



Paperback Books -- Boon or Bane?

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Title:	Paperback Books -- Boon or Bane?
Author(s):	Strout, Donald E.
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Abstract:	The scene is a publishers' party and the central figures a man in a tweedy sports coat, puffing at a pipe, and a pleasantly plump matron, balancing a glass in her hand. "Tell me," she gushes brightly, "Are you paper-back or hardcover?" --Thus the New Yorker, with customary urbanity, recently paid its respects to an aspect of the contemporary publishing scene that to some is a revolution and to others merely revolting. All of this business of publishing paperbacks started quite a while back and is not, one must hasten to point out, exclusively American, nor indeed, exclusively 20th century. Paperbacks have doubtless existed, in one form or another, for 2000 years or so. But for our purposes, a point of well-documented origin seems to be the famed Tauchnitz Edition series of British and American authors, started in Leipzig in 1841 by Bernhard (later Baron) Tauchnitz, and running ere its final days into something over 5,000 titles. This, and Philip Reclam's Universal Bibliothek, started in 1867 and running to 6,000 titles (with sales of over 30,000,000) in fifty years, are the most famous of the foreign series in paper covers prior to the 20th century. Interestingly enough, at almost the same time Tauchnitz was beginning his highly successful venture on the Continent, we witness (in 1831) the start of what is considered to be the first paperback series in America--The Library of Useful Knowledge, published by the Boston Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge.
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