

# Anthology

Royal Library of Sweden

## Hell-Bent and Hand-Bound

According to legend, a repentant scribe once produced an entire manuscript in a single night — assisted by the wickedest of underwriters.



Sweden's Royal Library acquired the Devil's Bible when the Swedish army conquered Prague in 1648.

Confined to a cell for breaching monastic creed, the thirteenth-century monk summoned the original Author of Evil himself to help create what eventually would be known as the Devil's Bible.

With the moonlight creeping through his tiny window in the Benedictine monastery in Podlazice, Bohemia, the fearsome friar labored through the night as he transcribed the Old and New Testaments, Isidore of Seville's *Etmologiae*, and Cosmas of Prague's *Chronicle of Bohemia* into pre-Vulgate Latin, as well as Josephus' *History of the Jews* into Latin. He then bound the 165-pound *Codex Gigas* (giant book) in vellum prepared from the skins of 160 asses, surely upon recommendation of his hellspawn sponsor.

One wonders if the old monk, doomed forever to wander the jagged halls of the Hades Reference Section, might have conjured a more sympathetic editor.

## Let Freedom Read

The freedom to read and to be free of government persecution for one's reading is an essential element of our democracy....," wrote executive members of the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America (ABAA) in a June letter to independent counsel Kenneth Starr, protesting his subpoena of records of book purchases made by former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. "Seeking subpoenas for book-related records... jeopardizes freedoms in ways that outweigh the many legal issues involved in the case," ABAA officers wrote.

Starr's subpoena targets an alleged exchange of books between Lewinsky and President Clinton. The president reportedly gave the intern a copy of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; she in turn gave him a copy of Nicholson Baker's steamy novel about phone sex, *Vox*.

Kramerbooks & afterwords, a Washington, D.C., bookstore, sidestepped the subpoena and a First Amendment fight in a June agreement to voluntarily turn over records to Lewinsky's attorneys rather than be forced to give them to Whitewater prosecutors.

ABAA President Priscilla Juvelis, Vice President Thomas Congalton, and Secretary Ken Lopez say the subpoena oversteps a fragile line of constitutional privacy. As their letter states, "We cannot ignore the broad and frightening implications of our country taking a step away from its freedoms and toward the much more common circumstance throughout human history of those in power dictating what may or may not be read by the rest of us."



Michigan book artist Susan Hensel's recent literary sculpture, *Anne*, pays tribute to the anguished poet Anne Sexton. "She was an awful person," says the nationally exhibited artist, "but the power of her words to stitch her life together, to keep her alive, and to profoundly echo in the hearts of her readers, is worthy of great admiration."

