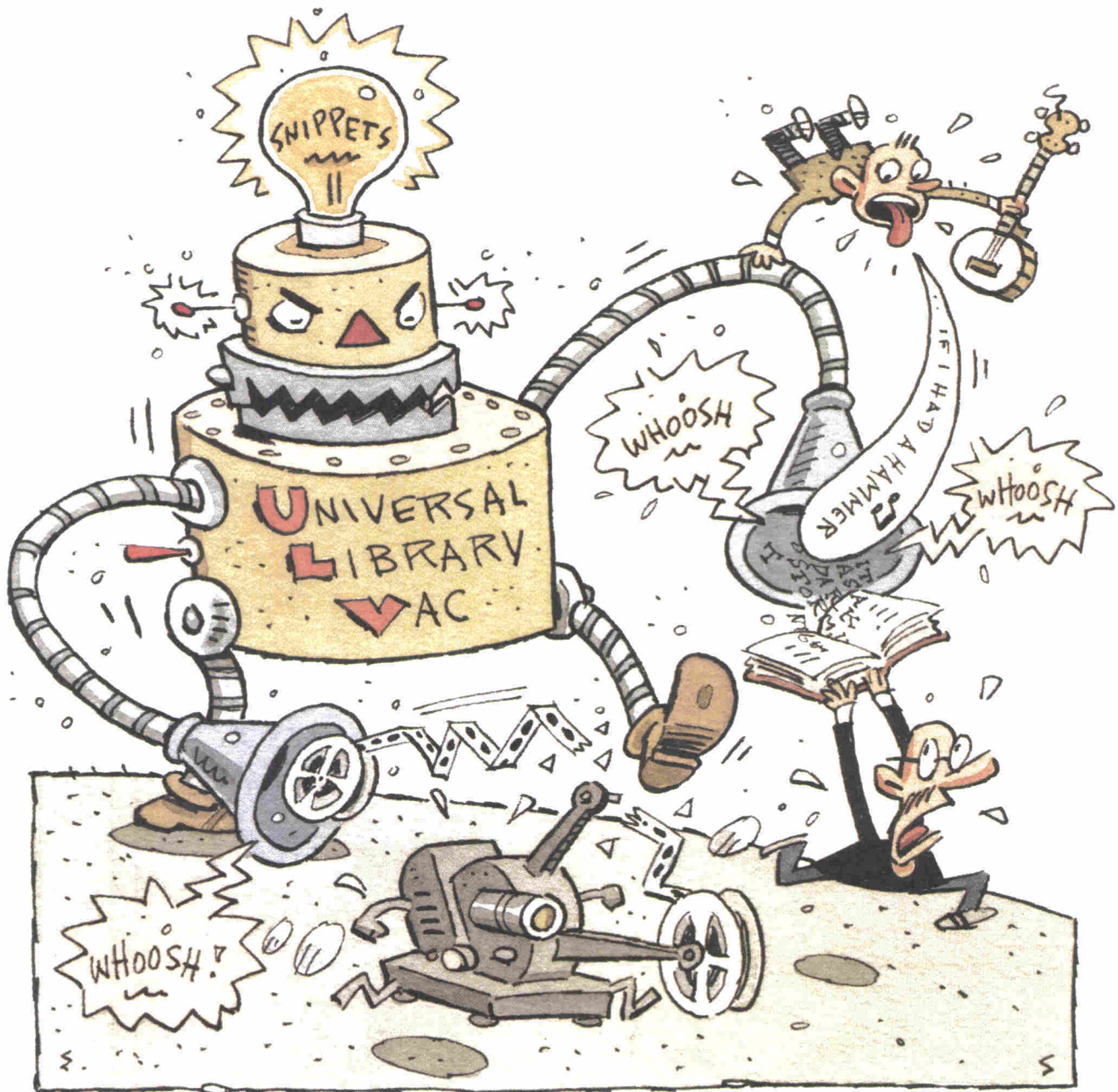


# AUTHORS GUILD

Summer 2006

**BULLETIN**



## THE UNIVERSAL LIBRARY: AN "EDEN OF EVERYTHING"?

John Updike on Authorship and the Universal Book

Nick Taylor on the Right Way to Build a Digital Library

When Publishers Go Belly-Up

The Ascent of *Literatura Latina*

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In *Along Publishers Row* (Spring Bulletin 2006) you mention Maurice Sendak's 1970 book, *In the Night Kitchen*, in which a naked boy appears. As I remember, there were several naked boys, and librarians painted shorts on them. Some of the censored copies became collectors' items.

Clyde Robert Bulla  
Warrensburg, MO

I read Nicholas Weinstock's profile of Ronna Wineberg's quest for fame if not fortune in "Opening Lines" with some disappointment that the plain speaking I'd expect in the Bulletin was not forthcoming. Ronna Wineberg's experience is typical of the many writers inclined to literary fiction, first achieving competence in the short story, hopes for a novel, and the discovery and participation in the literary contests that seem to proliferate like mushrooms after rain in Oregon.

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](mailto:staff@authorsguild.org) (type "Letters to the Editor" in the subject line). Letters may be edited for length, grammar and clarity.

But there is a step beyond where Ms. Wineberg has arrived; the recognition that such contests ultimately do great harm to the larger literary community, rarely if ever offer writers an important venue for their work, and almost certainly leave most writers poorer.

The fact is that most journals that sponsor contests also publish material that comes in over the transom, and that the total amount of the awards is far less than the sum of the fees collected. If you were to find yourself in a casino where the "vig-orish" [house percentage] was 50 percent, you'd head for the door, but contests draw several hundreds of hopefuls with fees of \$20 to \$50, and usually give awards of \$1,000 or less. Do the math. These contests are not a service to struggling writers or a service to literature; they are subsi-

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## ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

"Publishers say there is no harder sell in the world of books these days than literary fiction," wrote Edward Wyatt in *The New York Times*. "Even critically acclaimed literary novels often have a short life in hardcover . . ."

So publishers have begun to offer books by some authors as paperback originals. Morgan Entrekin, publisher of Grove/Atlantic, said, "In the last four or five years, it's gotten hard to publish fiction by lesser-known authors, and even by some better-known authors. When you're taking back 50 to 70 percent of the hardcover copies you shipped, the stores—rightfully so—are not willing to take another chance."

HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster and Random House have also begun to go this route. Jane von Mehren, publisher of trade paperbacks at Random House, told *The Times*, "It's been more of an evolution than a big jump. Getting somebody to spend \$22 on a book by an author who they've never heard of is hard, but getting them to spend \$13.95 on a paperback is much easier."

Authors and agents understandably resist this trend. Not only do authors forfeit the prestige of a

hardcover publication, they also forfeit the higher royalties that come with it, along with the chance for a second run with a paperback.

CASE CLOSED: A High Court judge in London ruled that Dan Brown did not steal the idea for *The Da Vinci Code* from *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, an earlier book by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln. The judge said that *Holy Blood* "does not have a central theme as contended by the claimants: it was an artificial creation for the purposes of the litigation working back from *The Da Vinci Code*."

Mark Stephen, a London lawyer, told *The New York Times*: "Whilst the decision shows that [Brown] didn't infringe copyright, his moral behavior is more, in my view, open to question. It's clear that he used the fundamental theses and ideas of *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, and . . . Dan Brown owes a debt to Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln." Lincoln, the third author of *Holy Blood*, did not take part in the lawsuit.

The judge rejected the plaintiffs' request to appeal

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