

## *Journey Through the Book*

Richard D. Katzev

*Culture is not only passed on orally or by instinctive imitation, but above all through reading and study, hence also through the assistance of such a small object as a bookmark.*

Marco Ferreri

While only a few readers place marks in the margin by the notable passages they find on the page, almost all mark their place in a book in some fashion when they put the book down. I had forgotten about the special nature of this practice until from out of the blue a friend recently sent me a beautiful book on the subject of bookmarks.<sup>1</sup> What an unusual subject for a book, I thought. The small volume is much like a catalogue that you would find at a museum. In fact, it was published in conjunction with a bookmark exhibition held in Milan a few years ago that was organized by Italian furniture manufacturer.

Again I thought how strange that seemed—what do bookmarks have to do with manufacturing furniture? However, the author assured me that a furniture manufacturer's interest in bookmarks should not appear the least bit odd by pointing out that the tables and chairs that his firm makes are closely associated with the act of reading and studying, both of which require that a bookmark be close at hand. Who can deny such impeccable logic?

Each page of the book displays a collection of bookmarks reproduced in their approximate size and color and organized around a common theme—bookshops, publishers, cinemas, propaganda, cosmetics, etc. I had no idea there were so many different varieties of bookmarks or that they were often crafted with such artistic skill.

The book is a work of art in itself, and it started me mulling over the role that bookmarks

---

<sup>1</sup> Marco Ferreri. (1995). *Bookmarks*. Corraini Editore: Mantova, Italy

play in my own reading life, and then, the more I dwelled on it, what they mean for readers in general.

I don't know if you feel the same, but I'm very particular about the bookmarks I use. They have to be just the right size. I don't like small ones like the business cards or bus tickets that some readers use; they tend to fall out of books or get lost somewhere, so they are really quite useless. I don't much care for paper clips that crease the pages of the books I am reading or those printed on flimsy paper that tear or bend easily. The bookmarks at Powell's in Portland, Oregon, said to be one of the world's largest bookstores, used to be like that. I never liked them at all and always recycled them whenever I found one in a book I had purchased there. But Mr. Powell must have taken to heart comparable stories from his many loyal customers for just recently I noticed he has stiffened up his bookmarks so that they now remain in the books I buy there, rather than on the stack of papers in my recycling box.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:49 PM  
Deleted: are

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:50 PM  
Deleted: just put them

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:51 PM  
Deleted: in my recycling box

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:51 PM  
Deleted: up

One of my favorite bookmarks is given out by a small, independent bookstore in Portland that I've been going to for almost 40 years. It is a miracle the store is still in business, given the likes of Amazon.com and the crowd at Borders and Barnes & Noble. The store is called Twenty-Third Avenue Books, and they have an almost perfect bookmark, one that has remained the same during all the years that I've been going there. They keep doling them out from an inventory that must number in the millions.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:52 PM  
Deleted: 30

They are just the right size, about five inches long, and just the right texture, firm and not easily bent. It would not surprise me if I still had some of the very first they gave to me. Their address and phone number is printed on one side, while on the others is a quote by A. Edward Newton: "The buying of more books than one can read is nothing less than the soul reaching toward...infinity." Nothing fancy, just the basics, along with a suggestion about how to help them stay in business. I am also partial to their bookmarks (I never throw one away) because I like the atmosphere in the store, the people who work there, and the fact that it is still operating after all these years and all the changes that have taken place in the neighborhood and the book selling business.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:53 PM  
Deleted: bookish

Some of the books I like to read are reviewed in [The New York Times](#) or one of the other literary publications I've been reading lately. If it is thoughtful analysis, I will print a copy, fold it into bookmark shape, and keep it to use as a bookmark in my copy of the book. This makes a dandy bookmark, one that I can review from time to time as I read the book. Not colorful or the least bit artistic, but definitely informative, as well as functional. I seem to be using them more and more lately, which is too bad for all the bookmark artists and printers hard at work at their trade.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:54 PM  
Deleted: t

Every now and then I read a book that is a treasure. Some of these are reference books, like the dictionary or encyclopedia. Others are books of paintings or photographs. These books clearly require one of the cherished bookmarks that I've collected over the years in my travels. These usually turn out to be made of thin leather with a calligraphed message or distinctive symbol printed on the front side. Or [the book](#) might already include one of those colorful ribbon strips that sometimes accompany those really fine and important books, as well as all my red Michelin guides of hotels and restaurants in Italy and France.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:56 PM  
Deleted: they

These narrow cloth or silk ribbons that are bound into the book at the top of the spine are said to be the eighteenth and nineteenth century precursors of the modern bookmark. It is a mystery why they aren't included in every book. Wonder of wonders, the *Paris Review* now includes a bookmark with each issue. Such a simple idea--promote the periodical, aid those who take their time reading the material, point the way to the publisher's website where the reader can search the archive, listen to poems, and by golly also subscribe. Then again, maybe it is not such a good idea, since if it is widely adopted it will [likely](#) be the end of bookmark craftsman, as well as the pleasure of collecting distinctive bookmarks.

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:57 PM  
Deleted: pretty much

I keep my most valued bookmarks in a very special box upon my desk. My wife, who knows all too well how keen I am about nifty boxes, gave it to me on [one of my](#) birthdays. The box is about the size of an egg carton, opens with a hinged lid, and has always sat upon my desk ever since I received it. It has more than enough room to house

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:58 PM  
Deleted: one year

Preferred Customer 11/6/05 11:58 PM  
Deleted: that

all my favorite bookmarks. The lid is appropriately calligraphed with passages about writing: *“Writing is nothing more than a guided dream (Jorge Luis Borges). If there’s a book you really want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it (Toni Morrison). True ease in writing comes from art not chance (Proust).”*

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:01 AM  
Deleted: .

Most of the special bookmarks that I place in this box are from Italy, some [are](#) from Oxford, and a couple that I still have [are](#) from the Library of Congress. I also keep at least one from my favorite bookstores—Keplers in Menlo Park, Cody’s in Berkeley, Blackwells in London, WH Smith in Paris, and Powells, just down the block from my home. I also keep one made by the publisher of a little book of essays that I wrote. This bookmark has a blurb about the book and a photograph of me with my cat, Ernie, sitting on my shoulders. Silly, isn’t it? These books do more than allow me to mark my place in a book. They also set loose a string of associations [about](#) the place I visited, who I was with, what the weather was like, and what I did when I was there, or, in the case of the bookmark for my recent book, the pleasure I had in writing those essays.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:02 AM  
Deleted: of

One of the principal rules of bookmark [use](#) is that the book and its bookmark must be suitably matched. You wouldn’t want to use a bookmark from Twenty-[T](#)hird Avenue Books in the Second Edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* or the *Collected Photographs of Edward Steichen*. Books like those call for one of those special leather bookmarks with the calligraphed text and striped bottom edge.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:03 AM  
Deleted: ing

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:03 AM  
Deleted:

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:03 AM  
Deleted: T

I’ve asked a few of my reader friends if they have any special preference about the bookmarks they use. One reported she uses any old item that happens to be hanging around, like an old post card, Polaroid, or food stamp pamphlet. Another wrote to me that she never leaves a bookstore without checking to see if they have a bookmark to add to her rather enormous collection. She reported that, aside from bookstores, her best finds are in museums. She is also particular about her bookmarks, noting that she doesn’t really like the metal or plastic versions because they don’t feel quite right. Who wants to keep a lump of metal in the middle of a book?

A variety of bookmarks have made an appearance in works of literature. Louse in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* was said to be an avid reader who used "hairpins, inside the library books where she had marked her place." Christine the professor in Tessa Hadley's short story, *Mother's Son*, used a widely employed bookmarking technique: "...books by Rhys and Woolf and Bowen were piled all around her, some of them open face down on the table, some of them bristling with torn bits of papers as bookmarks." More recently, and to my relief, the art of bookmarking has been restored to its aesthetic integrity by Michael Ondaatje in *Divisadero*: "Once Lucien picked up a book that the thief had been reading and saw a sprig of absinthe leaves used as a bookmark. That felt like the only certain thing about the man, and from then on, every few days, the writer carefully noted the progress of the absinthe, making its own journey through the plot."

The other day I asked my wife, a voracious reader, if she had thought much about the place of bookmarks in her reading life. She replied quite simply that she never uses a bookmark, with the clear implication that my question was pretty stupid. I thought that odd at the time, until I realized she usually reads a book from start to finish, so obviously she would have no need for anything as mundane as a bookmark. Neither did my aunt, who I recalled the other day, used to tear each page out of a book once she had finished reading it. What a booklover she was! Of course, I only saw her do that when she was reading cheap paperback novels. Since I never saw her reading anything else, I doubt if she ever had need for anything as humdrum as a bookmark.

On the other hand, another reader friend of mine reports that she has a special fondness for bookmarks largely because she often makes her own. She recounted the construction of several when she was at the beach with her daughter and grandchildren. The bookmarks they made that day included glued shells, sand, and seagull feathers. It was a good memory for her. Another came from a time when she was sitting around with some close friends and someone suggested they make bookmarks for one another. She still has a couple of those, and every time she uses one, it reminds her of some special people and the times they've had together.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:05 AM

Deleted:

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:05 AM

Deleted:

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:07 AM

Deleted: such occasion

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:08 AM

Deleted: was

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:08 AM

Deleted: they

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:08 AM

Deleted: were

I have recently adopted the practice of ordering some of my books on the Internet, almost exclusively from Amazon.com. I don't always like doing that because it comes at the expense of my favorite local bookshops. But Amazon is quick, and convenient, and I don't have to suit up in the winter to go over to Powells or Twenty-Third Avenue Books. Amazon almost always has a new copy of every book I want, and then some.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:09 AM  
Deleted: Recently

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:10 AM  
Deleted: ive

In the old days, Amazon used to send me an attractive bookmark along with each order. They were made of firm paper, colorfully decorated, were a goodly length (8 inches), and adorned with a booklover's quote on one side. *A book is like a garden carried in the pocket* (Chinese Proverb). *When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left I buy food and clothes* (Erasmus). *The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it* (Elizabeth Drew). *When you sell a man a book, you don't sell him 12 ounces of paper and ink and glue—you sell him a whole new life* (Christopher Morley).

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:11 AM  
Deleted: .

A few years ago, Amazon stopped including bookmarks with my order. That was unfortunate. I still have every one they sent me housed in my box of favorite bookmarks.

I wonder why they stopped the practice, I must e-mail Jeff Bezos to find out. He has become one of my virtual friends, and I often send him an e-mail. But instead of attractive bookmarks, he now sends me a traveling coffee mug each Christmas. Quite frankly, I'd prefer a bookmark with an expression that reminds me how lucky I am to be able to read the books in the packages that he sends.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:12 AM  
Deleted: ?

I have been going to Italy a great deal lately. I don't know exactly why except that I have come to feel at home there and am rather taken with the life and beauty that surrounds me. Most of the time I stay in Florence, where I rent an apartment for a month or two. Over the years, I have discovered all the English language bookstores in the Centro, some of which rival anything you might find in this country or England. Each one has its own bookmark, now duly added to my collection. But mostly I've been accumulating those with beautiful pictures of the Tuscan landscape. They are just the right size, printed on

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:13 AM  
Deleted: that has been

heavy paper, with a photograph in the center-- a field of sunflowers, a villa in the distance, vines hanging limp with grapes, the golden hillsides of Tuscany.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:14 AM  
Deleted: are

Along with its countless works of art and historical monuments, Florence is known as a center for printing fine paper. One of the most renowned printers is the Bottega d'Arte Giulio Ginnini & Figlio. They have designed a distinctive tri-fold bookmark that describes in four languages their fine paper products, including sheets of paper salvaged from the books that were irreparably damaged in the great Florentine flood of 1966. It is not surprising that this has become one of my most cherished bookmarks, also housed quite naturally in my special bookmark box.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:15 AM  
Deleted: also

Bookmarks have not escaped the wonders of the digital age either. A 21<sup>st</sup> century reader can now purchase a digital bookmark with a built-in dictionary, the ever-popular Selco Bookmark Dictionary II. It is said to hold 130,000 words with "definitions thoroughly revised and updated." They can be had at Amazon.com for a little over \$35. Whoever heard of paying for a bookmark? The "keypad" of this gadget is no thicker than your ordinary bookmark. However, it is attached at the top to a modest-size LCD screen that not only displays the meaning of words, but when it is not in the dictionary mode, also the date and time of day for readers who can't live without this information. There is a scrolling feature for those wordy definitions, plus a key for viewing the previous definition. As if that is not enough, it also incorporates a calculator for readers trying to solve Fermant's Last Theorem. I have been rendered speechless by the thing. The screen sits up upon the top of the keypad, like Humpty-Dumpty on his wall. I have a feeling it won't be long before my jazzy new Selco Bookmark Dictionary II will experience a similar fate.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:16 AM  
Deleted: C

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:18 AM  
Deleted:

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:16 AM  
Deleted:

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:19 AM  
Deleted: who are

For readers ready to upgrade to a four-star deluxe bookmark, I can report that Tiffany's new bamboo leaf/scarab bookmark in sterling silver is now available. I saw it advertised in *The Times* the other day and was duly informed that it is designed for bookmark lovers who want to add a touch of glamour to their favorite coffee table book. Each one is carefully embossed with bamboo stalks and a tiny copper and gold beetle. At \$120, it

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:20 AM  
Deleted: who are

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:20 AM  
Deleted: r

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:20 AM  
Deleted: -

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:20 AM  
Deleted: o

would make a perfect Christmas gift for all your bookish friends. You don't live near a Tiffany store? No problem; just go to [www.tiffany.com](http://www.tiffany.com) to order this gem. Better do so before they run out; I am sure the supply is limited.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:21 AM  
Deleted: ,

The Internet has given birth to new meaning for the word "bookmark." Now there are digital bookmarks to accompany all those "real world" versions that have given readers such pleasure over the centuries. If you ask someone to describe a bookmark, they are likely to tell you it is one of their favorite Web pages that can be reached by clicking on its link in the browser they are using. Of course, there is nothing aesthetically appealing about these kinds of bookmarks, nor does their appearance vary in any particular respect. They are surely not going to be collected or treasured like the bookmarks of yesteryear, and no one is going to get very choosy about how they look or feel either.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:21 AM  
Deleted: -

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:21 AM  
Deleted: recently

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:22 AM  
Deleted: ed

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:22 AM  
Deleted: today

It bothers me a bit to dilute the meaning of an object that is as richly valued as a bookmark that we use in reading a book, so I think it might be a really good idea to find another way to refer to the Web pages that we want to remember. How about webmark, virtualmark or digimark? Any of those terms would do. Don't they denote more accurately what a Web site is than does the word "bookmark?"

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:22 AM  
Deleted: either

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:23 AM  
Deleted: .

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:23 AM  
Deleted: S

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:24 AM  
Deleted: have been

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:24 AM  
Deleted: ing

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:24 AM  
Deleted: really

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:23 AM  
Deleted: think of

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:25 AM  
Deleted: does

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:25 AM  
Deleted: on the Web

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:25 AM  
Deleted: S

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:26 AM  
Deleted: .

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:27 AM  
Deleted: In fact, recently

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:27 AM  
Deleted: that

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:28 AM  
Deleted: that

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:28 AM  
Deleted: on there

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:28 AM  
Deleted: .

There is even a site on the Web now devoted exclusively to the topic of bookmarks. While not the most popular of sites, (since February 2001, it has had over 21,000 "visitors"), if you go to [www.miragebookmark.ch/index.html](http://www.miragebookmark.ch/index.html), you will find links to a sizeable number of bookmark collections and exhibitions, documents on the history of bookmarks, and information about exchanging books with other collectors. You could also visit a site on how to make bookmarks, as well as a host of other web-shops to purchase them. I also did a bookmark search on [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com), and to my amazement, discovered there were over 12 pages displaying more than 575 bookmark collections for which you could bid. Who would have believed that the world of bookmarks is so vast?

The beautiful book of the bookmark exhibition in Milan set the occasion for my ramblings about this world. I'm still not quite sure why it did. But once I started, it was

not difficult to keep going. And in doing so, I began to appreciate that bookmarks are not just for marking a page in the books I am reading. To be sure, I want them to do that but I also want them to do the job reliably, that is, I don't want them to fall out or bend easily or be so flimsy that they quickly begin to crumble.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:29 AM  
Deleted: ,

Yes, it never hurts if they are also aesthetically pleasing or informative in some way, say by including a memorable passage about reading by a well-known writer, or a thoughtful review of the book I am reading. It is no less important that they be worth preserving for some reason. I don't collect a great many objects. I may save a few postcards from places I have been in my travels, or photographs of the special people in my life, or treasures that someone has made for me. But that's about it, except, of course, for the bookmarks from my favorite bookstores.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:30 AM  
Deleted: .

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:30 AM  
Deleted: E

Each of the treasured bookmarks in my box conjures a memory of the bookstore, the town where it is located, its size, the quality of its collection, the light in the store, and the feeling that comes to me when I am there. In this sense, a bookmark is indistinguishable from any memento, say a photograph or a trinket from a place I have been. Both seek to preserve an experience that was in some way memorable and don't want to forget. For my friend who makes bookmarks, it is the memories of people who helped her construct them. For me it is primarily the memories of the good times I have had in the places where I found them. In this way, a bookmark does its part, albeit a small one, to sustain the culture of reading and all that follows from that experience.

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:30 AM  
Deleted: little

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:32 AM  
Deleted: up

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:33 AM  
Deleted: them

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:34 AM  
Deleted: some

Preferred Customer 11/7/05 12:35 AM  
Deleted: This is not to be taken lightly in an age when reading literature is said to be on the wane.