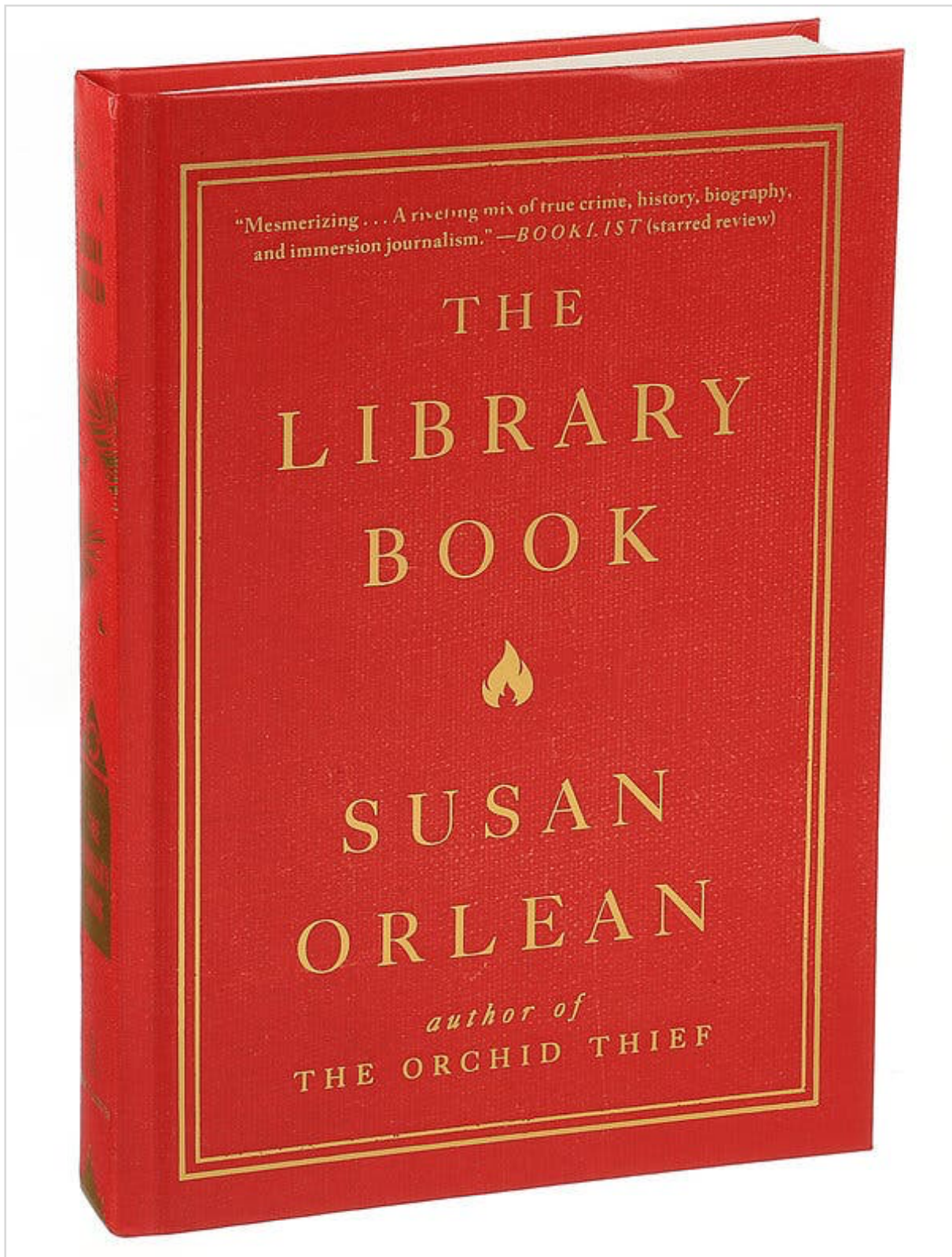


 #95: The Library Book

#books/date/2019/06

#books/type/non-fiction

#books/rating/★★★★



Overview

Having walked by the LA Central Library many times, I was surprised to learn that a massive fire had destroyed over 400,000 books in 1986 (the largest library fire in the history of the United States). Susan Orlean's, appropriately titled book, chronicles the fire, the history of the Los Angeles public library system, and the life of the suspected arsonist. While it wasn't my favorite, it was fascinating to learn more about the city I live in and some of the rich history that is relatively unknown. One example: the library's renovation was funded by selling the building's air rights for \$28 million to the developers across the street.

Book Notes

- International news about the fire was upstaged by the Chernobyl incident (pg. 16)
- 400,000 books were destroyed in the fire and 700,000 were badly damaged by smoke and water; it was the greatest loss of any public library in the history of the United States (pg. 34)
- 32,000 books are moved by the shipping department at the Central Library, every weekday—the equivalent of an entire library brand (pg. 61)
- "In Senegal, the polite expression for saying someone died is to say his or her library has burned." (pg. 93)
- Carnegie built many of the early libraries in the US—he funded 1700 libraries, including 6 in Los Angeles (pg. 131)
- Early librarian, Charles Lummis dealt with books of dubious intellectual quality with an interesting strategy...
 - "The popularity of pseudoscience books...worried him. Instead of removing the books from the collection, he established what he called the 'Literary Pure Food Act' to warn readers...He hired a blacksmith to make a branding iron in the shape of a skull and crossbones—the poison warning symbol—and used it to brand the frontispiece of the offending books." (pg. 145)
- The rate of conviction for arson is less than 1% (pg. 167)
- Harry Pigeon completed the **first solo sailing trip** to circumnavigate the globe—he had borrowed the plans to build his boat from the LA Public Library.
- Bertram Goodhue, the architect of the LA Public Library, "imagined the building as a tribute to the glories of knowledge...a humanist cathedral celebrating the great intellectual works." (pg. 181)
- The library renovation was funded in 1986 by selling the library's air rights for \$28.2 million, and the land underneath the library's former garden to build an underground

parking lot. (pg. 251)

- Public libraries outnumber McDonalds in the United States; there are twice as many libraries as retail bookstores (pg. 289)