FINAL EDITION? A Newspaper Book Reviewer's Lament
The Half-Century Club: Eleven Longtime Guild Members
Remembering Madeleine L'Engle
Roy Blount: Why You've Never Seen Me on "Oprah"
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Geeslin: Since you promise that you “can pronounce Mary, Ruth and Fern,” I feel sure that you can learn to spell R-A-venel, not only “an editor at Algonquin” but one of its co-founders. I’d be tickled to know how many of the letters you get correcting your e for a come from Charleston, S.C., where Ms. Ravenel grew up, and where the name Ravenel is downright revered.

Ms. Ravenel is not the first literary lion in her line. For historians, the Low Country’s early history is invaluable described in Charleston, the Place and the People (1906), by Harriott Horry Ravenel. And don’t ever spell that Harriott “Harriet” or your mailbox will fill up again.

My sympathies,
Martha Bennett Stiles
Lexington, KY

Geeslin answers: “Sorry I messed up. I once got a letter addressed to Kamal G. Slin, and I ought to be more sensitive.”

ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

The late Bernard Malamud wrote several novels, including The Fixer and The Natural. In an introductory essay to The Stories of Bernard Malamud, the author wrote, “Much occurs in the writing that isn’t expected, including some types you meet and become attached to. Before you know it you’ve collected two or three strangers swearing eternal love and friendship before they begin to make demands that divide and multiply. García Márquez will start a fiction with someone pushing a dream around, or running from one, and before you know it he had peopled a small country. Working alone to create stories, despite serious inconveniences, is not a bad way to live our human loneliness.

“And let me say this: Literature, since it values man by describing him, tends toward morality in the same way that Robert Frost’s poem is ‘a momentary stay against confusion.’ Art celebrates life and gives us our measure.”

FEAR THERAPY: An interviewer for The Paris Review once asked the late William Styron if his emotional state had any impact on his work. The author wrote about his fight against depression in Darkness Visible.

Styron replied, “I guess like everybody, I’m emotionally fouled up most of the time, but I find I do better when I’m relatively placid. It’s hard to say though. If writers had to wait until their precious psyches were completely serene there wouldn’t be much writing done. Actually—though I don’t take advantage of the fact as much as I should—I find that I’m simply the happiest, the placiest, when I’m writing, and so I suppose that, for me, is the final answer. When I’m writing I find it’s the only time that I feel completely self-possessed, even when the writing itself is not going too well. It’s fine therapy for people who are perpetually scared of nameless threats as I am most of the time—for jittery people.”

HOW HE DID IT: Sylvia Raphael, a British academic, translated a collection, Selected Short Stories, by Honoré de Balzac. In her introduction, Raphael pointed out how the famous French writer used his own experience in his fiction.

In a story entitled “Facino Cane,” Balzac’s narrator says, “I had already acquired a power of intuitive observation which penetrated to the soul without ignoring the body, or rather it grasped external details so well that it immediately went beyond them. This power of observation enabled me to live the life of the individual I was watching, allowing me to substitute myself for him. . . .”

SANITY: Elizabeth Crook of Austin, Tex., is the author of a novel, The Night Journal. She took part in a panel discussion about the disturbed writer and said, “I think there’s a misconception that writers need to be

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About the Cover
Kevin Sanchez Walsh is a freelance artist in New York City.

Overheard
A Sign of the Times?
A friend reports receiving a solicitation from Graywolf Press inviting well-wishers to help defray the high cost of publishing books. For $500, a donor can underwrite the proofreading of a Graywolf novel; $750 buys an "author tour to independent bookstores" $1,000 offsets an advance for a new Graywolf poet.

No word yet on how much it costs to fly their foreign rights representative to Frankfort.
From the President

BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

H ow's your book doing?” people want to know. It's a natural question. I just wish I could come up with what people would recognize as a natural answer.

“It has become an instant classic,” is what they want me to say, I guess. Or “Gladys Knight and the Pips are reuniting to do the video.” Or “Wal-Mart is cutting back on tube socks to make more room for my 17th printing, the illuminated version.”

What I do say is the truth (or was the truth, last time I checked a sufficiently comprehensive bookstore): “It's still out there, here and there, for the time being, plugging along fairly well.”

This, I gratefully realize, is more than most authors can still say six months after pub date, but to people who aren't authors, it is disappointing. The man who mows my lawn in the country, for instance, looked downright crestfallen. I don't think he was worried that I would have to go back to yard work myself, therefore that he would lose me as a customer, if my book didn't start duking it out with *Freakonomics.* I am subsisting well enough as an author, and a contributor to scattered magazines, and an occasionally overpaid speaker, and a semi-regular radio person (I prefer not to use “personality,” since we're talking *public* radio), and a recipient of Social Security and dribs and drabs of movie residuals, to keep on paying him more regularly than I have been paid since 1975, when last I drew a salary.

Nor do I believe that my lawn technician was so let down because he has been hoping to retire on a tell-all book of his own, in which he rips the veil from the weediness of my turf. He just wants me to live up to his conception of an author, in which bestsellerdom is to be assumed.

“But don't books . . . keep . . . going . . . over the years?” he asked.

The Bible, yes.

I just wish people wouldn't conclude that if I am not rolling in authorial dough I must not be doing enough to get my product into everybody's hands. “I looked for it in the Borders in Chapel Hill yesterday,” they say, “and there wasn't a single copy.” And they give me an accusing look. Not that they were necessarily going to *buy* it in that particular Borders, but they were going to look it over, and evidently I hadn't bothered to tote enough boxes of it to that site, to last until they got around to looking for it.

They believe I have a dream job, and that I am not doing it the way they would. Sometimes their eyes light up. “I know what you ought to do,” they say. “You should go on Oprah!”

Oh! Why didn't I think of that? For that matter, why didn't Oprah? I should know, but I don't. I guess she, or her numbers people (you know how they are) made the hard decision that her audience would rather she give them Pontiacs.

Actually . . . Well, you know the story about the playwright who stopped by the box office to see how his Off-Off Broadway production was doing. “Not so great,” he was told. “Last week we took in $248.”

He walked down the street and bumped into a friend of his, a more successful dramatist, who informed him without being asked that his show was selling out every night for the 60th week in a row, and three road shows were set to roll next season, and the movie version was in the works, and of course there were the Tony nominations and it looked good for the Pulitzer. “Oh,” said the friend, “how about your play?”

“Not so great,” said the first guy. “I just went by the box office. Last week we did $448.”

Actually, if you want to know the absolute truth, it's only been for five months that my book has managed to keep plugging along fairly well.

But just between you and me, here's the bottom line. That book that I put together over a period of years ending a year and a half ago and that I have boiled down orally ad nauseam in venues ranging from the Fenway Park Authors Series (that was cool) to Book Group Expo (which was fun, except when somebody asked me why I thought book clubs never take to humorous books—“We've had one depressing memoir after another”)—that book is doing well enough that I'm able to be writing another one. The realization, letter by letter, of, OK, a dream job. ♦
Opening Lines

Bishop’s Move

BY NICHOLAS WEINSTOCK

Authors are always trying to make themselves heard. They struggle to find their “voice”; they strive to “speak” through their pages; they work to communicate as loudly and clearly as they can. But in the case of new author Katharine Jefferts Schori, the effort to speak to her audience is literal: as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America, Schori delivers sermons to worldwide congregations on a near-constant basis; and now her book delivers them to readers as well. And while she has long since become accustomed to the dynamic between speaker and listener, the medium—and the phenomenon—of book publishing came as a surprise.

“I’ve been preaching for the better part of 15 years,” says Schori, 53. “This book represents 40 or so speaking opportunities. And now, when I travel around, I hear from people about the book all the time. I get all kinds of individual letters. And frankly, I was surprised to get letters at all.”

This is not the Presiding Bishop’s first published writing, though she points out that her previous authorship was “a very different kind.” Schori was born in Florida but grew up in the Seattle area—“I was formed in the Northwest,” she offers with exactness—and had a previous career as an oceanographer, publishing articles and research studies in scientific journals before she began her religious training and in 1994 was ordained to the priesthood. In 2001, she was elected Bishop of the Diocese of Nevada, and in 2006, became the first woman to be chosen as Primate in the worldwide Anglican union. Schori continues to be interested in science as well as remaining an active, instrument-rated airplane pilot, a variety of pursuits that match well with her childhood reading.

“When I was young,” she recalls, “I read mainly adventure stories: Richard Halliburton, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, science fiction. I still do, when I have the time. That’s what vacations are for.”

In fact, given her travel schedule and time commitments as the church’s chief elected official—who has been embroiled for much of the last year in a fierce intra-communion dispute over the ordination of gay priests—virtually the only possible way to concoct a book was to collect and assemble her previously written sermons. Yet it turns out, as Schori explains, sermons are in many ways ideal fodder for the modern book reader. For one thing, they’re inherently powerful. “Sermons,” she says, “help people make sense of their own lives.” For another, they’re short. “Most of my sermons are 10 to 12 minutes when spoken. I find that most Americans don’t have attention spans longer than that, it’s more or less the time between television commercial breaks.” Not that Schori’s complaining: “I think there’s something good about having to make your point succinctly and directly. I think that’s the most effective way to engage someone and ensure they hear your words.”

But perhaps the greatest strength of published sermons, as Schori sees it, is their spiritual value—a value that books themselves, as revered objects in our culture, offer as well. “There’s something about a book that’s sacramental,” she considers, “something permanent and physical that suggests the nonphysical world. It’s a tangible sign of something larger than the physical—something transcendent.”

And that’s a quality that moves her—as a reader, as Presiding Bishop, and as an author who, despite the countless logistical hurdles, is considering another book. “I have a request to write another project that’s more focused, and would require more localized and disciplined writing,” she reveals. Schori’s daily and weekly routine would suggest that such in-depth authorship is impossible. Yet her instincts suggest otherwise. “I must admit that, with my schedule, it sounds a little daunting.” She pauses. “I may have to look into doing a little restructuring.”
Long-term Relationship

Eleven Members Who Joined the Guild in the First Half of the 20th Century

By Isabel Howe

Last winter we received a telephone call from Robert Bendick, husband of longtime member Jeanne Bendick. Jeanne, he told us, was approaching her 88th birthday, and could we perhaps send her a letter commemorating her many decades as an active writer and member of the Authors Guild, as a birthday surprise? Ms. Bendick, it turned out, joined the Guild in 1950—57 years ago.

We gladly sent Ms. Bendick a birthday letter, remarking on her accomplishments: writing and illustrating dozens of books for young readers, including several groundbreaking science books. But our curiosity was piqued—how many other members have been with us since the first half of the 20th century? It turns out she was not alone. We found 12 other writers who have been members for 57 years or more, including the literary agency Curtis Brown, Ltd., a Member-at-Large since 1915.

We sent letters to each of these members, thanking them for their dedication and support, and asking for news. We received such moving responses that we decided to share them with you.

Marcelle Michelin Alsop

Marcelle Michelin Alsop, who joined the Guild in 1948, has lived in Argentina, Venezuela, the United States, and the south of France. She was once a reporter for Life and Life en Español and is now at work on a book about Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV. She sent us this note:

Your letter was a most pleasant and unexpected surprise.

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 10, 1920 of French parents and came to the U.S.A. at the age of six. I’ve been writing since the age of seven and I’m still at it.

I’m living now in the south of France, and have been working for the past several years on two books for publication in America.

I deem it a privilege to be a member of the Authors Guild, both for achieving so much on behalf of writers and for defending freedom of expression, constantly threatened, and today more than ever.

Lucinda Baker

Lucinda Baker joined the Guild in 1948. Over the years, she has published about 2,000 stories in magazines such as Redbook, Ladies’ Home Journal and Family Circle. She sent us this letter:

It has been a long time since I met anyone else who began, as I did, supporting myself by writing for the love pulps.

I was attending what is now Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff. (In those days, the late 1930s, it was Arizona State Teachers College.) I had from childhood wanted to be a professional writer. I had learned to escape some tragedies that touched my family by making up stories and pretending I was living in them. I’d sold two stories to Household Magazine, a forerunner of Family Circle.

In my junior year, 1937, I won First Prize in the National PanHellenic Essay contest on the subject of what I hoped New York City would mean in my career. The prize was two weeks in New York, meeting people in the publishing, theatrical and radio worlds. It was really a wonderful two weeks, and the PanHellenic people gave me an extra two weeks, so I was there a month. (I wasn’t a member of a sorority, and I think they were touched by my homemade dresses.)

When I returned to Arizona I wrote a letter to NBC in Hollywood, explained my background, and asked for a job writing. They responded by offering me a position in which I would work in the typing pool four hours a day and study scripts the other four hours. After a week of that I knew it wasn’t for me, but I still had to support myself. Racks of pulp magazines were in every drugstore, and Writer’s Digest reported that they paid a cent a word for stories. I’d never read a pulp magazine, and I had never even had a real date, but I bought copies of Love Story, Sweetheart Stories, and all the ones that had Love on the cover, and studied and began to write love stories. (I was a lonely girl who had done a lot of dreaming.)

I started submitting stories and was soon selling most of them. (In those days you could live on a cent per word.)
For the next few years I lived in Hollywood, San Francisco, and Chicago, and wrote for all the love pulps, and especially for those published by A. A. Wyn. I wrote under my own name, Lucinda Baker, but editors gave me extra names if they used more than one story of mine in an issue. Through the 1940s and the Second World War I averaged about 90 stories a year published. And I loved writing—dreaming—them.

When the love pulps began to fade I began writing confessions. (Mine weren’t ever very sexy. More homey and family-ish, and some mysterious plots.) I married in 1946, and we lived in San Francisco. My darling Will, home from the war in the Pacific, was a tenor. At night he sang arias in North Beach operatic nightclubs and was a member of the San Francisco Opera chorus; by day he worked for the Naval Radiation Laboratory.

I continued to write for confessions but also occasionally published stories in Redbook, Ladies’ Home Journal and Family Circle, and magazines in Canada. After Will retired we moved back to Arizona, I got up my courage and wrote some romantic suspense novels. G. S. Putnam’s published three of them, The Place of Devils, Walk the Night Unseen and The Memoirs of the First Baroness. My most recent book was published by Avalon, Painted Lady. I have also written, under my married name, many inspirational articles for The Christian Science Monitor and other periodicals.

Will has passed away. Since my early love story days people constantly ask, “Are you still writing?” and the answer is always affirmative. At present I’m working on two books.

In 1948, Phyllis Whitney was startled that I wasn’t a member of the Authors Guild. I’d thought I wasn’t eligible because I hadn’t written books at that point. I was thrilled to become a member. (But it can’t have been that long ago that I joined, can it?)

Jacques Barzun

Jacques Barzun joined the Guild in 1942. A distinguished historian who taught at Columbia University—his alma mater—for almost 50 years, he is the author or translator of more than 30 books, including From Dawn to Decadence: Five Hundred Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present.

Mr. Barzun, who will turn 100 on November 30, and now lives in San Antonio, Texas, was the subject of a recent profile in the New Yorker written by a former student, who recalled that “Barzun always seemed to know everything you had ever read or thought about reading one day.”

Jeanne Bendick

At the moment I am writing (and illustrating) a book on Herodotus, aka The Father of History. It makes me laugh to be using a map from a book called Battles and How They Are Won that I did with Mary Elting* in 1944. (She was a very early Guild member.)

*[Elting was a member from 1949–2005.]
Bill Heinz

Bill Heinz, who joined in 1950, was featured in a lengthy Sports Illustrated profile in September 2000. His daughter wrote to tell us that he was inducted into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Hall of Fame in 2001, and into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2004. She also told us that information from a 1955 article Heinz wrote about his friend, the photographer Joe Rosenthal, “explaining the story of how Joe shot the famous flag-raising photo on Iwo Jima,” was used in the production of Paramount Pictures' recent film Flags of Our Fathers.

Hans Holzer

Hans Holzer, a member since 1946, is an Austrian-born writer, editor, and TV producer. He has written more than 100 books of fiction and nonfiction, most of which are studies of the supernatural. He is considered a leading parapsychologist and has been featured in documentaries and news programs. His novel The Secret of Amityville was developed into the hit horror movie The Amityville Curse.

A. E. Hotchner

A. E. Hotchner, a member since 1950, is a novelist, biographer and playwright best known for his memoirs Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir, about his friendship with Ernest Hemingway, and King of the Hill, which chronicled his childhood during the Great Depression. His most recent book is Everyone Comes to Elaine’s, a tribute to the legendary New York restaurant and literary night spot.

Mary Augusta Rodgers

Mary Augusta Rodgers began her career writing for Today’s Woman (now Woman’s Day) and has written for nearly every women’s magazine, including Redbook, Ladies’ Home Journal, Family Circle and McCall’s. She contributed to the New York Times travel section and wrote food-related travel articles for Gourmet magazine. She is the author of Country Roads of Kentucky, part of the Country Roads series. She sent us this letter:

It was a surprise (shock!) to have your letter and realize that I joined the Guild “in the first half of the 20th century.” It seems like ancient history in one way, and only yesterday in another.

I started writing freelance feature stories for the Louisville Courier Journal when I was in high school and have been at it, more or less, ever since. Unlike most women writers that I know, I never liked to work at home. I always had a little office, which is really wonderful, if you have a place where you don’t do anything but write. That was very helpful to me for many years.

In 1994 an article, “Home at the End of the Road,” published in the Detroit Free Press Magazine, won an Outstanding Article Award from the ASJA (American Society of Journalists and Authors).

My last published article was a back-page piece for the Smithsonian magazine in 1998. Since then, things have been pretty quiet but I have a few pet projects and (intermittent) hope for the future.

Budd Schulberg

Budd Schulberg, a member since 1945, has been a book author, a screenwriter, a Sports Illustrated editor, and a writing teacher. He is the author of several novels and nonfiction books, including What Makes Sammy Run? and The Disenchanted, and his screenplays...
include Winter Carnival, written with F. Scott Fitzgerald, and On the Waterfront, which won the 1954 Oscar for Best Screenplay. He has received numerous honors for his work, including awards from the American Library Association, the Screen Writers Guild, the Foreign Correspondents Association, the NAACP, and several universities and cultural centers.

Peter Viertel

Peter Viertel, a member since 1947, is a German-born novelist and screenwriter who adapted The Old Man and the Sea and The Sun Also Rises for film. He co-adapted, with James Agee, The African Queen and later based a novel, White Hunger, Black Heart, on his experiences working with John Huston on the film. In 1992 he published a semi-autobiographical work entitled Dangerous Friends: At Large with Hemingway and Huston in the Fifties.9

*Shortly before we went to press, we heard of Mr. Viertel’s death in Marbella, Spain, at the age of 86, three weeks after the death of his wife, actress Deborah Kerr.

Phyllis Whitney

Phyllis Whitney, a member since 1947, has been called “Queen of the American Goths” by the New York Times. In 1988, she received the illustrious Grand Master award for lifetime achievement from the Mystery Writers of America. She is the author of more than 70 books for young readers and adults. She sent us this note:

I am 104 years old and have written 76 books.

I hope to bring out the first part of my autobiography, which deals with my life in the Orient, in a small volume. I was born in Yokohama, Japan, of American parents.

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**Ehrenfeld v. Bin Mahfouz,**

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit

Rachel Ehrenfeld, author of *Funding Evil: How Terrorism Is Financed—and How to Stop It,* finally received a favorable ruling in her case against Saudi Prince Khalid Salim Bin Mahfouz. As reported in past issues, Bin Mahfouz brought a libel action in British court against Ehrenfeld for her portrayal of him as a financer of terrorism in *Funding Evil*. Ehrenfeld defaulted in the English action and subsequently tried to obtain a declaratory judgment from the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of New York that Mahfouz could not prevail on his libel claims under the laws of New York and the U.S., and that the English judgment would not be enforced against her in the U.S. The district court dismissed her case for lack of personal jurisdiction. Ehrenfeld appealed to the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

That court refused to rule on her appeal because it believed there were “long arm” jurisdictional questions that only the New York Court of Appeals could answer. (The circuit court claimed that there was no controlling precedent currently issued by the New York Court of Appeals.) The Second Circuit Court asked the New York Court of Appeals to rule first on whether New York’s long arm statute would provide for jurisdiction over Bin Mahfouz given the established facts of the case:

• Bin Mahfouz sued Ehrenfeld, a New York resident, outside the U.S.;

• His only prior contact with New York stemmed from a foreign lawsuit that he initiated;

• The judgment favorable to him in the foreign suit resulted in acts that must be performed by Ehrenfeld as a result of the suit brought in New York.

The New York Court of Appeals has accepted the case, which will be argued on November 15.

—Michael Gross
Murmurings from the Girls’ Locker Room

O’Connor v. Burningham
Supreme Court of Utah

A case involving public criticism of a high school basketball coach was the basis for a ruling that tested the boundaries of defamation law in Utah. Michael O’Connor was women’s basketball coach at Lehi High School in a small northern Utah town. In 2003 a talented athlete named Michelle Harrison came to play for the team. Her accomplishments were not necessarily well received by others—and Coach O’Connor suddenly became the subject of great deal of criticism from family and friends of the other girls on the team. In their eyes, his stern coaching was now abusive coaching; his use of funds, a misuse; and his decision to lean heavily on an underclassman like Harrison to win the regional championships, a case of playing favorites, pure and simple. The parents first complained to the school principal and administrators. Coach O’Connor was cleared of any suspicion of wrongdoing, so the parents took their cause to the local school board. Although the school board did not take formal action against O’Connor, the high school eventually stripped him of his coaching position because, they claimed, he refused to promise that he would not deny team membership or game time to those players whose parents were engaged in his defamation.

Shorn of his job as basketball coach—Harrison had meanwhile transferred to a high school in a neighboring town with a better girls’ team—O’Connor sued the parents in state court for personal defamation. The parents successfully moved for summary judgment, and defeated the charges against them by arguing that O’Connor is a “public official” whose reputation is entitled to less legal protection than the average private citizen’s. O’Connor appealed his case to the Utah Supreme Court.

In the landmark decision of New York Times v. Sullivan (1964), the U.S. Supreme Court held that defendants can be said to defame a public official only if their statements have been made with “actual malice”—that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not.” Otherwise, the allegedly defamatory statements will receive First Amendment protection because citizens in a democracy should be able to openly criticize public officials and their decisions without fear of a defamation suit. Yet the Court never specified who should be included under the rubric of “public official,” setting off a fierce guessing game amongst the lower courts. The Court’s opinion nevertheless made it clear that not every government employee should qualify as a public official, much as diplomatic immunity is not extended to every member of a foreign consulate. Still greater confusion reigned after the U.S. Supreme Court created a new class of persons with lower protections against defamation in Curtis Publishing v. Butts (1967): the general/limited purpose public figure.

For decades, Utah courts perpetuated this confusion, often conflating public officials with public figures as if no legal difference could distinguish them. Thus, whereas a regular police officer would not be considered a public official for First Amendment purposes, Utah held that a patrolman could nevertheless become one if involved in something newsworthy like a shooting. Similarly, in O’Connor’s case, the lower court ruled that whereas a high school basketball coach is not usually considered a public official, Coach O’Connor had become one because his coaching of the girls’ team had become a source of contention.

In a unanimous decision filed on July 31, the Utah Supreme Court finally reversed this course of reasoning and held that “public officials owe their status to the duties demanded by their official positions, not to the vagaries of events that may occur while they occupy these positions.” In other words, whereas a private citizen may become a public figure via “the vagaries of events,” such as winning American Idol, a public school employee cannot become a public official by similar means. Thus, the lower court wrongfully granted the parents summary judgment and O’Connor’s defamation claims have been reinstated. But although the Utah Supreme Court reversed the lower court’s ruling on O’Connor’s ‘public official’ status, the parents could still argue that O’Connor, as the butt of their rumors, has morphed into a ‘limited purpose public figure.’

On separate grounds, the Utah Supreme Court also recognized a “conditional privilege” that protects communications relating to familial relationships. That privilege could protect the defendants, because their allegedly defamatory statements contained “information that affects the well-being of a member of the immediate family,” the publication of which had been “of service in the lawful protection of the well-being of the member of the family.” The application of this privilege to the facts of the case appears strained, particularly since Utah law is largely silent on the existence of such a privilege. For one thing, not all of the defendants are
related to members of the girls’ basketball team that O’Connor once coached. Furthermore, not all of the alleged defamation directly concerned the well-being of the girls on the team. Yet the Utah Supreme Court claimed that this privilege would cover all of the alleged defamation at issue. Only if O’Connor can prove that this privilege was somehow abused will he be able to move forward with his claims.

—David Bornstein
Legal Intern

Don’t Shoot the Math Teacher

David Boim, Kimberly Boim v. Fulton County School District, James Wilson (Superintendent) Edward Spurka (Principal)
U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit

In October of 2003, Rachel Boim, a student at Roswell High School in Fulton County, Ga., wrote a story about bringing a gun to school and shooting her math teacher. During her art class, Boim passed the story, which was in a section of her notebook labeled “dream,” to a male student sitting next to her. Her teacher, Travis Carr, observed the male student writing in the notebook, which, at the time, he did not know belonged to Boim. When the male student failed to adhere to Carr’s order to put the notebook away, Carr demanded that the student turn over the notebook to him. However, rather than giving the notebook to Carr, the student passed it back to Boim, who then refused to give Carr the notebook. Eventually, Boim reluctantly turned the notebook over, and after class, Carr found and read the story.

After school ended, Carr spoke with John Coen, the school’s administrative assistant in charge of disciplinary matters. Coen asked Carr to bring him the notebook the following morning, which he did. After reading the story, Coen was concerned that Boim actually planned to murder her math teacher and believed that her choice to file the narrative in the “dream” section of her notebook was done to mask her true intentions. Coen then consulted Officer James Young, the school’s police officer, who also showed concern about the narrative’s school setting and violent nature.

Ultimately, Young removed Boim from her second period class and escorted her to the school’s administrative offices, where her parents were waiting, to discuss the incident. Edward Spurka, the school’s principal, also participated in the meeting. Boim admitted to Coen and Young that she wrote the story, but dismissed it as creative writing. Her parents supported her position. At the end of the meeting, Boim was sent home with her parents.

Spurka decided further investigation was necessary to determine whether Boim had violated school rules by writing the story. He took special note of the recent history of school violence in the U.S., including the notorious Columbine shootings as well as a local shooting at Heritage High School in Conyers, Ga. Spurka and school administrators talked to Boim’s math teacher, who expressed shock at the writing, and said he felt threatened by Boim. The group of administrators concluded that Boim violated three school rules: 1) threatening a teacher with bodily harm; 2) disregarding school rules, directions and commands, and 3) general disrespectful conduct. Consequently, Spurka suspended Boim for 10 days and recommended that she be expelled. An independent arbiter confirmed the expulsion. However, District Superintendent James Wilson stayed Boim’s expulsion pending an appeal to the Fulton County Board of Education (the board later affirmed the suspension but overturned the expulsion). Boim accepted the consequences at that time.

Two years later, Boim and her parents filed suit against the Fulton County School District, James Wilson and Edward Spurka, alleging that their prior

Legal Services Scorecard

From July 5 through October 4, 2007, the Authors Guild Legal Service Department handled 191 legal inquiries. Included were:

- 37 book contract reviews
- 7 agency contract reviews
- 14 reversion of rights inquiries
- 15 inquiries on copyright law, including infringement, registration, duration and fair use
- 11 inquiries regarding securing permissions and privacy releases
- 3 electronic rights inquiries
- 104 other inquiries (including literary estates, contract disputes, periodical and multimedia contracts, movie and television options, Internet piracy, liability insurance, finding an agent, and attorney referrals)

Continued on page 40
Madeleine L’Engle
Served as Guild President and on Authors League Fund Board

Madeleine L’Engle, the best-selling author of dozens of books for children and adults, died on September 6 at the age of 88. Though she had considered herself a writer since childhood, her career took off only after *A Wrinkle in Time*, the first of her “Time Fantasy” series, was published by Farrar Straus & Giroux in 1962. Ms. L’Engle was 43. As she explained years later, the book “almost never got published,” having been rejected by 26 publishers. “It was so ‘almost’ that I called my agent after two and a half years of trying ... and asked him to send it back. ... That should have been the end of it. But my mother was with us for Christmas, and I gave her a tea party for some of her old New York friends. And she happened to go to church with John Farrar ...”

In addition to becoming Farrar, Straus’s all-time bestseller, *A Wrinkle in Time* won the Newbery Medal and the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and was a finalist for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. The book was also frequently banned from libraries and schools in the United States, largely because of complaints from religious conservatives about its “occult” themes and “inaccurate” portrayal of God and religion. The charge astonished the writer, who often wrote about her own faith. “It seems people are willing to damn the book without reading it,” she told the *The New York Times* in 2001. “First I felt horror, then anger, and finally I said, ‘Ah, the hell with it.’ It’s great publicity, really.”

Ms. L’Engle joined the Authors Guild in 1962 and was elected to the Council in 1973. In 1985, she was elected Guild president, a position she held for two years. From 1987 to 2007, she was an ex-officio member of the Council, and also served on the Board of the Authors League Fund for many years. Ms. L’Engle’s term as president of the Guild was distinguished by active outreach to writers in the Soviet Union, then in the early years of glasnost. In the summer of 1986, Ms. L’Engle and the Authors Guild held a luncheon for four prominent Russian authors who were visiting the United States; later that year, the Children’s Book Committee held a reception for the Russian children’s book author and poet Boris Zakhoder.

Ms. L’Engle was also concerned with changes in the publishing industry and the decline of literacy among elementary school children. At the Annual Meeting in 1986, she discussed the consequences to writers and editors of the increasing “corporatization” in publishing, and shared her concern that young readers were “not as well able to articulate thoughts and questions” as in earlier decades. She entreated her fellow authors to “write with a wide vocabulary and to challenge people,” a mission she continued to carry out in her own work—writing “so open, so honest,” says Judy Blume, that “of course her books will live on.”

Historian Robert K. Massie, who served as vice president of the Guild under Ms. L’Engle and succeeded her as president, remembered her as “the same distinguished, articulate person whom her readers

*The author with her granddaughters Charlotte and Lena, c. 1976*
From the Guild Archives

Things Which Never Were But Always Are

By Madeleine L'Engle

Myth is now "in," and so there are far too many conflicting definitions of it. The best I know is an ancient one, by the prolific author, Anon: These things which never were, but always are.

It's rather jolting to realize that the world in which we are writing children's books today is radically different from the world in which we were writing only a few years ago. The old, comfortable, apple pie, American way of life is vanishing almost without our realizing it, and books which have merely mirrored it have either become lovely pieces of nostalgia, or . . . obsolete.

Jung blames many of the ills of our society on the fact that we do not have a valid myth to live by. The youngsters who are turning to children's books are insisting on something to live by, often quite consciously. Fairy tales are obviously mythic. That's why they don't date. So is fantasy. Many of the movies teenagers flock to are overtly fantastic: A Clockwork Orange is a recent example, but there are the less obvious ones: kids love the old Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton movies, because these, too, are mythic, showing us, by the painful particularity of the comedian, more about our unknown selves.

Great art always transcends its culture, while lesser art merely reflects it. The Greek and Roman myths, fairy tales from all lands, Beowulf, The Wind in the Willows, Alice (of course)—all these have a reality which outlasts the cultures in which they were written.

Nothing is more successful in raising my blood pressure than having someone say to me, condescendingly, "I hear you write children's books." There's something patronizing, above-it-all, in the tone of voice; obviously one would never write for children if one were capable of making it in the adult field. It seems to me it's considerably easier to make it in the adult field than in the demanding, articu-

"To write for children at all is an act of faith."

late, ruthlessly honest world of children. And children spot—and reject—the phony a mile off.

If I stopped to worry about whether or not I could write for children in a way that would mean something to them in our violently changing world, I would probably never write another children's book. To write for children at all is an act of faith, faith that somewhere under all our confusion, arbitrary good guys and bad guys on television, unsolved violence on our streets and in our schools, there are nevertheless standards which remain, despite the changes around us. I write in the faith that the things which profoundly concern me, and then demand to be enfleshed in story, touch upon these strange, yet lasting truths. I cannot try to write mythically, but I can try to write truthfully.

And I am vastly encouraged, as I look at the books which have been offered children lately, how many of them touch on the alive and powerful quality of these things which never were, but always are.

Adapted from a longer piece that appeared in the February/March 1972 issue of the Authors Guild Bulletin. Text Copyright © 1972 by Crosswicks, Ltd. Reprinted with permission of McIntosh & Otis, Inc.

knew from her books . . . who ran Council meetings with a quiet, almost effortless dignity and effectiveness." Former Guild president Mary Pope Osborne says she joined the Authors Guild 22 years ago solely because Ms. L'Engle was president. "When we finally met at the first board meeting I nervously attended," she said, "I found her to be warm and inclusive—her kindness immediately put me at ease."

Madeleine L'Engle leaves a legacy of powerful, affecting books loved by children and adults alike, and will continue to inspire writers with her encouragement to take risks. "I think if we speak the truth and are not afraid to be disagreed with," she told an interviewer in 2000, "we can make big changes."

—Isabel Howe
CONTRACTS Q&A

BY MARK L. LEVINE

Q. As a longstanding member of the Authors Guild, I read your article in the Bulletin (Summer 2007) with great interest. I am puzzled by the answer to the first question: “For e-books published by the book’s original publisher, the minimum royalty an author should receive is 15% of list, with 25% of list a fairer one.” I was offered 20% by Lerner Publications for three books that are out of print, but I asked for 50%, which they refused. According to your statement, their offer would be considered acceptable. I have asked for my rights back. I have contracts with other publishers for print books that specify a division of 50/50. I think you may be interested in knowing that I don’t understand why there should be a difference for the original publisher, as there may be others who may also be confused.

A. I used “original publisher” to mean any publisher with whom an author has signed a book contract that gives that publisher the right to publish the book itself and to authorize others to publish the book as well. The term is intended to distinguish that first publisher from its licensees under that contract. These licensees—also book publishers—are typically licensed to publish other editions of the book, such as paperback, foreign language and e-book editions. “Original publisher” is not limited to the first company to have ever published the book; it includes publishers signing a contract with an author for republication of a book after editions published under an earlier contract have gone out of print and publication rights have reverted to the author.

Although as an author advocate I believe that 50% of net (which is the same as 50% of list on copies sold directly by the publisher to a consumer at full price) is the fairest royalty for publishers to pay on e-books, it is rare to find publishers who agree with this. A royalty of 25% of list on e-books is more typical and, as I mentioned in my last column, a royalty of 15% of list is the minimum an author should consider. These percentages should be the same whether paid by the original publisher or a licensee of the original publisher; to the extent my answer in the earlier column caused you to infer otherwise, I apologize. The percentage payable by the licensee publisher, of course, is determined by the contract it signed with the original publisher.

The 50% royalty, which you report having unsuccessfully sought, is very different from the division of 50/50 you have in your contracts with other publishers, however. That “50/50” refers to the split between author and original publisher of the amount that the licensee publisher pays to the original publisher on subsidiary rights income, in this case sales of the e-book by the licensee publisher. It in no way refers to the amount or royalty percentage payable on copies of the e-book sold by the licensee publisher. Thus, even though the royalty percentages paid by both the original publisher and the licensee publisher should be and generally are the same, the amount of money that the author receives from royalties paid by the licensee publisher is typically half of what it would receive if the e-books were sold (and the royalties paid) by the original publisher. The other half paid by the licensee publisher, when the contract provides for a 50/50 split of subsidiary rights income from licensees, is kept by the original publisher. To compare the 20% offered to you by Lerner (regardless of whether it’s a percentage of net proceeds or the book’s list price) to the 50/50 under your other contracts is like the proverbial apples/oranges comparison and inappropriate.

Q. The bankruptcy of Triskelion Enterprises, LLC, to which I had sold a romance, has brought to light an outrageous abuse of authors’ rights by federal bankruptcy judges. Many publishing contracts—I’ve sold 80 novels, so I’m very familiar with these—include a clause stating that, in the event of the publisher’s bankruptcy, all rights in the contracted work revert to the author. I discovered that bankruptcy judges routinely void this clause and allow the trustee to sell our contracts, en masse, to the highest bidder. Their rationale is that bankruptcies are adjudicated under federal law, whereas contracts are governed by state law, and federal bankruptcy law takes precedence. Thus, in addition to losing the money due us from royalties, authors are stripped of creative control over our books. This could happen to any author, with any publisher, as well as to composers, lyricists and illustrators. We get no say over who buys these contracts, and there is no guarantee this will even be a legitimate publisher. One can easily imagine situations in which our work would be distorted and our reputations harmed. This is a situation that can only be rectified by an act of Congress, and I urge everyone to write his or her senators and congressperson urging that they sponsor a bill barring bankruptcy judges from voiding these contract clauses.

A. Although I understand your annoyance and share your dismay that the termination clause is unenforceable as a matter of law, I disagree with several of the underlying assumptions of your letter.

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Goodbye to All That
A Book Reviewer’s Lament

BY STEVE WASSEMERAN

Steve Wasserman, a former editor of The Los Angeles Times Book Review, is currently managing director of the New York office of the literary agency Kneerim & Williams at Fish & Richardson. He is also book editor of www.truthdig.com. This article originally appeared in the September/October 2007 issue of the Columbia Journalism Review, and is reprinted here with permission of the author and of CJR.

Indeed, the following April, the San Francisco Chronicle folded its book section into its Sunday Datebook of arts and cultural coverage. The move was greeted with dismay by many readers. After six months of public protest—and after newspaper focus groups indicated the book section enjoyed a substantial readership—it was reinstated as a stand-alone section. (Five years later, it would lose two pages in a cost-cutting move that reduced the section, now a broadsheet, by a third to just four pages.) In 2001, The Boston Globe merged its book review and commentary pages. Today, The New York Times Book Review averages 32 to 36 tabloid pages, a steep decline from the 44 pages it averaged in 1985.

That book coverage is disappearing is not news. What is news is the current pace of the erosion in coverage, as well as the fear that an unbearable cultural threshold has been crossed: Whether the book beat should exist at all is now, apparently, a legitimate question. Jobs, book sections, and pages are vanishing at a rate rivaled only by the degree to which entire species are being rendered extinct in the Amazonian rain forest. Last spring, Teresa Weaver, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s longtime and well-regarded book editor, was shunted aside, her original book reviews largely replaced with wire copy. The paper’s editor said without shame or chagrin that the move was part of a more general intent to reconfigure the newspaper’s coverage of arts, including music and dance. Meanwhile, readers of The Dallas Morning News found themselves without a full-time book critic when Jerome Weeks, who had filled the role since 1996, accepted a buyout offer amid a vast restructuring of the paper.

Other papers, including the Raleigh News & Observer, the Orlando Sentinel, and The Cleveland Plain Dealer, also eliminated the book editor’s position or cut coverage. The Chicago Tribune decided to move its book pages to Saturday, the least-read day of the week. Its book editor, Elizabeth Taylor, ever the optimist, said that the very slimness of the Saturday edition would mean that its few pages would loom larger in the eyes of readers and, with any luck, in the esteem of potential advertisers. In June, the San Diego Union-Tribune killed its decade-old, stand-alone book section, opting instead to move book reviews into its arts pages. And earlier this year, The Los Angeles Times, in a significant retreat from the ambitions that prompted the creation of its weekly Book Review in 1975, decided to cut its 12-page Sunday tabloid section by two pages and graft the remaining stump to its revamped Sunday Opinion section. The press release announcing the change sought to allay readers’ concerns by proclaim-

The health of a society is always best measured by how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable citizens. The same test may be usefully applied to America’s beleaguered newspapers. Set against the general loss of confidence afflicting the profession is the crisis confronting those few newspapers that bother to regularly review books. Over the past year, and with alarming speed, newspapers across the country have been cutting back their book coverage and, in some instances, abandoning the beat entirely. At a time when newspaper owners feel themselves and the institutions over which they preside to be under siege from newer technologies and the relentless Wall Street pressure to pump profits at ever-higher margins, book coverage is among the first beats to be scaled back or phased out. Today, such coverage is thought by many newspaper managers to be inessential and, worse, a money loser.

Yet a close look at the history of how America’s newspapers have treated books as news suggests that while the drop in such coverage is precipitous, it is not altogether recent. In the fall of 2000, Charles McGrath, then editor of The New York Times Book Review, the nation’s preeminent newspaper book section by virtue of longevity, geography, ambition, circulation and staff, was already lamenting the steady shrinkage of book coverage. “A lot of papers have either dropped book coverage or dumbed it way down to commercial stuff. The newsweeklies, which used to cover books regularly, don’t any longer,” McGrath told a Times insert profiling the Book Review.

ing the paper's intent to expand online coverage (a task made more difficult by the paper's reluctance, so far, to add staff, but instead to increase the burden on the Review's editor and subeditors). The paper also promised to increase the number and prominence of illustrations and photographs, neglecting to note that doing so would further reduce the space allotted for actual words.

For many writers, this threat to the nation's delicate ecology of literary and cultural life is cause for considerable alarm. Last spring, the novelist Richard Ford decried the disappearance of book reviews. Michael Connelly, an ex-Los Angeles Times reporter and now a best-selling mystery writer, denounced the contraction of his former paper's book section. Salman Rushdie, in a rare public appearance, went on The Colbert Report to voice his displeasure. Writers and readers alike signed petitions circulated by the National Book Critics Circle, hoping to reverse the trend. America's newspapers, they argued, must not be permitted to regard the coverage of books as a luxury to be tossed aside. A widespread cultural and political illiteracy is abetted by newspapers that no longer review books, they charged.

Others, equally passionate, dismiss these concerns as exaggerations, the overblown reaction of latter-day Luddites vainly resisting the new world order now upon us. They foresee—indeed, welcome—an inevitable if difficult adaptation and seek to free themselves of the nostalgia for a past that never was. Newspapers, in this view, are at long last taking steps, however painful, toward a revivified cultural blossoming. James Atlas, a former writer for The New York Times and The New Yorker, and now an independent publisher, embraces the new with all the fervor of a convert. Not only is the future rosy, the present is prelude. As he told The Los Angeles Times in May, "There is intelligent book talk going on at so many levels. It includes much more than reviewers and bloggers. Once technology is discovered, you can't stop it. We're going to have e-books. We're going to have print-on-demand business. We're going to have a lot more discourse on the web, and it will become more sophisticated as literary gatekeepers arrive to keep order. The key word is adaptation, which will happen whether we like it or not."

To listen to the avatars of the New Information Age, the means of communication provided by digital devices and ever-enhanced software have democratized debate, empowered those whose opinions have been marginalized by or, worse, shut out of mainstream media, and unleashed a new era of book chat and book commerce.

** * **

The predicament facing newspaper book reviews is best understood against the backdrop of several overlapping and contending crises: The first is the general challenge confronting America's newspapers of adapting to the new digital and electronic technologies that are increasingly absorbing advertising dollars, wooing readers away from newspapers, and undercutting profit margins; the second is the profound structural transformation roiling the entire book-publishing and book-selling industry in an age of conglomerate and digitization; and the third and most troubling crisis is the sea change in the culture of literacy itself, the degree to which our overwhelmingly fast and visually furious culture renders serious reading increasingly irrelevant, hollowing out the habits of attention indispensable for absorbing long-form narrative and the following of sustained argument.

These crises, taken together, have profound implications, not least for the effort to create an informed citizenry so necessary for a thriving democracy. It would be hard to overestimate the importance in these matters of how books are reported and discussed. The moral and cultural imperative is plain, but there may also be a much overlooked commercial opportunity for newspapers waiting to be seized.

A harsher truth may lurk behind the headlines as well: Book coverage is not only meager but shockingly mediocre. The pabulum that passes for most reviews is an insult to the intelligence of most readers. One is tempted to say, perversely, that its disappearance from the pages of America's newspapers is arguably cause for celebration.

**Passion and Obligation**

In the nine years that I was privileged to preside over The Los Angeles Times Book Review (from 1996 to 2005), I grappled with many of these issues. I had a front-row seat at the increasingly contested intersection of culture and commerce. I regularly dealt with such vexing questions as how to balance the reporting of both so-called high and low culture, how to gain more readers and advertisers, how to improve and expand book coverage throughout the pages of the newspaper. It was more than a spectator sport. I was deeply enmeshed in this unfolding drama and had a large stake in its outcome. After all, I had worked for five years as a journalist in the late 70s and early 80s as deputy editor of the paper's Sunday Opinion section and daily op-ed page. I left to join The New Republic, where I ran its publishing imprint, a joint venture first with Henry Holt and then with Basic Books, departing three years later to become editorial director and pub-
lisher of The Noonday Press and Hill & Wang, both divisions of Farrar, Straus & Giroux. In 1990, I was appointed editorial director of Times Books, then an imprint of Random House, Inc., and it was there, in my 11-floor Manhattan office, one sweltering day in August 1996, that I received a telephone call from my old alma mater—The Los Angeles Times—wondering if I’d return as the paper’s literary editor.

I felt I had no time to waste; life was short and literature long. Moreover, in a nation of nearly 300 million people, you were lucky at most papers to get a column or a half page devoted to book reviews, a virtual ghetto that I had long thought was a betrayal of journalism’s obligation to bring before its readers the news from elsewhere. Only a handful of America’s papers deemed the beat important enough to dedicate an entire Sunday section to it, preeminently The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times. The New York Times, even after its reduction to 36 pages, dwarfed the others. It was the paper to beat. My aim was to be three times as good in one-third the space: to boost the nutritive value of each review and deliver to readers a section on Sunday that would be remembered on Monday.

I wanted to edit The Los Angeles Times Book Review in such a way—and with such zeal—that readers might feel the heat of genuine passion for books and ideas in its few pages, which were guaranteed by the paper’s top editors at 12 tabloid-sized pages, but occasionally went up to 16, depending on ad revenue (of which there was barely a trickle) or sometimes on special occasions. Above all, I wanted to treat readers as adults, to shun the baby talk that passes for book chat in all too many of America’s newspapers. I wanted to deliver a section aimed squarely and unabashedly at the word-addicted and the book-besotted. To do so, I knew I would have to edit, as Nadine Gordimer once enjoined authors to write, as if I were already posthumous—otherwise I would perhaps lack the necessary courage.

My greatest conceit was my intent to use my new post to answer a single question: Is serious criticism possible in a mass society? If it were possible in L.A., then it would be possible anywhere. I wanted the Book Review to cover books the way the paper’s excellent sports section covered the Dodgers and the Lakers: with a consummate respect for ordinary readers’ deep knowledge and obvious passion for the games and characters who played them. Analysis and coverage in the paper’s sports pages were usually sophisticated, full of nuance, replete with often near-Talmudic disputation, vivid description, and sharp, often intemperate, opinion. Its editors neither condescended nor pandered to those of the paper’s readers who didn’t happen to love sports. No, this was a section aimed directly at fans, and it presumed a thoroughgoing familiarity with the world of sports. Like the Book Review, the sports section was nearly ad-free, and yet nowhere was the demand made that the section ought to gear its coverage to encourage advertising from the very teams its editors and reporters were charged with covering. The sports section, like most sections of the newspaper, if one were to have separately totaled up its costs, lost money. The same was true of the Book Review. Nor was The Los Angeles Times alone. This was the case at most of America’s newspapers.

As I prepared to leave the precincts of book publishing for what I saw as simply another station in the kitchen, I discussed my move with Charles McGrath, who in 1994 had left The New Yorker to become editor of The New York Times Book Review. He surprised me by saying he rather envied me my new post, telling me that, unlike himself, I wouldn’t have to try to cover the waterfront. The few pages given to book reviews in The Los Angeles Times, he said, would liberate me from having to provide a full-service consumer guide, which in any case he knew to be a hopeless, even Siyphian, endeavor.

An unsentimental corollary to his sobriety was presented to me some days later by Joan Didion and her husband, the late John Gregory Dunne. What advice did they have as I prepared to return to my old paper and their former hometown? Didion extended her arm and, gripping my forearm with steel in her fingers, said: “Just review the good books.” I laughed, and she added, “No, I mean something quite specific: Just because a writer lives in zip code 90210 doesn’t mean you have to pay attention. If the work is good, of course, but if it’s second-rate, or worse, don’t give it the time of day. To do otherwise is a formula for mediocrity, for the provincialization of the Book Review.”

She was preaching to the converted. If I had a bias—and I did—it was toward paying attention to the unknown, the neglected, the small but worthy (and all-too-often invisible) authors whose work readers
would otherwise not have heard about. Books that had already jumped onto the bestseller lists by writers who had become so-called brand names and who benefited from the enormous publicity machines marshaled on their behalf by established publishers, seemed beside the point. Why bring to readers news they’d already heard?

Mass and Class

Besides, review space at The Los Angeles Times, as at all other papers, was tight, making hard choices inescapable. Decisions about which books to review were inherently subjective. Given the avalanche of titles that publishers daily sent my way (nearly 1,000 a week), it would be triage every day. Between the Sunday Book Review and the reviews that appeared in the daily paper, we had room enough to note or review only about 1,200 books annually (The New York Times, by contrast, reviews about three times that number). I would simply have to rely upon my own literary acumen and taste, cross my fingers, and hope that a sufficient number of the newspaper’s readers would find in themselves an echo of my own enthusiasms. I would try to honor what Mary Lou Williams, the jazz pianist and composer, said about her obligation to her audience and her art: “I . . . keep a little ahead of them, like a mirror that shows what will happen next.”

My mission, I was told by Shelby Coffey III, then the paper’s editor and the man who hired me, was to focus on books as news that stayed news—books whose pertinence was likely to remain fresh despite the passage of time. Reasonable people might reasonably differ, of course, on how best to do this. But doing it properly, we agreed, meant exercising both literary and journalistic judgment, spurning commercial pressures, eschewing the ostensibly popular in favor of work that would be of enduring worth—insofar, of course, that one can ever be sure of the future’s verdict from the decidedly imperfect vantage point of the present. I knew this ambition would likely incur the unremitting hostility of the samurai of political correctness, whether of the right or the left, as well as the palpable disdain of newspaper editors who had convinced themselves that the way to win readers and improve circulation was to embrace the faux populism of the marketplace.

In this view, only the review (or book) that is immediately understood by the greatest number of readers can be permitted to see the light of day. Anything else smacks of “elitism.” This is a coarse and pernicious dogma—a dogma that is at the center of the anti-intellectual tradition that is alive and well within America’s newspapers. It is why most newspapers barely bother with reviews. And it is why most newspaper reviews are not worth reading. I sought to subvert this dogma. Of course, ideally I wanted what Otis Chandler in his heyday had wanted: mass and class. But if it came down to a choice between the two, I knew I’d go for class every time. In literary affairs, I was always a closet Leninist: better fewer, but better.

Leon Wieseltier, The New Republic’s literary editor for nearly 25 years, has rightly observed that if “value is a function of scarcity,” then “what is most scarce in our culture is long, thoughtful, patient, deliberate analysis of questions that do not have obvious or easy answers.” He is among the few who have chosen to resist what he condemns as “the insane acceleration of everything,” and prefers instead to embrace the enduring need for thought, for serious analysis, so necessary in an increasingly dizzying culture. Wieseltier knows that the fundamental idea at stake in a novel—in the criticism of culture generally—is the self-image of society: how it reasons with itself, describes itself, imagines itself. Nothing in the Eros of acceleration made possible by the digital revolution banishes the need for the rigor such self-reckoning requires. It is, as he has said, the obligation of cultural criticism—and is that too fancy a word for what ought to be everywhere present in, but is almost everywhere wholly absent from, the pages of our newspapers?—to bear down on what matters. It is a striking irony, as Wieseltier points out, that with the arrival of the Internet, “a medium of communication with no limitations of physical space, everything on it has to be in six hundred words.”

Wieseltier’s high-minded sentiments recall the lofty ambitions of Margaret Fuller, literary editor of the New York Tribune in the mid-19th century and the country’s first full-time book reviewer. Fuller, too, saw books as “a medium for viewing all humanity, a core around which all knowledge, all experience, all science, all the ideal as well as all the practical in our nature could gather.” She sought, she said, to tell “the whole truth, as well as nothing but the truth.” Hers was a severe and sound standard—one that American journalism would only rarely seek to emulate.

Thin Gruel

For the most part, early newspaper book reviewing, where it was done at all, was a dreary affair. And discerning observers knew it. In a 1931 assessment of the state of book coverage, James Truslow Adams complained in The Saturday Review of Literature that “mass production journalism is doing much to lower the status of reviewing.” Nearly 30 years later, little
had occurred to revise that judgment. Elizabeth Hardwick’s coruscating essay, “The Decline of Book Reviewing,” appeared in Harper’s Magazine in October 1959. She called for “the great metropolitan publications” to welcome “the unusual, the difficult, the lengthy, the intransigent, and above all, the interesting.” Her plea fell on deaf ears.

But soon she would have a chance to take matters into her own hands. Little more than three years later, during the New York newspaper strike begun in December 1962, Hardwick and her then husband, the poet Robert Lowell, would help found The New York Review of Books, whose first issue appeared in February 1963. Hardwick and her co-conspirators, including Jason Epstein, founder of Anchor Books at Doubleday and an editor at Random House, and his then wife, Barbara, were fed up with the idea that books could be adequately discussed in reviews hardly longer in length than several haikus stitched together. To properly elucidate significant books one needed elbow room, as it were, to stretch out with an idea. One needed a certain rigor. What serious readers craved and what the editors of the Review would provide would be reviewers, often poets and novelists, scholars and historians themselves, who had earned, as Hardwick put it, “the authority to compose a relevant examination of the themes that make up the dramas of current and past culture.” Further, the editors of the NYRB proclaimed, in a credo published in the first issue, that they would not waste time or space “on books that are trivial in their intentions or venal in their effects, except occasionally to reduce a temporarily inflated reputation or to call attention to a fraud.” The NYRB was intended as an exercise in literary hygiene. Today, the Review’s original editor, Robert B. Silvers, who had asked Hardwick to write her essay for Harper’s Magazine nearly 50 years ago, remains at its helm.

The NYRB, alas, was a singular intervention in American letters, and its appearance did little to elevate the ossified and blinkered coverage of books in newspapers. The truth is that there never was a golden age of book reviewing in American newspapers. Space was always meager and the quality low. About 600 to 1,200 each. Most papers averaged far fewer reviews—about 300 each. Only three papers thought such coverage warranted an entire, separate Sunday section.

In 1999, Jay Parini, a distinguished critic, poet and novelist, issued a grim assessment of the state of contemporary newspaper book reviewing. “Evaluating books has fallen to ordinary, usually obscure, reviewers,” he observed in The Chronicle of Higher Education. “Too often, the apparent slightness of the review leads inexperienced reviewers into swamps of self-indulgence from which they rarely emerge with glory.” Moreover, the very brevity of most newspaper reviews “means one rarely has enough space to develop an idea or back up opinions with substantial argumentation. As a result, reviews are commonly shallow, full of unfounded or ill-formed thoughts, crude opinions, and unacknowledged prejudices.” The result, Parini concluded, is all too often a mélange of “ill-considered opinion, ludicrously off-the-mark praise, and blame.” How little newspaper book coverage had changed. Thirty-six years earlier, disgust with the same ubiquitous, thin gruel had prompted Edmund Wilson to declare in the second issue of The New York Review of Books: “The disappearance of the Times Sunday book section at the time of the printers’ strike only made us realize it had never existed.”

Mark Sarvas, among the more sophisticated of contemporary literary bloggers, whose lively site, The Elegant Variation, offers a compelling daily diet of discriminating enthusiasms and thoughtful book chat, recognizes the problem. In a post last spring about the fate of newspaper reviews, he wrote:

“There’s been an unspoken sense in this discussion that Book Review = Good. It doesn’t always—there are plenty of mediocre to lousy reviewers out there, alienating (or at least boring) readers. . . . Too many reviews are dull, workmanlike book reports. And every newspaper covers the same dozen titles. . . . There’s much talk about the thoughtful ‘literary criticism’ on offer in book reviews but you don’t get much of that literary

="The truth is that there never was a golden age of book reviewing in American newspapers. Space was always meager and the quality low.”
criticism in 850 words, so can we stop kidding ourselves?” But neither does Sarvas find such criticism on the vast Democracy Wall of the Internet, which he is otherwise at pains to promote. He confesses that, for him, the criticism that counts is to be found in the pages of such indispensable publications as The New York Review of Books or the pages of the upstairs Bookforum.

What Sarvas is reluctant to concede but is too intelligent to deny is what Richard Schickel, the film critic for Time magazine, eloquently affirmed in a blunt riposte, published in The Los Angeles Times in May, to the “hairy-chested populism” promoted by the boosters of blogging: “Criticism—and its humble cousin, reviewing—is not a democratic activity. It is, or should be, an elite enterprise, ideally undertaken by individuals who bring something to the party beyond their hasty, instinctive opinions of a book (or any other cultural object). It is work that requires disciplined taste, historical and theoretical knowledge and a fairly deep sense of the author’s (or filmmaker’s or painter’s) entire body of work, among other qualities.” Sure, two, three, many opinions, but let’s all acknowledge a truth as simple as it is obvious: Not all opinions are equal.

Moreover, the debate over the means by which reviews are published—or, for that matter, the news more generally—is sterile. What counts is the nature and depth and authority of such coverage, as well as its availability to the widest possible audience. Whether readers find it on the web or on the printed page matters not at all. Content rules.

**Loss Leaders**

In the fall of 1996, as news of my appointment as editor of The Los Angeles Times Book Review was made public, I attended a reception and party at the New York Public Library to mark the centenary of The New York Times Book Review. One hundred years after Adolph Ochs started a separate book review supplement as one of his first acts after buying The New York Times in 1896, his descendants gathered to toast a visionary who had done his utmost to ensure that his newspaper would be peerless far into the future as the indispensable chronicler of a city he believed destined to become the financial and cultural capital of the 20th century.

As I greeted Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., who had only recently been named publisher, succeeding his father, he congratulated me on my own new post. I drew him aside, thinking to take advantage of the opportunity to ask him whether or not The New York Times Book Review, the beneficiary of a disproportionate share of book publishing ads by virtue both of its location in the capital of American book publishing and its national distribution, had ever made any money. It had long been rumored in publishing circles that it did not. But who really knew? He looked at me evenly and said, “I think, Steve, someone in the family would have told me if it had.” He then said that in the previous year, if one were to have added up the staff’s collective salaries (there were then more than 20 full-time editors), the cost of health care, the combined expense of printing, production and distribution, payments to contributors and illustrators, among other sundry expenses, the section had lost millions.

Readers of The New York Times have inarguably benefited from the enlightened views of the paper’s owners and editors who have always understood the importance of providing readers with news of the most important and entertaining books being published in the country. They also regard the Book Review as something of a loss leader, appealing to the best-educated and most prosperous of the paper’s readers, many of whom they rightly presume will go wandering among the Ralph Lauren ads in the money machine that is the paper’s Sunday magazine. In his illuminating 1985 three-part series in The Los Angeles Times on how newspapers go about reviewing books, David Shaw, the paper’s late Pulitzer Prize-winning media correspondent, quoted Mitchel Levitas, then the editor of The New York Times Book Review: “We lose money, and we always have, but I don’t know how much.”

At the time, Levitas’s section at the Times had a staff of 21, The Washington Post had four, and The Los Angeles Times made do with two full-time editors.
Shaw reported that in the mid-1980s, The Washington Post was losing nearly $1 million a year on its Sunday Book section. In 1985, the San Francisco Chronicle was expecting to lose just under a quarter million dollars on its weekly 12 tabloid pages devoted to books. Levitas’s boss, Abe Rosenthal, then the executive editor of The New York Times, declared he neither knew nor cared if the Book Review lost money. “You can’t expect a payoff on reviewing books anymore than you can expect a payoff for covering foreign news,” he told Shaw. Such a view seems a relic from the Pleistocene Era.

I knew very well when I took the job at The Los Angeles Times that getting ad revenue from publishers was all but hopeless. I had had to make tough decisions as a publisher myself about where to place ads and, for most books, buying ads in The Los Angeles Times didn’t make sense. The cost for a single full-page ad in its Book Review exceeded the entire advertising and promotional budgets for the vast majority of all books published. Given a choice between advertising in The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, publishers invariably and sensibly went for The New York Times. After all, The New York Times made sure that more than 75,000 copies of its Sunday Book Review were separately available in bookstores across the country. Individual subscribers accounted for another 28,000 copies. In an industry where 50,000 copies of a book sold within three weeks of publication is enough to make a book a national bestseller, any instrument of publicity that reasonably assures that the news of new books will get into the hands of readers disposed to buy them will always have pride of place with potential advertisers. That is why the prospect of commanding the attention of the 100,000 or so readers and separate subscribers to The New York Times Book Review offers the single most compelling reason for publishers to advertise in its pages (and to pay a premium for doing so) while ignoring the exorbitant fees more local papers charge. The Times offers a national audience in multiple markets and assures delivery to dedicated readers. Local papers can’t compete by offering meager coverage whose few pages are lost within the circulars and inserts of the typical Sunday paper.

During the years I edited The Los Angeles Times Book Review, it lost about a million dollars annually. The pittance the section received in the early years of my tenure, from the ads supplied chiefly by Barnes & Noble and Crown Books, dried up when B&N made a strategic decision to pull the bulk of its advertising from book sections in favor of placing ads in main news sections, and when Crown Books, owned by the feuding Haft family, declared bankruptcy. Nothing that has occurred in the more than two decades since Shaw’s 1985 survey suggests that book reviews are clinging to life on anything other than the sufferance of their respective papers’ managers. And now that support, always precarious, is at ever greater risk.

The argument that it is book sections’ lack of advertising revenue from publishers that constrains book coverage is bogus. Such coverage has rarely made a dime for newspapers. Nor will it. Book publishers have scant resources; their own profits are too slim and, besides, newspapers charge too much for them to afford significant print advertising. Just to pay for the real estate in the chain stores consumes a huge chunk of a publisher’s advertising budget. Moreover, their own marketing surveys consistently show that most people who buy books do so not on the basis of any review they read, nor ad they’ve seen, but upon word of mouth. What’s worse is that most people who buy books, like most people who watch movies, don’t read reviews at all. For those who do, reviews are an invaluable way of eavesdropping, as it were, on an ongoing cultural conversation of critical importance.”

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reviews at all. For those who do, however, reviews are an invaluable way of eavesdropping, as it were, on an ongoing cultural conversation of critical importance.

The obligation of America’s newspapers to cover this conversation—to cover the news of books—ought not to depend on the dollars that are (or are not) to be derived from publishers’ ads in the book supplement. It’s beside the point. Of course, if one were to make profit the measure of such coverage, then the model to be emulated is less that of the typical newspaper and more the model of a magazine like The New York Review of Books, the most profitable and erudite and influential review publication in the history of modern American letters. It enjoys a readership of 280,000—readers who remain loyal to its unflaggingly high standard—and has been in the black for nearly 40 years.

At The Los Angeles Times, as at other newspapers, readers of the Book Review were a minority of the paper’s overall circulation. Internal market surveys at the Times consistently showed the Book Review to be the single worst-read weekly section produced by the
paper. I was neither surprised nor alarmed. Since most people didn’t read books, I figured of those who did, only a fanatical few would go to any great length actually to read about them. The regular consumption of book reviews is an acquired taste. Since 1975, when the Book Review was created as a separate section at The Los Angeles Times, it had almost always been the least-read section of the Sunday paper. This was so at other newspapers as well.

This unhappy fact bears scrutiny. Among the paper’s most well-off and best-read demographic cohorts—whose members arguably make up any book review’s ideal readers—the Sunday Book Review was among the more favored of the weekly sections of The Los Angeles Times. Ed Batson, the paper’s director of marketing research, told me that in 2004 some 1.2 mil-

“\textit{The real problem was never the inability of book review sections to turn a profit, but rather the anti-intellectual ethos in the nation’s newsrooms.}”

lion people had read the Book Review over the past four Sundays out of 6.4 million readers. The core readership of what Batson called the paper’s “Cosmopolitan Enthusiasts” amounted to about 320,000 avid and dedicated readers for whom the weekly Book Review was among the most important sections of the paper. It was, in part, because of the devotion of this core readership that when, having survived three editorial regime changes, I chose to leave the Times in 2005, I believed that my work there had driven a wooden stake through the idea that no one reads or cares about serious criticism in L.A.

If newspapers properly understood such readers and the lifestyle they pursue, they would, in theory, be able to attract advertising from a diverse array of companies, including movie companies, coffee manufacturers, distillers of premium whiskey, among others. Diversification of ad revenue is a key component of a winning strategy of growth. But apart from The New York Times, no newspaper has dedicated sales reps whose sole job is to sell space for book ads. And even The New York Times, with three such reps, finds it hard to drum up significant business.

It is an unfortunate truth that a mass readership will always elude any newspaper section dedicated to the review of books. Nevertheless, I was convinced that because readers of book reviews are among a paper’s best-educated and most prosperous readers, it might be possible to turn a cultural imperative into a profitable strategy. Such a strategy would require commitment and vision from the overlords of the newspaper—qualities that, if history is any guide, are always in short supply.

\textbf{News That Stays News}

The real problem was never the inability of book review sections to turn a profit, but rather the anti-intellectual ethos in the nation’s newsrooms that is—and, alas, always was—an ineluctable fact of American newsgathering. There was among many reporters and editors a barely disguised contempt for the bookish. Even for those few newspapers that boasted a separate book section, book reviewing was regarded as something of a sidelines. It simply wasn’t at the beating heart of the newsroom. Careers were advanced by shoe leather, not by way of the armchair. The suspicion was strong among reporters and editors alike that anyone with enough time could read the pages of a book and accurately report its contents. Such a sedentary activity, however, was a poor substitute for breaking news and getting scoops.

Carlin Romano, the book critic of The Philadelphia Inquirer, ran up against this widespread prejudice time and again. “I remember once putting on the cover of my section a translation of \textit{Tirant Lo Blanc}, a Catalan epic, on the dubious argument that maybe, you know, it’s the next Cervantes and it will endure in the culture.” (Published in 1490, \textit{Tirant Lo Blanc} had, in fact, strongly influenced Cervantes when he wrote \textit{Don Quixote} a century later.) “I got called into the office on that, and someone said, ‘Have you gone crazy?’” Romano goes further: “Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of American newspapers in the 1990s is their hostility to reading in all forms.” This is the taboo that dares not speak its name.

I wanted to say goodbye to all that. Where everyone else was going faster, shorter, dumber, I was intent upon going slower, longer, smarter, on the perhaps foolhardy presumption that there were enough adults out there in Newspaper Land who yearned to be spoken to as adults. During my years at the helm of The Los Angeles Times Book Review, I always did have an Ideal Literary Editor in my head. I often tried to imagine what I might do if I had been, say, the literary editor of The Times of London in 1900 when a then obscure Viennese doctor named Sigmund Freud pub-
lished his first book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Suppose I’d had on my desk only two books—Freud’s and, say, the next surefire best-selling novel by Mrs. Humphry Ward, the Danielle Steel of her day. Space is, as ever, limited. Mrs. Ward’s publisher has announced an unprecedented first printing of 100,000 (the equivalent of at least a half million today) while Freud’s book will start off with well under a 1,000 copies (of which it will take his independent publisher the next six years to sell a paltry 351 copies). I have to choose which to review. I like to think I would have chosen the Freud. I like to think that I would have had the perspicacity to ask George Bernard Shaw to undertake it. And I like to think that I would have asked Shaw to write a long essay—some 2,500 words, more if he thought it warranted—in which he would declare the book a masterpiece, of lasting merit, and predict that it would go on to influence the whole of the 20th century. As indeed it would. Who, today, remembers Mrs. Humphry Ward? Or, for that matter, the editor who chose her book over Freud’s?

From time to time, occasions for such choices presented themselves during my tenure as editor of The Los Angeles Times Book Review. To be honest, it was less a matter of serendipity than my own willfulness. Two instances stand out. In 1997, Penguin announced that it would be releasing a volume of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s selected writings. Years ago, Carlos Fuentes had told me of this remarkable 17th-century Mexican nun and poet. I had never heard of her. Nor was I alone. Much of her work had yet to be translated into English, even some 300 years after her death. It was, Fuentes said, as if Shakespeare had still to be translated into Spanish. The whole of Spanish literature owed a debt to her work. Thus I decided that an anthology of her writings, translated by the excellent Margaret Sayers Peden, and published under the imprimatur of Penguin Classics, ought to be treated as news. Big news. After all, about a quarter of the readers of The Los Angeles Times had Latino roots.

Octavio Paz, Mexico’s greatest living poet and critic, contributed a lengthy essay praising Sor Juana. But when I showed the color proof of the cover to my superiors, I was met with baffled incomprehension. Sor Juana who? A nun who’d been dead for almost half a millennium? Had I taken complete leave of my senses? Dispirited, proof in hand, I trundled up to the paper’s executive dining room to brood upon the wisdom of my decision. When Alberto Gonzalez, the paper’s longtime Mexican American waiter, appeared to take my order, he exhaled audibly and exclaimed: “Sor Juana!” “You’ve heard of her?” I asked. “Of course. Every school child in Mexico knows her poems. I still remember my parents taking me as a small boy to visit her convent, now a museum. I know many of her poems by heart.” At which point, in a mellifluous Spanish, he began to recite several verses. So much for my minds, I thought; I’m going to trust Alberto on this one. After Paz’s paean appeared, many people wrote to praise the Book Review for at last recognizing the cultural heritage of a substantial segment of the paper’s readers. Their response suggested that the surest route to connecting with readers was to give them the news that stays news.

In 1999, Modern Library announced the imminent publication of a new translation of Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Richard Howard, America’s most gifted living French translator. Such a translation of one of the classics of Western literature was, I felt, news. And so I commissioned a lengthy essay by Edmund White, which turned out to be so laudatory that I published it prominently in the Sunday Book Review. The next morning, Michael Parks, then the editor of the entire paper, waved me into his office as I happened to walk by. With one eyebrow cocked, he looked at me and said with a kind of weary bewilderment: “Steve, Stendhal? Another dead, white, European male?” I explained my reasons. He didn’t seem convinced. Readers all over Los Angeles, however, came to my aid. Thanks to them, the Stendhal was flying out of local bookstores and rising steadily on the paper’s bestseller list. Our review was followed by considerations in The New York Review of Books and The New York Times Book Review. Sales took off, prompting The New Yorker’s Talk of the Town to print an item tracing the trajectory of the book’s unexpected success and crediting The Los Angeles Times for having helped to spark the sudden national interest.

**Cultural Shift**

The prospect of running The Los Angeles Times Book Review was irresistible. I was also convinced that the moment was ripe, that Los Angeles had long ago shed the fetish of its provincialism. It was now a big, grown-up metropolis, no longer afraid to wear its neuroses on its sleeve. I also suspected, as The Wall Street Journal would report in a front-page story in 1998, that America was “increasingly wealthy, worldly, and wired.” Interest in the arts was booming. I could see that notions of elitism and snobbery were collapsing upon the palpable catholicity of a public whose curiosities were ever more diverse and eclectic. The percentage of Americans attending the performing arts was rising dramatically. Movies like *Shakespeare in Love* and *The Hours* (and in later years *Babel* and *Pan’s Labyrinth*) that might once have been consigned to art-house ghettos were now finding both a mass audience and Oscars.
Regional theaters and opera companies blossomed even as Tower Records closed its doors. CD sales might have been slipping, but online music was soaring. Almost 10 years later, Peter Gelb, the Metropolitan Opera's new general manager, understands this cultural shift better than most and launched a series of live, high-definition broadcasts of operas like Puccini's Il Trittico and Mozart's Magic Flute shown at movie theaters across America. His experiment was a triumph, pulling in thousands of new viewers. As Alex Ross reported in The New Yorker, Gelb’s broadcasts “have consistently counted among the twenty highest-grossing films in America, and have often bested Hollywood’s proudest blockbusters on a per-screen, per-day average. Such figures are a timely slap in the face to media companies that have written off classical music as an art with no mass appeal.” The truth is that many people everywhere are interested in almost everything. Thanks to Amazon, geography hardly matters. It is now possible through the magic of Internet browsing and buying to obtain virtually any book ever printed and have it delivered to your doorstep no matter where you live. This achievement, combined with the vast archipelago of bricks-and-mortar emporiums operated by, say, Barnes & Noble or Borders or any of the more robust of the independent bookstores, has given Americans a cornucopia of riches. To be sure, there has also been the concomitant and deplorable collapse of many independent bookstores—down by half from the nearly 4,000 such stores that existed in 1990. Nevertheless, even a cursory glance at the landscape of contemporary American bookselling and publishing makes it hard not to believe we are living at the apotheosis of our culture. Never before in the whole of human history has more good literature, attractively presented and sold for still reasonably low prices, been available to so many people. You would need several lifetimes over doing nothing but lying prone in a semi-darkened room with only a lamp for illumination just to make your way through the good books that are on offer.

This is, strangely, a story that has not received near the attention it deserves. And yet its implications are large, especially if papers are to have a prayer of retaining readers and expanding circulation. There is money to be made in culture, if only newspapers were nimble and imaginative enough to take advantage of the opportunities that lie all around them. Yet the opposite appears to be the case. In 1999, Michael Janeway and András Szántó directed a yearlong study of how America’s newspapers covered the arts. Their conclusion: poorly. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and based at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, the study found that straightforward listings of upcoming events make up “close to 50 percent of arts and entertainment coverage” and that “in-house staffing and resources have not been increased to match an explosion of arts activity.” The report noted that “the visual arts, architecture, dance and radio get only cursory coverage” and that “the daily Arts & Living section lags behind both business and sports as a priority on almost every newspaper, both in its allotment of pages and staff.” Yet, by almost every measure, Americans are a people who spend vast amounts of time and income pursuing leisure activities of all kinds, including reading. Sure, book sales might be down nationally and serious reading a minority pursuit, but other indicators suggested a persistent and passionate engagement with the written word. By the early years of the 21st century, for example, book clubs had grown to an estimated five million members. Brian Lamb’s CSPAN-2 airs in-depth, commercial-free interviews with and readings by nonfiction authors round the clock every weekend. And even in Los Angeles, a city notorious for making a fetish of the body and eschewing the life of the mind, interest in books flourishes. I found myself returning to a Los Angeles in which more bookstores were thriving than ever before in the city's history. Indeed, in some years the average per-capita sales of books in The Los Angeles metropolitan region had exceeded—by some $50 million—such annual sales in the greater New York area.

Reading Matters

It’s almost enough to give one hope. This apparent utopia of readers, however, masks a bitter truth: The arts of reading are under siege. In June 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts released the findings of an authoritative survey based on an enormous sample of more than 17,000 adults. Conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and spanning 20 years of polling, it showed that for the first time a majority of Americans no longer had any interest in what, broadly defined, might be called literature. That is to say, 53 percent of Americans claimed, when asked, that in the previous year they had not read a novel, play, or poem. This was true for all classes and categories, whatever their age, sex, education, income, region, race, or ethnicity. Still, despite the growth in the population of the country, the survey found that the overall number of people reading literature remained stable at about 96 million between 1982 and 2002. Interestingly, the West and Northeast regions of the country had the highest reading rates. It wasn’t at all clear why, and the report didn’t say. Nor did the survey ask whether or not these same Americans had read history, biography, or self-
help, the chief subjects that have historically engaged Americans’ attention.

Serious reading, of course, was always a minority taste. We’ve known that ever since Dr. Johnson. “People in general do not willingly read,” he said, “if they can have anything else to amuse them.” Today, the entertainment-industrial complex offers a staggering number of compelling alternatives. A substantial number of Americans—scores of millions—are functionally and seemingly happily illiterate. Many more can read but choose not to. Of those who do, most read for the entirely understandable pleasures of escaping the drudgeries of daily life or for moral, spiritual, financial, or physical self-improvement, as the history of American bestsellers suggests. The fables of Horatio Alger, the platitudes of Dale Carnegie, the nostrums of Marianne Williamson, the inspirations of such secular saints as Lee Iacocca—all are the golden jelly on which the queen bees of American publishing have traditionally batten.

Obsessive devotion to the written word is rare. Acquiring the knowledge and technique to do it well is arduous. Serious readers are a peculiar breed. Elizabeth Hardwick, for one, has always known this. “Perhaps the love of, or the intense need for, reading is psychological, an eccentricity, even something like a neurosis, that is, a pattern of behavior that persists beyond its usefulness, which is controlled by inner forces and which in turn controls.” For this kind of reading is a profoundly antisocial act: It cannot be done in concert with friends; it is not a branch of the leisure industry, whose entertainments, whether video or computer or sports or rock ‘n’ roll, can be enjoyed in the mass. How many times, for instance, did you ever say as a child: “Leave me alone! Can’t you see I’m reading?”

Twenty-five years ago, the distinguished editor and publisher Elisabeth Sifton announced the discovery of what she dubbed Sifton’s Law: “There is a natural limit on the readership for serious fiction, poetry and nonfiction in America that ranges, I would say, between 500 and 5,000 people—roughly a hundred times the number of the publisher’s and the author’s immediate friends.” Sifton’s Law was a gloss on Dwight MacDonald’s puckish speculation of the late 1940s in which he supposed that there were only about 5,000 people interested in serious writing. The problem, he observed two decades later, was that it was likely the same 5,000 but they were all getting quite a bit longer in the tooth.

That suspicion could not have surprised the folks at the Book-of-the-Month Club. They had long been monitoring the steady decline in Americans’ reading habits. Back in the middle of the Great Depression, long before the advent of television, much less the Internet, the club had hired the Gallup organization to survey reading habits among Americans. In 1937, Gallup found that only 29 percent of all adults read books; in 1955, the percentage had sunk to 17 percent. Fifteen years later, in 1970, the club evidently no longer could bear to know, and Gallup stopped asking. True, the total income of American publishers continued to rise, but that happy news concealed a more troubling reality: Profits reflected inflationary costs passed along in higher list prices, while the number of readers flocking to bookstores continued to decline. That is still the case.

The terrible irony is that at the dawn of an era of almost magical technology with a potential of deepening the implicit democratic promise of mass literacy, we also totter on the edge of an abyss of profound cultural neglect. One is reminded of Philip Roth’s old aphorism about Communism and the West: “In the East, nothing is permitted and everything matters; in the West, everything is permitted and nothing matters.”

“Serious reading, of course, was always a minority taste. We’ve known that ever since Doctor Johnson. ‘People in general do not willingly read,’ he said, ‘if they can have anything else to amuse them.’”

ters.” In today’s McWorld, the forces seeking to enroll the populace in the junk cults of celebrity, sensationalism, and gossip are increasingly powerful and wield tremendous economic clout. The cultural conversation devolves and is held hostage to these trends. The corporate wars over who will control the technology of newsgathering and electronic communication and data and distribution are increasingly fierce. Taken together, these factors threaten to leave us ignorant of tradition, contemptuous of the habits of quality and excellence, unable to distinguish among the good, the bad, and the ugly.

But perhaps this is too bleak a view. After all, 96 million readers is a third of the country. As John Maxwell Hamilton, a longtime journalist and commentator on Public Radio International’s Marketplace, writes in his irreverent and trenchant book, Casanova Was a Book Lover, “People who care about books care profoundly. What they lack in numbers they make up for in passion. A typical mid-1980s study illustrates the
fidelity of readers to reading. Only half of the American public, the study found, had read at least one book in the past six months. Of those 'readers,' however, almost one-third devoured at least one book a week."

And the book itself—compact, portable, sensuous—has yet to be bested as our most important information-retrieval system. Even Bill Gates, that Yoda of the virtual world, has been unable to resist its seductions. When, in 1996, he wanted to tell us about "The Road Ahead," to commit the vision thing, what did he do? He had the Viking Press publish his book. He did not post his Delphic pronunciamentos on his Microsoft site. For Gates knew then—as he knows now, despite his recent insistence that the digital future will carry the day—that the book still retains the patina of authority that only time and tradition can bestow.

What matters in this Kulturkampf is a newspaper's ambition, its business acumen, and its cultural imagination. It's a question of allocation of resources, of what a paper's owners and editors think is important for readers to know. It is a question of what, in the judgment of the paper's minders, is news. It's a question of respect for ordinary readers' intelligence and their avidity for culture. Famously, books contain news that stays news. I believed when I was editor of The Los Angeles Times Book Review—as I believe now—that there is no more useful framework for understanding America and the world it inhabits. It is through the work of novelists and poets that we understand how we imagine ourselves and contend with the often elusive forces—of which language itself is a foremost factor—that shape us as individuals and families, citizens and communities, and it is through our historians and scientists, journalists and essayists that we wrestle with how we have lived, how the present came to be, and what the future might bring.

Readers know that. They know in their bones something newspapers forget at their peril: that without books, indeed, without the news of such books—without literacy—the good society vanishes and barbarism triumphs. I shall never forget overhearing some years ago, on the morning of the first day of the annual Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, a woman asking a UCLA police officer if he expected trouble. He looked at her with surprise and said, "Ma'am, books are like Kryptonite to gangs." There was more wisdom in that cop's remark than in a thousand academic monographs on reforming the criminal justice system. What he knew, of course, is what all societies since time immemorial have known: If you want to reduce crime, teach your children to read. Civilization is built on a foundation of books. ♦

Brooklyn Grows a Book Fair

On a windy Saturday in September, an estimated 15,000–20,000 thousand bibliophiles, writers, editors, students and novelists/writing professors turned out for the 2nd Annual Brooklyn Book Festival, whose official motto is "Smart, hip, and diverse." It drew a crowd to match. Like a literary version of Woodstock, the festival was a sea of vendors' stalls, tents and tables. Large and small booksellers, mainstream publishers, small presses, libraries, literary magazines and literary organizations—the Authors Guild among them—shared the marketplace with self-published authors who pressed samples of their wares on passersby.

Indoors, panelists wrestled with the declining state of the book review, examined the art of the memoir, debated cultural clashes in literature, and only a bit more parochially, celebrated the glorious and ever-expanding literary legacy of the borough itself. Brooklyn, boasted Borough President Marty Markowitz, whose office cosponsored the event, has more resident writers than anyplace else in the country, and the fair mustered an impressive roster of local talent (native-born or émigré), including Jonathan Lethem, Phillip Lopate, Jonathan Safran Foer, Pete Hamill, Paul Auster, Edwidge Danticat, and Brooklyn's own Poet Laureate, Ken Siegelman. (Does Manhattan have a Poet Laureate? Not yet.)

To judge from the equally prominent lineup of international writers who turned up for the day—Chris Abani, Colin Channer, Ana Castillo, Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Amitav Ghosh were some of the more easily recognized—writer-friendly Brooklyn is now a registered stop on the global literary circuit. Next year, Markowitz and company are going for broke with a two-day schedule and an even more ambitious list of events and participants.

—Muse Ossé
Along Publishers Row

Continued from page 2

sort of tormented souls. There’s something to be said for having been there. But you can’t be very productive in that state of mind.” She was quoted in The Keystone, a publication of Texas State University San Marcos.

CHANGES: Daniel Menaker, 65, executive editor in chief of Random House, left the company at the end of June. The New York Times said, “The move seemed to be an indication that Random House was shrugging off the sophisticated literary fiction that Mr. Menaker had nurtured.”

Menaker said that he wanted to spend time writing a novel and learning to play the fiddle, “something I always wanted to do.”

Menaker’s duties have been divided between Kate Medina, executive editorial director of the hardcover imprint, and Jennifer Hershew, editorial director of the Random imprints. Medina has the added title of associate publisher.

JOIN THE CLUB: Laura Moriarty lives in Kansas and is the author of The Rest of Her Life. PW asked her about her first novel, The Center of Everything, because it is a popular choice for book groups.

Moriarty said, “Often what happens when I visit a book group to talk about the book, [is] I end up wanting to join the group—and in one case, I did end up coming back, as a regular member.”

QUESTION: Do magazine excerpts help or hurt book sales? Paul Boggaards, executive director of publicity for Knopf, told The New York Times, “The goal of any excerpt is to engage readers, to suggest that here is a book that will interest them. But the key is not to sate them with the material. You want the hunger and thirst to still be there.”

This was a hot topic because Tina Brown’s The Diana Chronicles was excerpted (8,200 words) in the July issue of Vanity Fair, the magazine she once edited.

Bogaards said that the well-chosen slice of a book in the appropriate magazine provides the framework for the initial publicity campaign. A cover story in Time or Newsweek suggests weight and importance, perhaps a national dialogue; Vanity Fair, a certain buzz; Ladies’ Home Journal or Good Housekeeping, issues of importance to women.

Sara Nelson, editor of PW, said, “I see more and more [publishers] interested in the TV interview for their author rather than the book excerpt because TV has a greater reach than magazines.”

HER WAY: Anne Fadiman’s new book of essays, At Large and At Small, is packaged to look like a sister volume to her Ex Libris, published in 1998. In an essay entitled “Night Owl,” Fadiman asks, “How can the writer’s distinctive sirens be resisted?”

She wrote: “During a phase when his muse was particularly obdurate, John McPhee used to tie himself to his chair with his bathrobe sash. Schiller heightened his powers of concentration by inhaling the fumes from a cache of rotten apples he kept in a drawer. All I need to do is stay up past midnight.

“Something amazing happens when the rest of the world is sleep. I am glued to my chair. I forget that I ever wanted to do anything but write... Three or four hours pass in a moment; I have no idea what time it is, because I never look at the clock... I am suspended in a sensory deprivation tank, and the very lack of sensation is delicious.”

MONEY MAN: “Let’s start by saying I have a lot of money,” Daniel Handler (a.k.a. Lemony Snicket) wrote in The New York Times Magazine. “I’ve acquired it by writing children’s books about terrible things happening to orphans, and this seems like such a crazy and possibly monstrous way of acquiring money that I give a lot of it away... If your salary equaled the amount of money my wife and I gave Planned Parenthood one year, you’d be in the richest 1 percent in the world.”

The rest of the essay describes how difficult it is, when one is wealthy, to decide how to give away one’s money.

TEACHER: Mona Simpson is the author of a best-selling novel, Anywhere but Here. Her fifth book will be My Hollywood, out next year. In the late 1970s, she was a student of the late Leonard Michaels in his creative writing class at the University of California, Berkeley.

Simpson told The New York Times Book Review, “Students killed to get in. Hundreds applied. He took twelve.” In the first session, a student asked if they should all photocopy their stories and hand them around. “No need,’ Michaels said from the podium. ‘We will be working orally.’

One copy went to Michaels. “After he’d worked through a paragraph, Michaels would throw the manuscript to the floor and pick up another one. He rarely made it past the first page.” Midway through the course, Simpson said, ‘we’d all stopped writing. But our ears would never be the same.”

TWO JOBS: Novelist Wesley Stace is the author of Misfortune. His second novel, By George, was published in August. The British-born Stace lives in Brooklyn and, as a singer-songwriter named John Wesley Harding, has produced 10 full-length albums.
He compared his two kinds of work for PW:

"At the end of a day’s work on a novel, you have pushed a boulder an infinitesimal amount up a hill, and it might have rolled back down past where you started. But with a song, you’ve not only probably finished it, but you can play it at a gig that night and have people go, ‘Hey, great song!’"

HOW HE DOES IT: Jeffery Deaver, author of the best-selling The Sleeping Doll, explained on his website how he gets his ideas. He said, “I spend much of my time during the early stages of a book sitting in a dark room to think up a story line— one that features strong (though possibly flawed) heroes, sick and twisted bad guys, deadlines every few chapters, a short time frame for the story (eight to 48 hours or so), lots of surprising plot twists and turns and plenty of cliffhangers.”

TOGETHER AGAIN: Dwight Garner writes a column about best-sellers for The New York Times Book Review. He noted: “Nora Ephron and Carl Bernstein, famously divorced, are back together on the hardcover nonfiction list. Ephron is on top. Her memoir I Feel Bad about My Neck is No. 6 and Bernstein’s Hillary Clinton bio, A Woman in Charge, arrives just below it at No. 7.”

THE MALE APPROACH: Jo Beverly is the author of a best-selling paperback, Lady Beware. PW recalled that at a romance writers conference a few years ago, Beverly talked about how often male writers reach for a metaphor when writing sex scenes, “perhaps as a way of distancing themselves.” Here is an example she gave from Kissing England by Sean Thomas: “She is so small and compact, and yet she has all the necessary features. Shall I compare thee to a Sony Walkman . . . ?”

THANKS: This summer Oprah Winfrey waved her magic wand at Jeffrey Eugenides’s novel Middlesex. It won a Pulitzer in 2003. The author told The New York Times, “It’s getting a little difficult, at this point, to complain about being an Oprah pick. You don’t want to be a member of a club that has Faulkner as a member? Then, too, Middlesex has already had quite a life. Ms. Winfrey is extending that lease. I’m pleased, grateful—and absorbed in writing another book.”

ART ADDED: Herbert Kohl is the author of more than 40 books. His latest is Painting Chinese. The book is about a class he took in Chinese landscape painting in which he was the oldest student by more than 60 years. Kohl told PW: “I’ve been teaching and writing about education for nearly 45 years so I had to unlearn a couple of things. . . . My whole perception of learning and teaching was transformed.”

In Memoriam
Whitney Balliett
Murray Bookchin
Dena Gutman
Leila Kelly
Charlotte O. Kursh
Madeleine L’Engle
Gene Liberty
Axel Madsen
James McCargar
Eliza McCormick
Robert F. Mirvish
Harriet Kamm Nye
Grace Paley
Fred Saberhagen
Shane Stevens
Fred M. Stewart
Jana Striegel
Dianna Torson
Vincent T. Walsh
Paul Watzlawick

Asked if painting had helped him as a writer, he said, “Absolutely. When I paint I’m not really thinking about it, but when I get back to my writing, something seems to have worked through the brain.”

Joe Andoe is a painter who writes. His book, Jubilee City, is about his childhood in Texas and how he became a successful artist in New York.

Andoe told PW: “I feel like my painting has helped my writing. The old masters always say you need a good drawing to make a good painting. You do the drawing, and after that it’s all damage control to keep it from falling off the wall. With stories, I feel like you have to have the content first. I type out the story as fast as I can—which isn’t very fast, I use three fingers—and then spend a much longer time combing through it, making it read like the story in my head.”

HOW TO: Meryle Secrest has written biographies of Leonard Bernstein, Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Rodgers and Salvador Dali. Her latest book is a memoir entitled Shoot the Widow. It offers some insights that might prove useful to would-be biographers.

She wrote, “Deciding on a subject [for a biography] is mostly a cold-blooded business of weighing the subject against potential markets, timeliness, the availability of material, and the likelihood of getting the story, the kinds of factors publishers have to worry about. . . .

“Prurience titillates, the more the better, leading to bigger sales and better royalties for the writer who is, not to put too fine a point on it, making money from others’ misfortunes.”

The widows Secrest wants to shoot in her book’s title are those of famous men who, according to Louis Menand in The New Yorker, “obscure a clear view into the private world of famous people.”
JACKET HAPPY: Roy Peter Clark has taught writing for 30 years at the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla. His new book is Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer. He thought the jacket for his book was so handsome that he wrote an essay about it for PW.

His description of the jacket: it’s “an earthy, moss-green cover with a cream-colored border, and an elegant typeface with literary flourishes; all printed on uncoated paper stock to make it feel more rich and tactile.”

Keith Hayes, an art director at the publisher, Little, Brown, told Clark, “Bad covers are works of excessive tweaking.” When the designer, the publisher and others involved can’t agree, Clark says, “someone—not always the art director—needs to go back to the drawing board.”

RUNNING: Former House speaker Newt Gingrich coauthored a novel, Pearl Harbor, with William R. Forstchen. Gingrich said on a TV morning show that he was using his 20-city book tour during the summer to test the waters about running for president. “I think right now,” he told Diane Sawyer, “it is a great possibility.”

EXPLANATION: Sabrina Jefferies’s paperback bestseller is Beware a Scot’s Revenge. She also writes under the names Deborah Martin and Deborah Nichols. She uses the name Jefferies for her “lighter, sexier historical romances.”

She told PW, “If you’re wondering how the daughter of missionaries ended up a romance novelist, let me explain. When you’re in the boones in a foreign country with only your pesky siblings for company, you read a lot. I read everything—classics, children’s books, mysteries, science fiction, even comic books. Most of all, I read romances.”

ON TOUR: German writer and Nobel laureate Gunter Grass, 79, gave a reading from his new memoir, Peeling the Onion, at Manhattan’s 92nd Street Y. An actor, Michael Stuhlbarg, then read the same section in English.

Afterwards, Israeli writer Amos Elon interviewed Grass, who has been criticized for an admission that he had not been an ordinary soldier in World War II as everyone had been led to believe but had served in the Waffen-SS, the Nazi’s elite force.

MAKE ‘EM HAPPY: Jorge Luis Borges told an interviewer for The Paris Review that a writer “should be judged by the enjoyment he gives and by the emotions one gets. As to ideas, after all it is not very important whether a writer has some political opinion or other because a work will come through despite them, as in the case of Kipling’s Kim. Suppose you consider the idea of the empire of the English—well, in Kim I think the characters one really is fond of are not the English, but many of the Indians, the Mussulmans. I think they’re nicer people. And that’s because he thought them—no! no! not because he thought them nicer—because he felt them nicer.”

FOUND: In 1938, Pearl Buck became the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The manuscript of her 1932 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, The Good Earth, has been recovered after disappearing from the author’s farm in Perkasie, Pa., around 1966. It turned up at a Philadelphia auction house in July, and the FBI was notified.

PAYBACK: The headline said, “Harsh Book Critics Are Punished.” Agence France-Press reported that five villagers in the small town of Lussaud in central France were given suspended prison sentences and fines (as much as 500 Euros) for attacking Pierre Jourde, author of a novel, Pays Perdu (Lost Country).

The author is a native of the town, and his “critics” thought he had portrayed them in his novel as simpletons and drunks.

HOME RUN: By mid-July, Water for Elephants, a novel by Sara Gruen, was No. 1 on the list of paperback bestsellers. And Spiegel & Grau, a Random House imprint and the author’s new publisher, paid Gruen more than $5 million for her next two books. If Elephants is made into a film, Gruen will get $1 million for the rights.

The hardcover of Elephants spent 12 weeks on the bestseller lists and sold 248,000 copies. It’s referred to as a “word-of-mouth favorite.” The book is about a Depression-era veterinarian who joins a circus and befriends an elephant named Rosie.

Gruen is the mother of three in Grayslake, Ill. She and her husband have bought a new home with room for four cats, two dogs, three goats and two horses. She is working on her next novel, about apes.

The author told The New York Times, “I tend not to think about the reading public at all, or the business, when I’m writing. I have to get into that fictional world almost in a physical sense. I feel very passionate about this subject, so I’m hopeful that it will be received enthusiastically.” She has been doing research at the Great Ape Trust in Des Moines.

MORE 007: His creator died several years ago, but spy novels featuring 007 keep appearing. The next is due out on Ian Fleming’s 100th birthday, May 28, 2008. Authorized Bond novels have been written by Kingsley Amis, John Gardner and Raymond Benson. The new one will be entitled Devil May Care, and the author is Sebastian Faulks, British author of several novels including The Girl at the Lion d’Or.
Faulks told The New York Times, “In his house in Jamaica, Ian Fleming used to write 1,000 words in the morning, then go snorkeling, have a cocktail, lunch on the terrace, more diving, another 1,000 words in late afternoon, then more martinis and glamorous women. In my house in London, I followed this routine exactly, apart from the cocktail, the lunch and the snorkeling.”

POST SCRIPTS: Fleming isn’t the only one with a life-after-death career. V. C. Andrews died in 1986, but novels with her name on the cover continue to sell well. Robert Ludlum died six years ago, but a dozen novels with his name on the jacket have appeared since then.

A friend of Ludlum, Eric Van Lustbader, is the author of Robert Ludlum’s The Bourne Betrayal. Ludlum and Lustbader met at a party in 1980, and Lustbader told The New York Times, “We talked for hours about characters and story arcs and how to fashion a book in three acts, where one act outdoes the next one. We talked about being the only thriller writers who knew anything about characters and wrote about characters in our books.”

Sara Nelson, editor of PW, explained, “Series and big-name authors have tended to work well . . . instead of going off to find the new Ludlum, [publishers] figure they’ve got this formula and will continue to use it.”

GOOD YEAR: First came the Pulitzer. Then Oprah Winfrey chatted up Cormac McCarthy on TV. Sales of The Road soared. The New York Times reported that the novel about a father and son trying to survive after a catastrophe sold 225,000 copies in hardback, and there are 1.1 million paperbacks in print.

In April, The Road won the annual Texas Institute of Letters prize for fiction, and in August it was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. That award was announced at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. McCarthy, who lives in New Mexico, didn’t show up either in Texas or Scotland for the presentations.

In July, Knopf announced that it had signed a two-book deal with the author.

RESEARCH: While preparing to write his epic account of the African-American experience, Roots, Alex Haley took a freighter from Africa to the U.S. He got permission from the ship’s captain to spend his nights crossing the Atlantic stretched out naked on a plank in the cold, dark hold of the ship.

HOW-TO: James A. Harden-Hickey was the author of Euthanasia: The Aesthetics of Suicide, published in 1894. The book described 90 poisons and 50 instruments that can be used to kill oneself. Many methods were illustrated with line drawings. The Literary Life and Other Curiosities said that Harden-Hickey’s book “no doubt influenced many people to kill themselves.”

In 1898, when he was 44, the author followed his instructions and committed suicide with an overdose of morphine.

FICTIONAL FELSENFELDS: Several of the writers who have worked at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire have given the name Felsenfeld to characters in their novels.

The trend was started by Ellen Slezak, who gave the name Sarah Felsenfeld to a University of Michigan student. She told The New Yorker, “I needed a Jewish name, and I didn’t have my usual sources to find one—I don’t know, looking through a phone book or taking a walk in a Jewish cemetery. I was sitting there in my little studio that day, and I started saying to myself, ‘Felsenfeld, Felsenfeld, Danny—that guy who’s always around.’”

Michael Chabon has named a detective Felsenfeld in The Yiddish Policemen’s Union.

Lisa Carey has a Dr. Felsenfeld, a pipe-smoking high-school principal, in Every Visible Thing.

Benjamin Anastas has Herr Felsenfeld in his book At the Feet of the Divine. He said of the name: “There is something kind of poetic about it. You imagine water falling over steps or something.”

Katherine Min has a teacher named Felsenfeld in The Secondhand World. “It’s an upbeat name,” Min said. She plans to include the name in all her future works.

The real (Danny) Felsenfeld lives in Brooklyn. His fiancee, Elizabeth Isadora Gold, is working on a novel, but she told The New Yorker that she has no plans to include the name in her book, and she will keep her name when she marries.

FAMILIAR FACE: On Ernest Hemingway’s 108th birthday, insurance agent Larry Austin won out over 122 rivals to win the annual Ernest Hemingway Look-Alike Contest in Key West, Fla. The Associated Press reported that Austin has been competing for the title for a dozen years.

Hemingway’s granddaughter, Lorian Hemingway, directs a short-story competition at the festival. She called of her grandfather, “I think if he were to walk into Sloppy Joe’s to see dozens of men hoping to look like him, he would be honored. In fact I think he might even break into tears, because the connection with him here in Key West goes so deep, and all the look-alikes love this man.”

MURDER, SHE WROTE: Kathy Reichs works for the North Carolina medical examiner in Charlotte and for Quebec’s central crime lab in Montreal. When she’s not doing that, she writes novels. Her 10th is Bones to Ashes. She has a doctorate in anthropology, a lawyer husband, and three grown children.
Reichs told The Smithsonian magazine that she started writing in the mid-1990s “when I had a serial murder case. It was before this massive interest in forensics. The time seemed right to combine murder mystery and forensics with a strong female character. I took the approach to write about what I know. I base my books only loosely on real cases. The one that triggered Bones to Ashes was a child skeleton found on the Quebec-New Brunswick border—a child about five or six years old who has never been identified.”

Her fictional heroine, Temperance Brennan, inspired the TV show “Bones,” about a female forensic specialist.

When asked what her science colleagues think of her fiction, Reichs said, “You’re not supposed to be writing fiction. If you do it in the English department, you’re a hero. If you do it in the science department, you’re a little suspect.”

BIG SMILES: For a day or two in July, images of smiling customers holding newly purchased copies of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows dominated newspapers and television screens. Author J. K. Rowling smiled a lot on NBC-TV’s Today show. She said there will be no more Potter books. She was through with that. But “I will write. I am a writer. That’s what I do,” she said. “I will still write until I can’t write any more.” She told U.S.A. Today that she was working on two books, one for children and another for adults.

The New York Times reported that Rowling’s Potter series had earned her about $1 billion and she “is probably the richest living author.”

But there were more big smiles at the publisher, Scholastic, and booksellers like Barnes & Noble and Amazon. Scholastic was reported to have printed 12 million copies, and 8.3 million were sold on the first day. Barnes and Noble stores sold a record 1.8 million in the first 48 hours after the book went on sale. Amazon delivered 2.2 million copies, its company profits tripled, and its stock sold like . . . well, copies of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.

Will we ever see smiles like those again?

TOP SELLERS: Nancy A. Anderson is literary professor at the University of South Florida and the author of What Should I Read Aloud: A Guide to 200 Best-Selling Picture Books.

Anderson said, “I have long seen a need for a compilation of the canon of childhood literary treasures. . . . The most prevalent theme by far is animal fantasy, followed by concept books—such as the alphabet, colors, numbers, and shapes. The theme of parental love and bedtime are also popular.”

Anderson said that her favorites were Goodnight Moon by Margaret Brown; Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Numeroff, Love You Forever by Robert Munsch, The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter and You Are Special by Max Lucado.

BANNING JUNIE B.: In its Styles section, The New York Times had a major article about why some parents dislike the Junie B. Jones books. There are more than 43 million copies of Barbara Parks’s stories in print. The 27th installment was published last February.

The books are banned in Lewis and Susan Bartell’s home in Old Westbury, N.Y. “My dad doesn’t like the grammar,” said Mollie Bartell, 9. “And I guess that’s important, because maybe when you grow up and you’re at work and you say ‘I runned,’ people will get annoyed at you.”

Junie B. is a troublemaker who calls people naughty names and talks back to her teachers. Her adverbs lack the suffix “ly.” She has trouble with irregular past tense verbs, and she has created words like “funnest” and “beautifuller.”

Parks defended herself with: “I’ve stopped reading about my books on the Internet because it’s too hurtful. People act as if I’m teaching children how to blow up cats. The worst thing [Junie B.] does is maybe call someone stupid, but that’s just her being a five-year-old. You’d hear worse than that walking across any playground! And when she acts out, kids who are reading it know that she’s doing something wrong.”

Jill Ratzan, a doctoral student in library and information science at Rutgers University, is author of a paper entitled “You Are Not the Boss of My Words.” Ratzan told The Times, “Junie B. is actually following the precise rules of English. What she’s not following are the exceptions.” Ratzan said that Junie B. might be teaching the English of the future.

FOREIGN AID: Curt Leviant of Edison, N.J., noted that this column often includes success stories and sent us one of his own. He wrote that his fifth novel, Diary of an Adulterous Woman, was published in 2001 “with only a modest success.”

Leviant got back the rights and sent the novel to a French agent.

The agent found a publisher who bought the book and spent $75,000 in promoting it. The publisher invited the author to Paris for a week in May where Leviant appeared on television and was interviewed by journalists. Leviant said, “Bookstores all over France featured the book and three printings sold out in five weeks. . . . Whereas in the U.S., Diary of an Adulterous Woman’s Amazon ranking was in the low six figures, Leviant’s foreign rights advances are now in that category.

The French publisher also bought the French rights to Leviant’s new novel, Kafka’s Son, before any U.S. publisher had seen the manuscript.
IN COSTUME: Joyce Carol Oates’s latest novel is The Gravedigger’s Daughter. The prolific author, who teaches at Princeton, was the subject of a fashion article in The New York Times.

She has said has been given many shawls and is the uneasy owner of a Fortuny dress, “worth thousands of dollars,” that was a gift from Gloria Vanderbilt. Oates said, “I don’t feel worthy of it. The Fortuny gown is for an occasion that somehow I haven’t yet deserved.”

For the Times’s photographer, Oates posed outdoors in a red, short-sleeved top, longish white skirt, white sandals, straw boater and a rope of big beads. But she told the reporter, “Right now, I am wearing a T-shirt and running shorts. I don’t go to a lot of those occasions where one dresses beautifully. I don’t like to be the center of attention. If you’re a writer, you don’t want to be a character.”

ABOUT MEMOIRS: Mary-Ann Tironne Smith, the author of eight novels, lives in East Haven, Conn. Her latest book is her first of nonfiction, a memoir entitled Girls of Tender Age.

The book includes a discussion group guide and a “conversation” with the writer, who says, “In writing a memoir you tell the truth; when you feel the need to embellish you speak a metaphor . . . As for the state of the memoir, I can see no evidence that people are getting tired of them. People enjoy trying on other people’s lives. As for being objective or subjective, we can be either. We can make the choice. A memoirist looking at an event objectively translates to a pretentious and boring take, I think. A subjective outlook enveloping human foibles is humbler and provocative, and that is the recipe for the poignancy a good memoir requires.”

SURVIVOR: Robert Vare is editor at large at The Atlantic Monthly. He wrote to say that the magazine was celebrating its 150th anniversary with an anthology: The Best of the Atlantic Monthly: 150 Years of Writers and Thinkers Who Shaped Our History. The 650-page volume, due out in October, will have 78 articles, essays, humor pieces, short stories and poems by an impressive list of A-list authors.

A few that Vare mentioned include Mark Twain, Henry David Thoreau, Robert Frost, Garrison Keillor, Walt Whitman, Saul Bellow and Vladimir Nabokov.

SNARES: Michael Wolff is a columnist for Vanity Fair magazine. A recent subject for his column was Rupert Murdoch’s acquisition of The Wall Street Journal. Brent Cunningham, managing editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, wrote on the web that Wolff’s “calculated counterintuitive take of Murdoch” in Vanity Fair ‘had ‘book proposal’ stamped all over it."

Wolff’s last book was published by HarperCollins, but that company is owned by Murdoch. “If I ended up being too nice to Murdoch, everyone would say it was in the bag,” Wolff told The New York Times. “And if I was horrible to him, I guess they would all get fired.” Wolff’s proposal for a Murdoch biography was put out for bids. Doubleday bought it for an advance in the high six figures, according to the Times.

A Murdoch bio may have repercussions. Wolff’s daughter Elizabeth Wolff works as a reporter at Murdoch’s New York Post. Wolff said, “This might be a terrible thing to say, but not for a second did it cross my mind that I have to protect my child. She could get another job at some point, and I’m sure she will.”

CRISIS: Khaled Hosseini, author of the No. 1 best-selling A Thousand Splendid Suns was interviewed on BookPage.com. He said that the success of his first novel, The Kite Runner, had made writing a second novel difficult. “Suddenly everybody was interested in what I was writing next. You go through these crises of self-doubt. You wonder: Am I a hack? It took a little bit of work to ignore the noise outside my door.”

He rented an office in a nondescript building with nothing on the walls to distract him. He called it his “windowless bunker” and produced A Thousand Splendid Suns.

The New York Times Book Review reported that the value of some editions of The Kite Runner are rising. Abebooks.com is asking $1,500 for a copy that is: “Signed by Khaled Hosseini on the title page in both Farsi and English . . . comes with a glossy photo of the author at the signing event, and two promo bookmarks! This is one of the mostollectible books in recent memory, with the prices surely to go up when the movie based on this remarkable novel comes out at the end of 2007.”

LESS GRAY: Do you get writer’s cramp? Don’t admit it. Researchers were reported in The New York Times as saying that those who suffer from it “have less gray matter than normal in three parts of the brain, including areas involved in the control of the affected hand.”

NEGATIVE PLUS: Tim Weiner’s best-selling Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA brought a complaint from the spy agency: “With a strong range of sources, Tim Weiner had an opportunity to write a balanced history of a complex, important subject. But he did not. His bias overwhelms his scholarship.”

PW observed: “That’s the kind of commentary that helps sell more books.”

INSTRUCTIONS: New World Writing: A Cross Section of Current Literature was published in 1952. It
contains an essay by Charles A. Fenton entitled “Hemingway’s Kansas City Apprenticeship.”

Fenton wrote that the newspaper’s style sheet, which a $15-a-week cub like Ernest Hemingway was expected to master, was a long, single page containing 110 rules that governed the Kansas City Star’s reporters and their prose.

The first paragraph said: “Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative.”

And I thought that those had been invented by old Hem himself.

GAY’S PLACE: In summer, Gay Talese, 75, goes to Ocean City, N.J., his hometown, where he has a house just one block from the ocean. The New York Times said, “His summer routine is to write in the morning, play tennis in the afternoon, then maybe watch a game on the 36-inch Sony Trinitron with DirecTV service that he has set up in his office. His tastes run from the Yankees to Japanese skiing.”

His office is on the third floor of the shingled Victorian. His latest book, A Writer’s Life, was written here. He has an ancient IBM Selectric and a five-year-old Power Macintosh, which is not connected to the Internet. Talese does not do e-mail and hand delivers his manuscripts to his editors.

COMIC ROUTINE: Lisa Jackson’s latest title is Almost Dead. She entertained guests at a promotion luncheon in Dallas by getting into her writing costume: pajamas and a ratty black hood. She also displayed her necessary fuel — munchies — and said, “When I’m really writing, I work my ass on.”

PW reported that the audience roared with laughter and commented: “If she ever wanted to give up her day job as a best-selling author of romantic suspense, she could try stand-up comedy.”

BRRRR: Novelist Mary Gordon was asked about the current literary scene, and she told The New York Times: “I think coldness is chic among writers, and particularly ironic coldness. What is absolutely not allowable is sadness. People will do anything rather than to acknowledge that they are sad. . . . William Trevor is my absolute beau ideal. I love him. I love Coetzee. I think Toni Morrison can be great. Beloved is a great, searing novel.”

Gordon’s latest book is a memoir, Circling My Mother.

FREE PUBLICITY: A newspaper photograph of soccer star wife Victoria Beckham with a copy of Skinny Bitch by Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin sent the book onto the bestseller charts. It had been a slow seller after its 2005 publication. Now, after 19 printings, there are more than 350,000 copies in print.

One critic said that the book offered “solid advice with a brazen attitude.” And a brazen title, too.

CELEBRITY BOOK: First Lady Laura Bush and daughter Jenna are writing a children’s book that The New York Times said will be about a “mischievous little boy [who] learns the fun of reading with the help of his teacher.” It’s due out next spring.

NEW LAUREATE: Charles Simic, 69, was named the 15th poet laureate of the U.S. The Yugoslavian-born retired professor at the University of New Hampshire has published more than 20 books of poetry, an essay collection, translations and a memoir. He won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1990 and held a MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant from 1984 to 1989. He succeeds Donald Hall, who held the post for a year.

SEQUEL? Shannon Hale’s 2006 Newbery Honor winner Princess Academy is a bestseller.

PW said the author was often asked if there will be a sequel, and she said on her blog: “At this point, probably not. I like the book intact, whole, without needing another story to it. I don’t want to say that I never will, but I also have three other books that feel more insistent to me to write first. Besides, wouldn’t you rather decide yourself what happens next?”

BIRTHDAY: Joyce Johnson’s memoir, Minor Characters, was published in 1983 and received the National Book Critics Circle Award. It is about Jack Kerouac and his beatnik gang.

When the 50th anniversary of Kerouac’s On the Road occurred this summer, the Smithsonian had Johnson write about her affair with the author. She concluded her article with: “Fifty years after On the Road was first published, Kerouac’s voice still calls out: Look around you, stay open, question the roles society has thrust upon you, don’t give up the search for connection and meanings. In this bleak new doom-haunted century, those imperatives again sound urgent and subversive—and necessary.”

THE REAL THING: Marcus Luttrell, a former 6-foot-5-inch, 230-pound Navy Seal with a Navy Cross for combat heroism, is coauthor of the best-selling Lone Survivor. It details a 2005 battle and rescue in Afghanistan in which Luttrell was the only survivor. He told his account to Patrick Robinson, an Englishman who has written several novels about Navy Seals.

Luttrell lives on a ranch outside Houston and Robinson has a house on Cape Cod. Between visits, Robinson typed chapters on his computer, adding researched material and filling in facts that Luttrell couldn’t remember. Robinson’s fictional hero is Rick Hunter, a 6-foot-5 inch, 230-pound Navy Seal who grew up on a ranch too.
Luttrell told The New York Times that he would occasionally nudge his coauthor. Luttrell explained, "You know, he's English, so he'd have stuff like 'bloody hell' or 'mate,' and I'd smile, 'Sorry, I don't talk like that. . . ."

LAUGHS HELP: Charlaine Harris added humor to her mystery novels, and her sales took off. Her agent, Joshua Bilmes, told PW that the author has written 29 books that have sold 75 million copies worldwide. An Ice Cold Grave was published in September.

Harris explained to PW, "I was about to turn fifty. I thought, let's just step out of the mystery box and try to do something different." Harris averages two books a year for her two series and said writing for a series is "like visiting old friends."

The Sookie Stackhouse character will be played by Anna Paquin on a television series produced by Alan Ball for HBO to be shown in January.

NOT TOO NOVEL: William Gibson's new novel is Spook Country. He was asked by New York Times Magazine columnist Deborah Solomon if he felt that his work transcended the science-fiction genre.

He replied, "My roots are in a genre. That is the funny thing. Novels are called novels because, ideally, they provide a novel experience. But in genre, you're sort of buying a guarantee that you are going to have essentially the same experience again and again. It's a novel. It won't be too novel. Don't worry."

FINDING PARALLELS: Andrea Barrett's new novel is The Air We Breathe. It's about a group of tuberculosis patients before World War I.

Barrett explained to PW how she selected the time and place for her novels. She said, "Sometimes things I'm most concerned about or upset about in the contemporary world—I can't seem to write about them directly. If I can find an analogous period in another time and place, it helps me articulate my feelings more clearly. If you think the invasion of Iraq is the only time something like that has happened, you think about it one way. If you think about it in terms of other invasions and other periods . . . that changes your perspective on the current situation."

HOT BOOK: The Barnes & Noble chain announced that it would not carry O. J. Simpson's If I Did It in any of its stores. The book is about the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. The controversy surrounding it cost Judith Regan her imprint when Rupert Murdoch fired her. The New York Times reported that Borders said it would carry the book in its stores, but "will not promote or market the book in any way."

A week after Barnes & Noble said it wouldn't carry the book, advance orders were so heavy that minds were changed. It will be on their shelves but, like Borders, there will be no promotion, they said.

BIO SEX: Nigel Hamilton is the author of biographies of John F. Kennedy and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. He is at work on a three-volume biography of President Bill Clinton. Hamilton has recently published Biography: A Brief History, which emphasizes the gradually relaxing taboos about discussing a subject's sex life.

Hamilton wrote, "Sex . . . provided the modern biographer with a weapon—one that could be used not merely, as Freud had done, to reduce the puzzle of a human being's life and creativity to a theorem (as in explaining Leonardo da Vinci's inventiveness), or solely to understand an individual in greater complexity and depth, but also to tease a modern audience into reading more about the subject. Sex was, in sum, a way of enticing readers toward greater empathy and knowledge."

OH: Wilson Mizner, who died in 1933, wasn't as famous as Dorothy Parker, but the screenwriter was known in his day as a noted wit. He once said, "Steal from one author and it's plagiarism; steal from many and it's research."

STILL GOING: Ray Bradbury, 87, famous for sci-fi novels such as Fahrenheit 451 and The Martian Chronicles, admitted to The New York Times that the science in his books is often faulty and serves only as a vehicle for his fiction. He'll provide the inspiration, he said, and let the scientists worry about the particulars. "The arts and sciences are connected," he said. "Scientists have to have a metaphor. All scientists start with imagination."

A pair of never-released Bradbury novellas, Leviathan '99 and Somewhere a Band Is Playing, were published in September under the title Now and Forever.

INSPIRED: Paulo Coelho is author of The Alchemist, listed as a best-selling trade paperback by PW.

In an interview on Beliefnet.com, he said, "The best way to get inspired to write—in my case—is by meeting people. When you meet people you learn, you hear. And sometimes you're hearing yourself. You're in front of a mirror. You're seeing yourself better. I only write a book every two years, and I write a book in one month because the book is being written in my soul. And then, of course, I have to share my life as part of the human condition. Because you have to share. If you don't share, you are lost."

sections. She wrote recently that today we are “living at the dawn of the ultra-mega-uber-monster book party” and listed a few recent ones.

**Patricia Marx**’s *Him Her Him Again the End of Him* attracted 380 guests. A. Alfred Taubman’s book, *Threshold Resistance: The Extraordinary Career of a Luxury Retailing Pioneer*, was celebrated by 400 at the Four Seasons. Danielle Ganek’s *Lulu Meets God and Doubts Him* came out with 600 guests drinking champagne at the Guggenheim Museum. Tina Brown’s *The Diana Chronicles* was greeted by 200. Holly Peterson’s *The Manny* was a special occasion for 250 guests. It was held in Pete Peterson’s apartment. Peterson is the head of the Blackstone Group, and was Secretary of Commerce under Richard M. Nixon. He’s also the author’s father.


**THE BIG SELL:** Holly Peterson’s name popped up again (see item above) in a full-page advertisement for *The Manny* in the Times and in an article about the making of a video starring the author’s friends and models to help sell her novel. The book started as an article Peterson wrote for the Times in 2002 about male nannies who were hired to expose boys “to the sort of informal knowledge about sports and girls that nannies and workaholic fathers were not delivering.” Peterson’s advance for *The Manny* (plus a second book) was $1 million.

PW explained, “One of the main things publishers look for, especially with potentially commercial books, is a promotable author, an author who is attractive, an author who is connected, an author who has some sort of platform and might be able to get some coverage for that book, and this author has all that. Who she is definitely has some bearing on her getting this contract.”

**HOT SUBJECT:** “Dog-related books still outsell any other category,” publisher Christopher Riggio told PW.

In a 2007 survey, the U.S. cat population was 88.3 million, outnumbering households with 74.8 million dogs.

But books about dogs sell better. Check out any bookstore.

**TELLING TALES:** A new anthology, *Bad Girls: 26 Writers Misbelieve*, was edited by Ellen Sussman, who describes a skinny-dipping adventure of her own.

In the book, authors tell what reviewer Lynn Harris, in The New York Times Book Review, called “tales of glorious, even dangerous, badness, of rebellion both classic and creative. There is more nudity, in ill-advised one-night stands, in thrillingly dodgy liaisons.” Among the contributors were Erica Jong, Susan Cheever, Joyce Maynard, Maggie Estep, Ann Hood, Kim Addonizio and Pam Houston.

**LABORER:** Richard Russo’s *Empire Falls* won a Pulitzer in 2002. His new novel is *Bridge of Sighs*. He and his wife live in Camden, Maine, and his books all deal with what PW called the “working-class culture.” Russo spent his early years doing labor that required a lot of heavy lifting.

He told PW: “What you knew the first twenty-one years of your life, that’s what you know. That’s what you know to the marrow of your bones—the rest of it you’ve just been observing.”

**BIGGER LIST:** Sourcebook’s imprint Casablanca publishes Jane Austen sequels and romance nonfiction. In September it expanded, adding romance fiction, paranormal, time travel, romantic suspense, historical, erotic and Regency genres. The plan is to publish 15 to 20 titles per season in a mix of mass market and trade paperback formats.

**WORRIED:** Fernanda Eberstadt’s most recent book is *Little Money Street*. For The New York Times Magazine she wrote an article entitled “The Unexpected Fantasist: The Portuguese Novelist and Nobel Prize-Winner Jose Saramago Is a Stubborn Atheist, an Unreconstructed Communist, an Ornery Political Polemicist—and the Creator of Some of the World’s Most Magical, Imaginative, Sweetly Lyrical Fiction.” Whew.

Saramago is quoted: “When I finish a book, I wait for the next idea, and sometimes it takes a long time, and I get worried. When I finished *Perquenas Memorias*, I wondered if the cycle was now complete. I had for the first time in my life a sense of finitude, and it was not a pleasant feeling. Everything seemed little, insignificant. I am 84. I could live perhaps another three, four years. The worst that death has is that you were here, and now you’re not.”

Saramago’s *Las Intermitencias de la Muerte* will be published in the U.S. next year.

**PERFECT SCORE:** Cassie Edwards began writing romance novels about Native Americans 25 years ago. Her 100th title, *Savage Skies*, was published in August. Her editor, Alicia Condon at Dorchester Publishing, told PW that more than 10 million copies of Edwards’ books are in print. All have been reissued as mass market originals.

**ON THE ROAD:** David Halberstam died in a car accident in April. His last book, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, was published in September, and an all-star cast of Halberstam friends took to
the road to promote the book. These included Joan Didion, Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward, Anna Quindlen and Samantha Power.

They offered personal reminiscences and readings. Constance Sayre of a Manhattan consulting firm, Market Partners International, told The New York Times, "What's going to make it effective is the fact that his best friends are high-profile people, big names. You can also put them on local television and radio. It should create a wave of news because each person is going to say something different."

Didion, Gay Talese, Robert MacNeil and Jon Meacham, managing editor of Newsweek, were scheduled for a panel at New York's Union Square Barnes & Noble in October.

GRACE'S WAY: The late Grace Paley (see Deaths below) taught writing at Sarah Lawrence for 18 years. In 1985, Paley told Nina Darnton of The New York Times that she believed that the greatest advantage in having writers teach writers is that they remember their own process of becoming artists, and are thus better able to see their pupils' work as part of a trajectory.

In another interview, Paley told a reporter for Mirabella magazine that she started off writing a short story with a sentence. "I'll have the sentence before I have the story," she said. "When you're used to writing poetry, you think the language first almost."

LESSON LEARNED: When the late V. S. Pritchett was 80, he looked back at his decades of producing short stories in an interview and said, "I think I tended to overwrite at the beginning. I used more adjectives and long descriptive passages. It was more 'glorious' than need be.

"I learned a lot from the Irish—the people and the writers. I went to Ireland as a reporter and found it was their talk that would tell the story, not the prose-ing of the writer."

SERIES HIT: On the children's best-seller list was the latest in a series, How Do Dinosaurs Go to School? by Jane Yolen and illustrator Mark Teague.

Teague told PW, "Sending the dinosaurs to school was Jane's idea, and it was a great one. It gave us a chance to explore a lot of the issues that kids face in school—mostly issues about how they are supposed to behave and how they aren't."

 Asked what's next for the series, Yolen said, "Despite many letters asking for a dino potty book, I am adamant about not doing that. The bad behavior would be too—well, yucky."

INFLUENCES: Denis Johnson's new novel, Tree of Smoke, was featured on the cover of The New York Times Book Review. Many critics admire his work, but he's never had a bestseller.

In 1984, Johnson told The Times: "My ear for the diction and rhythms of poetry was trained by—in chronological order—Dr. Seuss, Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman, the guitar solos of Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix, and T. S. Eliot. Other influences come and go, but those I admire the most and those I admired the earliest (I still admire them) have something to say in every line I write. I don't like William Faulkner. I think Wallace Stevens writes like the photograph of a person, not a person. But they too have had their effect on me."

DREAMDAY: Julie Rugg and Lynda Murphy collected an assortment of quotes from books about books and reading and called it A Book Addict's Treasury.

This sample of the contents is from poet W. H. Auden: "Occasionally I come across a book which I feel has been written especially for me and for me only. Like a jealous lover, I don't want anybody else to hear of it. To have a million such readers, unaware of each other's existence, to be read with passion and never talked about, is the daydream, surely, of every author."

VIA BLOG: A book tour has never been a requirement, but tours are expensive and are now reserved only for Big Name Authors.

The substitute these days, according to The New York Times, is the blog book tour which "usually requires an author or publicist to take the initiative, reaching out to bloggers as if they were booksellers and asking them to be the host for a writer's online visit."

To promote her first book, The Late Bloomer's Revolution, Amy Cohen, a former TV writer, visited Prillboyle and Bluestalking Reader.

Frank Portman, author of King Dark, teamed up with Andrew Krucoff, a blogger who created a video about the book's main character, and asked Portman questions. The Q and A then was posted on websites like Gawker, Largehearted Boy and Brooklyn Vegan.

Booktour.com lets authors post information about their books, and the Times said, "Many publishing houses have now hired Web-savy publicists or outside blog tour 'producers.'"

BACK AGAIN: At least three authors who produced surprise best-sellers have new novels this season.

Ann Packer, author of The Dive from Clausen's Pier, has Songs Without Words. The new book by Alice Sebold (The Lovely Bones) is The Almost Moon: Ann Patchett (Bel Canto) has named her new novel Run.

Packer, who lives south of San Francisco, told The New York Times that when she was working on a book, she found her writers' group especially helpful. "I need to open
DEATHS

Rudolf Arnheim, 102, died June 8 in Ann Arbor, Mich. The psychologist, philosopher and academic was author of *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), *Film as Art* (1957) and *Visual Thinking* (1969).

Philip Booth, 81, died July 2 in Hanover, N.H. The former professor at Syracuse wrote 10 books of poetry including *The Islanders, Weathers and Edges, Letters from a Distant Land* and *Lifelines: Selected Poems 1950–1999.*

Alice Borchardt, 67, died July 24 in Houston, Tex. She was the sister of novelist Anne Rice and author of seven historical romances. Titles include *The Silver Wolf, Night of the Wolf* and *The Wolf King.*


Michael Jackson, 65, died August 30 in London. He was a beer critic for 30 years and author of *The Great Beers of Belgium* and *The World Guide to Beer.*

Perry H. Knowlton, 80, died July 6 in Westchester County. He was chairman and CEO of Curtis Brown, Ltd, literary agency, for many years. His many clients included W. H. Auden, Ogden Nash, Any Rand, Tony Hillerman, A. A. Milne, Brian Moore, Pauline Kael, C. S. Lewis, Louis Auchincloss, John Knowles and Robertson Davies.

Edwin McDowell, 72, died July 10 in Bronxville, N.Y. The New York Times reporter (publishing was his beat for several years) was the author of *Barry Goldwater: Portrait of an Arizonan* (1964) and the novels *Three Cheers and a Tiger* (1966), *To Keep Our Honor Clean* (1980) and *The Lost World* (1988).


Carleton Mitchell, 96, died July 16 in Key Biscayne, Fla. The racing yachtsman was the author of *Islands to Windward* (1948) and *Passage East* (1953).


Hans Ruesch, 94, died August 17 in Lugano, Switzerland. He was the author of *Top of the World* (1950), *The Racer* (1953) and *South of the Heart: A Novel of Modern Arabia* (1957). He also wrote *Slaughter of the Innocent* (1983), a nonfiction book about slaughtering animals.

Fred T. Saberhagen, 77, died June 19 in Albuquerque. The sci-fi and fantasy writer was author of 60 novels and several collections of short stories. He was best known for his “Berserker” series and an adventure series written from Dracula’s point of view.

Peggy Samuels, 84, died August 23 in East Falmouth, Mass. She was a biographer and art historian who, with her husband, Howard, wrote *Frederic Remington: A Biography* (1982), *Remembering the Maine* (1995)
**BULLETIN BOARD**

**Children/Young Adult**

The newly established Carol Otis Hurst Children’s Book Prize, founded in 2007 by the Westfield Athenaeum Library in Westfield, MA, to celebrate the life and work of children’s book author Carol Otis Hurst, will be awarded annually to an outstanding book about The New England Experience written for children or young adults. The award carries a prize of $500. Books may be submitted by any individual, publisher or organization, and must have been published in 2007. To enter, send three copies of the book and an entry form, available online at westath.org, by **December 31, 2007**. Carol Otis Hurst Children’s Book Prize, Westfield Athenaeum, 6 Elm Street, Westfield, MA 01085. (413) 568-7833.

**Multiple Genres**

Poets & Writers will bestow the Maureen Egan Writers Exchange Award to two writers, a poet and a fiction writer. The award in each category will go to a writer who has lived in Washington, D.C., for at least two years, and has never published a book or has published no more than one book in the genre in which he is applying. Winners will receive $500 and a trip to New York City in October 2008 to meet with editors, agents, publishers and other writers, with travel expenses and a per diem stipend covered by Poets & Writers. Winners will also give a public reading of their work and be given the offer of a month at the Jentel Artist Residency Program in Wyoming. Submission guidelines and an application form are online at pw.org/prizes. Send entries between October 1 and **December 1, 2007**, to Writers Exchange Contest, Poets & Writers, Inc., 90 Broad Street, Suite 2100, New York, NY 10004-2205. (212) 226-3586; rwny@pw.org.

The Lambda Literary Foundation will present its 20th Annual Literary Awards in 25 categories. The awards are given to books published in 2007 that deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender themes. Nominations may be submitted by the book’s author or publisher between September 1 and **December 1, 2007**. Include a nomination form, a $20 fee, and four copies of the book. For full eligibility and submission guidelines, visit lambdaliterary.org and click on “Awards.” The awards will be announced at a celebration in New York City in the spring. Lambda Literary Foundation, 16 West 32nd Street, Suite 10E, New York, NY 10001-3808. (212) 239-6575; asklambda@earthlink.net.

Each year, the Publishing Triangle, the association of lesbians and gay men in publishing, offers the Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement ($3,000), the Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Nonfiction ($1,000), the Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction ($1,000), the Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry ($250), the Thom Gunn Award for Gay Poetry ($250), the Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction ($1,000) and the Robert Chesley Award for Lesbian and Gay Playwriting ($1,000). It also offers, in conjunction with the Ferro-Grumley Foundation, the Ferro-Grumley Awards for excellence and experiment in literary fiction ($1,000 each). All submissions must be made by publishers and others, but not the work’s author; submission forms are available online at publishingtriangle.org, or contact the Publishing Triangle to receive one by mail. Each submission requires a $25 application fee. Deadline: **December 3, 2007**. The Publishing Triangle, 332 Bleecker Street, #D36, New York, NY 10014. awards@publishingtriangle.org.

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) serves as an advocate for the development,
promotion and improvement of library services and resources to the nation’s African American community. Its annual Literary Awards, founded in 1994, recognize outstanding works by African American authors that depict the cultural, historical or sociopolitical aspects of the African Diaspora. The winning books—one fiction and one nonfiction—will each receive a $500 prize. In addition, BCALA will present the First Novelist Award to a first-time fiction writer and the Outstanding Contribution to Publishing citation to an author or publishing company. Publishers of any size or specialty should submit titles published in 2007 for review. Submissions must be sent by December 31, 2007. Visit www.bcala.org/awards/literary.htm for eligibility and submission guidelines, or contact John S. Page, Chair, BCALA Literary Awards Committee, Washington, DC 20008. (202) 274-6030; jpage@wrlc.org.

The Western Writers of America, Inc., are accepting nominations for the 2008 Spur Awards competition. Works must be published during 2007 and in the American West, the early frontier, or relate to the Western or frontier experience to be eligible. Authors may submit works in any category; visit westernwriters.org/SPUR_RULES_08.pdf for a list of categories and full guidelines. Deadline: December 31, 2007. Spur Awards Chair, Deborah Morgan, 5552 Walsh Road, Whitmore Lake, MI 48189. (734) 426-5627; deborahmorgan@earthlink.net.

The Stanford University Libraries will honor two writers with the 2008 William Saroyan International Prizes for Writing, for books published between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2007. One fiction writer and one nonfiction writer will receive $12,500 each. Finalists will be chosen by a nominating committee and the winners will be selected by the Stanford University Librarian, in consultation with the president of the William Saroyan Foundation. Deadline: January 31, 2008. To enter, send an entry form (available for download at library.stanford.edu/saroyan/entryform.html), five copies of the work, and a $50 entry fee to Administrator of The Saroyan Prize Committee, Green Library, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6004. Visit library.stanford.edu/saroyan/termsncond.html for full guidelines and eligibility requirements. (650) 736-9538; sonialee@stanford.edu.

Sarabande Books holds two contests each year, the Kathryn A. Morton Prize in Poetry and the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction. Winners receive $2,000, publication of either a full-length collection of poetry or a book of short stories, novellas, or a short novel, and a standard royalty contract. There is a $25 handling fee and submissions must be accompanied by an entry form. Entries must be postmarked between January 1 and February 15, 2008. For detailed submission guidelines and an entry form, visit sarabandebooks.org or contact Sarabande Books, Inc., PO Box 4456, Louisville, KY 40204.

The Pacific Northwest Writers Association (PNWA) offers its annual literary contest for unpublished writing in 12 categories. The prizes awarded within each category are $600 for first place, $300 for second place, and $150 for third place. The 10 finalists in each category may attend the PNWA Summer Conference and, in addition to receiving two critiques on their entries, their manuscripts will be made available to agents and editors who attend the conference. First-place winners may attend a special Agents and Editors Reception at the conference. Entries must be postmarked by February 22, 2008. Visit pnwa.org for submission guidelines or contact PNWA at (425) 673-2665 or pnwa@pnwa.org.

The San Francisco Foundation, in conjunction with the Intersection for the Arts, offers three literary awards each year to writers between the ages of 20 and 35: the Joseph Henry Jackson award, the James Duval Phelan award, and the Mary Tanenbaum award. The awards are presented for manuscripts-in-progress by authors born in California or currently residing in Northern California or Nevada. Manuscripts may be fiction, nonfiction prose, poetry or drama. The two winners of the James Duval Phelan and Mary Tanenbaum awards receive $2,000 each, and the winner of the Joseph Henry Jackson award will receive $3,000. Applications will be available online after January 15, 2008. Deadline: March 31, 2008. For eligibility requirements and full submission guidelines, visit www.sff.org/programs/awards-programs. (415) 733-8500; artsinfo@sff.org.

Fiction Contests

The North Carolina Writers’ Network (NCWN) is accepting submissions for its Thomas Wolfe Fiction Prize, which carries an award of $1,000 and possible publication in The Thomas Wolfe Review. To enter, send two copies of an unpublished fiction manuscript of up to 12 double-spaced pages. The author’s name should not appear on the manuscript; include a cover sheet with name, address, phone number, e-mail address and title. The entry fee is $15 for members of the NCWN and $25 for non-members. Full guidelines are at ncwriters.org/programs/competitions/wolfe.shtml. Deadline: December 15. The NCWN also offers a poetry chapbook competition (January 31 deadline) and the Doris Betts Fiction Prize (February 1 deadline). Thomas Wolfe Fiction Prize, Professor Tony Abbott, PO Box 7096, Davidson College, Davidson, NC 28035. (919)
The Cintas Foundation will accept applications for its 2008 Fellowship in Creative Writing between November 15, 2007 and January 14, 2008. The foundation will award $15,000 in quarterly stipends to a writer of Cuban citizenship or direct descent (having a Cuban parent or grandparent) living outside of Cuba. For more information or to download an application form, visit cintasfoundation.org or e-mail Ingrid LaFleur Rogers, Cintas Fellows Collection Manager, at ingrid.rogers@fiu.edu.

Poetry Contests

Chelsea, a literary magazine established in 1958, is holding its annual poetry contest. To enter, send 4–6 poems, no more than 500 lines in total, by December 15. The winner will receive $1,000 and publication. Entries must be unpublished, not under consideration elsewhere, and single-spaced. Do not write the author’s name on the manuscript; include a separate cover sheet with the title(s), name, address, phone number and e-mail address. There is a $15 entry fee, which includes a copy of Chelsea. Entries must be sent by mail to Chelsea Awards Competition, PO Box 773, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10276-0773. chelseamag.org/awards/guidelines.asp

The Cultural Center of Cape Cod is holding their first annual poetry competition, which will award $1,000 to a single, unpublished poem written by a poet residing anywhere in the U.S. and $250 to a single, unpublished poem written by a resident of Cape Cod, Nantucket, or Martha’s Vineyard. Submit up to three poems per entry, no more than five pages in total, with a $15 fee by January 15, 2008. The poet’s name should appear on a cover page only, along with mailing address, phone number, e-mail address, the titles of the poems, and a one paragraph bio. “Contest Entry” should be written on both the envelope and the cover page. Visit www.cultural-center.org/poetry-competition.htm for full guidelines or contact Lauren Wolk, Cultural Center of Cape Cod, Box 118, 307 Old Main Street, South Yar-

Legal Watch

Continued from page 12

actions against Boim violated her First Amendment rights under the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia dismissed the case on summary judgment.

On appeal, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit considered whether the district court had erred in concluding that Boim’s suspension did not violate her First Amendment rights. The court also considered whether Boim was entitled to any injunctive relief, which would require the defendants to expunge negative documentation relating to the suspension from her records.

The court of appeals initially noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has held that students do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression upon entering school grounds. However, the constitutional rights of students do not precisely coincide with the rights of adults in other settings, since school officials must have some flexibility to control student speech within the physical boundaries of the school. The general rule has been that student speech must “at least be likely to cause a material and substantial disruption and more than a brief, easily overlooked, de minimis impact, before it may be curtailed.” Further, student expression may unquestionably be regulated when “doing so contributes to the maintenance of order and decorum within the educational system.”

In the case at hand, the court of appeals found there was no question that Boim’s writing about killing her teacher constituted “speech.” But the court noted that Boim was not punished for the passage alone, but also for initially refusing to turn over the notebook to the teacher, which was a clear act of insubordination that was reasonably likely to cause a “material and substantial disruption to the “maintenance of order and decorum” within the school. The court also took into account the violent history that has pervaded U.S. schools over the prior eight-year period (a total of 16 school shootings had been reported in the U.S) as well as federal legislation passed at least in part in response to the school violence issue. (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that states that receive federal funds must allow students who attend persistently dangerous schools or who become victims of violent crimes on school property to transfer to schools that are considered safe.)

Taking all of the evidence together, the court of appeals found that in consideration of the increasing school violence and government oversight, coupled with the school’s compelling interest in ensuring no violence occurs on its property, there was no violation of
Boim’s First Amendment rights when she was suspended. Moreover, the court of appeals held that it was not an abuse of discretion for the district court to deny injunctive relief, which would have removed the disciplinary records from Boim’s student education files, since the court already concluded that the disciplinary actions did not violate her First Amendment rights.

—Michael Gross
Staff Lawyer

Tweaking Carol

Burnett v. Twentieth Century Fox
Central District Court of California

Porn shops are not renowned for their hygiene, so when some characters in the animated television series *Family Guy* visited their local adult store in an April 2006 episode, the program’s writers thought it would be funny if the shop were as clean as a whistle. When Peter Griffin, the show’s Archie Bunker-like protagonist, comments on this, one of his friends explains, “Carol Burnett works part-time as a janitor.” Cut to an animated image of the “Charwoman” character from *The Carol Burnett Show* mopping the floor next to a rack of blow-up dolls and porn; in the background, a curtained door leads to the “Video Booths” where customers may view their stag movie in private. A slightly altered version of “Carol’s Theme” from *The Carol Burnett Show* plays over this image. Another of Peter’s friends then remarks, “You know, when she tugged her ear at the end of that show, she was really saying goodnight to her mom.” The punch line: “I wonder what she tugged to say goodnight to her dad.”

In March 2007, Carol Burnett sued Twentieth Century Fox, the show’s producers, in federal district court in California for copyright infringement, trademark infringement, common law misappropriation of name and likeness, and violating her statutory right of publicity. These last two charges concern state law, as opposed to federal law. The district court judge, Dean D. Pregerson, dismissed her suit for failure to state a legal claim on the federal claims, without ruling on the state law claims.

Although Burnett holds a valid copyright in the “Charwoman” character, Judge Pregerson held that the use of this character and related music in *Family Guy* constituted fair use. The Copyright Act of 1976 sets forth a four-factor test to help courts determine whether a particular use of copyrighted material is “fair.”

The first factor requires the court to determine “the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes.” For years, courts believed that every commercial use is presumptively unfair, but the U.S. Supreme Court corrected this misperception in the landmark fair use case of *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose* (1994). Today, courts employ the first factor to decide whether the use at issue is either “derivative” or “transformative” of the underlying copyrighted material. In *Acuff-Rose*, for example, the Supreme Court held that 2 Live Crew’s parodic rendition of Roy Orbison’s “Oh, Pretty Woman” was sufficiently transformative to count as fair. Relying on this precedent, Twentieth Century Fox argued that its use of Carol Burnett’s Charwoman in *Family Guy* was similarly parodic, and thus transformative.

In response, Burnett argued that the television show’s use of her copyrighted character “does not constitute parody in the strict legal sense” because, according to *Acuff-Rose*, “the heart of any parodist’s claim to quote from existing material is the use of some elements of a prior author’s composition to create a new one that, at least in part, comments on that author’s works.” Yet *Family Guy*’s purpose in using Burnett’s Charwoman was not so much to comment on that character, if at all, but to ridicule Burnett herself. Burnett’s argument plays on a distinction between parody and satire that receives some airtime in the *Acuff-Rose* decision, but which lower courts have recently begun to view as nonbinding. The idea behind the distinction is that parody requires use of the specific object it is parodying; hence, parodic use has a better claim to being “fair” than satiric use, which simply uses an object, no one in particular, to comment on a broader category of things.

Judge Pregerson, following the current trend, rejected the distinction as irrelevant and held that using the Charwoman character to lampoon Burnett herself still counts as both parodic and transformative, and thus fair use. The fact that this use was in bad taste does not detract from its being “fair use” for copyright infringement purposes.

The second factor calls on courts to evaluate “the nature of the copyrighted work.” For although everything from an objective list of facts to a subjective expression of feeling can be copyrighted, copyright doctrine recognizes that the more original a work is, the greater the copyright protection it should receive. However, since fair use cases involving parody by their nature concern publicly known, expressive works, the court refused to accord great weight to this aspect of the traditional fair use test.

The third factor requires courts to consider “the amount and substantiality of the portion used in rela-
tion to the copyrighted work as a whole"—courts have always been wary of allowing the use of entire copyrighted work without permission. Judge Pregerson held that the 18 seconds that Family Guy devoted to its parody took "just enough of the imagery and accompanying theme music to make this crude depiction of the Charwoman character 'recognizable' to viewers," thereby supporting a finding of fair use.

The fourth and final factor focuses on "the effect of the use on the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work." Judge Pregerson concluded that market demand for Burnett's Charwoman character would not be met by the porn shop version of her in Family Guy, and that it did not serve as a substitute for the original.

The court thus held that Twentieth Century Fox's parodic use of Burnett's Charwoman constituted a fair use. As for Burnett's trademark infringement claim, the court held that the very outrageousness of the parody would ensure that viewers will not confuse the porn shop Charwoman with anything either sponsored or approved by Burnett. Furthermore, only purely commercial speech, like an advertisement, can result in trademark dilution. Since Family Guy does more than propose a commercial transaction, since the show also involves artistic and parodic expression, the court dismissed Burnett's trademark infringement claims.

Judge Pregerson declined to rule on Burnett's two state law claims concerning the violation of her rights of publicity and the misappropriation of her name and likeness, but instead dismissed them as no longer part of his court's jurisdiction, now that Burnett's federal law claims had been quashed. As of this writing, Burnett has not refiled these claims in California state court.

—David Bornstein
Legal Intern

Fact vs. Opinion

Joseph Rapp and Joseph Rapp Enterprises Inc. v.
Carrie Joannia Robinson
Supreme Court of the State of New York

Joseph Rapp, head of Joseph Rapp Enterprises, was the manager of African-American comedian Nipsey Russell's career from the late 1970s until Russell's death in October 2005. After Russell's death, Rapp claimed that Russell's girlfriend of 20 years, Carrie Joannia Robinson, demanded he return to her several items Russell had given him over the years. Rapp allegedly refused. Subsequently, Robinson filed a police report alleging that Joseph Rapp, along with Russell's ex-girlfriend, Peggy Chane, had stolen several items from Russell's apartment, which included $50,000 in bearer bonds, Russell's address book, two cameras, several tapes from Russell's radio show, and a number of letters written to Russell, including one from Langston Hughes.

In an article about the alleged theft of Russell's possessions in The New York Daily News in July 2006, Robinson claimed that she believed Rapp and Chane had looted the comic's valuables after his death, as they were the only ones with access to Russell's apartment. The article also noted that Chane was later arrested and charged with petit larceny for allegedly stealing Russell's address book and cameras. The other missing items were not found at the time the article was published. No charges were ever filed against Rapp. Nonetheless, Rapp was upset about the allegations made by Robinson to the police as well as to The New York Daily News. As a result, Rapp brought an action against Robinson for defamation in the Supreme Court of the State of New York. Robinson moved to dismiss the case.

For Rapp to prove defamation, the Supreme Court noted that he must show Robinson made a false statement that was publicized, without privilege or authorization, to a third party. He must also show that her statement was made with negligence or malice and that the statement caused special damages or was defamatory per se. In regard to the article, the court noted that giving a false statement to a newspaper representative with the intent that a false story be published could give rise to liability for damages caused by the publication. However, in this case, the writer only reported that Robinson believed Chane and Rapp had stolen the items from Russell's apartment because of their known access (a fact that was later verified). The court found that the language of the article would lead a reasonable reader to conclude that Robinson's statement was an opinion as opposed to one of known fact. The court ultimately concluded that the article as a whole appeared to present Robinson's expression of opinion only, and, as such, held that the article was not defamatory.

In regard to Robinson's police report, the court stated that when a citizen makes a statement to police based on facts he or she believes to be true, there is, in the absence of pure malice, a complete defense to defamation. The court noted that the purpose of this policy is to "permit, within reasonable limits, free and intelligent discussion of matters in the public interest. Such discussion could not be effected, if reasonably drawn inferences resulted in liability, merely because they prove to be wrong." Essentially, if people feared civil prosecution for providing police information in
CONTRACTS Q&A

Continued from page 14

1. Judges are not negating the provision of their own accord but are applying basic constitutional principles. Bankruptcy, like the First Amendment, is a right that is guaranteed by the United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 8). There are many examples where federal law trumps state law (civil rights, New Deal legislation, gun control, abortion, auto gas emission limits). To argue against this requires an argument based on some other constitutional principle rather than a dislike of the result. I don’t see that other constitutional principle here.

2. Courts are not discriminating against authors or other creative individuals when they rule that the typical termination clause in publishing agreements is unenforceable in a bankruptcy proceeding. Similar clauses exist in many contracts that do not involve publishing companies or creative individuals and, with limited exceptions, those contracts are not permitted to automatically terminate either. Lacking this discrimination or another appropriate reason (see point 5 below), I see no valid reason why we as authors should seek special treatment.

3. Your concern that authors have no say over who buys their contracts ignores the fact that authors do have the right to present their views to the bank-

druptcy court in the same manner as others who have contracts with the bankrupt company, even though it is a right that few avail themselves of. Your concern that authors’ works could be distorted by the acquiring company overlooks the fact that it is legally bound by your contract’s provisions in the same way that the original publisher was; thus you have the same rights against the new company as you had against the old in the event it distorts your work or otherwise breaches your contract.

4. I fail to understand how you lose creative control over your books. Your book has either been published already or not. If it has been, there is no creative control left to be had. And if it hasn’t been, you have two options: you can return your advance and not deliver the final manuscript (if you don’t like the new publisher) or you can hold the new publisher to the provisions all authors should have in their contracts that prohibit the publisher from making changes in your manuscript (with certain limited, specified exceptions) without your consent.

5. I’m not unsympathetic to the difficulty that the ordinary author has in obtaining proper legal representation in a legal proceeding and being able to afford top-notch (or any other) counsel. But these are problems that most citizens have every day in legal proceedings of virtually every type and is not peculiar to our situation as authors. For us to argue for a special privilege simply because we are writers is without doubt appropriate in certain situations (such as censorship, journalist “shield” laws and the like), but I don’t consider our losing money or property because we entered into a business transaction with a company that ended up in financial difficulty to be among them.

Thanks to Gayle Ehrlich of Sullivan & Worcester LLP, Boston, Mass., for her advice concerning federal bankruptcy law. Please note the more detailed discussion of bankruptcy law and author-publisher contracts in my column in the Summer 2006 Bulletin.

E-mail questions to QandAColumn@authorsguild.org. Questions and letters are often edited for readability or to make them more broadly applicable.

The answers in this column are general in nature only and may not include exceptions to a general rule or take into account related facts that may result in a different answer. You should consult a lawyer for information about a particular situation. No question submitted, or answer provided, creates an attorney-client relationship with the column’s author.
Diane Ackerman: The Zookeeper’s Wife; David A. Adler: Working with Fractions; Trudi Alexy: In Search of Forgiveness; Rudolf Anaya: The First Tortilla; Nancy A. Anderson: What Should I Read Aloud? A Guide to 200 Best-Selling Picture Books with the International Reading Association; Jerry Apps: In a Pickle; Thomas Armstrong: The Human Odyssey: Navigating the Twelve Stages of Life; Frank Asch: Mrs. Marlowe’s Mice; Jeaninne Atkins: Anne Hutchinson’s Way; Avi: Iron Thunder: The Battle Between The Monitor & The Merrimac;


John J. Clayton: Kuperman’s Fire: Wrestling with Angels: New and Collected Stories; Alison Clement: Twenty Questions; Margaret Coel: The Girl with Braided Hair; Mark Cogniss: Runoff; Rachel Cohn (and David Levithan): Naomi and Ely’s No Kiss List; Sneed B. Collard, III: Pocket Babies: and Other Amazing Marsupials; Josh Conviser: Empyre; Alan Cook: Honeymoon for Three; Jacques Cousvillon: The Chicken Dance; Judy Cox: The Mystery of the Burnese Bandicoot: The Tails of Frederick and Ishbu; Doreen Cronin: Diary of a Fly; Chris Crutcher: Deadline;

Edwidge Danticat: Brother, I’m Dying; Kevin Davis: Defending the Damned: Inside Chicago’s Cook County Public Defender’s Office; Thomas A. DeLong: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and Miss Emma Mills; Carl Deuker: Gym Candy; Linda Eve Diamond: Perfect Phrases for Building Strong Teams; The Human Experience; Gerard Donovan: Sunless; Kathleen Duve: Skin Hunger: A Resurrection of Magic; Patrick Duranton: L’Influence Philosophique dans l’Intuition d’Antonio Machado; David Anthony Durham: Acacia: Book One: The War with the Mein;

Ed Emberley: Bye-Bye, Big Bad Bullybug!: Delia Ephron: Frannie in Pieces; Ian Falconer: Olivia Helps with Christmas; Sid Fleischman: The Entertainer and the Dybbuk; Candace Fleming: The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School; Thomas Fleming: The Perils of Peace: America’s Struggle for Survival After Yorktown; Kathleen Flinn: The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry; Ken Follett: World Without End; Judy Fradin (and Dennis Fradin): Volcanoes: Witness to Disaster;


Joy Hakim: The Story of Science, Book Three: Einstein Adds a New Dimension; Patricia Hampl: The Florist’s Daughter: A Memoir; Wilborn Hampton: War in the Middle East: A Reporter’s Story: Black September and the Yom Kippur War; Joan Hiatt Harlow: Blown Away!; Cecil Harris: Charging the Net: A History of Blacks in Tennis from Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe to the Williams Sisters; Lawrence Hazelrigg (and Melissa Hardy): Social Security and the Great Debate; Bruce Henderson: Down to the Sea: An Epic Story of Naval Disaster and Heroism in World War II; Joshua Henkin: Matrimony; Susan Tyler Hitchcock: Frankenstein: A Cultural History; Mary Ann Hoberman: You Read to Me, I’ll Read to You: Very Short Scary Tales to Read Together; Ellen Hopkins: Glass; Karen Hunt: The Rumpoles and the Barleys: A Picnic with the Barleys; Patrick Jennings: Barb & Dingbat’s Crybaby Hotline; Marthe Jocelyn: Eats; Jacqueline Jules: Abraham’s Search for God;

Letters

Continued from page 2

In the most recent Authors Guild Bulletin, the Along the Publishers Row item titled "Warning" mentions a letter written by Jacqueline Kennedy to Leonard Bernstein thanking him for conducting Mahler's Requiem at Robert Kennedy's funeral. There is no such work. Although Mahler's music repeatedly returns to death as a subject, he never wrote a formal requiem or gave any composition that title. According to leonardbernstein.com, the piece conducted by the famous Mahler interpreter at the Kennedy funeral was the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony.

Timothy Bush
New York, NY

I long ago noticed that the average age of authors listed in the obituary section of the Bulletin appears to be well into the 80s and 90s. The ages listed in the Spring 2007 column, for instance, averaged 80 years, with a range of 65 to 98. A brief review of past issues will show similar results.

Could it be that writers have so much to say that we need as much time as possible? Or does the creative pursuit in itself lead to longevity?

Thank you for all the great work. I look forward to my copies and devour every word.

Stew Mosberg
Breckenridge, CO

Funny you should mention the subject of writers' longevity. See page 6. —Ed.

MEMBERS MAKE NEWS

Rudolfo Anaya's Bless Me, Ultima and Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club are two of 12 featured books for The Big Read, a National Endowment for the Arts initiative. With The Big Read, the NEA hopes to fight illiteracy and encourage reading by organizing local events in which communities across the nation read a single book and participate in discussions, readings, and other events.

Candace Fleming’s Lowji Discovers America has been chosen as a Suburban Mosaic book for 2007. The program, sponsored by Illinois’ Daily Herald Newspaper and a number of Illinois libraries, uses literature to foster cultural understanding. The theme for 2007 is the American immigrant experience.

The Society of Midland Authors awards dinner was held May 8 in Chicago. Jane Addams: Champion of Democracy, coauthored by Judith Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindell Fradin, won the award for Children’s Nonfiction. Firmin, Adventures of a Metropolitan Loaife, by Sam Savage, was a finalist for Adult Fiction.

The 2007 Lambda Literary Awards were presented by the Lambda Literary Foundation at a gala celebration in New York City on May 31. Winners included Greg Herren, coeditor with Paul J. Willis of Love, Bourbon Street, in the Anthology category, and Julie Anne Peters, Between Mom and Jo, who tied for the Childrens/Young Adult award.

The Western Writers of America recently announced the winners of the 2007 Spur Awards for distinguished writing about the American West, and the Owen Wister Award for lifelong contributions to the field of western literature. The Owen Wister Award was presented to best-selling author John Jakes. The Spur Award for Best Western Nonfiction-Historical went to Hampton Sides for Blood and Thunder: An Epic of the American West. Finalists included Ivan Doig, The Whistling Season, Best Western Long Novel; Sneed B. Collard III, Shep: Our Most Loyal Dog, Storyteller; and Stan Lynde, Summer Snow, Audiobook. The awards were presented at their annual convention in June, held this year in Springfield, MO.

Stephen King received a 2006 Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement for his novel, Lisey’s Story. Michael Largo tied for the Nonfiction award for Final Exits: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of How We Die. The awards were presented by the Horror Writers Association in Toronto in March, in conjunction with the World Horror Convention.

Martha LaGuardia’s So Others May Live: Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers—Saving Lives, Defying Death was awarded the 2007 award for Best Book in the Category of Coast Guard Heritage from the Foundation for Coast Guard History.
Barbara Quick’s novel *Vivaldi’s Virgins* was included in Barnes & Noble’s “Summer Getaway” list of book recommendations, Redbook’s list of the 10 best books of the summer, and a BookSense Notable Book in August.

Arlene Sanders was a finalist for the 2007 Jefferson Press Prize for Best New Voice in Fiction for her story collection, *Tiger Burning Bright*.


The Whiting Writers’ Awards, which recognize outstanding talent in emerging writers, were announced on October 24 at a ceremony at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City. Among the recipients was Dalia Sofer, author of *The Septembers of Shiraz*, who will receive $50,000 along with the award.

The Winterthur Museum and Country Estate, a decorative arts museum in Wilmington, DE, is holding a 10-month-long celebration of children’s book author Jane Yolen’s work. From mid-September 2007 through mid-July 2008, the museum will hold readings, performances, workshops and other events relating to Yolen’s books and children’s books in general.
Membership Application

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