

# Letters from our readers

24 January 2013

*On "Open access activist dead at 26"*

Thank you for a very fine article. What happened to Aaron Swartz is partly the consequence of a massive commercialization of information. It is true, as Swartz claimed, that corporations in the information business are digitizing and controlling information. The method they use is database licensing, a complicated type of institutional subscription plan.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Libraries undoubtedly had signed a license agreement with JSTOR. In colleges and universities, licensing programs are administered through libraries, working closely with university legal counsel. Typically, licenses will prohibit any dissemination of the content by users of the database, and set extensive terms and conditions for use. The knot gets tied pretty tightly.

Libraries pay between \$5,000 and \$200,000 or more per database, in annual licensing fees, to make available a broad range of proprietary databases of scholarly information in the sciences, social sciences and humanities; image databases in the arts, and music. Millions of dollars are involved. It's a very big business, requiring a substantial commitment of library staff time and causing extensive headaches.

Librarians traditionally have had a strong public service ethic. Now, we have become *de facto* policemen and sales agents, enforcing licensing regulations and promoting the use of electronic products on behalf of the PROQUEST Corporation, EBSCO Corporation, and other corporate interests, within our institutions. In many cases, research libraries have even provided the texts for digitization! We are buying back our own texts, in electronic form.

Everyone in higher education knows these expensive resources are under-utilized. People find them difficult and complicated to use, and they cannot be approached through familiar web search engines like Google or Yahoo. There is a vast potential for their use, beyond the universities. This is why activists like Aaron Swartz

and many librarians, faculty and others are so passionate in their desire to make information more freely and easily accessible to large numbers of people.

Lesley J  
Ohio, USA  
20 January 2013

*On "Lance Armstrong and the world of professional sports"*

I personally think the interview was bullshit. To give Oprah some ratings on her failing network, and to get Lance back in the cancer business. I personally will never watch either again. I could only stomach a few minutes at best.

Mary  
23 January 2013

*On "New York bus drivers continue strike to defend jobs"*

I support the bus drivers and EPP... this is another battle in the war to save the poor and middle class.

I thank them for the courage to stand up for their right to make a living. It may require more than peaceful means to do battle with the corporates who want more for themselves and wages for others that seem livable only to third world workers. They want to lower us all to the third world level so they can leave more to their heirs!

Herbert D  
Minnesota, USA  
20 January 2013

*On "Bradley Manning denied whistleblower defense"*

It seems to me that this polemic whether the information allegedly leaked to WikiLeaks did or did not "endanger" American lives is a giant red herring. The truth is that the very actions of the US imperialism *do* endanger not only American lives, the lives of civilian populations of countries in contact with US military, but the very interests of American capitalism, in the final analysis. All this reverts back to a dictum by Karl Marx some 150 years ago, which held that

capitalism breeds its own gravediggers. To which we say: None Too Soon!

Mirek  
NSW, Australia  
19 January 2013

On “Tom Hooper’s *Les Misérables: Social misery, with a vengeance*”

I saw the original stage production of *Les Misérables* in London and also saw the subsequent production in New York, in which a friend of mine played Marius. I loved the stage production and also the music and the singing. I am a singer myself and the stage casts were magnificent, especially Colm Wilkinson as Valjean. I don’t know how you cannot be stirred by “Do You Hear the People Sing” or “End of the Day”.

I have not yet seen the film, but judging by the trailer, the performances are pretty damned good and quite unexpected in some quarters. Remember, the film is not a film of the book (which I have read twice), but of the English musical. This in itself is very different in tone and atmosphere from the original French production, of which I have a recording. The French version is *much* darker and harsher. I recommend giving it a listen. By the way, the film of the book, with Gerard Depardieu, is quite good, too.

CZ  
San Francisco, California  
21 January 2013

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*Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo is my favorite novel, and I was thrilled by some of the panoramic scenes portrayed in the film—but I must agree with your assessment of it. Why was it ultimately so leaden, crude, and tedious?

I recently watched the 1968 musical *Oliver!* again. It’s a bit dated perhaps—but what a contrast it is in comparison. One loves the characters as much in that film as in Dickens’ original novel—maybe even a bit more! I will forever associate the characters of the novel with the inspired and gifted cast that played them in that film. The music was also inspired and unforgettable.

While viewing *Les Misérables*, I often thought that the novel really deserves a lengthy series such as have been done for several Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy stories—some quite excellently.

Surely the plot of the hyper-driving film was

unintelligible to most viewers unless they were already familiar with the story. Unlike *Oliver!* it seemed muddled in its values—more interested in staging spectacles than in exploring Hugo’s timeless story about history, human nature, and heroism.

Just my two cents.

Best wishes,

RBL

San Francisco, California  
22 January 2013



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