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## My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian

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## *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

After focusing on cataloging during my MLIS degree, one would probably assume that I'm a diehard Dewey fan and a stickler for the meticulous organization of my shelves. Certainly, in the library I'm a firm adherent to organization, but as for my personal shelves, things are a bit more...chaotic. My secret is that I have absolutely no method of where to place my books. If I'm being honest, I don't even orient them all the same way. Regency romance mingles with Appalachian Trail guides; feminist theory works press up against adventure sci-fi; pristine hardbacks are thrown together with ratty flea market paperbacks. And if things weren't chaotic enough for you yet, all 14 of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series are sprinkled randomly throughout. I've been "reading" this series for the past nine years, promising myself every January that this would be the year to finish—yet they continue to languish on my shelves.



My sister recently asked me, "why on Earth do you do this to your books?" Despite the confusion it entails, I truly love the mess that is my shelves. To cram them all in, my single-level shelf actually has a second row of books behind the first. Bookception, if you will. Not knowing where anything is means I must sort through my books every time I'm looking for something, which sounds annoying, but actually keeps me in touch with all of my books. Without fail, I'll always find something I forgot I owned, or a book that fits my mood perfectly, or a book that sparks a good memory. Speaking of memories, one of the few children's books I have is a

signed copy of Avi's *The End of the Beginning*. My mom took me to a signing of his when I was around 10 years old, the first book event I ever attended. My mom passed away a while ago, and just looking at this book reminds me so strongly of her. If I had to choose just one, this would probably be the book I would keep.

Somewhere on the shelf (no telling where) is my one poetry book, Pablo Neruda's *Love Poems*. My adoration for it is clear from the dog-eared pages, marked-up stanzas, and severely broken spine. Rarely is it that I find a book that moves me enough to write in the pages, but I could not resist writing down all my thoughts about these gorgeous words. My love for these poems grew even further when my boyfriend read his favorites out loud to me in the original Spanish. It's safe to say that I find this book even more romantic than my actual romance novels. Despite romance being my favorite

genre, I have surprisingly little of it on my shelves. My one romance title is Amalie Howard's *The Rakehell of Roth*, a trade paperback with, in my opinion, a beautiful cover, but that my hairdresser called "smutty" when she saw me reading it while having my hair dyed.

The one thing I keep organized is the stack I call my excitement pile. I keep this stack on the top of my bookcase for easier access, keeping the books that top my to-read list in easy reach. The most recent addition to this pile is Richard Gilman-Opalsky's *The Communism of Love: An*

*Inquiry into the Poverty of Exchange Value*, a gem I found at my favorite feminist bookstore in Atlanta.

I have to admit, I have an obscene number of *Gone with the Wind* copies dominating my limited space. Even after a major book culling earlier this year, I have a whopping seven copies: four in English, a German edition sent from a friend after they returned home from their study abroad, an Icelandic edition my mother purchased for me at a flea market in Iceland, and a Hungarian edition from an old coworker from her trips back home to Budapest. I first read *Gone with the Wind* at age 12 and tore through all 1,037 pages in three days. Needless to say, I was in love with the story. Scarlett's bullheaded tenacity and the descriptions of beautiful ball gowns drew me back to the story over and over and over—I've read this book at least 200 times. But looking back on these copies today, especially given our current social climate, I can't help but cringe. This is less my guilty pleasure book and more



my book of shame. The extreme racism and classism Mitchell tosses about so casually is painful to read now, but I am still captivated by the exceptional storytelling. Despite the feeling of unease and disappointment this shelf brings me, it also reminds me of how far I've come, both as a reader and as a person. When I first fell in love with this story, I was a kid who wanted Scarlett to run after Rhett. But as I learned more about the world and my feminist values, I now can recognize this book for what it is: a product of its time that revolves around inexcusable hate and prejudice. Can I still love it? Absolutely! That's why all those books are still on my shelf, even if I do occasionally give them the side-eye. But the more important reason those books remain in my library is the reminder they serve: I have grown as a person and my days of mindlessly consuming media are, shall we say, gone with the wind.

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