

My Non-Woke Personal Library and Its Saving Virtues, Part 11



It's been an eleven week tour through Geoffrey Clarfield's bookshelves. What a ride. Which installment was your favorite? For me it was a toss up between "[Anthropology](#)," "[History](#)," and "[Music](#)." But the one that I will return to first to re-read though, is the chapter on [Canada](#). Every chapter of this essay series offered so much for curious minds. Thanks to Geoffrey, many book titles have been added to my ever growing list of "Must Reads." I truly hope to get to and through all of them.

While it is sad to see this series come to a close, readers can be assured that more of Geoffrey's insights will grace

these pages soon. In fact, next week I'm publishing a fascinating piece by Geoffrey called "How Post-Colonial Theory Undermines Ethnomusicology."

Geoffrey is constantly travelling, adventuring, thinking, and writing. A few weeks ago he sent me a video he captured on his phone of an elephant in Africa. The elephant was walking in front of him. It looked like he was ten to fifteen feet away. Apparently Geoffrey was not concerned. In the last couple weeks Geoffrey has been in Israel. He has been sending photos everyday of famous archaeological and biblical sites from Jerusalem and all over the countryside. He always has a lot on his mind, and always has an angle or two in which to write. We will probably be getting vivid descriptions and rich historical insights of the Holyland soon. Geoffrey is always writing, and we are so lucky because of it!

[James Pew](#)

The Unread (and the Reread)

By Geoffrey Clarfield

Finally, there are those books which came onto my shelves, remained unread, were subsequently discarded, and deservedly so.

Notable among these authors is Bill Gates. For a number of years I had his book, *The Way Ahead*, lying unread on my shelf. As his Yankee ingenuity was transforming the world, I thought it would be wise to read what he thinks and says. But as I began to discover that his company, Microsoft, was beginning to act like any other near monopoly, I recognized the all-too-common American pattern of a startup that improves the life of the average citizen only to become an aggressive anti-democratic and anti-competitive monopoly. I also read in other articles that his initial claims about developing software had more to do with the teams he chose to work with than his own purported old fashioned Yankee ingenuity. So I put his book

aside. As I write this in 2024, I now believe that Gates has become a Davos Globalist of the worst sort.

Then there is the Austrian Physicist, Fritjof Capra, whose fabulous book, *The Tao of Physics*, shows how the language of modern physics echoes that of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. I loved this book, so started to read other books by him, including one on "deep ecology," only to discover that he would, like the UN, like to reshape the world from the top down. At that point, I stopped reading Capra.

Then there is Jacques Derrida, a confusionist, self-anointed pseudo-Freudian post-modernist whose writings were *de rigeur* when I was a graduate student. After a number of years doing cross cultural fieldwork in Africa, I realized that his postmodern gobbledygook is just not worth reading. It has no basis. It certainly has no relevance for anthropology, and it was my anthropology professors who had him on the reading lists.

To bring the unread, undead full circle, by the time the American Anthropological Association decided to officially boycott Israeli academics, I had long ago stopped reading their journal. Once a paragon of ethnographic reporting, its mostly younger contributors are, authors of poorly researched, shrill pieces of advocacy for selective grievance groups.

I hasten to add that, here and there, there are anthropological researchers who still publish some good ethnography. There are also Conservative publishing houses like the Claremont Press, the New English Review and Encounter Books which publish worthwhile titles across many fields.

And then there are "discarded" books which, like the unnamed spirits of the dead in Greco Roman times, shall remain nameless. These include many books about "social theory," comprising endless rehashings of Darwin, Marx, Durkheim, Freud, and Weber, some of which I was forced to read as a

graduate student, but they were quickly discarded when age and experience taught me that I had invested thousands of hours reading gobbledygook. I vowed I would never refer to them again.

Rereading

I am a member in good standing of the Toronto Public Library and use its services regularly, but for a number of months while I was putting together this essay hackers had closed much of its online portal, so I did not have sure access to their catalogue or to the list of books that I have borrowed from them. Someone was shaking them down. Off the record, librarians have told me that the perpetrators were demanding a ransom to get the system up again.

I am also a member of the University of Toronto's Robarts Library, but during the draconian covid lockdowns in Canada, the librarians there told me that although I am a graduate, I was barred from using the library because access was reserved, indefinitely, for students and professors alone. So I have learned that I cannot depend on other libraries to provide universal access to the books and articles that I need to support a writer's life.

This is made much worse by the short-sighted practice of "deaccessioning," a term that librarians use when they decide to take a book off the shelf and sell it off privately. I have purchased many such institutionally discarded volumes that are now on my shelves. Usually, they are writings that are now considered "politically incorrect" by librarians.

I am forced to conclude that librarians are going Woke, and so the contents of public and university libraries are changing before our eyes, as books that do not accord with the current political cultural narrative are discarded to make way for the invasion of LGBT books, especially into the children's sections of public and school libraries, books which are age

inappropriate, and all too often obscene.

Sadly, I have come to agree with some historians of libraries who tell us that the classics, and many specialized academic studies from the past that have survived and come down to us over the centuries, existed and survived exclusively in private libraries. So, I cultivate and cherish my private library, and especially its hard bound collection of the Bible and the one hundred Great Books recommended by Mortimer Adler in *How To Read a Book*. Copies of these can be found on my two sons' bookshelves, as well, so there is still hope for coming generations.

When I once again go downstairs and contemplate the books, on my shelves, I see books by Thucydides, Herodotus, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, McNeill, Braudel, Freud, Robertson Smith, Boaz, Benedict, Hallpike, Hornbostel, Sachs, Lenski, Lomax, Borges, Bowles and so many other writers whom I have come across and read. I then get a non-rational desire to read them all once more. Ancients or moderns, history or ethnography, economics, politics or international development, theology and science.

Any takers? Any or all of the above?

For me, the answer is "all of the above." I hope it will be the same for you.