

## *Albert Goldbarth*

### LIBRARY

This book saved my life.

This book takes place on one of the two small tagalong moons of Mars.

This book requests its author's absolution, centuries after his death.

This book required two of the sultan's largest royal elephants to bear it;  
this other book fit in a gourd.

This book reveals The Secret Name of God, and so its author is on a death  
list.

This is the book I lifted high over my head, intending to smash a roach in  
my girlfriend's bedroom; instead, my back unsprung, and I toppled  
painfully into her bed, where I stayed motionless for eight days.

This is a "book." That is, an audio cassette. This other "book" is a screen  
and a microchip. This other "book," the sky.

In chapter three of this book, a woman tries explaining her husband's  
tragically humiliating death to their daughter: reading it is like walking  
through a wall of setting cement.

This book taught me everything about sex.

This book is plagiarized.

This book is transparent; this book is a codex in Aztec; this book, written  
by a prisoner, in dung; the wind is turning the leaves of this book: a  
hill-top olive as thick as a Russian novel.

This book is a vivisected frog, and ova its text.

This book was dictated by Al-Méllikah, the Planetary Spirit of the Seventh  
Realm, to his intermediary on Earth (the Nineteenth Realm), who  
published it, first in mimeograph, and many editions later in gold-  
stamped leather.

This book taught me everything wrong about sex.

This book poured its colors into my childhood so strongly, they remain a  
dye in my imagination today.

This book is by a poet who makes me sick.

This is the first book in the world.

This is a photograph from Viet Nam, titled "Buddhist nuns copying  
scholarly Buddhist texts in the pagoda."

This book smells like salami.  
 This book is continued in volume two.  
 He was driving—evidently by some elusive, interior radar, since he was  
 busy reading a book propped on the steering wheel.  
 This book picks on men.  
 This is the split Red Sea: two *heavy* pages.  
 In this book I underlined *deimos, cabochon, pelagic, hegira*. I wanted to use  
 them.  
 This book poured its bile into my childhood.  
 This book defames women.  
 This book was smuggled into the country one page at a time, in tiny pill  
 containers, in hatbands, in the cracks of asses; sixty people risked their  
 lives repeatedly over this one book.  
 This book is nuts!!!  
 This book cost more than a seven-story chalet in the Tall Oaks subdivision.  
 This book—I don't remember.  
 This book is a hoax, and a damnable lie.  
 This chapbook was set in type and printed by hand, by Larry Levis's then-  
 wife, the poet Marcia Southwick, in 1975. It's 1997 now and Larry's  
 dead—too early, way too early—and this elliptical, heartbreaking poem  
 (which is, in part, exactly *about* too early death) keeps speaking to me  
 from its teal-green cover: the way they say the nails and the hair  
 continue to grow in the grave.  
 This book is two wings and a thorax the size of a sunflower seed.  
 This book gave me a hard-on.  
 This book is somewhere under those other books way over there.  
 This book deflected a bullet.  
 This book provided a vow I took.  
 If they knew you owned this book, they'd come and get you; it wouldn't  
 be pretty.  
 This book is a mask: its author isn't anything like it.  
 This book is by William Matthews, a *wonderful* poet, who died today, age  
 55. Now Larry Levis has someone he can talk to.  
 This book is an "airplane book" (but not *about* airplanes; *mean to be read on*  
*an airplane*; also, available every three steps in the airport). What does it  
 mean, to "bust" a "block"?  
 This is the book I pretended to read one day in the Perry-Castañeda Library  
 browsing room, but really I was rapt in covert appreciation of someone

in a slinky skirt that clung like kitchen plasticwrap. She squiggled near, and pointed to the book. "It's upside-down," she said.

For the rest of the afternoon I was so flustered, that when I finally left the library . . . this is the book, with its strip of magnetic-code tape, that I absentmindedly walked with through the security arch on the first day of its installation, becoming the first (though unintentional) lightfingered lifter of books to trigger the Perry-Castañeda alarm, which hadn't been fine-tuned as yet, and sounded even louder than the sirens I remember from grade school air raid drills, when the principal had us duck beneath our desks and cover our heads—as if gabled—with a book.

The chemical formulae for photosynthesis: this book taught me that.

And this book taught me what a "merkin" is.

The cover of this book is fashioned from the tanned skin of a favorite slave.

This book is inside a computer now.

This "book" is made of knotted string; and this, of stone; and this, the gut of a sheep.

This book existed in a dream of mine, and only there.

This book is a talk-show paperback with shiny gold raised lettering on the cover. (Needless to say, not one by me.)

This is a book of prohibitions; this other, a book of rowdy license. They serve equally to focus the prevalent chaos of our lives.

This book is guarded around the clock by men in navy serge and golden braiding, carrying *very* capable guns.

This is the book that destroyed a marriage. Take it, burn it, before it costs us more.

This book is an intercom for God.

This book I slammed against a wall.

My niece wrote this book in crayon and glitter.

This is the book (in a later paperback version) by which they recognized the sea-bleached, battered, and otherwise-unidentifiable body of Shelley.

Shit: I forgot to send in the card, and now the Book Club has billed me *twice* for *Synopses of 400 Little-Known Operas*.

This book is filled with sheep and rabbits, calmly promenading in their tartan vests and bowties, with their clay pipes, in their Easter Sunday salad-like hats. The hills are gently rounded. The sun is a clear firm yolk. The world will never be this sweetly welcoming again.

This book is studded with gems that have the liquid depth of aperitifs.

This book, *1,000 Wild Nights*, is actually wired to give an electr/ YOWCH!

This book I stole from Cornell University's Olin Library in the spring of 1976. Presumably, its meter's still running. Presumably, it still longs for its Dewey'd place in the dim-lit stacks.

This book has a bookplate reminding me, in Latin, to use my scant time well.

It's the last day of the semester. My students are waiting to sell their textbooks back to the campus store, like crazed racehorses barely restrained at the starting gate.

This book caused a howl / a stir / a ruckus / an uproar.

This book became a movie; they quickly raised the cover price.

This book is the Key to the Mysteries.

This book has a bookplate: a man and a woman have pretzeled themselves into one lubricious shape.

This book came apart in my hands.

This book is austere; it's like holding a block of dry ice.

This Bible is in Swahili.

This book contains seemingly endless pages of calculus—it may as well be in Swahili.

This is the book I pretended to read while Ellen's lushly naked body darkened into sleep beside me. And *this* is the book I pretended to read in a waiting room, once, as a cardiac specialist razored into my father's chest. And **THIS** book I pretended having read once, when I interviewed for a teaching position: "Oh yes," I said, "of course," and spewed a stream of my justly famous golden bullshit into the conference room.

This book was signed by the author fifteen minutes before she died.

This is Erhard Ratdolf's edition of Johann Regiomontanus's astronomical and astrological calendar (1476)—it contains "the first true title-page."

She snatched this book from a garbage can, just as Time was about to swallow it out of the visible world irrevocably. To this day, her grandchildren read it.

This book: braille. This one: handmade paper, with threads of the poet's own bathrobe as part of the book's rag content. This one: the cover is hollowed glass, with a goldfish swimming around the title.

This is my MFA thesis. Its title is *Goldbarth's MFA Thesis*.

This is the cookbook used by Madame Curie. It still faintly glows, seven decades later.

This book is the shame of an entire nation.

This book is one of fourteen matching volumes, like a dress parade.

This is the book I'm writing now. It's my best! (But where should I send it?)

This book doesn't do anyth / oh wow, check THIS out!

This is the book I bought for my nephew, *101 Small Physics Experiments*.

Later he exchanged it for *The Book of Twerps and Other Pukey Things*, and who could blame him?

This book is completely marred by the handiwork of the *Druckfehlerteufel*—"the imp who supplies the misprints."

This book has a kind of aurora-like glory radiating from it. There should be versions of uranium detectors that register glory-units from books.

We argued over this book in the days of the divorce. I kept it, she kept the stained glass window from Mike and Mimi.

Yes, he was supposed to be on the 7:05 to Amsterdam. But he stayed at home, to finish this whodunit. And so he didn't crash.

This book has a browned corsage pressed in it. I picked up both for a dime at the Goodwill.

"A diet of berries, vinegar, and goat's milk" will eventually not only cure your cancer, but will allow a man to become impregnated (diagrams explain this)—also, there's serious philosophy about Jews who control "the World Order," in this book.

This book reads from right to left. This book comes with a small wooden top attached by a saffron ribbon. This book makes the sound of a lion, a train, or a cuckoo clock, depending on where you press its cover.

I've always admired this title from 1481: *The Myrroure of the Worlde*.

This book is from the 1950s; the jacket says it's "a doozie."

This book is by me. I found it squealing piteously, poor piglet, in the back of a remainders bin. I took it home and nursed it.

This book let me adventure with the Interplanetary Police.

I threw myself, an aspirant, against the difficult theories this book propounded, until my spirit was bruised. I wasn't any smarter—just bruised.

This book is magic. There's more *inside* it than outside.

This is the copy of the *Iliad* that Alexander the Great took with him, always, on his expeditions—"in," Thoreau says, "a precious casket."

Help! (*thump*) I've been stuck in this book all week and I don't know how to get out! (*thump*)

This is the book of poetry I read from at my wedding to Morgan. We were divorced. The book (Fred Chappell's *River*) is still on my shelf, like an admonishment.

This book is stapled (they're rusted by now); this book, bound in buttery leather; this book's pages are chemically-treated leaves; this book, the size of a peanut, is still complete with indicia and an illustrated colophon page.

So tell me: out of what grim institution for the taste-deprived and the sensibility-challenged do they find the cover artists for these books?

This book I tried to carry balanced on my head with seven others.

This book I actually licked.

This book—remember? I carved a large hole in its pages, a “how-to magazine for boys” said this would be a foolproof place to hide my secret treasures. Then I remembered I *didn't have* any secret treasures worth hiding. Plus, I was down one book.

This book is nothing but jackal crap; unfortunately, its royalties have paid for two Rolls-Royces and a mansion in the south of France.

This book is said to have floated off the altar of the church, across the village square, and into the hut of a peasant woman in painful labor.

This is what he was reading when he died. The jacket copy says it's “a real page-turner—you can't put it down!” I'm going to assume he's in another world now, completing the story.

This book hangs by a string in an outhouse, and every day it gets thinner.

This book teaches you how to knit a carrying case for your rosary; this one, how to build a small but lethal incendiary device.

This book has pop-up pages with moveable parts, intended to look like the factory room where pop-up books with moveable parts are made.

If you don't return that book I loaned you, I'm going to smash your face.

This book says the famously saintly woman was really a ringtailed trash-mouth dirty-down bitch queen. *Everyone's* reading it!

There are stains in this book that carry a narrative greater than its text.

*The Case of* \_\_\_\_\_. *How to* \_\_\_\_\_. Books books books.

I know great petulant stormy swatches and peaceful lulls of this book by heart.

I was so excited, so jazzed up!—but shortly thereafter they found me asleep, over pages six and seven of this soporific book. (I won't say by who.)

And on her way back to her seat, she fell (the multiple sclerosis) and refused all offered assistance. Instead, she used her book she'd been reading from, as a prop, and worked herself pridefully back up to a standing position.

They gave me this book for free at the airport. Its cover features an Indian god with the massive head of an elephant, as brightly blue as a druid, flinging flowers into the air and looking unsurpassably wise.

My parents found this book in my bottom drawer, and spanked the living hell into my butt.

This book of yours, you tell me, was optioned by Hollywood for eighty-five impossibajillion dollars? Oh. Congratulations.

They lowered the esteemed and highly-published professor into his grave. A lot of silent weeping. A lot of elegiac rhetoric. And one man shaking his head in the chill December wind dumbfoundedly, who said, "And he perished anyway."

Although my 8th grade English teacher, Mrs. Hurd, always said "Whenever you open a book, remember: that author lives again."

After this book, there was no turning back.

Around 1000 A.D., when the Magyars were being converted over to Christianity, Magyar children were forced to attend school for the first time in their cultural history: "therefore the Magyar word *könyv* means tears as well as book."

This book, from when I was five, its fuzzy ducklings, and my mother's voice in the living room of the second-story apartment over the butcher shop on Division Street. . . . I'm fifty now. I've sought out, and I own now, one near-mint and two loose, yellowing copies that mean to me as much as the decorated gold masks and the torsos of marble meant to the excavators of Troy.

This book is done.

This book gave me a paper cut.

This book set its mouth on my heart, and sucked a mottled tangle of blood to the surface.

I open this book and smoke pours out, I open this book and a bad sleet slices my face, I open this book: brass knuckles, I open this book: the spiky scent of curry, I open this book and hands grab forcefully onto my hair as if in violent sex, I open this book: the wingbeat of a seraph, I open this book: the edgy cat-pain wailing of the damned thrusts up in a

column as sturdy around as a giant redwood, I open this book: the travel of light, I open this book and it's as damp as a wound, I open this book and I fall inside it farther than any physics, stickier than the jelly we scrape from cracked bones, cleaner than what we tell our children in the dark when they're afraid to close their eyes at night.

And this book can't be written yet: its author isn't born yet.

This book is going to save the world.