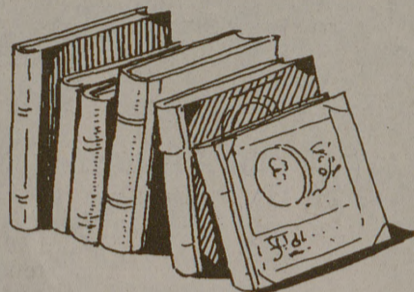


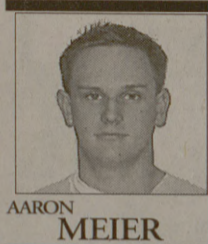
Books, looks and crooks

Popular culture has made booksellers look like **SIRENS**. But linking beauty with brilliance might not be so bad.



College bookstores can frequently behave like **SWINDLERS**. Buying books online can save an arm and a leg.

The June Playboy centerfold's measurements are 43-24-34. She enjoys jumping up and down, alphabetizing M&Ms and although she's still learning, she's quite fond of playing "Paper, Rock, Scissors." By the way, she is also a bookstore owner?



AARON MEIER

Find that hard to believe? You aren't alone. In the past year, no less than three movies have been released with major characters as sexy book store owners. And that should not be interpreted as "Adult Bookstore" sexy. In *You've Got Mail*, the queen of cute, Meg Ryan, plays the owner of a children's bookstore. In *The Love Letter*, former Indiana Jones babe, Kate Capshaw, plays a small town bookstore owner.

up and her nametag read, "Hi! My name is Cathy Z. Jones." However, maybe Hollywood is finally onto something with this trend. Maybe they have been able to see literature for the ultimate aphrodisiac it actually is. The trouble is no one really sees literature as being sexy. If the libraries across America had Meg Ryan doing a story hour once a week, it is easy to bet that single dad's would be dragging their kids to hear Amelia Bedilia stories week after week.

If Ricky Martin ditched his singing career to write an academic study of post-modern literature, every woman in the country, and a few men too, would enroll in English classes by the thousands.

But the truth is it never will happen. Society fears its own intellect. From the moment the smart kid in class got a 100 on his math test, he instantly became the class whipping boy. But when the first girl developed breasts, she became the girl everyone wanted to sit next to in lunch.

The prom king was never the kid who scored a 1600 on his SATs or won the gold medal for his essay.

He was the quarterback of the football team, or the guy who scored the clutch freethrow in the regional championship.

A powerful mind is more intimidating than a powerful physique. Has a woman ever dumped a guy for being too good looking? Doubtful, but it is easy to see how the same woman would dump a guy for being too smart.

While it may seem unlikely that Kate Capshaw is hawking the latest Leonard Elmore novel, or that Hugh Grant is recommending books about the Far East, this new infusion of external beauty to the industries of the mind shows Hollywood is trying to send the notion that the mind is the most important sexual organ of the human body.

Two cable television movies have been released in the past four months documenting the utter sensuality and passion of the great minds of the 20th century.

Showtime's *The Passion of Ayn Rand* shows the author as a somewhat kinky woman sleeping with a married man. Not really an image that can be evoked in a high school literature class. The A&E movie *Dash and Lilly* tells the story of the passionate relationship of author Dashiell Hammett and playwright Lillian Hellman. These movies along with films like *Dorothy Parker and the Vicious Circle*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Henry and June* finally show the sensuality that is tied up in some of the greatest works of literature. For too long, literature has been dissected in the sterile fields of classrooms.

Maybe it's time Cindy Crawford came out of the closet and admitted she was the valedictorian of her high school.

Maybe if she ditched the cover of *Vogue* and became the covergirl for *Scientific American* or *Popular Mechanics*, things in this world might be a little different.

Aaron Meier is a senior political science major.

Some of the most annoying aspects of college life are those persons, businesses and entities that leech out their existence on the backs of poor students. From PTTS, to overpriced restaurants, to obnoxious vendors hawking Houston Chronicle subscriptions, the parasites are on campus in force, draining wallets slowly but surely.

One of the most taxing of these bloodsuckers is your friendly campus bookstore. As the last holdouts of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, their anti-competitive, price-fixing ways have always meant unpleasant and inevitable academic expenses. But all of this changed since sales efficiencies of the Internet came online against the textbook market late last year, largely eliminating the middle man.

Though a number of websites, many extensively advertised on campus early in the spring semester, claim to have the lowest book prices, they all offer considerable savings on some selections, while charging near retail on others.

The best bet to find the lowest prices on any textbook is to visit the unbiased PriceScan service on the Internet.

This website offers a comprehensive pricing search of all the major book dealers on the web, and sorts them according to total cost, including shipping expenses.

The most important information to have when searching for a particular book is the ISBN number, which is a ten-character alphanumeric code that exactly identifies any book published in recent history.

One can easily find the ISBN numbers for a particular book by visiting the MSC Bookstore with a pad and pencil.

Find the books for a course and section, and write down the ISBN number. It can usually be found on the back cover of the book.

Though it takes some effort, 30 minutes of labor can easily save a student about \$100 to \$150 each semester on books, thanks to PriceScan's website.

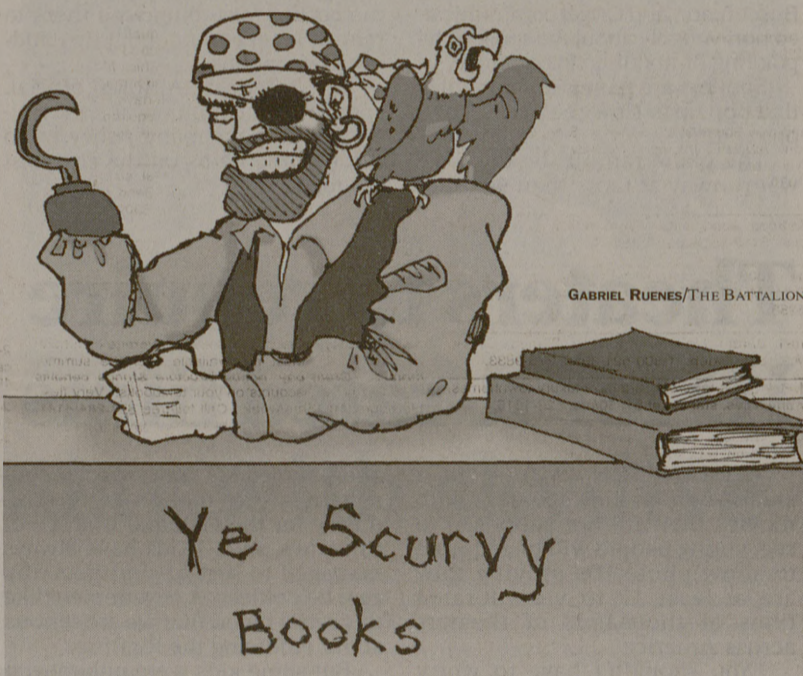
For example, consider an average fall semester freshman schedule. The coursework would typically include courses like PHYS 201, MATH 102, CHEM 101, BIOL 113 and POLS 206. A quick reference to online syllabi and a visit to PriceScan yielded an online total, including shipping, of \$362.75. The same books would

cost nearly \$500 retail after paying sales tax. No sales tax is charged on the Internet as long as the order is shipped from out of state.

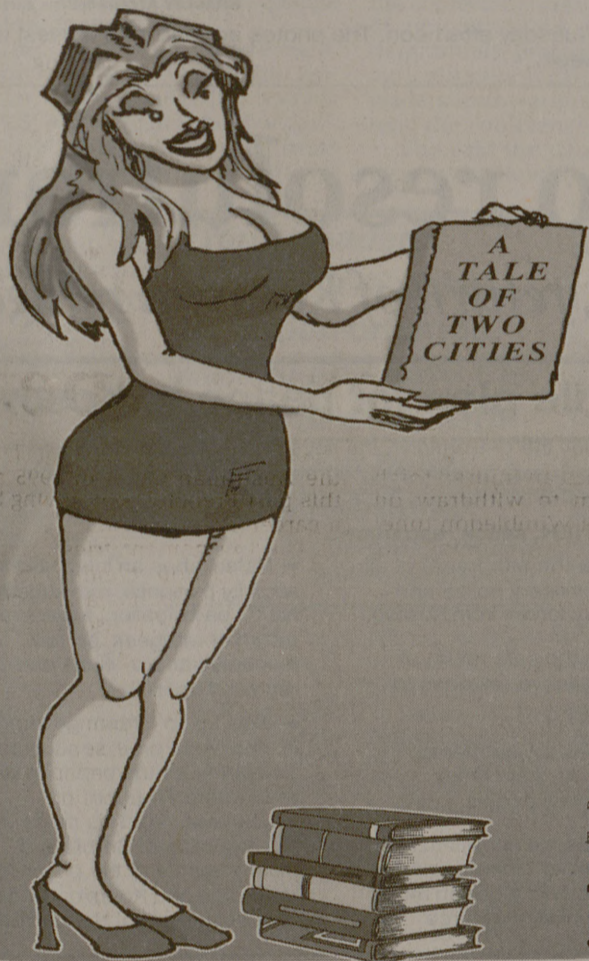
The price differences alone are considerable, but the perks keep coming. Online retailers give their customers a full 30 days for a refund, while local bookstores typically give only 14 days at the beginning of the semester. The locals also often have a "no refund" policy during finals, most likely to prevent students from buying books, studying with them and returning them.

However, online booksellers give you 30 days for refunds regardless of the time of the order, and their sales volume is such that they do not really care why or when books are returned. A really evil person could even order books shortly into a 5-week summer semester and return them right before finals for a free book rental, minus shipping costs.

Another benefit of buying books at dis-



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION



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And in *Notting Hill*, Hugh Grant plays a travel bookstore owner.

Okay, so maybe Grant isn't sexy, but in his past excursions, he has scored with Andie McDowell, Julianne Moore and Julia Roberts.

Not to mention his real-life scores with Elizabeth Hurley and the ever-so-ravishing Divine Brown.

In what Matrix-induced version of reality do bookstore owners look this good?

When was the last time anybody walked into Barnes and Noble and dropped their Rhumba Frappacino as the manager walked

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count prices is the ability to sell them back to local bookstores at the end of the semester, often at near the same price paid for them. For example, a Physical Chemistry book sold by the MSC for \$101.50 could be purchased online for \$60.00, and sold back to Rother's for \$48.00. Renting one's books for \$12 a semester is quite a deal.

If enough students buy their books elsewhere, then perhaps local bookstores will be forced to lower prices. In the meantime, students should take advantage of the broadened competition facilitated by the Internet.

Tom Owens is a senior chemical engineering major.

Summer students should read books for fun, not just for classes

Warren Chappell must have been thinking of summer school students when he once said, "The flood of print has turned reading into a process of gulping rather than savoring."



CALEB MCDANIEL

College is a flood of print, and ever more so than in a five-week summer session. There are virtually mountains of books to be read for classes, and they must be read quickly, understood even more quickly and then quickly regurgitated on papers. A student is lucky to have only three chapters of a book to read each night, and the summer weeks pass in a blur of reading, eating, sleeping and re-reading.

Supposedly, college students are used to this sort of reading schedule, or at least as used to it as they can be. The books we read have been picked for most of us since the first year of high school. Summer reading has become a part of life, to be accepted like other certainties such as taxes and death. There are some students who probably cannot remember the last time they read a book for pleasure. For many of them, this is only because they cannot remember a time when reading was a pleasure.

The souring of many students to reading is an unfortunate side effect of higher education. Swallowing many books whole often produces a nasty indigestion towards the very idea of reading.

And by the time leisure hours finally arrive, the last

thing most students want to do is plop down with another book, a word some of them utter as if it were a terrible profanity.

Even worse, too many students carry this distaste for reading with them throughout their lives.

Reading is work, not play, to the average American, and Herbert True could not have been far from his last name when he once speculated, "One half who graduate from college never read another book."

Fortunately, higher education does not have to make reading the equivalent of water torture for its students. But the only way to restore any inkling of joy to picking up a book is to work hard at it. If students find themselves loathing literature, they must train themselves to like it.

They must purposely create opportunities this summer to read for fun. Students will likely object to this program.

After all, the typical summer school schedule has already been described as stringent. Tests loom in the immediate future. There is studying to be done, and studying must necessarily take priority over good paperbacks. Time is short. The list of things to do is not.

These protests sound impressive but will usually crumble under closer inspection. If time can be made

for reruns of "Seinfeld" and "Friends," time can be made for reading.

Besides, watching television — especially late-night programming — is the best thing for zapping the very brain cells recently devoted to studying.

Picking up a good book, on the other hand, can provide a needed study break while continuing to educate. Reading non-assigned books, even mediocre ones, is guaranteed to improve academic success. First and foremost, reading is the only way to improve writing.

And if a student can restore the lost art of leisurely reading, that mountain of class books will look less nauseating. Learn to read for kicks, and you will start reading to learn for class.

It is time for students to reclaim reading for themselves. For a few more fleeting years, summer is still a vacation. If it must be a vacation with some classes, it should also be a vacation with some pleasurable reading.

For those who are not sure where to start in their revival of unforced reading, here are a few personal summer favorites that promise to entertain and educate at the same time.

For mystery lovers who like a thrill, try Michael Dibdin's *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story*. Do not be deceived by the title; this is not a dry, ordinary Holmes adventure. In a wonderful blend of fact and

fiction, Dibdin portrays Holmes and Watson tracking down the notorious Jack the Ripper. The book is short and fast-paced, and it ends with a deliciously surprising finish, courtesy of Dibdin's creative, if somewhat twisted, imagination.

For those who live for the legal thriller, forget John Grisham, who has gone from writing good books turned into bad movies to books written expressly for movie-making. Read Jonathan Harr's *A Civil Action* instead. Yes, the movie was disappointing. But if it is true books should not be judged by their covers, they definitely should not be judged by their movies. Harr's book is the best of its kind, and it is now available in paperback, well within a student's budget.

Everyone should read the Pulitzer-prize winning *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt. The autobiographical account of the author's childhood amidst squalid conditions in Ireland is funny and sobering at the same time. The book just arrived in bookstores in a paperback edition, making it the perfect pick for an enlightening summer read.

Masochists interested in reading can look up anything by Melville and self-inflict to their hearts' content. Everyone else should steer clear.

These recommendations are far from exhaustive, of course. The main thing is to read and read. Do not let textbooks suck the excitement out of summer. Try reading something not found on a syllabus for a change. Students will be glad they did.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

Gustave Flaubert
READ
in order to
live