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Some of us pick up books the way dogs pick up burrs, or a sweater collects lint. We have only to walk through the bookstore-infested parts of town, head for home, arrive at the doorstep, and there they are -- tucked under our arms in little paper bags with charge slips totaling half our weekly salary stuck inside. Certain households have a similar magnetic affinity. Visitors walk in and say "Oh what lovely books! You know, I have something you might enjoy reading." With or without encouragement the book will arrive on the next visit and never leave. The books you want to give back, you can never find. The ones you can find are all but impossible to return. People change their addresses when you try to track them down. They move to Brazil, try to disguise their voices on the phone, insist you have the wrong number. No one in this country ever throws out a book. They may linger for a while in the limbos of garage sales or library benefits, sporting titles like **Death Wears a Purple Shirt**, **A Golden Century of Rabbits**, or **Great Moments in Agronomy**; but eventually they end up at our place, accumulating in great piles before the windows, slowly shutting out the sun.

The terrible thing is -- I love it! I'm incapable of throwing away a book. **Great Moments in Agronomy** will never be burned for warmth or composted with vegetable scraps in the back lot. It will end up on a shelf with **The Tibetan Book of the Dead** (The Evans-Wentz edition), **Mail Order Moonlighting** by Cecil Hoge, Norman White's recent biography of Gerald Manley Hopkins, and **The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations**. Why? Because I am reluctant to define limits. Because I like rabbits and I might get interested some day in agronomy. Because I want everyone to know that my interests are eclectic. That I'm a person of the world. That I know lots of stuff. That I should be listened to at dinner parties.

And there is charm in this encroachment. As the season becomes blustery, I imagine our library to be a kind of fortress we build against some great coming spiritual and physical cold. (A physicist friend of mine once claimed that a solid wall of books has an "R" of .75.) I fantasize about winter weekends, snowed in, with the power and TV down, when I will be forced to park myself in a favorite chair, sit down by the light of a sputtering Coleman and read every last title. Then too -- like many of us, I share a deeper fantasy -- that after we are gone, someone will peruse our library (like anthropologists examining the artifacts of a tomb) and try to unravel the mystery of who the heck we were, and what we were up to with our lives. At my house, I confess, whole shelves have been arranged to titillate and deceive the imagination of these morbid intruders. (Look on my reading list, ye illiterates, and despair!)

Nestled too, among the lesser volumes on my shelves, are works I never lend out. Their pages have nurtured me in my darkest hours, and have altered the way I look at the world. Here flow the clear waters of Blake, Hopkins, Rimbaud, Keats, Emily Dickinson, Li Po, Lorinne Niedecker, Gwendolen Brooks. The laughing sunlight of Aristophanes. The broodings of Poe, Faulkner, and Conrad. The earth-knit essays of Thoreau and Emerson. The saving grace of Whitman. For who can truly read **Leaves of Grass** cover to cover, and afterwards not glimpse, even in the darkest landscape, a distant wave of tender rolling green?

Rod Clark, Editor