

Preface

The original intent of this book was to reprint the piece now titled "Paperback Island," along with an annotated list of books pertaining to it, and nothing more. I have no memory of when or why I strayed from this simple plan. Perhaps timeliness was a factor. Tuli Kupferberg had just died and Sid Bernard is forever connected in my mind with Tuli. Susanna Cuyler, meanwhile, lent me use of her apartment in order for me to read her book *Not Just Another Voice*. There was no overlooking the fact that her apartment and her book are virtually one, as Susanna had intimated. This alone, I thought, deserved to be written about since large numbers of readers seemed, all of a sudden, to be growing frivolously impatient with the printed book, much less books that require you to take up residence in a distant abode so as to read them.

Paperback Island

I happened to work on the piece about the Bill Free Library at Susanna's Mulberry Street apartment, so that too was in the forefront of my mind as I continued to contemplate the role books play in our lives. Material about Jim Farrell naturally began to seep in of its own accord, there is so much of it here at my disposal. Rather than deny its presence altogether, I decided that one of the goals of the book would be to provide, *sotto voce*, a covert profile of James T. Farrell. When the reader finished the book, he or she would be expert on Farrell in small useful ways, subliminally. (That profile does not seem so covert, now.) So things went.

The largely bygone era of old-fashioned print publishing demanded certain things of writers and their nervous systems. An awareness of this time found its way into the book, as well. ("Obviously!" some will protest.) The importance of friendship and specter of loss also figure as themes in the book. Perhaps they are the book. I hadn't fully anticipated this. But there it is, plain.

The changes in publishing and bookselling in the past few years—from 2010 to the present—have been nothing short of remarkable. I gave a talk in 2010 about the future of the book and tried in vain to borrow a Kindle in preparation for it. (I do not even know if Nooks existed then.) Today, I would have no such difficulty.

Books and their destiny aside, I now better appre-

Paperback Island

ciate how seismic historical change takes place, even when choice and preference are, in theory, permitted: without a superabundance of forethought, much less careful preparation. This richly naïve revelation has never been far from my mind during the making of this book.

The future may hold good things for books, yet. But, meanwhile, “Baby, it’s cold outside,” to echo Sidney Joseph Perelman. It’s even beginning to get cold inside.