and one, all ranked the fact that she was Max Ernst's widow among her signal accomplishments. Ernst's work has always been overvalued (Philip Fisher once called him "the very appropriately named Max Ernst") while Tanning, by far the more protean and surprising artist, might never get her full due. As Jane Kramer pointed out in a 2004 profile, Tanning owned—in all senses of that word—the female figure; it is hard to think of another woman artist who made more of women's bodies. Some of the women in her work look rather dumfounded, as though they'd expected to sit for an ordinary portrait and ended up in some Surrealist nightmare. Their deadpan looks ironize their surroundings: what a weird state of affairs it is that men have been entrusted to control the terms that define the depiction of women. What a sham! Later, she freed her women up, unfroze them: they dance and throng and embrace like sexy, slightly blob-like putti, sick of peering from the sidelines all these years.

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February 7, 2012

**Video: Katherine Boo's "Behind the Beautiful Forevers"**Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

Katherine Boo's new book, "Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity" documents the precarious existence of the three thousand people who live in Mumbai's Annawadi slum. Although they live in the shadow of some of India's most expensive luxury hotels, the residents of Annawadi are largely dependent for their livelihoods on the risky occupations of scavenging and theft. Sickness often goes untreated and substance abuse abounds. Yet slums are also sites of community, with all the advantages and conflicts that community entails. While children growing up in Annawadi have always been presented with bleak prospects, their future is now even more uncertain because of plans to level their homes to make way for new development.

Boo first wrote about the residents of Mumbai's slums for *The New Yorker* in 2009. She spent over three years investigating the customs, relationships, and aspirations that have sprung up as a way of life under the pressure of extreme poverty. This video above, filmed in collaboration with some of the children of Annawadi, gives a glimpse into the daily lives of the people she encountered there.

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February 7, 2012

## In the News: Dickens's Birthday, Clint Eastwood's Muse

Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

Much ado about Dickens: festivities abound for his two-hundredth birthday today.

Books are heavily censored in Vietnam, but technology circumvents the government.

The poet behind Clint Eastwood's halftime show.

T. S. Eliot had a day job, and he liked it.

A new series plans to print the literary canon as graphic novels.

The *Daily Mail* overtakes the New York *Times* as the top online newspaper.

You'd expect the elephant folio to be more truncated: Abe Books' introduction to book sizes.

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February 6, 2012

## This Week In Fiction: Michael Chabon

Posted by *Deborah Treisman*



*“Citizen Conn” tells the story of a falling-out between a pair of comic-book creators of the fifties and sixties. Were Mort Feather and Artie Conn based on anyone in particular?*

Well, the obvious answer is Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Stan and Jack met in the forties, began collaborating during lean times in the fifties, jointly revived the fortunes of Marvel Comics in the sixties, and then underwent a creative divorce that seems to have resulted in a certain amount of acrimony on Kirby’s side. So the outlines of the story are similar. But Feather and Conn are not Stan and Jack; their fates, their experiences, their biographies, and their personalities are quite different. Jack Kirby died in 1994, still idolized by fans, surrounded by his loving family, as far from the embittered loneliness of Mort Feather as you can be. And Stan Lee is still going strong, a potent creative force who seems to bear up under the tribulations and triumphs of a long and interesting life with the élan for which he has always been famous...Continue Reading >>

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February 6, 2012

## In the News: Words for Business, Words for Beauty

Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

Death threats? Conspiracy? William Dalrymple tries to clear up the confusion surrounding Salman Rushdie’s non-appearance at the Jaipur Literature Festival.

A rose is a rose is a rose, but a carrot is a carrot is a freakish, furcated panacea. Old manuscripts featuring carrots.

Steven Levy on the Facebook I.P.O. and Mark Zuckerberg’s wordsmithery.

The Turkish Prime Minister locks horns with the author Paul Auster over media censorship.

“It is a battlefield of books.” Discovering a treasure trove of discarded texts in Egypt.

Annabelle Selldorf on the ins and outs of book-based architecture.

The first Hachet Job of the Year award will be announced tomorrow. Geoff Dyer and Anna Baddeley discuss the value of the scathing review.

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February 2, 2012

## In the News: Exalted Piracy, Fallen Heroes

Posted by *Andrea DenHoed*

Paulo Coelho tells the world, “unite and pirate everything I’ve ever written.”

“One cannot feel that he is an important poet, and one knows that he is not an insignificant one.” The mixed legacy of William Carlos Williams.

Girls just want to have fun: surprising marginalia doodled by medieval nuns.

The memoirs of Richard Seaver, “editor of genius,” recall an avant-garde golden age in Paris.

Allen Ginsberg and other beat poets appear in various states of dress and domesticity in these candid photos.

Hero making is a complicated business: the protagonist of Dave Eggers’ “Zeitoun” convicted of domestic battery.

Today is Gertrude Stein’s 138th birthday. Celebrate by listening to her read one of her poems.

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