

Spotlight

Wednesday, November 21

The proof that libraries have truly infiltrated every aspect of my waking life can be evidenced by the fact that I spent almost three hours watching a non-narrative vignette style movie about the daily operations of the New York Public Library, which included extended meeting scenes with incredibly dry banter between staff, and that I am now recommending that movie to you. *Ex Libris* is a fascinating, if excessively comprehensive, view into the inner-workings of one of the greatest library systems in the world. It contains heartwarming scenes of children selecting books and insight into strangely specific collections – I'm thinking of the extensive physical image file– where you meet the equally eccentric and devoted librarians who oversee these niche areas. At one point in the movie the librarian waxes poetic to a visiting group of artists about the wide variety of dog images available and how each is perfectly categorized with appropriate keywords, of course.

I was enthralled. I was entranced. I was enchanted. Sometimes, I was profoundly bored but I walked away with a greater understanding of what it takes to maintain a world class library system in a way that was equal parts mundane and magic.

To compliment *Ex Libris*, I am also recommending *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean. Orlean, famed author of *The Orchid Thief*, which was made into the psychedelic and otherworldly movie, *Adaptation*, has produced an amazing homage to the history of the Los Angeles Public Library focused around the devastating fire the Central Branch endured in the 1960s. It was the worst library fire in North American history and one of the hottest fires every recorded in America. *The Library Book* is at once a true crime escapade (featuring a fair haired Hollywood wanna-be and compulsive liar, Harry Peak), a cultural history of the Los Angeles Public Library (with its hilarious and endearingly strange library managers including one who dressed exclusively in corduroy), and a manifesto in support of the enduring value of the public library. For library lovers (and future devotees) everywhere, these titles are a great reminder of the power and potential of the public library.

Megan Clark
Public Services Librarian