

A Writers Guide To The Library Oracle & Its Angel

By Justin Patrick Moore

For Robert Moss, who builds Imaginal Libraries within the House of Time.

“A big library really has the gift of tongues & vast potencies of telepathic communication.”-Northrop Frye¹

Theory

As a writer and reader the library can be both a beneficial and a detrimental place to work. On the one hand it is a garden of endless literary delights and cerebral pleasure, with seductive enticements on shelf after shelf, offering more texts than can easily be read in a lifetime and promises great strain to eyes that pore libidiously over dozens of opened volumes. On the other hand the library encourages that day and night be spent in flirtatious escapades with its otherworldly treasures. It is all too easy, when firmly ensconced within its whispering walls, to be swept into maelstroms of the imagination, be oversaturated by enumerations of scientific exploits, and cogitate on intellectual critiques of reason written by scribbling madmen. The library is a rebus of reality itself, a labyrinth of rhetoric wherein one can become lost for countless incarnations.

I have known souls trapped in dusty archive boxes. I have been witness to the call of ancestors who speak from genealogical cemetery records. I have seen old men hunched over the Poetic Edda with a magnifying glass in one hand and a raven perched on each shoulder.

With its café on the mezzanine serving coffee and rice, its staff lounge with refrigerators full of bagged lunches, its vending machines serving junk food to the scholarly, it is not necessary to ever leave the library. In those sad moments when it closes and I am forced leave I find myself grateful that at least pieces of it can be taken with me. In my own tiny library at home I have a shelf reserved for books from the one where I work. In this way I allow my books to mix and mingle among those I bring home in the hopes that they will reproduce. Given that the library books are only leant out for a predetermined and limited amount of time, the biblioteca ensures the eternal return of its patrons, securing the benefits of mutual aid between all parties.

As a writer though, the library can be damaging to self-esteem, to the bit of necessary egoism, which dictates that the writing should be continued, the quill picked up again, and arthritic fingers once again tap out lines on a board of keys. This damage is especially pervasive if the books by the yet-to-be published writer are not counted and cataloged among the holy chosen. When faced with a whole shelf of Balzac the miniature tidbits my pen manages to eek in a given day seem feeble, insipid, and uninspired. When standing in the D section looking at books by Dick, Philip K., and Delany, Samuel R., it is not uncommon for me to wonder out of mind, lonely as cloud, hostage to thoughts that I shall be forever doomed to merely comment upon and critique the works of others.

When I find the rare gem by a belated author whom no one else has heard of, that the librarians (who are supposedly keepers of natural order) have slated for the discard

bin in order to make room for more novels by the likes of James Patterson, it is easy to give in to pessimistic thinking, contemplating an ultimate fate where one's life's work is casually thrown out and replaced by drivel. It is natural for a writer to feel small when faced with the enormity of the library. Even if published, the work could be relegated to the stacks, where mishaps by uncaring shelvers (who blasting angry pop music into their skulls with tinnitus inducing headphones instead of meditating within the austerity of the cloistered silence), easily and frequently push books into the gaps between shelves. Stuck in that netherworld it could lurk for untold decades company only to silverfish and spiders as the dry dust of rheumatic cobwebs settle across pages whose memory remains unopened. In as much as these fears take hold, the library will remain an unassailable fortress, and the writer who works there a prisoner to whom the pencil and typewriter have become foreign objects, a mere servant who works only at preserving and ordering what others have written.

There is however another way.

The tutelary spirits who reside there can be of assistance, chief among them being the Library Angel. I first heard of this being in the work of Robert Moss², who in turn borrowed the term from Arthur Koestler. Though I have only known this term for a few years at the time of this writing, I have no doubts that I have been brushing up against this divine messenger since my first trips to the libraries with my Mother when I was wee lad in the single digit age group. She was also known to the ancient Sheppard poets and Cabalists who called him Herachiel, one of the seventy-two names of the Shemhamphorae. There are several variations of the name, including the one I originally learned from Robert Moss' blog, Harahel³. Others are Herochiel, and Herachael all of these being transliterations of the original Hebrew spelling: Heh, Resh, Cheth, Aleph, Lamed⁴. The Sheppard poets of Judaism thought of her as being in charge of libraries, archives, schools and universities. She has the ability to open minds to new information and new ideas. The word "angel" does mean messenger after all.

The being works through coincidence and synchronicity. The library is its oracle, delivering with a book or magazine article divine revelations and flashes of mythopoetic illumination. Arthur Koestler describes this being as "in charge of providing cross-references"⁵ thus she is of particular importance to researchers and writers. Working at libraries for over a decade I have had the pleasure of tracking the many ways Herochiel acts as an interlocutor between the ideas contained in one's head and the feelings in one's heart, and what is continually being scanned back into the computer system of the library as I process recent returns. The field of reference within this ever circulating domain is one of fractal chaos. Yet Herochiel delivers in outward reality, via the titles of books, movies, albums, and other materials vital messages corresponding to the burning questions of mind and soul. It is like bibliomancy on a vast scale practiced amongst the two million books and 160,000 plus audio-visual items in the collection at the Main library alone, not counting all those from the satellite branches that nonetheless pass through my hands.

It never ceases to amaze me how when thinking about a subject or talking about one heatedly with my coworkers, something about the subject, or by the author being discussed, will turn up amongst all the possibilities. Of course we are a privileged bunch working in the center of an intertextual cyclone, and as with all oracles, the one of the library can be fickle and obtuse. It often speaks in riddles, and the required actions to

bring about alignment of the soul may not always be exactly clear. One standard for knowing intuitive truths to actually be true is the Aha moment when shivers of heat or chills rush up the spine to mix and mingle with psychic insight. It should be no surprise to the open minded that a library can work in this supernormal fashion. Inscribed in the wall above its shelves in the famous library of Alexandria were the words “the place of the cure of the soul.”⁶ The Alexandrian library was but one part of the Museion, or Institution of the Muses, from which the modern word museum is derived⁷. Our modern libraries are thus very fitting places to go for those seeking the kind of amusement that only Muse provides.

Experiences

The following are a few illustrations of how the Library Angel works, mostly taken from my own personal stories.

The most striking and numinous example happened in relation to a dream I had on December 14th, 2009 that I titled “Dreams: A Survival Research Laboratory”: *I am at a museum of contemporary arts. I go into a gallery where various sound oriented multimedia installations are on display.*

I overhear a curator talking to an artist, “I’d like to put out a music CD of yours as part of a current series we are running. It will be in a limited edition of thirty copies.” Then I see some things on the wall, a circuit-bent⁷ sculpture with attached earbud headphones for listening. I go around the corner and see something that reminds me of the work of the West Coast artists collective Survival Research Labs⁸. It is a mechanoid robot that has a taxidermied dog/duck head attached to it, and it is coming after me. I am quite taken aback though not scared exactly, though the spectacle is grisly.

Later that day in my blog⁹ I wrote about my thoughts on how art and the magick of the imagination have a role to play in the survival of the human species. I still hadn’t penetrated the image of the dog/duck though, and what it might mean to me. I was aware that the real life artist group Survival Research Labs often did employ taxidermied animals and roadkill into their mechanical sculptures, but I didn’t feel any resonance in pursuing that particular lead. Later, back on the clock, I looked down at a book I was holding in my hand, as I was about to put it away on a cart. It was by a biologist named Glen Chilton, titled “The Curse of the Labrador Duck: My Obsessive Quest to the Edge of Extinction”¹⁰. In seeing those words I had a key to my dream, the Labrador being a type of dog, but also a specific, and now extinct, type of duck. In reading some of this book I learned that Chilton is the world’s foremost authority on this species that is no more. I never finished the book because it mostly detailed Chilton’s manic search to examine every known stuffed specimen of the extinct bird in the world. The Library Angel gave me exactly what I needed to understand the image in my dream, and a message from a species that once shared this planet with us. The conjunction of dream and synchronicity really brought home to me the stark reality of extinction, and the sobering thought that humans wanton destruction of other species might be the downfall of our own. In readings stemming from other dreams I have researched more concrete information about what actions humans might take to survive, and of how we can act as a voice for the earth to protect the other beings here (but that is another story and shall be told another time).

On the day I began this essay, returning from a Mediterranean diner where I like to eat with one hand and write with the other, I decided to do an experiment. Whatever book I first pulled out of a box to be scanned and checked in I would take as a personal message from the Library Oracle. The book I got was a thriller novel by Sharon Sala called “Nine Lives”¹¹ not my usual reading fare. I contemplated what it could mean for awhile before dismissing it from my mind, thinking that not every book I come across contains a message. I wish I had paid closer attention. The next day my wife and I went out to have an evening coffee at one of our favorite spots. One of our Cats ran out the door. Lucyfur is allowed to spend some time outside, but we prefer to have him in the house when we are gone. He came back in with us when we got home. It was a few hours later when I saw some bloody papers on my desk, and Audrey saw drips of blood on our sheets. Calling the cat, we were horrified to find that it had been punctured in the stomach, how we do not know. He had to be rushed to an all night vet clinic, where an emergency surgery was performed. Luckily no internal organs were damaged, and our cat is recovering well, but I can’t help but wonder if I could have saved him some pain, and my family an expensive vet bill, if I had given the “Nine Lives” message more credence.

The following story is recounted in a wonderful essay on art and activism by John Jordan and shows how astonishing the interplays between human and Angel can be:

Last year I was in the British Library, researching clowns and tricksters and I came upon a book about synchronicity. I opened it at random and read a story about how the writer Rebecca West had been researching a specific episode of the Nuremberg war crimes trials. She had been horrified to find that the transcripts were catalogued under completely arbitrary headings and impossible for any researcher to navigate. In frustration she took the first volume that came to hand, carelessly opened it at random to find she was not only holding the correct volume, but had opened it at exactly the right page. I put the book down and gazed over the reading desk at the person sitting in front of me. He was one of those characters that seems to dwell permanently in libraries, a large dusty sedentary bespectacled man, reading “A Train of Powder” by Rebecca West. The very book that collects her Nuremburg trials writings. Of all the hundreds upon thousand of volumes in the British library, of all the hundreds of seats in this reading room, how could it be that I happened to have sat in front of this person, with this particular book in his hands.¹²

There are many more examples from my own life I could cite, as I record many of these book related synchronicities in my journal. Rather than to continue to talk about my own experiences further, I would rather instigate and inspire you to have some of your own.

III. Application

I started off this essay by looking at the library from my perspective as a writer. Having discussed how the library operates in an oracular fashion through the agency of its governing angel, I will now talk about how the aspiring writer can cooperate with this being to bring greater depth to her or his projects.

The best writers are known to be voracious readers. The open text of the library offers access to the master who will choose you with the help of Herochiel. Everyone who reads avidly has favorite authors, often trying to foist books and authors on other people in their zealous enthusiasm for the written word. It is easy to forgive this breach of personal boundaries because it is a sin I am notoriously guilty of. Yet we should be careful what we read, because like music and other types of food we don't want to fill up on junk. If we go by the bestseller lists, literary canons, and what everyone else tells us we should be reading, then there looms the danger that what we ingest will be of no personal relevance to us. When the Library Angel is invoked you can be sure of discovering those works that will feed the soul. It is important for writers to keep water in the well, to not to let it run dry. Keeping the well full isn't done only through reading, but reading can help keep it stocked full of big fish¹³. And big fish are what you'll want to be reeling in with your stories, poems, and essays.

Of course if you visit the library frequently, or work at one like I do, Herochiel is liable to send so many books across your path that you will find it difficult to read all of them. The amassed piles will continue to grow until, like Babel, they collapse under the weight. You can't write if you spend all your time reading, so when your towers of books start cluttering every available space in your household take it as a sign that you should clear off your desk and start penning your own.

But what better way to learn then craft than by being apprenticed to a master?

It may not be so easy to find a pro that is willing to work with you. In the meantime twank¹⁴ the authors you love, stand on the shoulders of literary giants, cop a bit of their style and incorporate it into your own. When you feel pessimistic, pick up a biography of an artist you admire and think of their life and struggles, their rejections, their perseverance in the face of adversity, and the bodies of work they created anyway. Afterwards, writing will seem doable again. Twanking is a fun exercise in its own right anyway, whether pro, amateur, or beginner. Copying the style of a masterful writer improves your skills. Don't worry about losing your own voice. What you take from others will be absorbed, and when fully processed and assimilated, you will find that rather than merely copying a style or approach, your own style will have been informed by all that you have read. (The beauty of texts lay in their relationships to one another.) Learn to be the vehicle of the voice and it will speak through you on its own accord.

The best way to do that is by writing every day. Start in the morning with your dreams when you wake up. You are guaranteed a fresh delivery of material that way, so no excuses. Your dreams will feed you plots, poems, characters, and exciting lines of research besides; all personally relevant, but more often than not relevant to the community as well.

Robert Moss says, "the most important book on dreams you ever read is your own dream journal."¹⁵ I heartily agree. Furthermore the most important library you visit may be your own. In his book "Dreamgates"¹⁶ Robert gives instructions for entering and developing a personal Dream Library within the House of Time. In the imaginal space of your Dream Library you can look at the books, stories, essays and poems you are yet to write. It can be used as a gateway for further imaginal journeying, by stepping into scenes from the books in your library. This is a powerful tool not only for creativity but for soul remembering.

Outside of research and keeping your well stocked, the Library Angel can give writers the next image or sentence they need to break through a block, or navigate their way through a tricky paragraph or scene. This happened to me recently. I had set aside work on an ongoing story because I had reached an impasse. In those times, rather than give up on writing, I'll usually journal, pull out or start a shorter piece, and keep my hands moving if for no other reason than the exercise. I knew in some ways what the next part of the story would entail, how my character would react to his new situation, I just didn't know how to get the ball rolling on it again. Then somebody dumped into the book-drop an armload of titles on the Kabbalah. One of them was titled "Dreams of Being Eaten Alive: The Literary Core of the Kabbalah" by David Rosenberg¹⁷. In the fine tradition of intertextuality as practice by the likes of Umberto Eco and Jorge Luis Borges I borrowed the title and adapted it for my story. When I sat down in front of my notebook with that phrase in mind the entire next scene flowed out of me unbidden, and it took me to places I didn't know were inside me.

I have also been experimenting with meditating on the Hebrew name of the Library Angel, by using a method taught by the Western esoteric mystery school, the Golden Dawn. It consists of visualizing the letters of the Hebrew name to build up what they termed a Telesmatic Image¹⁸. Those versed in ceremonial magick should have no problem devising elaborate invocations of this being. While these practices are no doubt powerful and effective I do not know if they are necessary. Merely thinking of the Library Angel seems to keep the press of synchronicity rolling.

It is nice to know her name though, and it can be used as a mantra, either separately or combined with the visualization practice above in order to invoke her presence. The next time you go to a library, try chanting the name a few times before going in the door, walk to a random shelf, pull of a random book, and open it to a random page for a personal message. Or just go in with an open mind to the possibility of her intervention.

Herochiel is said to not only rule over libraries and archives, but also has an influence on printing, publishing, and the book industry in general¹⁹. I will not forget her name, but keep it close to my lips as I set about navigating the world of editors and agents, big publishers and small presses. By showing my thankfulness to her in my continued efforts at writing I hope to stay on her good side.

-Justin Patrick Moore, March 8th, 2010
(Sequestered in the Stacks of Cincinnati's Main Library)

Notes:

1. Quoted in "The Library At Night", by Alberto Manguel, Yale University Press, 2006
2. Mentioned in Robert's lively blog (www.mossdreams.blogspot.com) in a post titled "Shelf elves, Charlotte Bronte, & printers devils" at the following URL: <http://mossdreams.blogspot.com/2010/01/shelf-elf-charlotte-bronte-printers.html>
3. "Images as Energy Carriers" by Robert Moss at <http://mossdreams.blogspot.com/2010/02/ability-to-generate-images-and-relate.html>

4. "Godwin's Cabalistic Encyclopedia" by David Godwin, third edition, Llewellyn Publications, 1997
5. Quoted in "In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imagination", by John Jordan, available at www.thisisliveart.co.uk/pdf_docs/SRG_Jordan.pdf
6. "The Library At Night", by Alberto Manguel, Yale University Press, 2006
7. Circuit bending is an art form innovated by Cincinnati artist Q. Reed Ghazala (www.anti-theory.net) Reed says, "The circuit-bent instrument, often a re-wired audio toy or game, is an alien instrument: alien in electronic design, alien in voice, alien in musician interface. Through this procedure, all around our planet, a new musical vocabulary is being discovered. A new instrumentarium is being born."
8. <http://www.srl.org/> : "Survival Research Laboratories was conceived of and founded by Mark Pauline in November 1978. Since its inception SRL has operated as an organization of creative technicians dedicated to re-directing the techniques, tools, and tenets of industry, science, and the military away from their typical manifestations in practicality, product or warfare. Since 1979, SRL has staged over 45 mechanized presentations in the United States and Europe. Each performance consists of a unique set of ritualized interactions between machines, robots, and special effects devices, employed in developing themes of socio-political satire. Humans are present only as audience or operators."
9. www.sothismedias.com
10. "The Curse of the Labrador Duck: My Obsessive Quest to the Edge of Extinction" by Glen Chilton, Harper Collins, 2009
11. "Nine Lives" by Sharon Sala, Mira, 2006
12. John Jordan, see note five above.
13. "Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity" by David Lynch, Tarcher, 2007
14. I borrowed the term twank from Rudy Rucker. I had a dream about Twanking him on March 7, 2010, and had the thought that I should include the term in this essay. Twanking is a word he coined to describe the experience of getting into the mindspace of an author you really like in order to mimic his or her style, and also to improve your own writing. See "MS Found In Minidrive" for a short story about this, collected in "Mad Professor: The Uncollected Short Stories of Rudy Rucker", Thunders Mouth Press, 2007
15. "Conscious Dreaming: A Spiritual Path for Everyday Life" by Robert Moss, Three Rivers Press, 1996
16. "Dreamgates: An Explores Guide to the Worlds of Soul, Imagination, and Life Beyond Death" by Robert Moss, Three Rivers Press 1998. (Look for a new edition by April 2010 from New World Library.) The Dream Library is also further elaborated upon in his book "The Secret History of Dreaming" released from New World Library in 2008 (see the chapter titled "From the Dream Library"). Further study can be had in an expanded chapter from "The Dreamers Book of the Dead: A Soul Travelers Guide to Death, Dying and the Other Side", Destiny Books 2005, online at: http://mossdreams.com/Design%202009/Archives/essays/2010.03_friend%201.htm

17. "Dreams of Being Eaten Alive: The Literary Core of the Kabbalah" by David Rosenberg, Harmony, 2000
18. for more information on this technique see, "The Golden Dawn: The Original Account of the Teachings, Rites & Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order" as revealed by Israel Regardie, Llewellyn Publications, 2002
19. see: <http://guideangel.com/59.html>