

Joe Mills

If Librarians Were Honest

*“... a book indeed sometimes debauched me from my work....”*

*– Benjamin Franklin*

If librarians were honest,  
they wouldn't smile, or act  
welcoming. They would say,  
*You need to be careful. Here  
be monsters.* They would say,  
*These rooms house heathens  
and heretics, murderers and  
maniacs, the deluded, desperate,  
and dissolute.* They would say,  
*These books contain knowledge  
of death, desire, and decay,  
betrayal, blood, and more blood;  
each is a Pandora's box, so why  
would you want to open one.*  
They would post danger  
signs warning that contact  
might result in mood swings,  
severe changes in vision,  
and mind-altering effects.

If librarians were honest  
they would admit the stacks  
can be more seductive and  
shocking than porn. After all,  
once you've seen a few  
breasts, vaginas, and penises,  
more is simply more,  
a comforting banality,  
but the shelves of a library  
contain sensational novelties,  
a scandalous, permissive mingling  
of Malcolm X, Marx, Melville,  
Merwin, Millay, Milton, Morrison,

and anyone can check them out,  
taking them home or to some corner  
where they can be debauched  
and impregnated with ideas.

If librarians were honest,  
they would say, *No one  
spends time here without being  
changed. Maybe you should  
go home. While you still can.*