

# AUTHORS GUILD

Winter 2008 **BULLETIN**



## **BOOK REVIEWS**

**In Print, Online, In Decline?**

**Internet Pioneer: We Were Wrong, Piracy is Bad**

**Will it Catch Fire? Roy Blount Unpacks Amazon's Kindle**

**Authors Guild Survey: E-Mail & Book Promotion**



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I thought Steve Wasserman's piece on the decline of book reviewing was stimulating [Fall 2007 Bulletin], and I guess that is the reason I decided to renew my AG membership.

I do have something of a quibble with Wasserman, though. Hell yes, there is a decline in literacy, but was there a golden time in U.S. history where everyone read books, even the working classes? At least during the late 19th and early 20th century there were a few labor colleges and labor temples, where the workers actually read and discussed books and social issues. Now, the

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non-reading public, including the working class and underclass, get their cultural information from TV. I, myself, help teach, now and then, a course to labor apprentices, "Labor, Our Heritage." We show a lot of films, as that is what the laborers are used to in this visual culture. But, between the two of us who team-teach this class, we lay out a hell of a good library on the tables during the week for the laborers to borrow, and few of them borrow any books.

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## ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

"Now and again thousands of memories converge, harmonize, arrange themselves around a central idea in a coherent form, and I write a story."

That is a quotation from a volume entitled *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter*, published in 1970. She wrote, "I keep notes and journals only because I write a great deal, and the habit of writing helps me to arrange, annotate, stow away conveniently the references I may need later. Yet when I begin a story, I can never work in any of those promising paragraphs, those apt phrases, those small turns of anecdote I had believed would be so valuable. I must know a story 'by heart' and I must write from memory."

IF AT FIRST: Despite a couple of well-publicized starts, electronic books have not yet caught on with book buyers. Now there are two new devices designed to replace the paper book.

In October, Amazon.com introduced the Kindle, an electronic book reader that wirelessly connects to an e-book store on Amazon's site. Older e-book devices had to be connected to a computer to download books.

In the fall, Google began charging users for full online access to digital copies of some books in its database. Publishers set the prices for their books and share the revenue with Google.

The New York Times said, "neither offering is expected to carve out immediately a significant piece of the \$35-billion-a-year book business. But these new

services, from two Internet heavyweights, may help to answer the question of whether consumers are ready to read books on digital screens instead of on processed wood pulp."

NEW CLASSICS: **Adam Gopnik** wrote about new versions of *Moby-Dick* and *Vanity Fair* in a New Yorker article entitled "The Corrections." These books have been edited with major cuts by a British publisher so that they are fast, easy reading.

Gopnik read these new versions and concluded: "What makes writing matter is not a story, clearly told, but a voice, however odd or ordinary, and a point of view, however strange or sentimental. Books can be snipped at, and made less melodically muddled, but they lose their overtones, their bass notes, their chesty resonance—the same thing that happens, come to think of it, to human castrati."

RESEARCH? The plot of his novel got one author into big trouble. *Amok* by **Krystian Bala**, published in Poland in 2003, described a victim whose corpse showed torture and signs of starvation. There was a noose around his neck.

The similarities to the body of a businessman fished from the Oder River in 2000 were so remarkable that Bala, 35, was found guilty of planning and directing the killing. He suspected that the victim was hav-

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