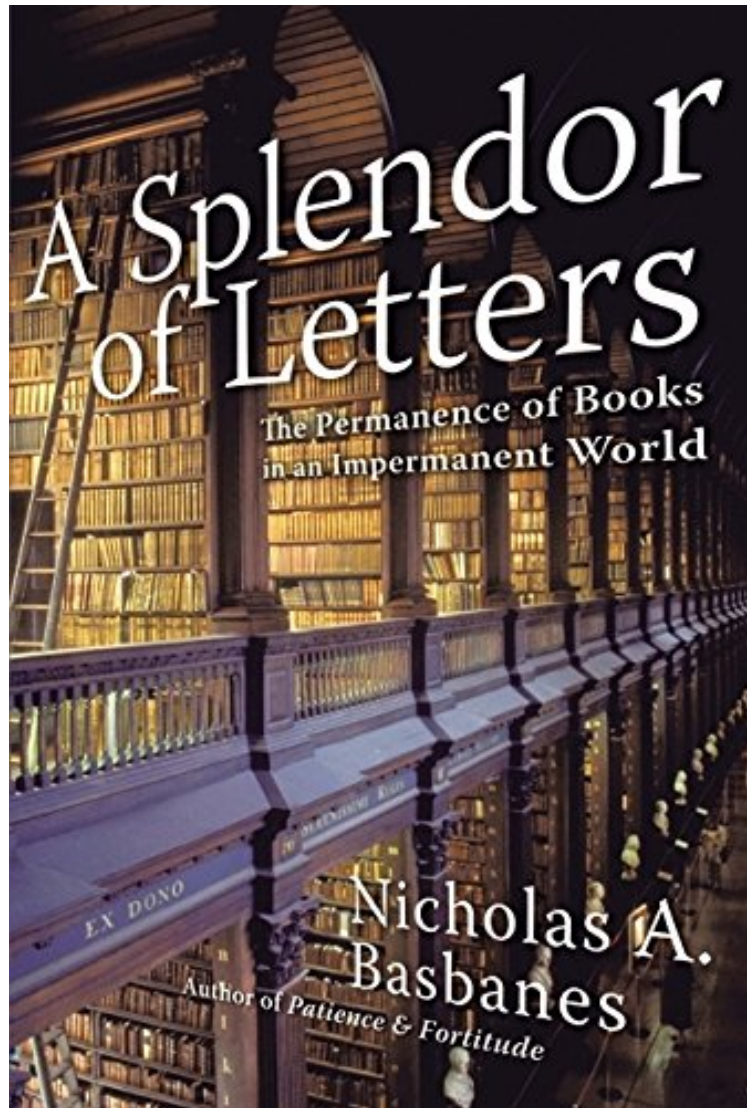


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A Splendor of Letters: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World

Nicholas A. Basbanes

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Nicholas A. Basbanes : A Splendor of Letters: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Splendor of Letters: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World:

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful. The Last of a Splendid TrilogyBy John D. CofieldNicholas Basbanes has enriched the lives of bibliophiles with his A Gentle Madness and Patience and Fortitude, the first two

volumes in this trilogy devoted to books and the people who love them. He has now brought the trilogy to a close with *A Splendor of Letters*, which is just as fascinating as either of the first two volumes. *A Splendor of Letters* is a wide ranging look at many aspects of the book world. History is served through an examination of several attempts to destroy the written word, from Nazi Germany to Pol Pot's Cambodia; and with happier stories of archaeologists' rediscoveries of ancient libraries. More stories of book collectors of the sort that made *A Gentle Madness* so interesting are also provided, as is more material on the problems libraries and collections have when they run out of space and must determine what to do with the overflow, which was a major topic in *Patience and Fortitude*. The main thrust of *A Splendor of Letters*, however, is a defense of the book in its traditional form against those who would proclaim its death at the hands of technology. As with all of Mr. Basbanes' works (which also include *Among the Gently Mad*, *A Primer for Book Collectors*), the fascinating material is enhanced by the beauty of the writing. No book lover should pass this by.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very good and informative. By Barbara D
This author is a leading authority about books and collections. Very, very good. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Save the Book
By Mary Ann Fischer
It's amazing to read without wanting to take a break a book of such a serious subject. My tears were real both for the tragedy of book destruction which destroyed the memories of many people over the course of history but for the realization that "the public" will not read this....but SHOULD! Everyone should know the story of the past in order to live responsibly in the present.-

In *A Splendor of Letters*, Nicholas A. Basbanes continues the lively, richly anecdotal exploration of book people, places, and culture he began in 1995 with *A Gentle Madness* (a finalist that year for the National Book Critics Circle Award) and expanded in 2001 with *Patience Fortitude*, a companion work that prompted the two-time Pulitzer Prizewinning historian and biographer David McCullough to proclaim him "the leading authority of books about books." Basbanes now offers a consideration of the many pressing issues that surround the role of books in contemporary society, such as the willful destruction of books and libraries in Sarajevo, Tibet, and Cambodia, and the spirited efforts to restore them. The matter of "discards" at various libraries takes on an entirely new dimension as well, with fully researched stories about the kind of attitudes that may lead to the loss of last copies of important works. In vivid detail, Basbanes examines the many materials that have been used over the centuries to record information -- among them clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, slabs of stone, palm leaves, animal skins, and hammered sheets of gold and copper. Also discussed are the various debates that continue to rage about preservation, which may mean saving and storing books on paper indefinitely, or as electronic data, which are by nature ephemeral. In this beautifully packaged edition, Nicholas Basbanes brings to a close his wonderful trilogy on the remarkable world of books and bibliophiles.

From *Publishers Weekly*
The final volume in an acclaimed trilogy for bibliophiles (after *A Gentle Madness* and *Patience Fortitude*) focuses on efforts to preserve books and other printed matter from the ravages of deterioration, destruction and obsolescence. The historical range here is expansive, encompassing texts by classical authors known today only through secondhand descriptions, William Blake's self-published illustrated volumes and used book sales at modern libraries. Even the most ancillary data have the power to fascinate: who knew, for example, that the Roman emperor Claudius was also probably the last scholar fluent in the language of the ancient Etruscans? But the research skills Basbanes displays are matched by the lively quality of his interviews, like an extended conversation with a Sarajevo librarian who saved thousands of Croatian volumes from the Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign. Other chapters, which describe how American libraries are regularly pruned of old books by less violent means, owe a heavy (and acknowledged) debt to Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold*, with minor updates to recap new trends in preservation. A final section elaborates on the potential threat of the e-book, but remains optimistic that love of the physical act of reading will enable the printed page to prevail. Even those who find the evidence unconvincing should find themselves compelled by story after story on the salvation of books. Basbanes's longtime fans will rejoice at more of the same, while new readers will no doubt be swiftly caught up in the book-loving spirit. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From *Booklist*
Basbanes' trilogy about the book world, whose earlier titles were *A Gentle Madness* (1995), concerning book collectors, and *Patience and Fortitude* (2001), about libraries, culminates in this eclectic ramble through the perpetual problem of preservation. Fiscal and physical limitations exacerbate the problem of determining which materials to save for posterity, while the malicious destruction of books and documents continues, as Basbanes lamentably recounts in the Khmer Rouge's obliteration of Cambodia's libraries, to be as hazardous to cultural heritage as it was when Rome razed Carthage. Against the threats of time and vandalism labor the preservationists, who are Basbanes' heroes. Their particular projects, for example, collecting and making durable copies of Tibetan literature, dot his narrative. Basbanes takes multiple directions in this work, from accounts about how the writings of antiquity have been precariously transmitted to the present to interviews with figures in the computer, publishing, and library professions. Yet, throughout, focus is maintained on the preservation issue through Basbanes' unabashed bibliophilism. Preservationists will be the best audience for this work. Gilbert Taylor
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About the Author
Nicholas A. Basbanes has worked as an award-

winning investigative reporter, a literary editor, and a nationally syndicated columnist. The author of five books, he also writes a regular column for Fine Books Collections magazine and lectures widely on book-related issues. He and his wife, Constance, live in Massachusetts.