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## Alexandria Bay, bibliophile

Casualene Meyer

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## Alexandria Bay, bibliophile

*As a boy I used to marvel that the letters in a closed book did not get mixed up and lost in the course of a night.*

—Jorge Luis Borges, “The Aleph”

Alexandria Bay is bibliophile—but  
anyone who’s anything-*phile* is out of date  
even if the passion’s timeless as it is  
Latinated, Greekated: philatelists, philologists,  
bibliophiles—alas! They’re as quaint  
as my saying “quaint” or “alas!”—anyhow,

Alexandria Bay loves books in a guts sort of way,  
but her brother, Ben, teaches her love for flow aesthetics:  
curling quotations, ligatures, pages without widows  
or orphans, words taken down in gorgeous fonts—  
and she worries, tries to outread acid death,  
nightmares libraries of ashes from internal fires.

Alexandria Bay turns to stacks, senses herself  
among temple columns etched with hieroglyph,  
gets this sort of reverent rush—careful not to spit,  
she blows bona fide dust off books, gentles them open,  
checks copyright dates, brain stumbling on spikes  
of Roman numerals—checks for *S*’s that look like *F*’s . . .

[as in “*f*pirit”]

Alexandria Bay's heart beats in her fingers  
 as she touches a 1777 *Paradise Lost* safe inside leather,  
 lost in the stacks like any other book—but Elder James E.  
 Talmage's signature diagonals the flyleaf—and for the name's  
 sake she escorts it to special collections, wonders  
 if it's rare enough—but anything old is rare, she says.

Alexandria Bay buys, inherits, gathers remnant books:  
 old grammars, readers, a book with Blake's *Milton*—

*[Bring me my Bow of burning gold:*

*Bring me my Arrows of desire:*

*Bring me my Spear: O clouds, unfold!*

*Bring me my Chariot of fire]*—

she buys a Herbert, its 1856 dust scenting her finger  
 as she runs it over “The Altar,” over “A. Bay 1859”  
 quill-scratched on a flyleaf—she wonders if it's a relative,  
 if the book has “come home”—her grandparents' books have, anyhow—

including three volumes of the *History of Utah*—  
 with wrinkled skin, gold tattoos on their backs and chests, their leather  
 flaking like dry blood on her shelf, they smell faintly  
 of maple sugar, remind her how they scented afternoons when sun  
 focused shafts through window panes, warming her grandparents'  
 books—and she loves them, Alexandria Bay, bibliophile.

—Casualene Meyer

“Alexandria Bay, bibliophile” won third place in the 1993 *BYU Studies* Writing  
 Contest, poetry division.