

Whippoorwill E-Comment

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The Sabretooth AAPA

SOME years ago I read a provocative book entitled *The Sabretooth Curriculum*. It condemned the archaic 19th century biology curriculum that was being universally employed to teach the subject to mid-20th century biology students. One of the most important subjects taught to the children of our cavemen ancestors was about sabretooth behavior. These dangerous big cats ate people, so it was important to instruct the young about how to avoid them, or to defend themselves if attacked. As time went on, humans exterminated the behemoths the sabretoothed cats depended on for food – mastodon, mammoth, giant ground sloth, and gigantic buffalo. Deprived of their traditional foods the sabretooths became scarce, and virtually ceased becoming a threat to people. But children continued to be taught about the danger the big cats posed.

Sabretooths became so scarce that soon it became necessary to capture and cage specimens to be used as teaching examples to show youngsters what they looked like, showing the size of their formidable serrated canine teeth and huge powerful claws and musculature. Times were rapidly changing but the curriculum did not. When sabretooths became extinct, children were taken into caves and shown wall drawings of the big cats, though there were none to threaten humans. The sabretooth curriculum perpetuated a myth which was taught for numberless generations afterwards.

The AAPA continues to perpetuate something akin to the sabretooth curriculum—the myth of the boy printer, happily printing away with a handful of worn type and a small tabletop Kelsey hand press. We only have one boy letterpress printer in the entire organization – Sam Jero, and I suggest that he is already in danger of being caged and used, like the last of the caged sabretooths, as an example of something many members seem to remember as being of importance. Make no mistake because Sam *is* vitally important to the survival of our hobby group. I have met him twice and know him to be a delightful, active young man – a real *treasure*. But he is an anomaly in the AAPA – an honest to goodness boy printer who is actively printing letterpress for the bundles. Dare we eventually introduce him to a computer? If we do, we might soon have to photograph him and like our cavemen ancestors, show his likeness to the few potential new members of AAPA out there as an example of a myth that though extinct, we want to remember as being of importance.



On Distaste for Modernism

Our society has an absurd tolerance for obscurantists who wish to deny the relevance of the art and science they do not understand. The more obtuse critics of modernism, treated seriously by some journalists, are like the creationists (also treated seriously by many journalists and even senators, and a president) who attack evolutionary theory because they think Darwin said that we are all descended from monkeys. The message of both groups is a simple celebration of ignorances: what I do not understand is not worth understanding. They may deserve our sympathy, but in the end there is no reason to listen to them.

--- Charles Rosen, Concert Pianist