I know these are not easy times for libraries and librarians. You are faced with people who are more than willing to come in and tell you what books you ought to get rid of. And with other people who want you to have all the books and services imaginable, so long as you don't spend any money doing it. And with still other people who think you don't really need books at all any more, you should just wire up the inside of the building like an electronic jukebox.

Well, after a lot of thought about what libraries and librarians are up against these days, I decided just to come here tonight and sing under your window.
I don't usually think of myself as a wandering minstrel, yet when I count up the libraries I have been to for the sake of my work, and the literary melodies that have been put into my books by those libraries, something like minstrelsy it seems to be.
I took the title for this talk from a friend of mine, another book person, the Missoula writer and teacher of writing fiction, Bill Kittredge. Kittredge came up with it when he was being interviewed for a book of oral history called The Ranchers, about the changes in his life since he grew up on a ranch of more than a million acres, down toward Klamath Falls in eastern Oregon. "In the landscapes of our minds, we have to learn how we can make a place for ourselves," Bill Kittredge told the interviewer's tape recorder. He went on: "I'm much less interested in the world's view of me than in my own past. It's still alive in my head. Even though it's not there any more--it is. The valley I grew up in was full of horses. And in my head the horses are still there.... I hear them! I hear them!"
Those of you who have enough trouble with the noise level in your libraries will be relieved that I don't hear horses clattering amid the stacks. But I've heard a lot else, and I want to do you some stanzas of it tonight.
So now, as quick as this, you are eighteen years old. You have come by train—which tells how long ago this is—from a Montana town with a population of 75, to begin college at Northwestern University, in suburban Chicago. And you set off to walk this campus you have never laid eyes on before, and there on a slight rise atop a wide green sweep of spotless lawn stands the university library, Deering Library. Deering is a library like they don't build 'em any more—similar to the original portion of Suzzallo Library on the University of Washington campus, the high long roof with a pair of gothic towers poking up at each end. Deering had architectural fame of a sort. The story was that Frank Lloyd Wright had driven past the Northwestern campus on Lake Shore Drive one day, looked at Deering Library with those gothic towers nobly poking into the air, and said, "It looks like a pig on its back."
I think what he really didn't like about it, though, was that Deering Library so much resembled a cathedral. And there's where Mr. Wright was wrong. There was inappropriate about nothing wrong with that resemblance, that library was a kind of cathedral, in several ways it behaved like a cathedral. You step now into the reading room of Deering, you find that the banks of lights hang just above the tables, they hang all the way from the vaulted ceiling, they hang down what seems to be thousands of feet just for your reading convenience, they hang there like the watchfobs of the gods. You sit with your book there in the golden pool of reflection, the lens of light brings the printed words up into your eyes. The diarist Bruce Frederick Cummings has written of "the desire every book has to be taken down and read, to live, to come into being in somebody's mind."
Passing by out there on Lake Shore Drive, Frank Lloyd Wright is not listening to the desires of the books. But you are there in the great reading room, and you do. You hear them. You hear them. 

Now it is last summer—July—and this is Scotland. St. Andrews. The oldest university in Scotland, one of the most venerable in all of Great Britain, so venerable it takes a couple of days to do a graduation ceremony, so many customs and traditions are there to be observed.
Be that as it may, the St. Andrews library is a modern one, just a few years old and going through a summer of teething pains. I walk in the first morning and on floor after floor, I pass white-haired maintenance men in blue dustcoats, staring silently forlornly down at the electrical trenches in the floor, into the mysterious entrails of wiring to which they are going to have to figure how to hook up the new—

computer—terminals. I step over to learn the catalogue system. Its basic fact is that all books before 1906, whatever their topic, are in the basement. I venture down, and immediately learn that the basement is a good ten degrees cooler than the floors above, so whenever I want a book that was published before 1906 I had better put my coat on. I return to the catalogue system. There is a set of bound volumes which catalogues some books. There is horizontal microfiche which catalogues
other books. There is vertical microfiche cataloguing still others. The back-and-forthing between the fiches has my eyes swimming. In none of the systems can I deduce how to find what I am after, material about the Scottish working class in western Scotland in the late 19th century. Somehow I stumble onto a promising book with "toil" in its title. Aha! There is a catalogue computer terminal by now, added to the three prior systems, though I have been warned that only a fraction of the library's holdings are in it yet. But at least I have the magic word "toil", and at the punch of a few buttons I'll get every title about the Scottish working class in whatever holdings have been computerized. I punch those buttons, and the screen fills, with the promise of more screenfulls to come. I begin joyfully to take down the titles--Technology and Toil in 19th Century Britain;
Toilers of the Linen Trade. But the third title—the third title is The Lady at Her Toilet—and it is all toiletry, cosmetic and other modes, after that.
Eventually, perseverance and a saintly librarian did help me track down the books I was after, and now began the photocopying. The St. Andrews library machine took only five-pence pieces, which are about the size of an American fifty-cent piece. I had hundreds of pages to do, so Carol said she'd go to the bank and get me some rolls of five-pence pieces. Back she came not with rolls of coins, there was no such Scottish thing, but with bulging plastic bags of coins—sort of like overloaded Baggies, a hundred five-pence pieces in each, a truly substantial sum of coins. I tried to get used to walking around lopsided with these coin bags in my pocket and started feeding the five-pences to the photocopy machine. About every other one, it spat-back-out. The problem here was that there are two kinds of five-pence pieces, new ones minted when Britain went onto the decimal system a dozen or so years
ago, and the old shilling pieces which were simply declared to be worth five pence from then on. My heart sank along with my pockets. Were we going to have to double this bulk of coinage to do my photocopying? Sort out the hundreds of old coins from the hundreds of new? Well, my abiding belief is that machines are at least as eccentric as any of the rest of us. I looked around to be sure no one was watching, and began trying different deliveries of shilling pieces into the coin slot. I pretty quickly found that if I gave each shilling piece a little extra body English—kind of snapped it into the slot—the photocopy machine would gulp hard and swallow it. Of all the noises that have ever come to me in libraries, that mechanical gulp of dismay was one of the most gratifying.

This is not meant to strike dread into the hearts of you librarians, but it might—
Finally, down to the St. Andrews archives, in another part of the basement—

I put my coat on—in search of letters of working class emigrants who left that region of Scotland in the late 1880s, as the main characters of my next novel to do. The archivist produces some letter collections for me, leads me into the reading room, and as I begin to sit down at a capacious table nicely lit by a window, he says, "Eh—there's the matter of the air." The airrr, in his "fifeshire burr. Does he mean error, is this some Scotch Calvinist probing of my scholarly soul? Can he somehow mean the Scottish town of Ayr, that Robert Burns wrote of—"Old Ayr, whom never a town surpasses, for honest men and bonnie lasses?" That's cryptic, even from an archivist.

But no, the airrr proved to be the air conditioning, which was blowing a gale
at the end of the room I had contemplated sitting at. I took the archivist's point and established myself at the opposite end of the room, noticing as I did that there was a heavy tartan lap robe in the chair beside me. Within minutes I was using that lap robe, and at lunch time I went home and—despite the fact that Scotland was sweltering under its hottest summer in a century—I put on a sweater under my sport jacket, came back and got under the lap robe again. All the while cursing the St. Andrews theory that the best method of preserving archives is to refrigerate them.

But all the while, too, beginning to hear. Hearing the letters in front of me. "During the storm our ship swung like a cork. The screaming of the bosun's whistle, the yells of women and children when she swung over on her side, and tins, trunks, barrels, everything movable flew from side to side... We poor human things held on
to the bedside like grim death." David McNeil, that voice, writing to his family in Scotland about his voyage to America as a steerage passenger in 1889. Another letter, McNeil has come by train across America to Colorado: Denver, he reports, "looks as if it commenced last week and might be moved somewhere else next." Another letter: "Clothing costs long prices in this America." As ever, a library voice worth coming the distance to hear.

As ever—as Deering Library was a quarter of a century before, as all the libraries in between have been—a library voice which was worth coming the distance to hear.
What a writer—or at least this writer—listens for in a library is not always what anybody else wants to spend ear time on.
Let me propound to you Doig's Law, which has not been tested quite as many times as Murphy's, but pretty close. Doig's Law, briefly put, is this: The more obscure the book, the longer it has been taking up shelf space, and the less it has been used—the more valuable that book is to a writer named Doig. Efficiency experts and consultants are never going to be fond of Doig's Law. Yet it proves out time and again. In the stacks of the Shoreline Community College library is an eccentric old volume by Edmund Pearson titled Queer Books, which a friend who shall remain nameless has rescued from purge after purge for me. Those of you who have read my last book, English Creek, may remember that there's an unusual 4th of July speech in the middle of that book—a speech without the usual rosy patriotic hue.
To set the scene for that speech, I had the person who introduces the speaker do it this way: "This is a holiday particularly American. Sometimes, if the person on the stump such as I am at this moment doesn't watch his enthusiasm, it can become a little too much so. I am always reminded of the mock speech which Mose Skinner, a Will Rogers of his day, proposed for this nation's one-hundredth birthday in 1876:

'Any person who insinuates in the remotest degree that America isn't the biggest and best country in the world, and far ahead of every other country in everything, will be filled with gunpowder and touched off.'

Mose Skinner's words somehow found their way into Pearson's memory, and perhaps into mine, and from his into mine, and back into another book, maybe to start the circle of murmuring again.
Dancing at the Rascal Fair, the other already-published novel in the Montana trilogy I'm finishing writing now, went across the period from 1889 until just after World War One. Early in my research I came across this paragraph in the Malone and Roeder Roeder history of Montana:
"Montana demonstrated its support for the war by surpassing all other states in enlistment rates and draft quotas for the armed forces. 12,500 young Montana males volunteered for service. And due apparently to confused population estimates, the Selective Service drafted nearly 28,000 more. So nearly 40,000 men—about ten percent of the population; not just of the military-age men, but of the total population—Montana's about ten percent of the population went to war, a rate of contribution that no other state even approached."
That rate of course is astounding. Did Sparta ever send such a proportion of young Spartans off to its wars? If the U.S. had sent military forces to the Vietnam War at that rate, the total would have been twenty million soldiers. So if I'm to write fiction about Montana during World War One, there is the colossal impact of that war to keep in mind. Again, an obscure voice from a library shelf spells it out for me. Big Horn County in the World War, the title of the book said when I browsed across it in the UW's Northwest Collection—a dark brown book, about the size and shape of a high school annual, with an eagle on the cover. Published by the local newspaper editor in the county seat of Hardin—east of Billings—it wasn't really much of a book, and Big Horn county wasn't that much of a place: then as now, its main claim to fame is the Custer Battlefield— it wasn't really much of a book, more a combination of memento and commercial enterprise.
But start through that book, with its oval photos of men in uniform and a paragraph apiece about their military service, and you begin to notice it goes on and on and on. There are 202 soldiers from that Montana stretch of grassland, in this section of the book. And then you find there are even more—a section called The Men Who Gave All.
Clifford A. Ross, contracted influenza and died three days later, at Camp Dodge, Iowa.

Daniel C. Schutte, while returning from a furlough in France, was killed in a train wreck between Paris and Brest.

Emmett C. Smith, killed in action at Cantigny.

Leonard J. Tudor, saw front-line service in France, died of wounds.

Spencer D. Willey, saw service in France, taken ill with influenza, died in hospital of lobar pneumonia.

Alfred Dent, fought in the battle of the Argonne, died of wounds.

Louis A. Gemucent, killed in the battle of the Marne.
Stephen Chief at Night, entered the service at Salem Indian Training School in Oregon, died of tuberculosis at the Lettermann General Hospital, San Francisco.

Henry Clay Luckett, killed in action.

Alexander Ross, killed in action at Chateau Thierry.

Claude L. Blackburn, taken down with pneumonia, died in the base hospital, Camp Dodge, Iowa.

Roy Cottrell, fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, killed in action.

Ira W. Hathaway, enlisted in the Royal Air Force, killed in an accident to his plane, in London.

Pete Pederson, died of pneumonia.
The names, and the ways of death, go on—there are several more—until the final one:

Walter W. Kollmar, killed by a high explosive shell two days before the signing of the Armistice.

I hear them. I hear them.

( Silence of Cow )

So much so, that Dancing at the Rascal Fair has a similar list, amid the World War One travails of its characters, of The Men Who Gave All.
I mentioned earlier that obscure voices are often the most valuable ones to me in a library. There's another sort of library voice that I don't even know what to call, except maybe ventriloquism. I have this example.

Now, like the rescued Montana Writers' Project records, we are in Bozeman—on a fine blue June day in 1977 when the five
The blue of the sky above Bozeman, on a June day in 1977 when the five mountain ranges around the Gallatin Valley all are in view. In the Montana State University library's Special Collections, I am going through a box of payroll records of the East Bench Dogie ranch, where my father worked for several years as a ranch hand and eventually foreman, and where my mother was the cook during lambing seasons. I find their names on the payroll records, and other names as well, one I recognize dimly—an old man who now is the swamper, the guy who sweeps the floor, at the grocery store in my hometown of White Sulphur Springs. The next day too is bright blue, and I am talking to the old man, Tony Hunolt, in his dark bachelor room in White Sulphur Springs. Yeah, Tony tells me in his Missourian voice, "Knowed your daddy since I landed into this country in '36, at shearing time at the Dogie. He staked me for my bedroll, I was so dead busted."
Didn't have to do it neither, but he done 'er."--and even though Tony Hunolt is dead by the time This House of Sky is published the next year, those words of his speak in its pages. Tony had told me too that I ought to go talk to so-and-so about some ranch topic--"He knows A to Why about that"--and that line speaks in the pages of English Creek. And Tony had said to me, about another man he and my father worked with on the Dogie, "He was an SOB on six wheels"--and that line is sure to speak in the pages of some future book of mine. There is simply no telling how long Tony Hunolt will go on, speaking in my pages, by way of library ventriloquism.
Fortunately, not all the heroic echoes that occur in a library have been fatal ones. I like the heroic story of the WPA Federal Writers Project for Montana. During the 1930's, as part of that New Deal project which also produced the famous state guidebooks, local people were put to work gathering local lore, often from their neighbors, sometimes even from themselves. In Montana that gathering was done in every county, the material accumulated, and files of it ended up at the state Historical Society in Helena. But a day in 1943, a history professor from Montana State College in Bozeman, Merrill Burlingame, decided to ride along with another faculty member on a trip to Butte, where the other faculty member needed to look at some sort of river-and-stream study that had ended up in the warehouse of the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, which was phasing out of existence. As Merrill Burlingame told the story when I asked him for it:
We found the files we wanted near the loading door. Even closer were six or eight file cases marked Writers’ Project. I investigated ever so lightly and began to drool. At that moment the woman who appeared to be in charge appeared. We questioned her about the destination of these files, and she informed us that they would go to the Butte City Dump in the morning. We backed her into whatever corner was available and told her she could not do that. She assured us in unprintable but perfectly clear English that she could and would.

She told us that in an early stage of closing the records she had sent a portion of these Writers’ Project records to the Montana Historical Society, which was the approved depository. There, numerous writers of sorts, largely of the newspaper variety, had used generous portions of the materials without giving WPA the least credit.
"She didn't approve of that, and she would make sure that the Historical Society did not get one more folder of those records." The dump loomed. Burlingame goes on:

"We assured the good lady that nothing of that kind would happen at Montana State College, and that we would take special care that WPA did get credit. About 4:30 we got her permission to take them, but we were sure that speed was of the essence. We telephoned the college physical plant office and pressured them to provide a truck and driver in Butte as early as possible the following morning. And at that early hour, I came with the driver."
I am eternally thankful that he did. Nearly forty years later, I was beginning to write a novel set in Montana in the 1930's, and in I came to the Special Collections at the Montana State University library in Bozeman and merrily ransacked those invaluable first-hand accounts of life during the Depression, that Merrill Burlingame heroically saved from the Butte dump. The people of my novel English Creek dance to a square dance call from out of those files, they remember great cattle roundups recounted therein, they enjoy at their Fourth of July picnic the succulent small spring frying chickens menued there. And yes, in my acknowledgments, I sing out a credit to the Montana Writers Project of the WPA era, and to Merrill Burlingame.
There are just a couple of more stanzas I want to croon to you, and the first is a kind of blow-by-blow of how library stuff becomes literary stuff. I can't blame you librarians at all if you sometimes wonder, "Can this person possibly have any use for what I've just spent an hour finding for him?" So I figure that by now, after hearing my vagaries about what a writer does in libraries, you could stand some reassurance that the material you provide does end up somewhere, in some more or less systematic way. I'm going to read a few paragraphs from the start of Dancing at the Rascal Fair, then briefly show the library research that helped produce them.
This is Scotland again. My narrator, Angus McCaskill, and his chum Robert Burns Barclay are emigrating to America, to Montana. They are in line with the other steerage passengers, a morning in 1889, on a dock at the port city of Greenock, at the mouth of the River Clyde. They're waiting to board the steamship James Watt—which is not a namesake of the unlamented former Secretary of the Interior, but of the Scottish inventor of the steam engine. The standing in line is tedious, Angus and his buddy are "both of us nineteen, and green as the cheese of the moon, and trying our double damnedest not to show it," Angus himself is afraid of water, cannot swim, and there's ten days of the Atlantic Ocean ahead. And here is what begins running through his mind:
Awful, what a person lets himself do to himself. There I stood on that Greenock dock, wanting more than anything else in this life not to put foot aboard that iron ship; and wanting just as desperately to do so and do it that instant. Oh, I knew what was wrestling in me. We had a book—Crofutt’s Trans-Atlantic Emigrants’ Guide—and my malady was right there in it, page one. Crofutt performed as our tutor that a shilling was worth 24 American cents, and how much postal stamps cost there in the big country, and that when it came midnight in old Scotland the clocks of Montana were striking just five of the afternoon. Crofutt told this, too, I can recite it yet today: Do not emigrate in a fever, but consider the question in each and every aspect. The mother country must be left behind, the family ties, all old associations, broken. Be sure that you look at the dark side of the picture: the broad Atlantic, the dusty ride to the great West of America, the scorching sun, the cold winter—coldest ever you experienced!—and the hard work of the homestead. But if you finally, with your eyes open, decide to emigrate, do it nobly. Do it with no divided heart.

Right advice, to keep your heart in one pure piece. But easier seen than followed.
I knew I oughtn’t, but I turned and looked up the river, east up the great broad trough of the Clyde. East into yesterday. For it had been only the day before when the pair of us were hurled almost all the way across Scotland by train from Nethermuir into clamorous Glasgow. A further train across the Clyde bridge and westward alongside mile upon brown mile of the river’s tideflats and their smell. Then here came Greenock to us, Watt’s city of steam, all its shipyards and docks, the chimney stalks of its sugar refineries, its sharp church spires and high, high above all its municipal tower of crisp new stone the color of pie crust. A more going town than our old Nethermuir could be in ten centuries, it took just that first look to tell us of Greenock. For night we bedded where the emigration agent had advised, the Model Lodging House, which may have been a model of something but lodging wasn’t it; when morning at last came, off we set to ask our way to the Cumbrae Line’s moorage, to the James Watt, and to be told in a Clydeside gabble it took the both of us to understand:
in ten centuries. For night, we bedded where the emigration agent had advised, the Model Lodging-House. Which may have been a model of something, but lodging wasn't it. Then this morning, Greenock true to reputation waking into rain, but every Scotsman has seen rain before and so off we set, to ask our way to the Cumbrae Line's moorage, to the steamship James Watt, and to be told in a Clydeside gabble it took the both of us to understand:

"The Jemmy, lads? Ye wan' tae gi doon tae Pa'rick Street."'

And there at the foot of Patrick Street was the Albert Harbor, there was the green-funneled steam swimmer to America, there were the two of us."

So, I am often asked, where does stuff like that come from? Where, indeed, but here's where at least some of those phrases had their origin:
We had a book, Crofutt's Trans-Atlantic Emigrants' Guide—Edinburgh, the National Library of Scotland had emigration guides of the late 19th century, not all of them as bombastic as the version I've given my young voyagers—but one of them does have that glorious line, "Do it with no divided heart."

"The pair of us had been hurled almost all the way across Scotland by train"—St. Andrews, the basement, an old Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland tells me that my young men of 1889 would have ridden the Caledonian Railway to the port of Greenock—"As a passenger line the Caledonian takes high rank, its stations embracing all the 'eight large towns' of Scotland."

"Here came Greenock to us, all its shipyards and docks, the chimney stalks" and so on—Greenock itself, the Watt Library, with its historic photos of Greenock
in its heyday before a channel was dredged in the River Clyde upstream to Glasgow.

"We bedded in the Model Lodging House"—St. Andrews, the basement again, a Pocket History and Guide to the Scottish town of Brechin, which had such an imaginatively named place to stay.

"Which may have been a model of something, but lodging wasn't it."—That same Pocket History provides the information that out of 3,276 men who stayed overnight sometime during that year, "No fewer than 1,100 went to bed under the influence of liquor."

"Off we set to the steamship James Watt—Glasgow, the Mitchell Library, where from the old Lloyd's Registers of Ships Carol put together for me the dimensions and speed and deck layouts and even the color scheme of a typical emigrant steamship of the time."
"To be told in a Clydeside gabble... 'The Jemmy lads? Ye wan' tae gi doon tae Pa'rick Street -- Glasgow and the Mitchell Library again. Here I was trying to get at the fact that as soon as you leave home, the world begins to sound different. And in Scotland, the residents of Glasgow and the nearby towns along the Clyde River have the reputation of sounding mysterious even to other Scots—which is saying a lot. The Glasgow film, Gregory's Girl, was dubbed with a new soundtrack for American audiences. Anyway, in trying to hear the Glaswegian dialect for the sake of this scene in my novel, I came onto a study of Scottish dialects which told me that a distinctive Glasgow sound is what's called a "glottal stop"—a swallowing of the letter T. The example given was the Glaswegian who introduces himself to you, "My name is Pa' Pa'erson—with TWO T's." And so from visiting nearby Greenock, and finding in the library material there that the Clydeside steamships for America
had left from the Albert Harbor at the foot of Patrick Street, I had my chance to put that half-baffling bit of dialect into my characters' ears.
I want to end this in the next few minutes, on a note such as you might find in a lovesong. For the fact seems to be, as I look back over my behavior as a writer, that I'm infatuated with libraries. There's more to it than that—there always is in affairs of the heart, divided or otherwise.
Many times I have loved libraries not just for themselves but for the company they keep. I think of the Alaska Historical Library in Juneau, during my Sea Runners research—of how I would take a break there by going out onto a balcony of that building above Juneau and watch the white cruise ships come up Gastineau Channel between the dark timbered avalanches of Alaskan mountains. It was like stepping directly from the library to a mountaintop. And I remember, more years ago, after a morning spent in the Reading Room of the British Museum, a lunchtime. On the other side of Great Russell Street was a pub which shrewdly called itself the Museum Tavern. You can hear the domestic dialogues that choice of name created—"And where have you been this long while?" "Where have I been, I was in the Museum."
Well, in I went, sat at the end of the bar, ordered a smoked salmon sandwich and a half of bitter. Next to me sat a huge character who was chatting with the pubkeeper and his young bartender. I sat, sipping and munching, in that snug harbor so close by the British Museum's ocean of books. The pubkeeper went to tend customers at the far end of the bar. The huge character leaned in on the young bartender and said: "You've got the money now?" The young bartender nodded nervously. The huge character ordered: "Give it me, with the change for my next pint." I realized that I was seeing a loan shark at work, and I fervently hoped that he was going to go on ignoring me, the invisible American. The young bartender grew even more nervous; instead of passing his payoff to the shark with the change for a drink, he turned his body and shoved the money across the bar, the shark snatched it, it disappeared--
just as the **bartender** looked down the bar, knowing he had seen something happen.

I went back to the Reading Room of the British Museum with the reminder that not all world's theories were in its books.

And I think back again to Scotland last summer, to Glasgow. The people of Glasgow, the Glaswegians, have a reputation as the Cockneys or the Brooklynese of Scotland, and while British person after British person told us we would find Glasgow generally hospitable enough, in a raffish kind of way, for heaven's sake, Carol and I—we naive library types—must never go into the pubs in that city of hard men.

I spent a first morning in Glasgow's Mitchell Library, a sleek enterprise which proclaims itself the largest public reference library in Europe and likely is.

Carol met me and said, "I think I've found us a lunch place."
It was a mere half-block away and it was called the Ritz Bar, and of course it was a pub. In we went, to a place of gleaming dark wood, and gorgeous high pressed-tin ceiling, and the most orderly of clientele, and impeccable service which included the motherly cook coming out of the kitchen to ask us, "Is the soup all right, dears?" Fearsome Glasgow pubs, ay? May they take over the world.

I don't know what you make of incidents such as these, but I suggest that it's no coincidence that memorable watering-holes so often come to mind with memorable libraries. After all, aren't librarians the bartenders of information? Behind your polished wood, don't you deal with all manner of customers who step in through that door from the street? Aren't strange concoctions ordered up from you?
Don't you see almost every sort of human behavior, and begin regularly to recite the ancient prayer that must have originated in a pub somewhere—"Please, Lord, not on my shift."? And don't you preside over shelves of intoxicating items, some of which are never opened until the day a bearded customer comes in and asks, "Do you have a brand called Doig's Law?" And at closing time, isn't there a cosmic chorus of librarians, all of you saying wearily to yourselves—at least I helped humankind make it through one more day?

That's what I hear.

And thank you for listening tonight.