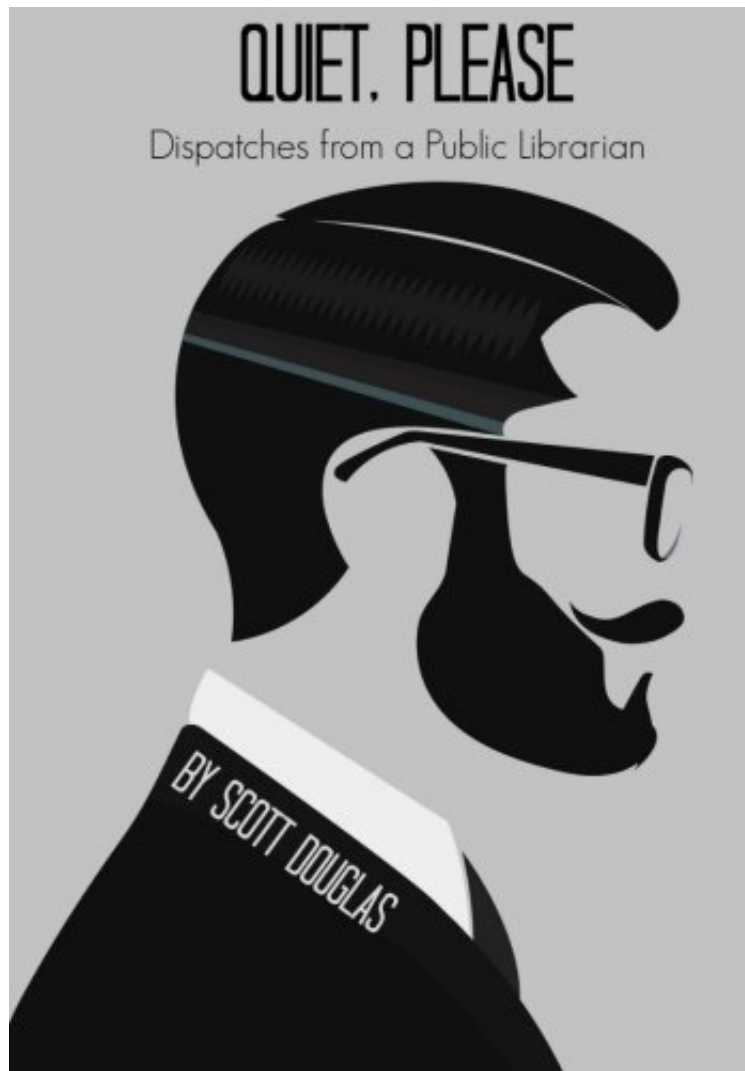


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## Quiet, Please: Dispatches From a Public Librarian

*Scott Douglas*

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**Scott Douglas : Quiet, Please: Dispatches From a Public Librarian** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Quiet, Please: Dispatches From a Public Librarian:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Library board Trustees must read this book !By George GalicThe author cares deeply about the future of public libraries. He has written, with charm and humor, an effective "statement of the problem" facing those Trustees and Boards who manage these libraries on behalf of the communities and taxpayers, to whom they are accountable. The book points out, in funny anecdotes, how the MLIS degreed reference-department librarians rise to become salaried heads of public libraries without any formal training in management. They lack cost-effective strategies common to the private-sector world of businesses (such as bookstores) serving the

same communities. These failures aren't isolated, they're systemic. And the elected or appointed members of the Board cannot "delegate away" to the salaried librarians the Board's duty to answer to the town's taxpayers for the value of every dollar spent by the library. Since the recent economic downturn, and rising public mistrust of governmental expenditures generally, the library board's critical review will be needed ASAP. Otherwise, towns will be (deservedly) defeating millage votes when smug or complacent boards fail in their duty. Besides reading the book, this reviewer also read the other 23 listed reviews posted for this book. Apparently I am the only public library Trustee to write a review of it (or at least the only Trustee to identify himself), so far. Tho recently retired, I'd headed the Trustee division of our state's professional librarian society, elected by 300 dues-paying members. Being a former business owner MBA degreeholder, I often saw well-meaning but unprepared library school grads flounder when trying to run libraries, because of lack of skills and training in their professional prep. And too often their boards were only "passionate booklovers" who also couldn't contribute the missing managerial oversight and judgement on the key issues of resource allocation. This book's many examples of throwing money away on poorly-thought-through gimmicks and self-serving promotional campaigns are typical of similar efforts seen in many other towns. Fads spread. Consultants and suppliers feed these notions to bored-with-their-jobs librarians attending tradeshow then they get funded by uncritical boards who want to be cheerleaders for their local public library. But in the long run, these flops are toxic to the public's confidence in their institutions (in a similar way that public school teachers also buy into fads). Boards need to "be the parent", not Santa Claus. If every Board could read this book, they'd see the kind of issues they should be working on. I note that the most negative reviews come from self-identified librarians or "library pros". That doesn't surprise, since the best of them are frustrated by the unsolved problems described in anecdotes, and the worst of them resent the criticism implied. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Being the Tale of Why Libraries Are Not Ivory Towers By Libra The story of Scott Douglas's life in the library has a great first line and one that acts as a springboard to the rest of his memoir. Policies in libraries, especially public libraries, often deal with issues involving who deals with patrons in bathrooms, patrons viewing computer pornography, computer hacking patrons, and patrons displaying sexual behavior not allowable in public, as well as with who can check out library materials, loan periods, fines, and library computer use. Scott's dispatches begin with his initial job as a library page, follow his experiences in library school, and end with the rebuilding of the first library where he worked and where he returns as a librarian. Although many of the chapters begin with what might be considered politically incorrect statements such as "I am not a fan of the handicapped," a bit later the author corrects himself and explains that the most important part of being a librarian is "talking to people, learning who they are and why they come to the library." Throughout the text there are clever touches. Chapters are numbered according to the Dewey Decimal System, which is used to arrange books in public libraries, and each chapter has a "For Shelving" section that is described as a "short pointless interlude." These sections contain background and historical information and are actually not pointless. There are also numerous footnotes, which add information or humor. Anyone can enjoy this book, but for those who have worked in libraries, it is especially funny and poignant. How nice to hear from a clever, perceptive, honest, and literary librarian without aspirations for an administrative position. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Pleasant But Thin By Jeff Talbott Pleasant memoir about the lot of a public librarian, this book is engaging though ultimately a swim in the shallow end of the pool. It's tricky to read a memoir from a 28 year-old; especially one that takes time out to offer observations about life in general, from politics to religion to human nature. There are certainly young authors I love who cover these issues with a depth-of-field, but what keeps this sweet book from greatness is the callowness of its writer. He comes off as a sweet enough guy, but as the book goes on, his lack of life experience starts to hamper his ability to be an authority on anything. Which is part of his point; unfortunately it robs him of credibility even as he tells his tale.

An unexpectedly raucous and illuminating memoir set in a Southern California public library. For most of us, librarians are the quiet people behind the desk, who, apart from the occasional "shush," vanish into the background. But in *Quiet, Please*, McSweeney's contributor Scott Douglas puts the quirky caretakers of our literature front and center. With a keen eye for the absurd and a Kesey-esque cast of characters (witness the librarian who is sure Thomas Pynchon is Julia Roberts's latest flame), Douglas takes us where few readers have gone before. Punctuated by his own highly subjective research into library history--from Andrew Carnegie's Gilded Age to today's Afghanistan--Douglas gives us a surprising (and sometimes hilarious) look at the lives which make up the social institution that is his library.

From Publishers Weekly McSweeney's contributor Douglas was a college student who liked books and needed a job, so he became a page in a "run-down" Anaheim public library. He soon discovered the "dark truth about librarians"--that they don't actually read much. Still, lacking better career plans, he accepted a state grant to get a degree in library science. The more he got to know his local branch, the more it felt like "watching a soap"; the staff was "like a family." When he's not repeating petty tales of staff infighting, Douglas focuses on four types of library users: teens, homeless people, crazy people and the elderly. According to him, most of them smell, all but the elderly make too much noise, and they all, in defiance of library rules, try to access pornography on the internet. After retelling a story

of someone masturbating at the computer, or of nefarious activities in the public restroom, the author is quick to follow up with proud words about being a non-discriminatory public servant; his pieties wear thin after awhile. Early on, when Douglas realizes he's a librarian because he loves helping people he's quite likeable, but when his stories become prurient, it's a turn-off. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Douglas launched his career as a page in a library branch, and never wholly losing his enthusiasm, he persevered, got an education, and now works as a librarian at Southern California's Anaheim Public Library. For several years, he has been documenting his experiences on McSweeney's Web site, giving vent to all the hopes, fears, everyday joys, and constant frustrations of daily life in a public library branch. Patrons with all their foibles take on recognizable form, from rowdy, sometimes threatening teens to an elderly patron demanding the Oxford English Dictionary on audiotape. Douglas casts a jaundiced eye on library administrators, but he does clear away stereotypes about public-service librarians and affirms their worth. Hardly a systematic treatise on public librarianship and limited by the very format of a blog (and its ineluctable narcissism), Douglas' memoir nevertheless offers unique and utterly engaging insights, valuable for public librarians, managers, and trustees. --Mark Knoblauch "[A] cleverly written book...Scott Douglas brings us into the stacks."—Chicago Tribune, 5/10/08, Editor's Choice "Scott Douglas is pretty cool for a librarian...His clear belief in the importance of libraries for communities gives the book heart."—London Paper, 5/6/08