

AUTHORS GUILD

Spring 2010

BULLETIN



SYMPOSIUM

Rights and Royalties in a Time of Digital Disruption

Correcting Harvard's Robert Darnton

Remembering J. D. Salinger

**Roy Blount: Are You Better Off Than You Were
Four Years Ago?**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Amid all the discussion about digitizing and displaying out-of-print books under the proposed Google settlement, many authors and agents seem unaware that Google is already doing this with in-print books. Under the Google Books Partner Program, the Google Books website is displaying large amounts of copyrighted content of books with the permission of thousands of publishers, but without the go-ahead or even notification of most authors.

What appears to be a copyright issue is actually a contractual one, Guild attorney Anita Fore tells me. Authors' contracts usually give publishers the right to allow publication of excerpts of books for promotional purposes. Clauses that were no doubt originally intended to allow a few quotations in advertisements, book reviews and the like, now permit something very different in the digital age. Allowing publication of small amounts of material in print

The Guild encourages members to write to the *Bulletin*. Letters should be sent to "Letters to the Editor," The Authors Guild, 31 East 32nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10016. They can also be faxed to (212) 564-5363, or sent via e-mail to staff@authorsguild.org (type "Letters to the Editor" in the subject line). Letters may be edited for length, grammar and clarity.

media is a lot different from permitting a fifth or more of a book to be made available to millions of readers around the world.

The content of as much as 20 percent of three of my in-print books is viewable on Google Books. (Information on the settlement website about the program invites an even greater percentage—up to 100 percent. See FAQ no. 57.) No one knows if this promotes or undercuts sales of books or makes any difference at all. It probably differs from book to book. Whatever the case, authors should be notified by their publishers when a book is selected and have a say as to whether it should be included. Also, publishers are receiving revenue from advertisements placed alongside the digitized books. Are they passing any of it along to authors?

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ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

Novelist **Philip Roth**, in *The Guardian* of London, predicted that in 25 years, the number of people reading novels will be akin to the numbers now reading Latin poetry. Novels will be a curiosity, certainly not a profit center.

That observation is from an essay by **Susan Dominus** in *The New York Times*. She said, "This is painful gospel for anyone who reads Philip Roth, or other great writers, the way other people read religious texts—to make sense of the world, to be humbled or inspired by the power of language."

In her essay, Dominus insisted that even without novels "people will keep making literary culture, just not at the same scale, or in the same hallways, or for a living."

DRAMA: The Lincoln Center Theater opened the fall season with "What Once We Felt," a new drama by **Ann Marie Healy**. It's "about a novelist of the future whose book becomes the last to be printed on paper."

The New York Times asked, "Grim parable? Macabre comedy? Naturalist drama? Given that subject matter,

it could be any of the above, or a little of all three." Let's hope it's an impossible fantasy.

TOO MUCH? **Thomas Mallon's** new book is *Yours Ever: People and Their Letters*. In an interview in *PW*, Mallon said, "To me, the idea of e-books as the most popular format bothers me less than the possibility of a publishing world in which the editorial apparatus has collapsed. As the world of self-publishing proliferates, I just worry about so much stuff being out there that people don't know how to find what's good. That, I think, is the big challenge, more than the shifting technology itself. I suppose that immediately provokes charges of elitism from people. Well, so be it. I don't want to live in a world where everything receives the same imprimatur as everything else. I don't want to live in a world without editors."

NOTED: The following quote is from **Chamfort's** *Maximes et Pensees*, published in 1805: "Most of today's

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