WHAT'S NEXT?
Sustaining the Boom in Children’s Book Publishing
Roy Blount Reflects on Compost and the Future of Books
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Just for fun and in case no one else responds, in re p. 40 of the Fall AG Bulletin, the Snark can be found starring in The Hunting of the Snark by Lewis Carroll. "for the Snark was boojum, you see."

Pete Cohen
Alta Vista, CA

No one there has read Lewis Carroll’s “The Hunting of the Snark”? Admittedly, Polit’s use of the word is a bit beamish, not to say frumious, but she may be thinking of the state of being snarked, when "the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder."

On the other hand, Wikipedia more seriously says that "snark" "refers to a belittling or sarcastic style of speech or writing."

William Borden
Royse City, TX

We write our books to be read—if possible, widely read—so I can certainly appreciate Deborah Lightfoot’s observation [Fall 2006] that “writers may be more inclined to participate [in the Accelerated Reader program] now and take sides later.” It’s tempting to have one’s books accepted by this company for inclusion on the list of AR titles that students will be more inclined to pick up.

But I think we have a moral obligation to take sides here because the stakes are so high. If someone from the dark side commissioned me to devise a program to undermine children’s interest in reading, I’d probably come up with something very similar to AR. More than 70 studies have shown that the more people are rewarded for doing something, the more they come to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. Sure, it’s possible to buy a behavior in the short run (for example, reading a book) by dangling an incentive in front of kids. But what psychologists call intrinsic motivation tends to decline as a result of the use of extrinsic inducements.

AR is doubly damaging because it affects how children read as well as why they read. The point is to

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ALONG PUBLISHERS ROW

BY CAMPBELL GESLIN

What is so spectacular about the book industry,” author Brad Meltzer told The New York Times, “is that it has no idea of its own demographics, no Nielsens, no way to track who is reading your book. Why would you be foolish and market to just one tiny demographic?”

Meltzer’s latest thriller, The Book of Fate, opens with a scene at the Daytona Speedway, so Meltzer had an advertisement for the novel painted on the hood of Car No. 12 in a race. Meltzer didn’t say how much it cost, but he said, “The best we can do is to be the first at anything, in terms of trying something new and different. Some authors will say, ‘I don’t want to be on a Nascar car because I’m above that,’ and I’m like, ‘That sounds like a great idea.’”

Before moving to novels, Meltzer began his career in marketing, comic books and television. In late September, The Book of Fate book hit the No. 1 spot on the bestseller list. And you probably thought Nascar fans couldn’t read, didn’t you?

DIVIDED: Kyle Smith, a film critic for The New York Post, took a crack at those writers who say on their dust jackets that they divide their time between Provence and Providence. On his novel, A Christmas Caroline, the flap reads, “He divides his time between the front and back rooms of his apartment.”

CREDITS: “The bibliography has lately been creeping into novels, rankling critics who called it a pretentious extension of the acknowledgments page, which began appearing more than a decade ago and was roundly derided as the tacky literary equivalent of the Oscar speech,” wrote Julie Bosman in The New York Times.

Norman Mailer’s new novel, The Castle in the Forest, lists 126 authors and titles that enriched his book. At the end of Martin Amis’s House of Meetings, the author lists six books that he read while writing his novel.

Robert Ferrigno, in Prayers for the Assassin, credits

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Overheard

“I never understood why you would drop *Moby Dick* on somebody. That’s like a pro football player being like, ‘Lemme tackle you.’”

—MIT associate writing professor and novelist Junot Díaz, author of *Drown*, on the importance of accessible writing to engage the younger generation, at his reading, “Love in the War Years,” at Penn State, February 12, 2007
From the President

BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

R
Recently a well-meaning loved one gave me a present that hurt my heart. The present was a book about compost. Compost, except for the eventual tomatoes, is my favorite aspect of gardening. There's something literary about the conversion of organic scraps into soil—like diverse influences breaking down together into a prose style.

This compost book was authoritative. It convinced me that I had not been using enough dead leaves. But it also made a strong case that compost should not include much in the way of shredded newspaper: newsprint decomposes, all right, but it doesn't provide your plants with any real nourishment, and, what is worse, since the paper has been bleached, it involves unwanted chemicals in your plot.

Maybe The New York Times could bring out an edition that is brown, like unbleached coffee filters. Or like dead leaves. Maybe I should write the ombudsman, give the paper a chance to rebut. But I'm afraid I have lost one more justification for reading the actual, physical (remember when "on paper" meant theoretical?) Times.

Every day, it seems, the print medium takes another hit. The Times itself ran a story headlined "Don't Like the Dancing Cowboys? Results Say You Do." The story was about the online ads (appearing in, or on, the online Times itself) in which cowboys and various other silhouetted figures dance, madly. The worst is a guy in a suit—but enough about him.

He is harder to get rid of, though, than books are. Recently the Washington Post reported that libraries in Fairfax County, Virginia, were feeling such a shelfspace pinch that they were dumping books like The Education of Henry Adams, Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings, and Emily Dickinson's Final Harvest because no one had checked them out (according to library computers) in the last 24 months.

"Like Borders and Barnes & Noble," the Post story said, "Fairfax is responding aggressively to market preferences, calculating the system's return on its investment by each foot of space on the library shelves—and figuring out which products will generate the biggest buzz. So books that people actually want are easy to find, but many books that no one is reading are gone—even if they are classics."

Ah, yes. Marketing. And "the numbers," as marketers say.

Leslie Burger, president of the American Library Association and director of the Princeton Public Library, was quoted by the Post as follows:

"I think the days of libraries saying, 'We must have that, because it's good for people,' are beyond us. There is a sense in many public libraries that popular materials are what most of our communities desire. Everybody's got a favorite book they're trying to promote."

There are so many new books coming out, and of course the Guild is all for that, and, hey, Henry Adams isn't a member. If it came down to a library choosing between one of my books, say, and one of Emily Dickinson's...

I take back what I was about to say. I yield to E.D. In fact I am going to try to imagine how she might have addressed this issue, if she had been more into the commercial aspects of authorship while alive:

If day arise when libraries
Lack room, my books to dwell in,
Then let them out into the air—
I betcha they'll keep sellin'.

No, she wouldn't have addressed the issue that way. For one thing—this is interesting, I think—she hardly ever, maybe never, used feminine rhymes. Or maybe it isn't interesting. I don't mean to imply that she would necessarily be expected to use feminine rhymes because she was a woman. For all I know, "feminine rhyme" is a sexist term, no longer taught in the schools. Hey, Emily Dickinson probably wrote the best poem ever about a snake—"a narrow fellow in the grass." She wrote it as if she were, or had been, male (adept at slipknot syntax):

Yet when a boy, and barefoot,
I more than once, at noon
Have passed, I thought, a whirlash
Unbraiding in the sun, —
When, stopping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.

At any rate, it's not just the volume of new volumes that's causing Fairfax's libraries to cull the classics ruthlessly, says the Post: "As books on tape, DVDs, computers and electronic equipment crowd into branches, there is less room for plain old books." And library-users no longer want to sit around communal tables with strangers, perusing periodicals and books. People want to commune with the blogosphere in sep-

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Opening Lines
Life in the Subjunctive

BY NICHOLAS WEINSTOCK

Patience may be a virtue, but for authors it’s also a requirement: the essential companion to the extraordinary stamina and single-mindedness required to nurture a handful of words into a finished book.

The batch of words that would eventually grow into Michele Morano’s first book was, in fact, an essay that took her more than six years to complete. “I was, and am, enamored of the essay form,” Morano, 42, reflects. “I love the interplay between real experience and the imaginative act of writing. Writing essays about your own experience really forces you to interpret what you’ve gone through and gain an understanding of your own experience. Which can take a lot of effort. And, in my case, a lot of time.”

After teaching literature at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, Morano earned a Master of Arts and Literature at the State University of New York in New Paltz, where she heard about a SUNY-sponsored year of teaching English in Spain. In 1991 Morano traveled to the Spanish city of Oviedo: a trip that would eventually make her an author, although she had no inkling then of either the book or herself as a writer. “I had no idea I’d ever write about the experience,” she recalls. “I was keeping a journal, of course—although, looking back, not as extensive a journal as I wished. I was playing around with short stories while I was there, but those were pure fiction. I wasn’t at all interested in chronicling my story in Spain, or putting my experiences there into any kind of narrative.”

What Morano was interested in doing was more personal: She was trying, in part, to escape a damaging relationship in the U.S. with a depressed and suicidal man. “It had become a very self-destructive relationship for me,” she considers, “and I wanted, and needed, to put some distance between us and lose that part of my daily life.” In its place, Morano’s daily life was filled with the kind of sensory and intellectual awakening that five-year-long essays—and ultimately books—are made of. Teaching English to a mixed class of young and old adults at the University of Oviedo, learning Spanish virtually from scratch, and avidly exploring the rambling city and rich culture, Morano discovered an excitement for life and experience that riveted her. “Both in Spain and at that time in my life, I didn’t know what would come next,” she says. “Everything changed day by day. My memory was really crisp, really eager. I had a friend from Spain who later read my essay, where I mentioned meeting her and noting her outfit, and she couldn’t believe that I could remember the exact color of her shoes. But that’s how hungry my mind was for whatever was new.”

Upon her return from Spain in 1992, and after disentangling herself from the tatters of her relationship, Morano started a Ph.D. program in English literature at the University of Iowa, and only then, after years of scholarly literary criticism, was she struck with the fanciful notion of becoming a writer herself. “I took a class in travel writing that jarred me,” she recalls. “The teacher presented a very expansive vision of travel writing—we read things like Babette’s Feast—and I started writing a little bit about Spain, just for myself. Then, gradually, through writing, I started to figure out that the real story was about that guy: that he had been the reason for my travels. But the story of him—his depression, his suicide attempt—was so sensational that I backed away from it. I had to find a specific approach that would enable me to write about it in a way that wasn’t just explosive.”

Fortunately, Morano’s background in teaching literature combined with her recent travels to provide just such an approach. And it started with, of all things, the subjunctive mood. “I started thinking about it, and for a lot of us learning a new language, the subjunctive mood is what kills us,” she says. “It’s complicated, it’s confusing, it’s theoretical and daunting—which got me thinking that there just might be a metaphorical correlation between the subjunctive mood and the mood issues of a guy who was contemplating suicide. What if the rules for learning Spanish were also applicable as the rules for an experience such as that?” Before she knew it, an essay was taking shape, one called “Grammar Lessons: The Subjunctive Mood,” that would become part of her Ph.D. dissertation. In fact, the thought of such writing was so energizing that Morano set about pursuing an MFA in a
writers’ program at the same time as her Ph.D., eventually graduating from Iowa with both degrees in 2001.

Yet the essay remained, to Morano’s mind, unfinished. She took a teaching job at Skidmore College in upstate New York, where she continued to tinker with the essay for two years. She moved to Chicago to accept a position at DePaul University and continued to labor at perfecting the essay there. “The essay made me nervous in a hundred ways,” she admits. “I was nervous about talking about the guy so candidly. I was nervous about my use of Spanish—because you have to consider that when I went to Spain I didn’t know how to say ‘Hello.’ I wasn’t exactly confident in my grammatical analyses.” On the latter front, she was helped by two colleagues at DePaul who were native Spanish speakers, and by her discovery of a new grammar book that more clearly explained the subjunctive. On the former, she was helped by the passage of time and by a growing confidence that she was using the powers of essay writing to come to terms with her past relationship and honoring it in the process.

It was 2005 when Morano at last judged the essay complete and sent it out for possible publication. She sent it to the Crab Orchard Review, where it was selected to receive their John Guyon Award for Literary Nonfiction. Then it was chosen as one of The Best American Essays of 2006, published by Houghton Mifflin. Years before, one of Morano’s dissertation advisors had started a new imprint of the University of Iowa Press, and had asked if she might be interested in channeling her newly discovered flair for essay writing into a book. Working from the scraps of additional writing she had amassed over those years, Morano fashioned a dozen more essays centered on the same theme. The collection, Grammar Lessons: Translating a Life in Spain, will be published by Sightline Books in March.

In the meantime, Morano is musing about a possible novel, but thinking more intensely about essays. “I continue to love essays,” she says. “I’m fascinated with what we make of our own lives. It’s a discipline, really, and it has required me to be very stubborn about thinking things through, and finishing them only when I think they work. As a writer, I realize, it’s a specific choice of form I’ve chosen. But I feel like in a lot of ways the form chose me.”

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From the President

Continued from page 4

arate carrels, which take up more space. And all that, according to the Post, is likely to be even more the case in “the data-driven library of the future.”

The future. It holds out glorious new vistas for more efficient, more widespread, less tree-devouring distribution of what writers will produce. Readers will be able to carry around whole libraries on their watchfobs. They’ll be able to connect in a twinkling with the feminine-rhyme-interest community. And I say that, and I mean it, even though what I am thinking at the moment is, the hell with it.

I was talking to a pair of distinguished publisher people the other day about the Internet. “It’s the future,” one of them sighed. “But when we try to market books on it, I don’t know . . . .”

I knew what he meant. At that time I had been tentatively writing an online column for a few weeks, and it didn’t feel like publication. It felt like peeing in the river.

What we wondered, we three plain old book people, was whether the Internet might always be in the future. Like Gatsby’s “green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us.” Then maybe someday it will wrinkle and be gone.

But, hey, that’s probably what illuminating monks said about the printing press. You want to read a bit of verse I wrote years ago about a fancied meeting between Johannes Gutenberg and a certain extremely languorous Faulkner character?

When Gutenberg met Eula Snopes
She raised in him unprintable hopes.
But soon enough he ran aground
Upon her earthiness profound.
“You’re not for me, although you’re ripe,”
Said G.: “I like the movable type.”

I’m just vamping here. All sorts of new shelf-space-conserving, compost-uncorrupting opportunities for authors are in the air, and I hope I live to get in on some of them. As long as they don’t involve that damned dancing man who keeps popping up, in frenetically jiggy silhouette, while I’m trying to read. Where will he pop up next? On my dinner plate when I go to take a bite? On my wife’s glasses when I bend to kiss her?

Hey, Emily Dickinson didn’t need graphics. She could make a snake move, and disappear, on paper.

Now I’m just venting. It’s going to be cool, the brave new world of authorship. You’ll see.

Or put it this way: We’ll see.
Downpaging

BY IAN FRAZIER

Check books out of the library instead of buying them... New releases of hard-cover novels cost $25 and more these days. If you buy just two a month, that’s $600 a year.

—From “Ten Sure Ways to Trim Your Budget,” in The News.

Polk Benham, St. Marys, Ohio: “Right now, it’s costing me forty-five dollars to fill up my 4Runner, which is about two novels. Tough decisions are going to have to be made. I’m used to having a newly released hardcover on the dash of my vehicle, another in the back seat for the kids. At home, we’ve got a novel in each bedroom, two in the family room, one in the laundry room for my wife when she’s down there, and a novella in the john. We go through a couple of dozen novels in a year without even noticing. I hate to say it, but this can’t go on.”

Mrs. Louise Rodgers, Eau Claire, Wisconsin: “I never owned brand-new hardcovers when I was a girl, and now I want my twin sixteen-year-old boys to enjoy opportunities I didn’t have. My boys are like any American teen-agers, in that they eat, sleep, and breathe novels. And they don’t want the three-dollar used paperback version, either. It’s got to be new, mint, original dust jacket, the works. How do you tell a youngster that he can’t have that just-released Modern Library edition of the complete Sinclair Lewis he’s been dreaming of? But I guess that’s what I’m going to have to do; I don’t see any other option.”

Jules Amthor, Torrance, California: “Let me give you a hypothetical situation: I’m walking down the street, I pass a bookstore, and they have a little table out front with some of the latest novels. I pick one up. The jacket says it’s about a male professor of writing who has an affair with a much younger female student. I leaf through the book, and I come across a sentence about the student, who is also very beautiful, sleeping in the passenger seat of a car that the narrator (the professor) is driving, and the student wakes, and stretches, and looks at the professor and—here’s the part that gets me—the pattern of the car-seat upholstery is still imprinted on her cheek. Well, there’s simply no way I’m not going to buy that book. I can be dead broke, nothing left on the credit cards—doesn’t matter. And that’s what happens to me, over and over again.”

Mitch Gelman, West Hempstead, New York: “As an accountant, the first thing I tell my clients is ‘Get a library card.’ Otherwise, you’re too subject to temptation, and liable to find yourself in over your head. Few people know that the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States is the ‘Clan of the Cave Bear’ novels. You overspend on one, and, just when you begin to dig yourself out, the next installment comes along. Public libraries began during the Depression as a government measure against this very problem. They’re there for our protection, so we should use them.”

“If every American back in 1950 had quit buying novels and invested money in high-yield bonds... Social Security would not be in the mess it’s in.”

Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama): “If every American back in 1950 had quit buying novels and invested money in high-yield bonds, today we would be looking at a savings surplus of several trillion dollars, and Social Security would not be in the mess it’s in. Instead, we know what happened—most of the money wound up in the pockets of one unscrupulous novelist, Pearl S. Buck, with the disastrous consequences of which we are too well aware. The fact that that woman never spent a day in jail is a disgrace to the history of our nation. I would ask every American, before you lavish your next paycheck on expensive novels you may not need, consider the other spending choices available. You could expand your cable service, visit a casino, make a political donation, give to a faith-based concern, or put the money in something the brokers call a flort. I think we all know a little bit better how our earnings should be spent than the average novel-writer does.”

Ms. Mabel Dodge Luhan (dec’d), Taos, New Mexico: “Our wasteful consumer society buys, reads, and dis-
cards more brand-new hardcover fiction in a single day than the rest of the industrial world combined. I find that statistic staggering.”

Parker (Chick) Tones, Sanibel Island, Florida: “As a man greatly favored by fortune, I can tell you the secret of my success in a single word: bookmarks. Everybody’s gotta have ‘em, someone’s gotta make ‘em and sell ‘em. Understanding that simple economic reality just a tick ahead of my rivals brought me wealth, position and power. Currently, however, I am very glad to be out of the business and retired. People don’t seem to care where they start or stop in a book nowadays, so long as they’re reading. They’ll mark their place with just their thumb, a magazine blow-in ad, a piece of string. And the minute they finish one novel they toss it aside and start another. I’ve seen people on the freeway flip through a novel to the dénouement, read it, and throw the book out the window. Then they’ll swing by a bodega, buy a new novel or two or a dozen, and be on their way. No one bothers to pick up the old novels, so they’re scattered all over, as we know, backing up in storm drains. The excess of it appalls me.”

Ben Bernanke, Federal Reserve Bank, St. George, Bermuda: “If I may, I would like to return for a moment to the topic of the financial instrument known colloquially as a flort, which was mentioned earlier, because I feel it was insufficiently explained. The term ‘flort’ is simply a shortened form of flort, which is an acronym for a much longer and more complex phrase involving entire words. A flort, in essence, is a type of non-available annuity whereby a depositor, or several, makes a predetermined contribution every year with the expectation that they will either get it back or not. Usually the latter is the case, in which case, fine. They did not have that much anyway, and no one but them is out anything. In certain instances, however, something else happens, which is that the flort value actually doubles or even quadruples, like Greenspan’s did. As if he needed it! There’s a guy with the dough! Cheney, too. Plus all the senators—man, are they in the chips! And you know what you never see any of the big-bucks guys do? Buy novels. They learned their lesson, disciplined themselves when they were young. The super-ultra-wealthy never touch the modern novel, thus racking up more than six hundred extra dollars per year, on top of what they’re making already. Well, they’re not like everybody. . . . Now I forget what I was talking about before. Oh, yeah—florts. Thank you.”

Melissa S., Manhattan: “Eventually, I was able to cut back on novels to one a month, then half a novel, then just a few pages. As of this week, I have not looked at

a novel (except from the library) for eighteen months, knock wood. For the first time, I’m learning what it is to live within a budget. At the end of the month, I’m always surprised to find a positive balance in my checking account—it’s nice. Little by little, I’ve reacquainted myself with my TV. There have been some innovations in the formats of reality shows that I had known nothing about. Every morning now I make it a point to get dressed and go outside. I’m paying more attention to my hair. If I hadn’t happened to pick up that copy of the News that day, I don’t know where I’d be.”
The Authors Guild Interview:
JEAN FEIWEI

BY ISABEL HOWE

As part of our ongoing interview series, and with a nod to the subject of this issue’s Symposium on children’s books, Isabel Howe spoke recently with Jean Feiwel, senior vice president and publisher of a newly formed children’s division at Holtzbrinck, Feiwel and Friends. Feiwel was previously editor in chief, senior vice president and publisher of Scholastic, Inc.’s trade division. During her 22 years at Scholastic, she launched several bestselling series, including The Baby-Sitters Club, Goosebumps, Captain Underpants, I Spy and Magic School Bus. In 2004 she became the third woman to receive the Association of American Publishers’ Curtis Benjamin Award for Creative Publishing.

What would you say are the three most significant changes in the children’s book market in the past two decades?

I would say, if we’re talking about the past two decades, that children’s books have become huge business. There was a time when it was a separate entity of a publishing house—children’s book people operated independently and had a nice business and the adult part of the house just kind of said, “Great, you guys over there, whatever you’re doing is wonderful.” That’s changed completely. Children’s books have become major drivers in publishing overall, and most houses have become very savvy to the fact that there’s tremendous potential in front list and, of course, in backlist sales. That’s big.

Contribution to that, or a corollary of that, is the invention of series publishing. That’s something that has changed in a major way over the last two decades.

The third change came with the publication of Harry Potter: Fantasy has become a huge category in children’s publishing. Before Harry started, there was tried and true fantasy, but it wasn’t a category that was being published with any kind of frequency or velocity. That’s totally changed. Sometimes it feels like nothing but fantasy is being published!

Do the returns on these big bestsellers like Harry Potter or A Series of Unfortunate Events provide a bit more breathing room for editors who are willing to take risks, or do they increase the pressure to come up with the next blockbuster?

The bar gets higher and higher. I don’t think it provides any respite. It just means that the pressures become greater. It’s almost impossible for a company to say, “Oh, that’s great, that’s a success, and we’ll drive that and now that will allow us to cultivate new talent.” It happens somewhat, but I think the rule is that success requires more success, at an exponential level.

Do you think that explains the explosion of celebrity children’s book authors?

I don’t think celebrity authors are actually as successful a category as series publishing. First of all, we’re talking about one book at a time. Celebrity publishing has good books and bad books. Unfortunately, I think most of them are not very good books. And I don’t think most of them are successful, either. There are some examples of successful celebrity publishing, but just because a celebrity writes one, and even promotes one, doesn’t mean it will sell. And booksellers and consumers have grown weary—and wary—of books by celebrities. If they like the person, they might buy it, but it doesn’t necessarily mean they’ll buy the next one if it’s not something that really satisfied. I don’t think that celebrity publishing is very healthy.

That seems to be the consensus. I read an article on the topic in which Anita Silvey [author of The 100 Best Books for Children] said, "Celebrity-written children’s books are the worst kind of disconnect between a parent—who is attached to a book written by a celebrity they like—and a child, for whom that celebrity is totally meaningless." It’s an image of parents picking things out without regard to what the child is interested in.

That’s a problem regardless. If parents are making the choices, for a certain period of time they can speak for the child or know what’s best, but very soon the child’s going to have her own opinions, and they’re not necessarily going to jibe with the parent’s.

How have the Internet and other media transformed the children’s book market, especially with respect to the moment when children start to take control of what they’re going to read?

It’s very hard for them, certainly up until the age of 10, 11, 12, because they can’t make transactions without a parent. They can go online to look for books, but the only places they’re making their own direct choices are at a school book fair, or a school book club. And even then, how money changes hands is something that needs to be figured out.
Book buyers at libraries and schools are indispensable in boosting sales. Has this remained a constant over time, aside from the question of book fairs?

I don’t know that I agree with that statement, that they’re indispensable. Librarians and teachers have a very central and critical role to play in promoting books, but selling books is another matter. The institutional market is there, but it’s not as robust as it once was. Kids are buying books more than they may be taking books out of the library. I think that librarians and teachers can be tastemakers, and they will point to the books they feel are important or strong—and booksellers also have that role of selecting books that they feel are the best of the best—but there are many ways that kids can turn on to books. A lot of book series, in fact, didn’t necessarily make their way through the schools and libraries; they made their way through bookstores, and were established through bookstores.

Would you say that the attitudes of libraries and schools have an effect on the choices that publishers make?

I think it depends on the kind of publisher you are. If you’re a smart publisher, you’re going to take every point of view into consideration. You want your book to be all things to all people, as much as that’s possible. You want it to be worthy of the classroom setting, or worth taking out of the library, and you want it to appeal directly to the child.

Some publishers are doing only mass market and movie tie-ins. They don’t care about the library or the school; they’re just selling it to the bookstore. Other publishers are really targeting the library and institutional markets, and that’s what they’re all about. My point of view as a publisher is that I want to make sure the books that I do get in as many places as possible and are viable for all of those venues.

There’s a lot of buzz around the popularity of fantasy, sci-fi, and chick lit among older children and teens. What trends or genres do you predict will be with us for a while and which will fade away?

What happens in publishing is that a trend starts from a book. So Harry Potter started fantasy and, let’s say, Meg Cabot started chick-lit. Then, with a certain amount of success, everybody jumps in. And everybody jumps in so that, at a certain point, the category is completely glutted. It’s then going to start to diminish. That doesn’t mean it’s going to go away completely. I think, though, as a category, it’ll max out and then it’ll sort of right itself in terms of the number of books it can actually tolerate.

But I don’t think sci-fi will ever go away, fantasy will never go away, nor will chick-lit. The question is, then, how do you get to the next new category if all anybody’s doing is fantasy or chick-lit? What’s going to happen is, there’ll be a book or two that identifies another area, let’s say mystery, and you’ll see people starting to jump in there. Take the “Alex Rider” series, for example, which does adventure, suspense—I think that’s something that’s going to be ramped up. I make choices based on enduring interests that kids have: the funny book, the mystery book, the scary book, the tear-jerking book, the animal story. I think they’re sort of tried and true things that you are aware of as a publisher.

And a lot of the trends aren’t even so much trends as popular adult genres applied to writing for younger people. A popular book might seem to signal a huge, new trend, when it’s just a different form of that trend.

Right, it sort of explodes. You have something like A Series of Unfortunate Events—I think that people have tried to mimic that kind of tone and style, but it’s really pretty impossible. You can try and sometimes you’ll get a certain distance, but an original invention is an original invention. As soon as somebody identifies an area, everybody’s going to jump into it, but what will really rise are the books and the series that are really well done, rather than the wannabes.

The market is more specific than it used to be, with categories like Ages 4-8, Middle Grade, Young Adult and Teen. What caused these distinctions to take root so strongly, and has it changed the kind of books writers are proposing?

There are differences in age groups, in terms of what they’re looking to read, what they’re learning in school,

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No Jews Allowed (no Mormons or Unitarians Either)

By Mark I. Pinsky

To outsiders, evangelical Christians can sometimes appear peculiar, contentious and even intolerant. In November, for example, news surfaced that Nashville-based Thomas Nelson Publishers, one of the world’s largest Christian imprints, would from now on work only with writers who adhere to the fourth-century Nicene Creed, which acknowledges “one Lord Jesus Christ,” and the Holy Trinity. This “content filter,” Nelson CEO Mike Hyatt told Publishers Weekly, would include most Protestant and Catholic writers, but effectively exclude Jews, Mormons, Unitarians and some Charismatic Christians, not to mention Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists.

“After a year of internal reflection among our executive team, we came back to our legacy as a company,” Hyatt wrote December 11 in his blog, “From Where I Sit.” “The bottom line is this: We Are a Christian Company. Unfortunately, we have not always had alignment internally with our own mission and values.” In the future, he wrote, Nelson books must be “true,” “noble,” “just,” “pure,” “lovely” and “praiseworthy.”

Hyatt said that existing book contracts, some with strictly secular content, including Donald Trump’s The Best Real Estate Advice I Ever Received, will be honored. The new policy is simply a reflection of Nelson’s “editorial standards,” he said, and the privately held company’s core values. In the past, however, these core values have been flexible, perhaps under pressure from the marketplace. Nelson’s edgy new imprint, Naked Ink, offers titles like The Hot Mom’s Handbook (with a contribution from Scientologist Kelly Preston) and The Hippie Guide to Climbing the Corporate Ladder & Other Mountains: How Janisport Makes It Happen. Titles from other Nelson divisions include Rick and Bubba’s Expert Guide to God, Country, Family, and Anything Else We Can Think Of, and Liberalism is a Mental Disorder: Savage Solutions, by conservative radio commentator Michael Savage, who is Jewish.

Nelson’s decision should come as no surprise. “Publishers choose their audiences,” said the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner, whose many books have been published by Jewish, mainline Protestant and evangelical houses. Neusner said that it is unlikely that Jewish or academic houses “with strong opinions different from mine on scholarly issues” would publish him. “It’s all standard.”

Since the 1990s, when commercial publishers realized there was big money to be made in the Christian market, these corporate giants began buying established independent houses, like Zondervan, or starting their own religious imprints. Within these publishers, there has always been tension between God and Mammon, between the bottom line and the Christian mission. In an October 19 staff memo, Hyatt bolstered his case for the new restrictions by noting that books that hewed most to the evangelical line had appreciably better sales results, in what has become an increasingly branded, Balkanized and niche-oriented marketplace. “We are, after all, a commercial publisher,” Hyatt wrote in his blog.

It is sometimes easy to forget that spreading belief in Jesus as the redeeming Messiah is the raison d’etre of evangelical Christians. Proselytizing, the New Testament’s “Great Commission,” defines them; it is their spiritual DNA. For an evangelical publishing house like Nelson, this means printing books that propagate their flavor of faith. This fact is sometimes obscured when Protestant evangelicals form tactical political alliances with other religious groups whose beliefs they do not share: with Jews in support for Israel; with Catholics, Mormons and Charismatics in opposition to abortion, gay marriage and stem cell research. The result, for some, has been a misleading impression of ecumenism.

Nelson’s decision reflects this bedrock evangelical position. “We want people to have confidence that our books will be written from a Christian worldview, by people who profess to be Christians,” Nelson’s Hyatt explained in his blog, “by people who share our vision, our mission, and our values.” Authors like Dawn Eden, a Jewish convert to Christianity, whose The Thrill of the Chaste: Finding Fulfillment While Keeping Your Clothes On is now a leading Nelson title.

Still, I have to wonder about the Nelson decision, especially because I got a personal glimpse of their apparent internal corporate soul-searching. More than a year ago, a high-ranking executive with the company asked if I was happy with my Presbyterian publisher and, if not, would I be interested in doing a book with him. If I hadn’t declined then, I’d be looking for a new home now—perhaps with Jewish Lights or the Jewish Publication Society. ♦
Contracts Q&A

BY MARK L. LEVINE

Q. I notice that the listing in books of other books by the same author often includes only other books published by the same publisher. Is there a way to avoid that?

A. If you want to make sure that all your previous books are listed under "Other Books by the Author" in your new book, and not just those published by the publisher you are about to sign a contract with, insert a sentence like the following in your contract:

"Publisher will include in the Work a list of all books previously written by Author, whether published by Publisher or another publisher."

Q. How typical is it to get approval in a contract for the design of the book’s cover?

A. It is extremely difficult—generally nigh to impossible—to get a provision in your contract giving you approval over design of the book’s cover or dust jacket. The best way to handle this situation, in practical terms, is to be in constant touch with your editor and be aware of the production schedule for your book, especially the dates when someone will be assigned to design the cover and the deadlines for its submission, approval and printing. This will enable you to ask the editor if you can see sketches of the design, cover proofs, etc. If asked properly (i.e., not as a demand or as a matter of right), many if not most editors will allow you to see them, though some reluctantly.

To make this more than an informal arrangement, there are provisions that many publishers will insert in their contracts that will give you the right to see the design and comment on it. Though this will (properly, in my opinion) not give you the right to substitute your judgment for that of your publisher’s marketing department, it will enable you to express your viewpoint and, in most cases, to hear the design and marketing reasons for their decision. Doing this also enables the publisher to get your input and particular knowledge of a subject to avoid gaffes (e.g., the use of the color orange in a book about Ireland—unless the subject is Orangemen—or the depiction of angels with wings in a book directed to Southern Baptists).

An example of the type of clause often accepted is the following:

"Cover Consultation. Publisher agrees to show Author the sketches and designs for the Work’s cover, as well as the proofs thereof, in time for Author’s suggestions and responses to be incorporated if Publisher agrees with them. Publisher shall use its best efforts to include the same or a substantially similar clause in any license for English language reprint editions of the Work, for publication primarily in the United States, which Publisher is permitted to license under this Agreement."

It is extremely difficult—generally nigh to impossible—to get a provision in your contract giving you approval over design of the book’s cover or dust jacket.

Q. Should the typical provisions about reduced royalties on copies sold at high discounts apply to e-books?

A. No. Unlike print-on-paper books, where each copy sold at a deep discount represents significant expenses incurred by the publisher which pertain specifically to the copy sold (paper, printing and binding costs and, sometimes, shipping and warehouse charges), the cost of creating and transmitting additional copies of e-books sold at a deep discount is negligible or non-existent.

One way to handle this easily in your contract is to simply add the following at the end of the section dealing with reduced royalties if the point was not covered in the section:

"None of the reduced royalty provisions in this section will apply to any e-book or other electronic editions of the Work."

Q. My contract says that my publisher has the right to publish my book for the "full term of the Work's copyright and all extensions and renewals." Are extensions and renewals subject to mutual agreement or are they dictated by law?

A. Questions about the length of copyright protection and the term of extensions or renewals are ones dictated by law rather than something subject to negotiation between you and the publisher.

Mark L. Levine, a lawyer and author, has been a member of the Authors Guild since 1978. He is a native of Bath, Maine.

Continued on page 29
240 Years of Open Government: Anders Chydenius and the Origins of Freedom of Information

American authors who regularly take advantage of the Freedom of Information Act to obtain documents or data from government agencies may be forgiven if they look back on 2006 as an important anniversary—the 40th—of the landmark federal FOI legislation passed in 1966.

In fact, however, the United States was beaten to the FOI punch by exactly two centuries. An obscure Finnish clergyman, economist, surgeon and inventor named Anders Chydenius successfully campaigned to get the first Freedom of the Press Act enacted in Sweden in 1766, when Finland was still a Swedish province. Like Ombudsman, another Swedish word that has been widely adopted by democracies elsewhere, Chydenius’ Offentlighetsprincipen, or Right of Publicity, has taken its place in the vocabulary of free press scholars, though the clergyman’s critical role in the development of the principle was little known beyond the Nordic countries.

Although he never traveled outside the Swedish realm, Chydenius’ thinking about freedom of the press drew heavily on the ideals of the Enlightenment. As a member of provincial parliamentary bodies, and later as a representative to the Swedish parliament, he became convinced that one of the prerequisites of peaceful change in a parliamentary state was the ability of citizens to examine the records of governing bodies. He was also influenced by other politicians and philosophers of his era, which saw the end of absolute monarchy and the shift of real power in Sweden to the four estates represented in parliament: the nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants. Sweden’s was Europe’s earliest experiment in parliamentarianism. In an environment in which many leading figures helped nudge Sweden toward a more open society with a free press, it was Chydenius who most forcefully pushed for a freedom of access to public documents, along with the banning of political censorship, as a cornerstone of a new model of governance.

In recent decades, the legacy of Chydenius has continued to spread. About 70 countries currently have some form of legislation or constitutional protection related to freedom of information, with 35 having added such protections in the 1990s alone. The principle is far from settled everywhere, however, and the European Union continues to debate the scope of its open information policies. In conjunction with Finland’s term in the presidency of the EU in 2006, the Anders Chydenius Foundation promoted the idea of a more open EU with conferences and the publication of a new work on Chydenius’ legacy.

As if being responsible for starting the worldwide spread of open government was not enough of an accomplishment, Chydenius made his mark in a number of other fields. Most notable, perhaps, is his pamphlet The National Gain, published 11 years before Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations, which includes theories very similar to Smith’s famous “invisible hand.” He is called the father of Swedish liberalism, and his ideas about open government, universal rights and the abolition of privilege live on today in what is commonly called the Nordic model. He also found time to establish an orchestra, conduct cataract surgery, and pioneer the practice of vaccination against smallpox in Finland.

David Curle

Bad Timing

_Nationwide Bi-Weekly Administration, Inc._
_v. Belo Corporation_
_U.S. District Court, Northern District of Texas_

On July 29, 2003, the Dallas Morning News ("DMN") published an article written by Scott Burns that discussed a particular accelerated rate mortgage plan offered by Nationwide Bi-Weekly Administration, Inc. Soon after, the article became available online via the DMN website, and was easily retrievable using a simple Internet search. Nationwide believed the article was defamatory and filed suit against DMN’s owner, the Belo Corporation, in Ohio on July 28, 2004, asserting separate claims for defamation, tortious interference with prospective business relations and business disparagement. The case was eventually moved to Texas, where it was heard by the U.S. District Court, Northern District of Texas. On May 30, 2006, the defendants filed a motion to dismiss the case.

From the outset, the district court recognized that in Texas there is a one-year statute of limitations period within which to file a defamation claim. This period is deemed to begin on the date of publication of the defamatory matter. However, while the district court recognized that Nationwide filed its complaint within the one-year applicable limitations period, the company had inexplicably failed to actually serve Belo with the complaint until June 2005, nearly 10 months after it filed its complaint with the court.

In its defense, Nationwide argued that because the alleged harm stemmed primarily from the online circulation of the article, the statute of limitations period should have started to run on the date the DMN posted the article on the Internet, not the date the article appeared in the print publication. Nationwide also asserted that each time the allegedly defamatory article was retrieved over the Internet, the court should have deemed the article as being republished—meaning the statute of limitations would have continuously restarted each time it was retrieved by a user.

The district court rejected this argument after ruling that the “single publication rule” definitively applied to cases where the plaintiff alleged defamation in mass media. Under this rule, a libel action is deemed to have started on “the last day of the mass distribution of the printed matter.” The court noted that this rule is meant to “prevent plaintiffs from bringing stale and repetitive claims against publishers, as the mass communication of a single defamatory statement should be viewed as a single wrong that gives rise to only one cause of action for defamation.”

Ultimately, the court concluded that to apply a multiple publication rule to Internet articles while applying single publication rule to the same article appearing in traditional print media would be inconsistent as well as undermine the pursuit of these goals. In addition, the court found that since the allegedly defamatory statements constituted the sole basis of both the tortious interference claim and business disparagement claim, the one-year statute of limitations period effectively barred those claims as well.

—Michael Gross
_Staff Attorney_

Civics 101

_Guiles v. Marineau_
_U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit_

Zachary Guiles, a 13-year-old seventh-grade student at Williamstown Middle High School in Williams-town, Vermont, is not a big supporter of current President George Bush. For approximately two months, he routinely wore a T-shirt to school bearing a picture of Bush’s face adorning the body of a chicken, accompanied by images of lines of cocaine, a razor blade and an alcoholic beverage. On May 12, 2004, Guiles was on a school-sponsored field trip when another student and the student’s mother complained to school officials that they were offended by the T-shirt. In response, Seth Marineau, the school official in charge of dress code policy, told Guiles that he had three options. He could turn the shirt inside out; put duct tape over the images of the drugs, alcohol and the word “cocaine,” or change his shirt. When Guiles’s father arrived at the scene, Marineau explained that the shirt violated the district’s school dress code, which he had confirmed with Douglas Shoik, the district superintendent. Guiles refused to comply and was sent home for the remainder of the day.

The next day, Guiles returned to school wearing the same T-shirt and was again ordered by Marineau to choose from one of the previously posed options or be sent home for a second day. Guiles refused to follow Marineau’s instructions and was subsequently sent home. Marineau filled out a discipline referral form, which remains on a student’s permanent record.
The following day, Guiles returned to school wearing the shirt for a third consecutive day. However, this time, he had covered up the images and the word “cocaine” with duct tape, and had written the word “Censored” across the tape.

Subsequently, Guiles, via his parents, brought a formal legal action against Seth Marineau, Principal Kathleen Morris Kortz and Superintendent Shoik, asserting that the school’s policy regarding his wearing the anti-Bush shirt violated Guiles’s First Amendment rights. After concluding that the images were “plainly offensive” and “inappropriate,” as defined by case law, the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont held that the school’s censorship was a permissible abridgment of Guiles’s First Amendment rights. The court also ruled that the disciplinary action imposed by the school should be expunged from Guiles’s permanent school record. Guiles appealed the court’s first ruling.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit partially reversed the district court after holding that the school had violated Guiles’s First Amendment rights by forcing him to remove or alter the messages contained on the shirt. From the outset, the appeals court noted that three basic tenets derived from case law governing political speech by students at public schools. The first prohibits the regulation of political speech unless it would “materially and substantially disrupt class work and discipline in the school.” The second prohibits speech insofar as the speech is “vulgar,” “lewd,” “indecent” or “plainly offensive.” The third permits regulation of speech as it appears in a student newspaper so long as the censorship is reasonably related to “legitimate pedagogical concerns.”

In the case at hand, the court of appeals determined that the first tenet applies, as Guiles’s shirt mocking a sitting President clearly constituted political speech that was not part of a school newspaper or other school-related project. The court noted that the parties did not dispute the fact that the T-shirt did not cause substantial disruption or confrontation within the school, nor did the defendants allege that they reasonably believed it would. Only after a mother attending the school field trip with her son complained to school officials did the officials insist that Guiles cover up the drug and alcohol illustrations. As such, the court of appeals reversed the district court, holding that the censorship of the shirt was unwarranted since the T-shirt did not cause disruption within the school setting. The appeals court also upheld the district court’s order that Guiles’s student record be expunged. However, the court specifically limited its holding to the particular circumstances of the case and clearly stated that it made no holding with respect to whether images of illegal drugs and alcohol on a

T-shirt that promote their use are subject to censorship under the First Amendment.

—Michael Gross
Staff Attorney

In the Eyes of the Beholder

Supreme Court of Texas

On December 1, 2006, the Supreme Court of Texas declined to reconsider a court of appeals ruling that the authors and publisher of a book about cults had not defamed a religious organization known as The Local Church.

The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions, by John Weldon and John Ankerberg, was published by Harvest House Publishers in December 1999. The plaintiff, The Local Church, is an unincorporated amalgam of Christian congregations. Each congregation takes the name of the place where it is located, e.g., the Church in Houston, the Church in Berkeley, the Church in Tampa. These churches subscribe to the teachings of two men known as Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, who joined forces in China in the 1930s and died in 1972 and 1997, respectively.

Harvest House describes itself as an evangelical Christian publisher. According to its website, the mission of the house is “to glorify God by providing high-quality books and products that affirm biblical values, help people grow spiritually strong, and proclaim Jesus Christ as the answer to every human need.” The litigation between the two parties over The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions has stretched over five years and two states, and is the subject of lengthy discussion at websites run by the publisher (www.harvesthousepublishers.com) and the church (www.contendingforthefaith.org/index.html). New copies of the book are currently unavailable through Barnes&Noble.com or Amazon.com, and according to Harvest House, the encyclopedia is “out of stock indefinitely.”

After an initial flurry of complaint and response letters, Harvest House filed a motion for declaratory judgment in Oregon in December 2001. That action was eventually dismissed in March 2002 for lack of jurisdiction. The Local Church and its publishing division, The Living Stream Ministry, filed its own action, a $136 million defamation lawsuit against Harvest House and the authors of The Encyclopedia, in Decem-
No Shuffle Step for Tango. The school superintendent of Shiloh, Illinois, Jennifer Filyaw, has rejected the demands of local parents up in arms over the availability of an award-winning children’s book about an unconventional family of penguins. The book, And Tango Makes Three, written by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, illustrated by Henry Cole, and published by Simon & Schuster in 2005, is a tale inspired by the Central Park Zoo’s famous gay penguin couple. Roy and Silo, two male penguins who set up housekeeping together in 1998 and then incubated and hatched an egg given to them by senior zookeeper Rob Gramzay in 2000, have been the subject of widespread media discussion. Reactions to the book, which recounts the hatching of the female chick Tango, have been contentious elsewhere in the country as well. The authors have heard firsthand accounts from librarians who love the book but cannot make it available at their schools because their administrators refuse to support its purchase. In March 2006, after complaints by two parents, local libraries in St. Joseph and Savannah, Missouri moved And Tango Makes Three from the young readers section to the children’s nonfiction shelves. The director of that Missouri library system maintained that the decision to relocate the book—made after a reading of the book and a consultation with zoologists—was motivated by the fact that the book is a retelling of a true story. To date, the Shiloh, Illinois school district has refused to bow to parental pressure, and superintendent Filyaw has rejected a recommendation that the book be removed from the regular children’s section of the local elementary school library and shelved in a restricted area, where parental permission might be required to check it out.

Increased Online Censorship in Iran. In its latest effort to more rigorously control Internet content, the government of Iran has issued legislation requiring the registration of all websites and web blogs by March 1. Although the Iranian government has been engaged in an effort to ban websites and filter content since at least 2002, the most recent law specifically prohibits certain types of content and requires website registrars to supply personal information to the government. Activists note that this is clearly a bid to censor speech and curtail online access to different points of view. The new law, which characterizes unacceptable content as “illegal,” will apply to all online content originating in Iran as well as imported, Farsi-language content available for viewing in that country.

A committee of government officials from various ministries—intelligence, judicial, telecommunications, culture, Islamic guidance—will be entrusted with the task of approving or rejecting the content of websites and blogs. Registrants who do not provide the personal information demanded by the government, such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, intended audience, etc., may be penalized or even jailed. Objectionable content includes anything critical of religious figures, Islamic laws, the late Ayatollah Khomeini and the current Ayatollah Khamenei. Also included are sexual matters. At least one feminist Iranian blogger, Farnaz Seify, who claims her website was censored in the past, has announced an intention to defy the registration requirement.

The government controls all Internet service providers in Iran, which ranks second only to China as the most rigorous censor of the Internet. Politically oriented websites and blogs that criticize the current regime are routinely blocked. The new registration policies will most likely be used to make it more difficult for online opinion-makers to write anonymously.

Online Reporters Second Largest Category of Jailed Journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists recently released its annual report, finding that, for the eighth straight year in a row, China is the world leader when it comes to imprisoning journalists. More than 134 journalists are imprisoned around the world; 31 of them are in China. The majority of journalists in custody worldwide have been charged with crimes against the state, such as subversion and exposure of state secrets. Most of the reporters being held are print journalists, but the number of online journalists imprisoned each year is climbing. Currently, 49 online reporters, editors or bloggers are in custody, compared to 67 print journalists, making Internet journalists the second largest category of imprisoned correspondents. Cuba, Eritrea and Ethiopia round out the list of the top four jailers. According to the report, the United States is holding two journalists, Associated Press photographer Bilal Hussein and Al-Jazeera cameraman Sami al-Haj, without charges. This places the United States in the same category as countries such as Eritrea, which is currently holding more than 10 journalists without charges in secret locations.

—Anita Fore
What’s Hot and What’s Not:
Current Trends in Children’s Book Publishing

Life after *Harry Potter*, the future of children’s nonfiction, and the staying power of licensed characters were among the subjects of a panel discussion sponsored by the Authors Guild’s Children’s Book Group November 13 at the Society of Illustrators in New York City. AG Council Member Rachel Vail, award-winning author of *Sometimes I’m Bombaloo*, the chapter book series *Mama Rex & T*, and the teen novels *You, Maybe* and *If We Kiss*, served as moderator. Participants included Susan Katz, president and publisher of HarperCollins Children’s Division, and a member of the board of directors of First Book and the Children’s Book Council; Gail Carson Levine, whose first book, *Ella Enchanted*, won a Newbery honor in 1998 and whose most recent books are *Fairest*, a retelling of Snow White, and *Writing Magic*, a nonfiction book for kids about writing; Josalyn Moran, previously a vice president at two children’s book publishers, North-South Books and Golden Books, and former executive director of Book Clubs at Scholastic, Inc., currently vice president of children’s books at Barnes & Noble; and Jodi Reamer, an agent and attorney at Writers House who represents award-winning authors Stephenie Meyer, John Green, Carolyn Mackler and Michelle Knudsen, among others.

**RACHEL VAIL:** Welcome, everyone, to tonight’s panel on current trends in children’s books. We’re delighted to have so many people here. I’ll start by asking our very distinguished panel for their thoughts on this subject, and then we’ll open it up for discussion.

**JODI REAMER:** I’ll talk briefly about some of the trends I see. I’m very excited by the level of sophistication that I find in middle grade and YA books. But what I’m particularly excited about is that I feel a lot of editors are now trying to address that elusive crossover market that everyone talks about: Books that work for the teen market as well as the adult market. A lot of adults are now reading teen books because of their sophistication in content and tone. I represent both adult and children’s books, and I see that a lot of adult editors are now trying to sell YA books as well because they see how successful the market is.

I notice now that what still works best for me when I try to sell something are the single title middle grade and YA books. I find that series aren’t selling quite as easily, though if something does very well, editors are more than happy to follow up with a sequel, because there’s a built-in audience. But generally the single titles sell very well. I’m also finding that a lot of editors are asking for books for the middle grades, and more specifically, for mysteries for that group. For some reason, middle grade books are much harder to find than YA, perhaps because adult writers have a much easier time finding their YA voice than their middle grade voice. It’s very hard to write something sophisticated for the 10 to 13 age group.

You had asked in setting this panel up, Rachel, about how fantasy is doing, and clearly it still sells well. People always worry that there’s a glut on the market, and yet good fantasy always sells. Paranormal is also very exciting right now in YA. It’s sort of an interesting time for picture books, which as many of you know, were very stagnant for a while. No one was buying picture books because the market was oversaturated. Now editors are once again asking for them. There are still very specific picture books they’re looking for, but at least I don’t feel like I have to tell authors to please just avoid that market anymore; a sale is still...
possible. Graphic novels are getting a lot of interest. It's still sort of a niche, but I think it's exciting and probably will become more mainstream as people figure out how to write them in more of a mainstream fashion. It attracts a lot of kids.

JOSELYN MORAN: I have some thoughts this evening about what I see in the general marketplace. One is, just as a realtor's going to tell you "location, location, location," what I would say to any writer or illustrator is "demographics, demographics, demographics." The U.S. Census Bureau provides data on yearly births in the United States. I refer to a chart with this date on it at least once a day. We all know about the baby boomlets that have been driving teen sales for the past few years, giving us double-digit increases in Teen books. There was a brief dip in the birthrate a while ago, but now we are back over to four million births a year. So there are four million six-year-olds, four million five-year-olds, and four million four-year-olds out there. That's a lot of kids. And so on down through three, two, one, and, if walking in the streets of New York is any indication, I think that we're going to see another four million-births year.

This, however, is very interesting: These parents are very well educated, but they are living in a very fifties kind of family setting. These are people who spend a lot of time with their kids and their kids' sports, their music, their dance, their whatever. This generation started game nights, right? They turn off the TV. They play games together. So there's a lot of togetherness, there's a lot of parent concern. And in our stores, as in other bookstores, the parents are right there. The parents are paying for all the books that are going out the door. And Mom or Dad or the caregiver who's with them wants to know what the kids are buying.

Another thing about this generation is media fragmentation. So, even though it might be a fifties generation, the television big three are dead. This is a satellite dish generation. This is not ABC, CBS, and NBC. So while it is a very large generation, it is also more specific. One business book right now touts the idea that "small is the new large." The point is that you can sell lots more of a specific kind of book because there are lots of people out there who are interested in more specific opportunities.

Another trend is that the baby boomers who were the most educated generation, that post-World War II group, are now grandparents. That is also something that we see in our stores: grandparents coming in for what is familiar to them and things that they're comfortable with.

We also see this younger generation of parents, and this is not your father's Oldsmobile, OK? To them, there's a new group of books that are common to their heritage. My literary heritage might take me to Little Women or Anne of Green Gables, but theirs might take them to Strawberry Shortcake or, if they grew up on him, Dr. Seuss. There's a lot of Sesame Street. We get lots of requests for Sesame Street books in our stores because the parents grew up on Sesame. The other thing about this generation is that they have very Catholic—small C—tastes. They're a very global generation. They belong to the entire world community and not just to America. So we see lots of diversity and we're able to sell books for all Americans in all of our stores.

SUSAN KATZ: In terms of what's selling at retail and what publishers are looking for—and I'm speaking not for HarperCollins alone, but for most of my colleagues in publishing—what's selling in young adult and middle grade areas is fantasy, great fiction, horror, definitely paranormal, chick lit.

Basically, in middle grade and YA, I'd say everything is selling, with the exception, for some reason—which makes me very sad—of historical fiction. We are having a very, very tough time with historical fiction. We at Harper, and I think most of our colleagues, love historical fiction. We grew up on historical fiction; we "ate" it. We used to like to say at our house that we ate books because we'd find books we loved and just hide in a corner somewhere and read them. I don't think this is a permanent situation, but right now historical fiction is very difficult to sell. I know there are a lot of writers in this room, and it would be interesting for you to know, if you're having a tougher time than normal selling historical fiction, that it's because right now these books are having a harder time finding their audience.

I do think it has a lot to do with what Josalyn was
saying: TV, cable, movies, video games. What’s happening in the culture is very much affecting what kids want to read about, and what they see in other media is definitely influencing their choices for reading. So an area that’s very near and dear to us and very important to us is not selling as well as others that are selling very, very well. Fantasy’s still very strong. Magic is still hot.

When I took over the children’s area at Harper’s 10 years ago, we talked a lot about the fact that no one was buying young adult literature. And we talked a lot about whether or not we should continue publishing it. In 10 years, and it didn’t happen in a minute, that situation has gone from black to white. Teen is an incredibly healthy area. Books sell in very large numbers, they’re all over the bestseller lists. Books can sell anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000 copies in a year. Certain publishers have really made a name for themselves in this area. Teens have a lot of disposable income. Speaking personally, the disposable income is not the result of getting a job. It’s from very generous parents and grandparents and others in teens’ lives giving them money. And so teens spend a lot of money, not just on books, but clearly on books, and clothing, and movies, and video games, and every other form of interesting entertainment you can imagine.

The most interesting thing I see in the teen market is community. Teens love to be online. They spend an unbelievable amount of time online, looking for other teens to talk about everything with. Whether it’s books or movies or fashion or politics, the world situation, teens are looking for their community. And it’s not just their school, camp, or other friends, it’s finding a community online of people who share like interests, who could be anywhere in the United States or anywhere, honestly, in the world. So what we have to do, to find teens, nurture them, guide them, excite them, is to offer them communities. And the way we are doing that—and I know many of our competitors are too—is by offering them opportunities online to meet our authors, talk to our authors, blog with our authors.

In October, we launched an exciting community writing contest for teens—HarperTeenFanLit. Working with a panel of bestselling authors, including Meg Cabot, and HarperTeen editors, we have invited teens to collaborate on an original HarperTeen story. Over a series of six rounds, teens submit and rate three-page chapters based on “story premises” created by our editorial panel. Along the way our authors and editors supply inspiration and writing tips, and writers are able to invite friends to read and vote on their work. The chapters that receive the most online votes will be assembled and turned into a HarperTeen eBook short story. Prizes are awarded to submitters
and voters and include a $5,000 scholarship, a trip to New York, shopping sprees at Alloy, and courses from the Princeton Review.

In January and February 2007, fans will be able to vote on and receive a copy of the final story. We are working on future community-based promotions for teens and will follow up with another FanLit event in the spring. This has been a very successful campaign for us, enabling us to engage our audience with our editors and authors and provide a controlled forum for communication and relationship building.

So we’re very pleased by the initial reaction, and it did confirm our suspicion that community access and teens sharing interests would be a very strong draw. I think there will be many more of these projects.

**GAIL CARSON LEVINE:** One thing Rachel asked me to talk about was my experience when *Ella Enchanted* was made into a movie. What I want to report first of all is the surprise I had when in the months surrounding the release of the movie, *Ella* sold a third as many books as it had sold in the seven previous years of its life. I was also totally stunned to learn that a producer will often spend as much to publicize a movie as to make it. In the case of *Ella Enchanted*, it cost $30 million to make, so say it cost $30 million to promote. I got a piece of that in free publicity. And when the movie was about to come out, Miramax flew me out to L.A. and I was part of the print and media junket, which meant that I had a series of press conferences. I was surprised that quite a number of the reporters had read the book. Then Miramax toured me across the country. Harper is kind enough to tour me for books, but on the Miramax tour, when I got to a city, there was a PR firm that had been hired to promote the movie for that location. If you went to the movie, you got a hamburger. There were tie-ins. I had satellite radio tours, which is when you sit in a hotel room where you’re connected to radio stations all over the country. And there was one where they thought that I was Meg Cabot. Where the interviewer insisted that I was Meg Cabot after I told her I was not Meg Cabot.

**VAIL:** Did you give in?

**LEVINE:** I did not give in. I said I’m not Meg Cabot. Anyway, all of that had a phenomenal effect on the book. The fact is that a publisher cannot throw $30 million at a book. There is no way. But it was wonderful to be the beneficiary of a bit of that. It was an eye-opening experience too.

I want to say a few things about trends. This is my prediction. Somebody is going to write such a glorious historical fiction novel that we are then going to see a spate of them, as it will explode. That seems to be the way it happens. Trends, to at least some degree, are about money. So a surprise happens, it sells a lot of books, and the trend follows in its wake. Or a trend is made. That only works by putting a lot of money into it. But I also think it only works if it’s something that really grabs kids and parents.

I think there is a money issue involved in trends. I think most writers have four goals. We write to satisfy the need to write. We write to be published. We write to be read. And we write to earn some money. We can only do the first one by ourselves. But if all four are happening, if we’re even earning a living, we’re not going to care much about trends. Although I must confess that when I wrote *Ella*, I was following a trend. I had just read the trendsetter, *Beauty* by Robin McKinley, which I adored. I didn’t write a novelized fairy tale because I wanted to catch a trend but because I loved the book and loved the form. And I wrote *Ella* on spec, expecting that it would never get published because I had been unpublished for nine years. And I think what happens with a book has a lot to do with
luck. Ella won the Newbery Honor and I think that was partly because it’s a good book, but it was also partly because it was a particular Newbery committee that year, there were a particular bunch of other books that year, and it’s all very much a matter of luck, which may not be helpful.

VAIL: My feeling is always, Well, maybe trends don’t matter at all. But then once every five years or so we’ll have one of these panels and it turns out it’s actually important. It’s important even though we’re all driven by our own creative muses, because we’re also—as Robin Davis Miller reminds us in many of her fabulous seminars—professionals. So we’re artists; that’s one tack. But we’re also professionals. And part of being professional is knowing what’s going on in our business and being aware and then bucking the trends if our muse says to.

I had lunch today with an editor and I said, All right, tell me what to say tonight. She said I think the two hot things in the next year or two or three are going to be paranormal or supernatural, and she actually explained to me the difference between paranormal and supernatural—that paranormal is more grounded in reality, like a regular kid who—in the case of the HarperTeen FanLit contest for example—has a bad day and goes home and says something to the mirror and the mirror answers her. Supernatural is more like maybe the devil would actually come out of her mirror. She also thought historical fiction would be big.

So who knows? Historical fiction is doing well in the adult market. It may be that somebody will write the Harry Potter of historical fiction or of pop-up books or whatever. On the other hand, I have been warned over and over again, never use Harry Potter as a benchmark for anything. When people say to you, Oh, so you wish you had written Harry Potter? Or, Is your book sort of like Harry Potter?—and you say No—that’s a whole different thing. On the other hand, Harry Potter does drive kids into the bookstore. My son just turned 12, and for his birthday he got, in addition to a bunch of books, a bunch of book gift cards. And that was mostly what he got for his birthday. And he was elated—he’s weird that way. But I think it’s true that the bookstore, whether because kids are going on their own steam or armed with gifts, and partly with the growth of Barnes & Noble as a destination for pre-teens and teens, has become more of a community go-to place.

The discussion was opened to the audience for questions.

Q: Is there a place for children’s books on social issues?

MORAN: There are two out right now. Supersize Me and Chew On This both sold in our stores. Al Gore has a book on global warming for kids coming out in the spring. We’re taking a strong position on that. We think that kids are really citizens of the world. Certainly there have been many picture books about social issues that have sold extremely well over the years. I mean books about slavery and books about the Holocaust, or books about being raised with a single parent, or losing a parent. But it has to be that miraculous melding between words and pictures that happens to have a message at the end. You can’t take the message and beat the child over the head with it. The book itself has to work and it has to answer a need; certainly there is a place for those and they will sell.

Q: Can you address the rise in gay and lesbian stories for children?

KATZ: What we have found with the rise of gay, lesbian and transgender literature is that society in general is a much more open and accepting place today
than it was, for example, when I was a teen, about a hundred years ago. The need has always been there, and an interest, I’m sure, but the more open our society is about allowing teens to explore differences, to come out, deal with issues and discuss them, the more this need can be served without as much of a stigma. And books that we publish have been very successful. I think they’re a hunger, and I think it answers that. Josalyn, do you have thoughts about that?

MORAN: David Levinson’s book Boy Meets Boy sells in our stores. Geography Club, by Bret Hartinger, sells in our stores. Dairy Queen, by Catherine Gilbert Murdock, sells in our stores. And the sequel to Dairy Queen is coming out in the spring. That will sell in our stores. Luna sells. We’ve moved YA/Teens outside the children’s section. That really is an indication to our customers, to parents and kids, that there are more sophisticated issues that are dealt with in these books, and you walk in and make choices on your own and we’re not going to censor those books. You know what’s right for your family to read.

REAMER: I also think there’s a greater sophistication of content now. It’s almost as if you can write about anything, provided that it still fits with that age group.

An author like Jim Howe does very well and he addresses a lot of different concerns. With a first-bestseller he can be even more daring, which is sort of exciting for a lot of authors.

Q: How does humor for teens do?

REAMER: Funny picture books are coming back. They’ve always been there, but funny picture books are definitely very hot. Funny middle grade books are very hot, and funny teen books. Humor sells really well in all areas. The challenge is finding something that really is funny. But when you find it, it really sells. That’s our experience.

MORAN: We’re having a lot of success with Simon & Schuster paperbacks, like Caribbean Cruise, and some of those titles that are just lighthearted romances are selling very well. Junie B. Jones is a funny book. So is the Katie Kazoo series. So we see it from chapter books all the way up to teen. Kids like to laugh.

Q: What subjects are most popular for children ages four to eight?

VAIL: That’s a tough bracket, isn’t it, to define, four to eight? That’s very different from preteen, right?

REAMER: There’s a certain audience that is always going to want a picture book experience. And kids want something that they’re familiar with or something they can relate to in some way. New books like Kissing Hands, which connects the mom and the child, do well. Then there’s that next group of readers, which might be those six to eights, or beginning readers. Classic books are still selling: Blueberries for Sal, Frog and Toad, Amelia Bedelia, and newer titles like Biscuit. You know, kids want to experience reading for themselves. At the top of the seven to eight group you’re looking at the moment when kids really start making the choices themselves, and that’s where Junie comes in or Captain Underpants—books that really tickle the child. Then you move to something like Magic Tree House.

KATZ: Four to eight is the age range for standard picture books, four to six or seven is the “I can read” set, and then you’re getting into early chapter books.

Q: What about books for a child who is a good reader but needs something with less advanced language? I’m also curious about books about socialization issues.

VAIL: At what age?

Q: Elementary school—eight to ten.

VAIL: She’s talking about what I’ve heard called the “reluctant reader.” Readers who have a high interest level but need an easier text, an easier way in. And also want to read about social issues and friendship or whatever.

KATZ: High interest/lower reading level is always a very big interest. I think a lot of kids struggle with that and I think there’s still a need for books aimed at this reader.

LEVINE: And doesn’t the American Library Association have a Best Books for Reluctant Readers?

REAMER: Yes.

VAIL: I wonder if I could tag on to that. I’ve seen a lot of collections of short stories. Is that something that sells? Because I hear from teenagers, “I don’t really have time to read your whole book. I read some of it and it’s good so far.” They have a lot of homework, they have a lot of activities. I can’t tell you how many e-mails I’ve gotten like that. So I’ve recommended short stories to kids who have written to me.

REAMER: Our experience is that short story collections don’t sell as well as novels, but if it’s about a topic in a certain area that kids are particularly interested in, then yes. You made me think of a book we’re publishing very soon, called Dates from Hell: Prom Date. A lot of kids are going to be wanting that because it’s a fun topic, with a lot of great authors taking a lot of different approaches. If it’s a topic that’s of particular interest to kids, I think you can hook them without them thinking they have to commit to the whole thing.
“It’s our experience . . . that around 12 or 13, we really lose a lot of boys. Either they’re not reading at all or they’re reading adult books. We can hold girls for a longer period of time in the children and teen area.”

—Jodi Reamer

In general, short story collections don’t sell at the same rate as novels by the same author.

MORAN: Alvin Schwartz’s collections are examples.

REAMER: Scary stories, yeah.

KATZ: A lot of editors think that anthologies don’t really sell.

REAMER: They sell, but not at the same level.

Q: What is the market for nonfiction children’s books?

MORAN: It’s very, very strong. It’s one of our top two or three subjects, because of course it encompasses everything from I’m a Big Brother, I’m a Big Sister, up through the most sophisticated books about current issues, true biographies and nature books and reference books. Reference books are strong in our stores, but there’s a lot of doing homework on the Internet. So we see that families don’t have quite the reference library that they might once have had at home. However, they come to our stores to do their homework assignments.

So they do buy. They read there or they’ll buy a biography or a story on a particular character or historical event. The Let’s Read It and Find Out series from Harper-Collins is written for K to threes but you can see a fourth- or fifth-grader reading those stories about all manner of scientific topics and finding really good information presented in a very clear, straightforward way.

Q: I wanted to ask about demographics on teen readers in terms of gender. My impression is girls read books and boys play video games. Is that true?

REAMER: I will tell you that it seems from our sales that more girls are reading than boys. We also think more adult women are reading than men. Our experience is women buy more books than men do. So do we publish for boys? Absolutely. Do we think it’s an important part of our culture and that we need to do it? Yes. But in general, it’s our experience—and I think Josalyn will have an even more informed answer than I do—but it’s our experience that around 12 or 13 we really lose a lot of boys. Either they’re not reading at all or they’re reading adult books. We can hold girls for a longer period of time in the children and teen area. But maybe Josalyn has a different experience to share.

MORAN: I think the studies show that men read more for information and women read more for pleasure. And that’s why we think we see boys moving out of our area into the adult science-fiction and fantasy area, which is very strong, and into adult mysteries.

VAIL: I’m wondering if you’re just guessing for the future. When I started writing, everybody said, Well nobody reads YA. It’s such a small thing because the population splits in thirds. One third—the good readers—read adult books. The bad readers have stopped reading for pleasure. Whereas every seven-year-old is reading, or every eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old, the 13, 14 age group, if they’re not strong readers, are not reading anymore, so you’re left with this little segment in the middle. But now there’s this thriving teen market, though mostly for girls. Some boys—like some men—will read Hemingway and Faulkner and Don DeLillo. I wonder if it’s a possibility for boys who are 14, 15, 16, to read really good, meaty stuff that’s actually not full of dragons.

Q: Jodi was talking about a resurgence in picture books. Could you speak more about what’s hot in that market?

REAMER: I think Susan may have touched on this also. I’ve had very witty, high concept, very strong text picture books. Those are the types of picture books that are selling, whereas before I just felt like no one
was buying picture books at all. People had put a moratorium on them because there were just too many. And now they’ve opened their markets again, but again in a limited way.

VAIL: And what about pop-ups? Is that a whole separate thing?

REAME R: I think that they’re a separate market.

KATZ: I think it’s a separate thing, but I think it’s booming right now in a very interesting way. I mean they’re fantastic looking and there are many out right now. They’re a much higher price, which I think is a very encouraging sign, because if it’s Robert Sabuda or even some of these what we call “ology” type books, they range anywhere in price from $17.99 to $25–$26.99. I’m encouraged that people are not minding paying that for a child’s book—even if it’s got a lot of tchotchkes in it. Just the idea that people are not pushing down at the idea of the more expensive book. I do think they’re collecting pop-ups and “ology” type books.

VAIL: Do you think that the grandparent demographic likes buying them?

REAME R: No, I think it’s the kids.

MORAN: Yeah. We see that with kids, who just love them. There’s My Little Red Toolbox, and now the Taxi book is coming out. I think kids see it in the stores and they’re just drawn to it, which is why they pack the kit with wrapping around it, so they can’t take things out.

Q: What kind of impact do reviews have on picture books?

REAME R: I do get very happy whenever I get a good review. I cheer for the author and the illustrator, and I think it can impact some. I mean we’re very aware of School Library Journal and Horn Book and when books get starred reviews. If a book gets three- or four- or five-star reviews from the librarian and teacher communities, it is a sign that this book is being embraced in a certain way that could be very important for its long and happy life. So we do get very excited about that, but our books that get good reviews don’t always enjoy good sales. It’s kind of a catch-as-catch can experience.

MORAN: I think the trick is to make sure that the librarians who put a list together for the award lists know about fine books. And I think reviews are one way in which they do.

REAME R: State awards are very much a revenue-driving, unit-driving experience—especially if it’s Texas.

VAIL: I’d also say that for YA, the Internet is hugely important, in terms of getting other kids to know what’s out there. Along with other recommendations from kids, I find that that’s helped get a lot more word of mouth.

REAME R: Well, I was going to say teens’ recommendations seem to be much more important to teens than anything else. They trust each other around the country, or around the world. They trust each other a lot more than they’re going to trust any adult review.

LEVINE: I don’t know if everybody knows what a state award is. State librarians in many states draw up lists of recommended books that students read and vote on. They’re Readers’ Choice awards. And they’re wonderful for writers. It’s wonderful to be on the recommended list. It’s less important to win the award than to be on the list, because if you’re on the list then lots of kids will read your book.

Q: I have a question for Gail. And I apologize for not knowing your background more. I liked how you put it, before Ella you were unpublished for nine years. What made you keep going? Was it the character? What made you keep going with that book?

LEVINE: I kept writing because of the community. And because of writing itself. I kept writing because I was taking classes and I was in a critique group and I was making friends and that’s important to me. But near the end I was close to giving up.

Q: Why didn’t you?

LEVINE: I got published before I gave up.

Q: I have a question about the artwork. I recently saw a show at the Met about the art dealer Ambroise Vollard. He was one of the first people to recognize that fine artists could be illustrators of books. What can happen to fine artists with regard to doing artwork in children’s books?

KATZ: I think fine artists do still illustrate books. Sometimes, unfortunately, publishers are imitators. A book will be written and it will be fabulous and it will start a whole new wave. But I think in some way that is not great about us, when we look around and see what’s selling, we try to imitate that, and that isn’t really the best way to publish the best books. So certain art styles become very popular. We tend to gravitate toward them. Or if we have books on our lists that aren’t selling as well as we hoped, we tend to move away from that direction, which probably is a bad decision on both parts. I think a book has to work and stand on its own. I think the pictures in a picture book are key, key, key, key, if not the driving force behind
the success of a picture book, and many different styles of art should be embraced and chosen and kids will benefit from that. Kids want variety. So when we race toward what seems to be a trend in terms of art styles, I think it doesn’t serve us and it doesn’t serve the general community.

VAIL: Jumping on that, I have a question about trends in book jackets. What are the trends? What is emerging as a trend whether in teen or in chapter books? I guess picture books are a separate thing. I’m thinking more about teen or middle grade. What trends are you seeing in covers?

REAMER: Well, I think we’re finally seeing the end of the headless book jacket. I mean you can only do that headless, footless, middle of the body thing for so long, and I think we’re probably reaching the end of that jolly trend. It seems that something becomes popular and then we all race toward it and then the readers finally say, “Oh you can’t tell one from the other,” and “I’m so sick of this.” And then we go on to the next race. It also seemed for a while that one sort of symbolic iconic thing in the middle of the book jacket—this was for novels and higher-end teen books—was popular. I don’t know where it’s going right now.

Q: What about poetry?

REAMER: We do very well with poetry. We’re very selective in the poetry that we publish. We’re fortunate enough to publish Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, and some others. I don’t know how successful we would be with a brand new poet. We certainly want to take a chance, but we would be very selective. Poetry sells at certain times of the year. Poetry sells well for schools and libraries. We are always interested in it, but we’re very selective about new voices.

MORAN: Poetry Speaks to Children was published last fall by Source Books and they’re now starting their own children’s imprint and they are going to concentrate on children’s poetry, so if you are a poet, that might be of interest to you. Daniel Pinkwater is a friend of children’s poetry, and you know when he reads a rhyming text on NPR it sells lots of books. Antarctic Antics is certainly an example of that. Poetry is a very childlike medium. It isn’t just a school subject and it is very childlike. David Catrow has illustrated Alan Katz’s books like Take Me Out to the Bathtub instead of Take Me Out to the Ballgame. Poems written based on songs and song lyrics, they’re really great fun. And you know, Jack Prelutsky has just been named the first children’s poet laureate of the United States, so we would expect that that would give additional impetus to poetry sales next spring.

VAIL: Some picture books I see as poems themselves. Chris Raschka comes to mind. Charlie Parker Played Be Bop to me is a poem.

Q: What about light verse?

VAIL: Light verse? I’m not sure quite what you have in mind.

Q: Poetry that is fun.

VAIL: Oh, poetry that’s funny. Yes, absolutely.

Q: Do you accept direct submissions from writers, and if so, do writers generally send in a complete manuscript or just the first page to give you an idea of the story?

REAMER: Yes, I do, and yes, they send the whole manuscript because they’re usually so short, you don’t need to just send the first page. And do not send illustrations unless you are an illustrator, or are working with sort of a known illustrator. But generally, and I think Susan will probably agree with this, we find the picture books that sell the best are ones where the text and art are just as strong, and there really is a marriage of the two. So often when authors send us text, they think we need to see the illustrations to understand the text. But truthfully the text has to work on its own. And often, the publishers come up with these amazing illustrators that add a whole new level to the text, even though the text still has to start just as strongly. But you really hurt yourself if you try to put in your own illustrations or grab a neighbor who you know can use a paintbrush to come up with illustrations. It doesn’t help you at all.
“In a non-Harry Potter year, picture books is our third strongest category. And contrary to trends in the marketplace, we’ve been up in picture books in the past four or five years, when the larger market has been down or flat.”

—Josalyn Moran

KATZ: I agree. It hurts you. One of the things that editors love to do is find a text that they love and then pair it with an illustrator who can push it further.

REAMER: I will say one of the easiest sales I ever made was a manuscript text that I submitted to an editor who happened to be looking for a particular text for their illustrator. The sale happened in about five minutes because of that. So definitely don’t send illustrations.

Q: How concerned are publishers about the shelf-life of a picture book?

MORAN: In a non-Harry Potter year, picture books is our third strongest category. And contrary to trends in the marketplace, we’ve been up in picture books in the past four or five years, when the larger market has been down or flat. We really do pride ourselves on our extensive backlist in picture books, both in paperback and in hard covers. We really do try our best to offer that, just as any independent store does, because book-sellers compete with Target and Wal-Mart and we’re looking for that point of differentiation and for that point of integrity.

Q: How important is it for a story to be shown in multiple media?

REAMER: Do you mean when it’s submitted?

KATZ: From my experience, we’re really in the business of books, and it has to work as a book. And so I usually tell authors to focus on just that medium. Because if it does really well, then you’ll easily be able to sell the other rights such as film, television and audio—which is now becoming a little more frequent, even with picture books. I suggest you focus just on the book medium and the rest will come.

LEVINE: I agree.

VAIL: To follow up on that, I wonder if anyone can speak about what an author can do to make his or her book more successful in the marketplace, either just before publication or after. How can the author be a successful part of the publishing team? What’s helpful?

MORAN: Particularly in the YA world, as I said before, the Internet is becoming a huge tool. What I hear from every editor is, make sure you have your website up because that’s a huge tool to get readers to notice your book and to find out more about it.

VAIL: Do you have blogs on websites?

MORAN: Blogs, sure. Again, I say that for YA. I don’t know how effective it is for middle grade and certainly not for picture books—I hope not. But for YA, absolutely, the Internet is a huge tool and authors are strongly recommended to do that.

REAMER: I agree. At the teen level, have your website up and definitely involve yourself in blogs and get on other authors’ blogs and start talking to them and you’ll be amazed at what will happen to your readership. In the middle grade area, if an author can make school visits and library visits, and come up with ideas for how to get on a program at IRA, the International Reading Association, or the National Council of Teachers of English, or any of the big academic conferences or the regional ones. If you can, come up with a great idea for a panel or a program that’s relevant to your book. But schools are an incredibly valuable tool, and we’ve published authors and illustrators who were very dedicated to getting school visits, and that has made a huge difference in their careers and the number of books they sell. At the picture book level that’s hugely important. I think there is an opportunity at whatever age your books would be targeted, whether it’s the school, the library, the national or regional associations, or the blogs, there’s definitely a lot you can
do to make yourself more visible so that more people know about your book and read your book.

MORAN: The only thing that I’d add is to make sure you contact local media and go to your local bookstore, whether it’s an independent or a chain. Make contacts with the manager of that store and make sure that he or she is aware that you’re happy to speak at their educator reception nights or any other book event that they might have, because they’re often asked to provide real live local authors to schools and other organizations.

REAMER: And offer to sign the inventory in the store.

VAIL: I’d like to do an Authors Guild plug. The Authors Guild has this amazing deal to host your website and it’s at a fraction of the cost of anyplace else I’ve seen. And they also have a web-builder program. They’ll help you build a website. They have certain paradigms that you can plug yourself into or you can build your own and they’ll host it for a couple of dollars a month, as opposed to hundreds of dollars a month or something.

REAMER: That’s great.

VAIL: It’s a benefit of Guild membership. We also have roundtables and seminars about school visits and other subjects. We even have a pamphlet that’s been very helpful to me about how to set up a school visit ahead of time so that you don’t end up there with your name misspelled. Daniel Pinkwater wrote a hilarious book, called Author’s Day, about everything that can go wrong on an author’s visit. I’ve had plenty of those, but this helps you organize things, set it all up and make sure that the school is prepared for your visit.

Q: In graphic novels, is it usual for the same person to write the text and do the illustrations?

VAIL: No it’s not. My friend Avi wrote a graphic novel that was illustrated by an illustrator, and he has a new one coming out that’s also a graphic novel by a different illustrator. So I know that it’s not necessarily so.

REAMER: In fact, most likely the illustrator is not going to be the writer. Graphic novel illustration is extremely complicated for a lot of reasons and there are specialists in graphic novels, and they’re not the same as the writers.

Q: I’d like to ask Gail to speak more about what happened when Ella was made into a movie.

LEVIN: First of all, it was quite a few years before an independent producer, Jane Startz, approached my agent and asked about optioning Ella. The first thought about it was having Michelle Kwan be Ella and having it be Ella on Ice. And then when it was optioned, I was told by my agent, you know thousands of books are optioned and very few become a movie. And it happened very, very gradually. Miramax came on board, there was a script, then it started to be cast. I guess it took about five years, which is quick. All my other novels have been optioned, except, so far, Fairest, and nothing has come of them. So options come, options go.

VAIL: But you never know, you can still have another.

LEVIN: You never know. And if anybody here has a brother who’s a producer, I’m interested.

KATZ: We’re fortunate enough to publish most of Gail’s work and my rule of thumb about a book that’s made into a movie—which Gail is saying was not her experience—is if a book is selling 10,000 copies a year when the movie comes out it will very quickly go to 50,000. It’s usually five times more the year that the movie comes out. So I have to go back now and look at your sales because I’m scratching my head about it.

LEVIN: Around the time of the movie it sold about a third of the total that it sold in the seven years.

REAMER: So you’re saying it dramatically increased your sales.

LEVIN: Oh, it was amazing.

REAMER: But in general it’s about five times—a rough rule of thumb.

LEVIN: It’s very interesting. People are interested in movies. You may have published 40 books, but one gets made into a movie, and you’re on the map.

REAMER: Can I give one cautionary tale? Just be prepared, when you do sell those rights, to not like the movie, because so often that’s what happens. And you have to know that you have absolutely no control. Once you sign that agreement anything can happen on the screen, and a lot of times the titles change.

Q: What’s the teen market for nonfiction?

MORAN: Well, you’re going to sell a lot of bios of hot characters. The High School Musical characters are selling very well right now. There’s a lot of self-help that’s selling very well. And a lot of things that sort of trickle down from the adult market, if it’s Steven Covey or the Chicken Soup line. Books that the magazines put out on health and beauty and friendship. Those books sell a lot. Books on self-esteem. Books on real life. Some of the difficult things kids go through. They sell well too. Good writing really appeals to them whether it’s fiction or nonfiction.
REAMER: I would agree. If there’s a bestseller that’s nonfiction and a teen version comes out, there’s a big market. One book I wished we had published but we didn’t was *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, then the *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*. Or if there’s a big diet book that does very well, sometimes you can publish a teen version, or any health issue or makeup issue as Josalyn said.

MORAN: We asked Simon & Schuster if they were going to do a teen version of *You, the Owner’s Manual* because it will sell very well.

VAIL: And are they?

MORAN: They’re in discussion.

Q: Is there still a market for fairy tales? Are we seeing fairy tales or folk tales or myths from other cultures at all for the younger kids?

MORAN: A well-written and illustrated tale will sell no matter what the country of origin. Jerry Pinkney’s *Little Red Hen* is a fairy tale that’s selling very well currently. So if it’s beautifully presented, kids and moms and dads will want to share it.

VAIL: OK, we’ll take a couple more and then we’ve got to go. Yes.

Q: It seems to me that there are books being published now for “middle grade” that at one time would have been called YA, and some books with a lot of what is called “content”—sexual themes, violence, drug use, curse words—that maybe 10, 15 years ago wouldn’t have been published, but are now being marketed to teens. Is this a real shift in the marketplace, in the way things are marketed, or what’s being written?

MORAN: Well, that happened to Paula Danziger’s book, *The Cat Ate My Gym Suit*. Those books are now published for young readers in that eight to twelve group because they were published for teens in a more innocent time and so were considered more sophisticated. Compared to some of what is being published today, they’re less sophisticated in terms of theme. Yes. I think we’re seeing some of that.

KATZ: Some of that, yes. But I think we’re very sensitive and we work very closely with booksellers. If there is more mature content in the book, we will not put it out for the eight- to 12-year-olds because it’s a problem for the bookseller and sometimes beyond the bookseller. In fact, we’re trying to be much more sensitive to what we consider mature content and have just started a new imprint called HarperTeen which is a signal to the reader and the buyer and the bookseller that there may be content in this book of a certain nature—sexual content or certain language, or drugs, whatever—that somebody in the community might not want kids below 13 to be reading.”

—Susan Katz

“We’re trying to be more sensitive to mature content and have started a new imprint called HarperTeen, which is a signal to the reader and the buyer and the bookseller that there may be content in this book—sexual content or certain language, or drugs, whatever—that somebody in the community might not want kids below 13 to be reading.”

Q: Is it worth sending an unsolicited manuscript to a publisher?

LEVINE: On the cover of my new book *Fairest*, the heroine had a kind of low-back dress, and I think it was Barnes & Noble that said the back was too low and the back came up.

Q: Is it worth sending an unsolicited manuscript to a publisher?

LEVINE: It depends on the publisher. Some publishers are open to unsolicited manuscripts, some aren’t.

KATZ: Harper does not read many unsolicited manu-
scripts because we’re plowed under from them and it is just overwhelming to us. So mostly we do work through agencies. But that’s just one house and that’s certainly not the standard.

Q: Do you work with many first-time authors?

REAMER: Oh, absolutely. A lot of my authors are first-time authors. Stephenie Meyer I found through the slush.

VAIL: And she’s a number one bestseller now.

REAMER: Thirteen weeks.

VAIL: OK, last question. Who’s brave enough to end this with a bang? OK, we have two.

Q: How much space is devoted to licensed characters in bookstores?

MORAN: That really comes and goes. It really does. So Strawberry Shortcake, right. There are some licenses that are sort of PBS licenses that parents feel comfortable with. So we’re seeing Nick’s Dora and Diego, and Backyardigans, and those kinds of books sell very well. But we also have non-licensed characters that sell very well too. We even have a section in the store that’s “favorite characters,” where we’ve started to put those characters. But if you go over to the board books or the picture books, you probably won’t find as many licensed characters.

VAIL: And kids, like all of us, do get comfortable with certain characters. When my older son was three, we went to Barnes & Noble and I said he could choose two books. And he said, any books I want? And I said yes. He said can they be TV tie-ins? I said is that because you like them or because you want to torture Mommy? Both.

On that note, I want to thank you all for coming, especially the people up here. It’s been a pleasure. ♦

For a copy of the Authors Guild booklet, “Planning Successful School Visits: Guidelines for Authors and Illustrators,” contact the Guild office at 212 563-5904 or Staff@authorsguild.org.

CONTRACTS Q&A

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A couple of quick points to keep in mind regarding this, however:

1. Your contract should always have an “out of print” clause that will terminate the publisher’s right to publish the book and to license other editions even if copyright has not yet expired.

2. The references to copyright law in the above provision should specify that you are talking about the United States copyright, not the law of another country.

3. United States law no longer requires an author or publisher to make any specific filing to extend a copyright. It once did and, if you are ever negotiating a publishing contract for any country that might have that type of system, you should include a provision requiring the publisher to make the filings for such renewal or extension on a timely basis if it still has the publishing rights to your book at the time.

4. Mass-market paperback reprint contracts, and publishing contracts in some foreign countries, are frequently for less than the full term of copyright (sometimes only for 7-10 years!). In those situations, the clause you refer to would not be in the contract. Instead, the number of years agreed on would be inserted as the term of the contract (also, of course, subject to a proper out-of-print clause if it goes out of print earlier).

Keep in Mind: What is left out of a contract is often more important than what is in it. Just reviewing a publisher’s (or any) contract and finding you have no problem with what is included is just the first part of your obligation to yourself in reviewing a contract. You should also consider what provisions that would benefit you ought to be in the contract but have not been included by the publisher. These omitted provisions can be found in books and articles about book contracts and in the Authors Guild’s Model Trade Book Contract & Guide.

Please send your questions to QandAcolumn@authorsguild.org.

The answers provided 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. ♦
Along Publishers Row

Continued from page 2

 six Web sites that provided background. At the end of Thirteen Moons, Charles Frazier lists eight nonfiction titles. Michael Crichton’s Next has a seven-page bibliography listing 36 books, 12 articles and 12 Internet sources. Crichton told Bosman, “My feeling is that if I’ve spent a lot of time in a particular field, after a couple of years I know quite a bit about it. I try and include the ones that either matter to me, or from a legal standpoint, the ones from which I drew most heavily.” He added, “People will often say to me, ‘Oh, my goodness, look how many books you’ve read.’”

Samuel Cohen, professor of English at the University of Missouri, told The Times, “Novels are supposed to be borrowings and stealings.” Critic James Wood said, “We expect authors to do that work, and I don’t see why . . . they should praise themselves for it . . . . I’m terribly old-fashioned. I wish they would reinstate ‘The End.’”

But Tim Duggan, an executive editor at HarperCollins, said, “I think people realize now that even in fiction, credit has to be given where credit is due.”

On its editorial page, The Times signed off an editorial with: “As far as we’re concerned, novelists are obliged to disclose nothing besides the art of the stories they have to tell.”

DEAD REVIEW: Jonathan Freedland is a political columnist for the London newspaper The Guardian. He published his first novel, The Righteous Men, under the pseudonym Sam Borne. When the reviewer for The Guardian turned in a negative review (reading the book was like “inviting a raving lunatic into your life”), the review was killed—only to turn up in another newspaper.


The Righteous Men was a bestseller in England.

SHAME: The fall issue of The Paris Review had an interview with Laura Albert, who, under the name J. T. LeRoy, wrote the books Sarah and The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things. Albert and others invented the fake author—an under-age, cross-dressing ex-male prostitute—but Albert said, “I never saw it as a hoax.”

Asked if she felt ashamed for deceiving readers, she said, “I bleed, but it’s a different kind of shame. I’m sad I was so injured.” The New York Times, originally taken in, exposed the hoax in 2006.

TITLE CHECK: The Writer suggests that you try out your title on the Web: www.lulu.com. The site predicts the chances of a title becoming a bestseller.

The site claims that it is 40 percent more accurate in predicting the success of a title than random guessing.

But it doesn’t always get it right. According to lulu, The Da Vinci Code was a rotten title, and the novel should have bombed.

IS SHORT BETTER?: Before her death in 1996, Mary Lavin’s fiction was often published in The New Yorker.

In the preface to her Selected Stories, she wrote that she wished she “could break up the two long novels I have published into the few short stories they ought to have been in the first place. For in spite of these two novels, and in spite of the fact that I may write other novels, I feel that it is in the short story that a writer distills the essence of his thought. I believe this because the short story, shape as well as matter, is determined by the writer’s own character. Both are one. Short-story writing—for me—is only looking closer than normal into the human heart.”

PATH MAKING: Jessamyn West once said, “There is no royal path to good writing, and such paths as exist do not lead through neat critical gardens, various as they are, but through the jungles of self, the world, and of craft.”

DYSLEXIC HERO: Rick Riordan’s YA novel, The Lightning Thief, came from the stories about Greek mythology that the author told at bedtime to his son Haley. PW said that the boy is dyslexic, like the hero of the best-selling children’s book. A sequel, The Sea of Monsters, came out last April, and book three, The Titan’s Curse, is due out in May.

CRIME SHIFT: Marilyn Stasio reviews mysteries and crime fiction—dozens of books every year—in a column for The New York Times Book Review. She noted that “There’s a New Bad Guy in Town.”

That was the title of her essay, which began: “Sometimes it seems as if writers of escapist fiction are themselves in need of escape. How else to explain the recent drift of hometown mysteries—as one might call those locally based whodunits that normally take a stern but essentially benign view of their neighbors’ criminal eccentricities . . . ?”

“Nowadays, the forces destabilizing the small towns in these books are the same ones bedeviling big cities—organized crime, foreign drug cartels, illegal immigration.
and a host of new ills perceived as threats to national security."

Stasio concludes her observations with: "Because every detective story both reflects and corrects the collective fears of a community, foiling the crooked lawyer who doctored grandfather’s will or running that real estate raider off the family farm is simply an imaginative way to reassure readers that there is still justice in the world. . . . The question now is what it might take for the decent detectives in hometown mysteries to throw up their hands and say, ‘This one beats me. This is one atrocity that I just can’t solve.’"

RELIGION PAYS: Lee Strobel is a former legal editor of The Chicago Tribune. PW identified him as an “atheist-turned-Christian.” Strobel has written almost two dozen bestselling books, including The Case for Christ. His The Case for Faith and The Case for a Creator were also bestsellers during the fall.

Sales for all his books add up to more than 8.5 million copies. His Case for the Real Jesus is scheduled for publication in 2007.

OUCH: “The unpublished manuscript is like an unconfessed sin that festers in the soul, corrupting and contaminating it,” wrote Antonio Machado.

ORGANIZER: Barbara Ehrenreich, author of Nickel and Dimed and Bait and Switch, has started an organization called United Professionals. It is designed to help white-collar workers who are unemployed, uninsured, downsized, stressed out or merely anxious.

Ehrenreich told The New York Times, “I thought, isn’t there some way that people in this situation can come together, and the model I had in the back of my head was the early women’s movement in the 1970’s.”

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, published in 2001, sold more than a million copies. Ehrenreich researched the book by working as a waitress, a hotel maid and a Wal-Mart sales clerk.

QUESTION: PW said that critics have asked: Is the Holocaust an appropriate subject for young adults? Random House printed 70,000 copies of Irish author John Boyle’s novel The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, which tells about the Holocaust from a boy’s point of view. The book has sold 120,000 copies in the UK. Miramax and Harry Potter producer David Heyman are scheduled to begin shooting a movie version in early 2007.


PW describes the main character, fictional editor Vivian Grant of Grant Books, as “a foul-mouthed, uber-demanding, tantrum-throwing tyrant.” But the reviewer goes on to insist that Grant is not patterned on either Regan.

WHY HE WROTE: The late novelist Frederick Busch wrote in Writers and Their Craft: Short Stories and Essays on the Narrative:

“I write for a living. I write, that is to say, for my life—for my life’s sake. Which is to say: when I write, I consider my life to be at stake; the values that help me to measure it, and the moments, memories, and emotions of it that I cherish—the people, therefore, whose presence in it makes me want to keep experiencing my life—all are at risk when I work. It feels that way to me. I believe the feeling to be true, and I write from that belief.”

ALIVE, ALIVE, HO: Noam Chomsky, 77, linguist, professor and author of many books, was in the news when Venezuela President Hugo Chavez said at a United Nations news conference that he regretted he had never met Chomsky before his death. Chavez held up one of Chomsky’s books, Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance, published in 2003.

Reporter Marc Santora of The New York Times telephoned Chomsky at his home in Lexington, Mass., and the former MIT professor said, “I continue to work and write.” Chomsky added, “I have been quite interested in [Chavez’s] policies. Personally, I think many of them are quite constructive.”

Chomsky’s book immediately became No. 1 on Amazon’s bestseller list, and climbed as high as No. 6 at both Borders and Barnes & Noble.

Alan M. Dershowitz, a lawyer and critic of Chomsky, told The Times, “I don’t know anybody who’s ever read a Chomsky book. . . . He does not write page turners, he writes page stoppers. There are a lot of bent pages in Noam Chomsky’s books, and they are usually at about Page 16.”

BUSY: Danielle Steel is the author of 68 books that have sold more than 550 million copies. The New York Times cited her accomplishments in a box alongside the hottest movies of the week. She also “heads a San Francisco art gallery and developed a perfume with Elizabeth Arden.” What have you done lately?

INTERVIEWS: Joseph Wambaugh, author of The Onion Field and other cop novels, has produced a new one, Hollywood Station.

He told PW: “I cannot write a novel, a script, or anything else without interviewing dozens of cops. I can tell you this: women cops are cheaper dates. Male cops require an average three and a half shots of booze to get them talking, women cops just smell the cork, and I can’t write fast enough to get it all down on paper.”
BLURBS: Roy Peter Clark is the author of Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer. He wrote an essay, “The Art of the Blurb,” for PW.

In it, he asked, “If a good haiku has 17 syllables, why does a good blurb take about 28 words? Shorter ones, to my taste, are chintzy, and longer ones cheesy. Worse than spasms of ecstatic praise (‘Compelling!’ ‘Riveting!’ ‘Electrifying!’) are blurbs so long they break the boundaries of the form, like a sonnet of 19 lines.”

Clark ends his essay with, “I want a blurb from E. B. White.”

MOVIE MAN: The best-selling Guinness World Records says that the 34 movies based on Stephen King’s books have grossed $835.9 million. That’s an average of $24.5 million per movie. His highest-grossing movie—at $287 million worldwide—is The Green Mile.

CRITIC: David Treuer is the author of Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual, in which he says, “Native American fiction does not exist.”

Treuer grew up on the Ojibwe reservation in Minnesota, where his mother is a tribal judge. An article about him and his book appeared in The Washington Post’s Book World.

Treuer said that Louise Erdrich is a marvelous writer, but “her books use fairly tried and true Western storytelling techniques to convincingly create an entire world. But if you know the Ojibwe language, what she does is not without problems. Her books, as all books are, are fantasies, an idea of culture, a longing for it, but are not derived from Native American storytelling.”

INSPIRED: Joanna Scott has written seven novels and two collections of short stories. Her latest collection is titled Everybody Loves Somebody.

PW asked her about where she got her inspiration, and she said, “I happened to be reading through an old New York Times. At the bottom of the front page was a personal ad for a brother beseeching his sister to get in touch. I’m always struck, reading old journals, letters, newspapers, how intensely people live their lives and the abruptness with which they disappear. I explore the meaning of their lives, I guess, in order to explore the meaning of our lives.”

THE EAR TEST: Historian David McCullough told The Writer that he reads his work out loud. He said, “I think . . . it’s very important to read what you’ve written aloud, or have it read to you aloud. In the process you hear these little verbal ticks we all fall into, whereas you might not see them.”

BIG SELLERS: PW says J. K. Rowling and Nicholas Sparks are the only two contemporary writers to have had novels spend more than a year on both the national hardcover and paperback lists.

Sparks’s latest is At First Sight. His books have sold more than 31 million copies in North America alone.

LAND OF PLENTY: In an essay devoted to new books about books and reading, The New York Times’s William Grimes wrote, “Today more novels are published in one week than Samuel Johnson had to deal with in a decade . . . It would take approximately 163 lifetimes to read the fiction currently available, at the click of a mouse, from Amazon.com.”

CURBING CHAOS: John Smolen teaches at Northern Michigan University. He is the author of Cold, The Invisible World and Winter by Degrees.

He told The Writer that he wrote because, “It’s the best way I know how to get in touch with the world, what it’s made of, how it works. There’s a lot of chaos out there, and it may be folly to try and make sense of it, but if a character’s voice sounds true, there’s no place I’d rather be than at my desk. I’m constantly trying to bore deeper—into a scene, into the way a sentence plays out. It’s a question of curiosity, I think. I really believe that my characters know more than I do, and if I’m lucky I might learn something from them.”

AWARD: Jack Prelutsky, 66, author of more than 35 books, was named children’s poet laureate by the Poetry Foundation. He got $25,000 and a medallion. More than a million of his books (Behold the Bold Umbrella-phant) and anthologies have been sold.

Prelutsky told The New York Times, “I am honored and baffled by this whole thing. And tickled.”

GREAT FIRSTS: In an article for The Writer, “Great Writing Starts with a Bang. Not a Dud,” Chuck Leddy cites a long list of notable first sentences, including Moby Dick’s familiar “Call me Ishmael.”

Leddy quotes the opening lines of Nathaniel Philbrick’s best-selling Mayflower:

“We all want to know how it was in the beginning. From the Big Bang to the Garden of Eden to the circumstances of our own births, we yearn to travel back to that distant time when everything was new and full of promise.”

FOUND: A previously unknown poem by the late Robert Frost was published last fall in The Virginia Quarterly Review. It was found by a graduate student, Robert Stilling, in a collection of books and manuscripts bought by the University of Virginia.

The poem, written in 1918, is entitled “War Thoughts at Home.”

CHEERS: Kim Edwards is a professor at the University of Kentucky
and the author of the bestselling *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*.

She had a rare experience last fall: “I have to say, as a literary writer, I never expected to have 65,000 people stand up and cheer for me! It was on the football field with the president of the University of Kentucky and his wife. UK did a great job, showing my book on those mega TV screens and reading off all the amazing stats . . . .”

PW said that after 15 printings there were more than 1,878,000 copies of *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*.

TRIO: William Faulkner said, “A writer needs three things, experience, observation, and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others.”

HISTORICAL NOVEL: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel is titled *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The Nigerian writer, who is studying at Yale, is 29 years old. The story takes place in Nigeria during the late 1960s and early ’70s. Biafra tried to break away in a civil war but was then forced into submission. Hundreds of thousands of Biafrans were murdered, starved or died of illness. Adichie’s family was uprooted.

All the events took place before Adichie was born, but she told The New York Times, “My family tells me that I must be old. This is a book I had to write because it’s my way of looking at this history that defines me and making sense of it. The writing took four years, but I’ve been thinking about this book my whole life.”

Adichie started writing early and published a book of poetry when she was 16. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, won the 2005 Commonwealth Writers’ Best First Book Prize.

Adichie said, “I didn’t want to just write about events. I wanted to put a human face on them.”

HO! HO! HO! Seven years after *Hannibal* was published, Thomas Harris has produced a new novel about his fictional serial killer and cannibal, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. *Hannibal Rising* came out December 5. It tells about Lecter’s early life from age 6 to 20. Harris’s agent, Mort Janklow, told The New York Times, “His books are very, very complex, and I think he thinks about them for a long time before he puts a pen to paper.”

Also available in time for the Christmas-buying season were books by Michael Crichton, John Grisham, Stephen King and John le Carré.

THE TRIGGER: Novelist Margo Livesey is the author of *The Missing World* and *Eva Moves the Furniture*. She was asked by The Writer, “How does a novel come to you?”

Livesey replied, “I’m usually slow to come up with characters. Most of the novels have come as some combination of idea and image. I picture a baby at a bus stop and think, Oh, I’ll write a novel about a banker who finds a baby in a bus station.”

FROM LATIN: Robert Fagles’s new translation, following his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is *The Aeneid*. Fagles explained, “I didn’t want to be too literal or too literary either. I want to tell you what Virgil says, but I want to write an English poem at the same time. That’s the real impossibility.”

Fagles told The New York Times that Virgil worked on *The Aeneid* for 10 years, and Fagles took almost as long. Virgil is said to have written only three or four lines a day. Once Fagles got rolling, he managed 30 or 40, reading the Latin text over and over at first and then searching for an English equivalent. For Dido’s lament, Fagles imagined a romantic heroine like Anna Karenina.

SPLIT: Edwidge Danticat is the author of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Farming of Bones*. About her writing, she once said: “I have always split my memories into two realms: one of real memory and one of fictional memory. Real memory is fragmented, messy, disorganized, has no clever dialogue, and you don’t always get the ending of your choice. That’s why I prefer to write fiction, though it is fiction that draws heavily from certain moments in my life. With my fictional memories, I can use lies to tell a greater truth, winding a different kind of tale out of myself, one in which the possibilities for tangents and digressions are boundless; I can also weave a more elaborate web, where everyone’s life can serve as a thread, including my own.”


She told PW: “I believe that the memoir is the novel of the 21st century; it’s an amazing form that we haven’t even begun to tap. People are just beginning to think about writing a memoir of five minutes or a memoir of everyone you’ve ever
met with blue eyes. . . . There are a couple of people who tried weird things, but it’s a huge form and we’re just getting started figuring out what the rules are.”

She added: “I feel that you can do anything as long as you tell the reader. Every writer has a contract with readers that had better be honored. If you let them think it happened, then it damn well better have really happened. If you call your book The Liar’s Club then you can do what you want.”

DIETED: When Hunger’s Brides was published in September of 2005, it had 1,360 pages. Before it was published in paperback in 2006, the author, Paul Anderson, took “a crack at reducing the book’s length.” The new version has only 768 pages because one of the modern plot lines was removed. The book is based on the story of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a 17th century Mexican nun and poet.

The new version has a subtitle: “The Essential Story from the Epic, Hunger’s Brides.”

ONLINE: The Chicago Manual of Style is online, and Anita Samen, managing editor of the University of Chicago Press, told The New York Times, “You can consult it on the fly so you are free to do your writing and editing without having to retain huge numbers of rules in your head.”

The print version costs $55. The new online version is $25 for individuals for the first year and $30 each year thereafter.

The first version of the manual was published in 1906. The 15th edition, published in 2003, has sold more than 200,000 copies.


TRICKY: Mark Danielewski writes books that play tricks with typography. In his new novel, Only Revolutions, one story runs across the top of the page, while another, upside down, runs along the bottom.

Deborah Vankin, in her review in The Los Angeles Times, wrote that she needed office supplies to read the book—“in my case, two bookmarks, three sets of Post-its, a dictionary, a ruler, a stapler (don’t ask) and a calculator, along with a bottle of Bordeaux.”


WHAT’S IN A NAME? Where do you get the names for your fictional characters?

Novelist Stuart Woods is quoted on his home page: “When I wrote Chiefs I knew I would need a lot of names, so I wrote down the names of all the merchants on Main Street in my hometown, then mixed up the first and last names. I got many compliments on their authenticity. Now I use friends’ names or just make them up.”

Woods’s Dark Harbor made the paperback bestseller list in PW with 435,000 copies in print.


Bullshit sold more than 400,000 copies, and Frankfurt told Deborah Solomon of The Times: “I used to teach at Yale, which was at one time the center of postmodernist literary theory. Derrida was there. Paul de Man was there. I originally wrote the bull____ essay at Yale, and a physics professor told me that it was appropriate that this essay should have been written at Yale, because, after all, he said, Yale is the bull—capital of the world.”

Bullshit is 80 pages long and his new book is only 101 pages. Asked why, Frankfurt said, “What I think is that a short book can contain a lot of bull____, but a long book almost inevitably contains a lot of bull____.”

HOAX? An Incomplete History of the Art of the Funerary Violin, by Rohan Kriwaczek, is about a “little-known genre” of music condemned by the Catholic Church and almost wiped out by purges in the 1830s and ’40s. The book is listed in Overlook Press’s winter catalog as fiction.

The New York Times said that the book had “tricked even Peter Mayer, his publisher at the American publishing house . . . who bought the book last year believing it was an authentic historical work of nonfiction.”

Mayer told The Times, “Maybe I have been fooled. It is possible.” The Times said that Overlook had paid about $1,800 for the book. Mayer said, “I just thought, whether it is true or not true, it is the work of some sort of crazy genius. If it is a hoax, it is a brilliant, brilliant hoax.”

SITE: Authors Guild member Ellen Pall wrote to say that she has created a website, DebbiesIdea.com, where readers “who know an author well suggest to readers unfamiliar with that author which book serves as the best introduction.”

Pall said that the nonprofit wiki website is a memorial to her friend Debbie because it was her idea. Pall explained, “If you start with a weak or atypical work by even the most marvelous author, you probably will never read that author again.”

Pall added, “And please do add your titles to your own page on the site.”
LIKE MOTHER: Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Man Booker Prize. Her mother, Anita Desai, author of *Clear Light of Day, In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting*, has been a finalist for that prize three times.

The younger Desai, 35, lives in Brooklyn but spends part of the year with her father in her homeland, India. She told The New York Times that she doesn’t think of marrying or having children. “The isolation of writing settles in too deeply,” she said. “It becomes part of your personality and your life. If I had a child, I’d have to break out of it and be sweet. But as a writer I am trying to understand hate and anger.”

According to The Times of London, Desai was once told by an editor at The New Yorker: “This is the worst book I have ever read in my life. It is perverse, horrible and awful, and there is no way to rescue it.”

COMPLAINT: With his new novel, *Lisey’s Story*, Stephen King “wants readers, and critics, to recognize that he isn’t a hack.”

King complained to The New York Times: “You get a reputation as a bestseller, and you immediately get hung with a label that you write for the lowest common denominator.” Mokoto Rich of the The Times said *Lisey’s Story* “is a book about a marriage and the journey through grief that a widow—the title’s Lisey—makes after the death of her husband, Scott Landon, also [like Stephen King] a rock star of the book world.”

Because he was writing in a woman’s voice, King asked Nan Graham, editor in chief at Scribner, to edit the book instead of Chuck Verrill, King’s long-standing editor. Graham said that she helped with pacing and honing the title character. She said, “Lisey became a little more complex and compelling.”

King told The Times that language is “more important than it used to be.” He said that he has been reading more poetry, and he mentioned D. H. Lawrence, Richard Wilbur and James Dickey. “You get older, you find out time is shorter, and you read stuff that you’ve missed before,” he said. “You say, ‘I can’t wait forever anymore to read Eudora Welty.’ I finally got to Eudora Welty, so maybe I’m just meeting a better class of literary person.”

OUT: Joe Maguire, an editor at Reuters news service, wrote a book entitled *Brainless: The Lies and Lunacy of Ann Coulter*. He gave galleys of the book to his bosses and lost his job. Maguire told The New York Times, “There was a difference of opinion about the approval I received to write this book. I thought I had met the conditions, and proceeded accordingly. As a result, I no longer work there.”

The author said his book “looks at Ann Coulter’s arguments, and deconstructs them to show how misguided they can be. When the political discourse has dropped to the unfathomable levels it has, someone has to say this is wrong.”

At a meeting, Reuters management told workers there that they weren’t allowed to ask why Maguire no longer had a job there.

HOT TOPIC: The most talked about book at October’s Frankfurt Book Fair was *Les Bienveillantes (The Kindly Ones)* by first-time novelist Jonathan Littell, an American. The book, written in French, was already a bestseller in Paris. A critic compared it to *War and Peace* and other epic novels.

The 900-page novel was described in The New York Times as having “themes that range from incest to genocide, and an unrepentant Nazi SS officer as the hero.”

Littell, 39, said that he chose to write in French because that is the language of his literary heroes, Flaubert among them. Littell’s novel was awarded the top literary prize of the Académie Française ($9,500), the first time an American author has won it. It also took France’s coveted Goncourt Prize.

The author’s father is Robert Littell, author of spy thrillers, who lives in the south of France. *The Kindly Ones* will be published in the U.S. by HarperCollins.

CONFLICT?: Joyce Dudley is a deputy district attorney in Santa Barbara, Calif. She is also the author of a crime novel, *Intoxicating Agent*, about “a rape case [in which] the victim said she had been sexually assaulted after being given an intoxicating drug.”

Justice Kenneth R. Egan ruled that Dudley could not take part in a similar, real-life case because “she has a disabling conflict of interest.” The New York Times reported: “Egan wrote that Dudley’s desire for money and fame might tempt her to throw the book at the defendant, as it were.”

Egan said, “Dudley will garner no laurels, and the case will not generate favorable media publicity for her book if she enters into a negotiated settlement.”

Linda Fairstein, a former prosecutor in New York who has written nine crime novels, told The Times, “It’s not really a good judgment call to closely mirror the facts of a case while it’s still pending.”

SOLD: Salman Rushdie, 59, sold his papers to Emory University in Atlanta, where he will serve as writer in residence for the next five years. The papers include the manuscripts of all his books and two early, unpublished novels. He has also kept journals for 36 years. Rushdie plans to use the journals to write an autobiography. He told The New York Times...
Times, “I would like to have first go at this story; after that, everyone else can do as they please with the material.”

FANTASY LIFE: Naomi Novik, 33, is the author of three fantasy novels about a sea captain and a dragon named Temeraire. She lives with husband Charles Ardai on Manhattan’s Upper East Side.

Novik is at work on a fourth book in her series, and The New York Times said, “Most days she can be found with her laptop in a cafe at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the few places where she can concentrate enough to churn out the 6,000 words that she considers add up to a productive day.”

Novik made news when Peter Jackson, the New Zealand filmmaker who made The Lord of the Rings trilogy, bought the film rights to her books.

BORROWER: Prolific writer Joyce Carol Oates was called “insensitive” because a short story, “Landfill,” published in The New Yorker, “resembles the true story of John A. Fiocco Jr., a 19-year-old freshman at the College of New Jersey whose body was found in a landfill.”

Matt Golden, a spokesman for the College of New Jersey said, “There are many members of our community who are still grieving, and reading this fictionalized version of the Fiocco tragedy can be painful for them.”

The New York Times pointed out that “countless authors, including Flaubert with Madame Bovary and Robert Penn Warren with All the King’s Men, have drawn from real-life events to create works of fiction. Oates said that she had done the same in the past with her novel Black Water, based on the Edward M. Kennedy accident at Chappaquiddick. She also said she wished many of her story’s elements were not so similar to the true event. She added, “If I had to do it all over again, I certainly would have changed some details.”

NEW TRY: The headline in the business section of The New York Times said: “Trying Again to Make Books Obsolete.” The article described the latest e-book, the Sony Reader, “a small, sleek, portable screen” that was introduced last October at Borders bookstores for $350. This new version is described as “a handsome half-inch-thick slab, a bit smaller than 5 inches by 7 inches, ‘bound’ in a protective leatherette cover.”

The text is made up of millions of transparent, nearly microscopic liquid-filled spheres sandwiched between plastic film. White and black particles float inside them, forming crisp patterns. “The result looks like ink on light gray paper. The reading experience is pleasant, natural and nothing like reading a computer screen.”

On the negative side: “Like an Etch A Sketch, the reader’s screen has to wipe away each page before drawing the next one. Unfortunately, the result is a one-second white-black-white blink that quickly becomes annoying.” The controls were described as “fairly baffling.” There was no search function, video or clickable links either.

The article concludes that readers “may continue to prefer the more established portable-document format. Those older reading machines never run out of power, cost about 2 percent as much and don’t break when dropped. You know: p-books.”

WARNING: Andrew Sean Greer is the author of a novel, The Confessions of Max Tivoli. In a review for The New York Times, Greer wrote: “History stands naked, clothed only by our imagination. So a historical novel has a particularly difficult task: breathing life into a story without losing it in a maze of research.”

SOLO: Mystery writer Dick Francis’s Under Orders is his first book since his wife Mary died in 2000. A biographer, Graham Lord, claimed that Mary had written all of his books. Francis, 85, told The Sunday Herald in England that his wife had done his research and “put the English right.”

Under Orders, without Mary’s help, got good reviews and became a bestseller.

WINNER: Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, 54, won the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. The New York Times published quotes from several of his books.

The following is from The Black Book, translated by Guneli Gun: “You have any idea what love is? Have these words ever served you other than as material for the disgraceful literary sleights of hand you produce for your retarded readers who’re all too ready to believe your fairy tales? I pity you. I despise you. I feel sorry for you. What else have you done with your life aside from turning a phrase and dawdling with words? Answer me!”

“My dear friend,” Galip said, “it’s my profession.”

ENDING: The seventh and last Harry Potter book will be published in the summer. Its only competition has been the “Series of Unfortunate Events” sequence. Last October 13, the 13th and final book in Lemony Snicket’s series about the Baudelaire orphans, The End, was published. The poor siblings suffer disaster after disaster.

The author’s real name is Daniel Handler, 36, of San Francisco. His books have sold more than 51 million copies worldwide since the series began seven years ago.

The New York Times quoted 12-year-old Ben Gandesbery of Piedmont, Calif., to explain why the series may have been so popular: “The adults in the books are kind of
wacky. It’s kind of an odd feeling you get. The kids are the only sane people.”

JAIL VISIT: Last fall, mystery novelist Dennis Lehane went on the road to promote a new story collection, Coronado. One of his stops was the Youthful Offender Program at the Orange County Jail in Orlando, Fla. Lehane spoke to 17 boys, 14 to 17 years of age, who had been accused of serious crimes. The author established his credentials by telling the class that he grew up in a violent neighborhood in Boston. He said, “One or two made it out of my neighborhood. Sixteen other guys went down.”

The prison program, which started in 1995, is headed by John Richter, 53, and the boys had been assigned the book to read and had written reports.

A dozen other authors, including Brian Jacques, author of the Redwall series about mice, have since visited the class.

One of the prisoners said that the reading program “brings you into a whole new life for a brief period. Whatever you’re facing here, you can put it aside.”

MORE FAIRS: The number of book fairs in the U.S. is growing. John Y. Cole, director of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, told The New York Times, “There are now 35 statewide celebrations, and that has gone up tremendously in recent years.”

The National Book Festival in Washington drew 100,000 to the National Mall in Washington last October. In November, the Miami Book Fair International drew 300,000. The fifth annual Vegas Valley Book Festival took place in November with Chuck Palahniuk, author of Fight Club, as the main speaker.

The Latino Book & Family Festival traveled to Houston, Los Angeles, Dallas and Chicago. Connecticut Children’s Book Fair brought together children’s authors, illustrators and Clifford, the big red dog. Ohio’s 19th annual Buckeye Book Fair was for all ages. Actress Patricia Neal was the celebrity host at the Kentucky Book Fair in Frankfurt.

Cole said, “State festivals tend to focus, rightly, on local writers. In the electronic age, books and reading and authors really need promotion more than ever. The real competition now is not the computer per se, but for a reader’s time.”

WHAT SELLS: In an article about how “Even the Well Employed Yearn to Unleash Their Writer’s Muse,” San Francisco literary agent Elise Proulx told The New York Times, “Publishers are looking for high-caliber writing when it comes to commercial fiction, more expertise when it comes to nonfiction and more plot when it comes to literary fiction. I still get a lot of ‘This is the next Tom Clancy’ pitches—that stuff has to be really stellar to work without seeming tired.”

THIEF: Novelist Edna O’Brien’s 20th book is The Light of Evening. In an interview with The New York Times, O’Brien explained that she owns an oceanfront house in Donegal, but she can’t write a line there.

She said, “It’s not hidden enough for me,” she said. “There are these big windows looking out over the Atlantic. County Clare, where I’m from, is more my landscape; it’s full of little byways and copes. For me to write I have to be, a, alone, and b, know that nobody is going to question me. I write the way a thief steals: it’s a little covert.”

O’Brien, who does most of her writing in London, said, “I feel that the imagination is best nourished by not having too much everyday intimacy with a place. It doesn’t mean I’m out of touch. I gather the impulse, the incentive, the nourishment from Ireland, but in England I have seclusion. I’m very thankful, though, because Ireland has given me a good crop of stories. In the big world, you don’t get stories.”

SEASONAL REPORT: Last October, The New York Times reported: “Fall has always been the busy season in publishing, with its inevitable crush of titles scrambling for attention and a toehold in bookstores, but at no time in recent memory has there been such a traffic jam of big-name authors unleashing top-drawer books.”

More than a dozen big names were listed (Mitch Albom, Bob Woodward, John Grisham, Steven King, Michael Crichton, Thomas Harris, etc.). Then Stan Hynd, a book buyer in Manchester Center, Vt., was quoted: “This is one of the best fall seasons for fiction that we’ve seen in a long, long time. The category has been hurting for a few years because political books have been so dominant, so it’s nice that it’s going to bounce back this season.”

David Rosenthal of Simon & Schuster said that the high traffic in stores during the fall was irresistible to publishers. He said, “It is Darwinian. Some books will live, and some books will die.”

FREEBIES: Simon & Schuster sent copies of Robert Harris’s Imperium, a historical novel set in ancient Rome, to influential folks in Washington, D.C.—Senate staffers, campaign operatives and speechwriters.

According to PW, Harris wrote on the S&S website: “I’ve always wanted to write a political novel in which I could distill the universal laws of politics, whether in Washington, London, an African Village, or ancient Rome. . . . To me, an election is as exciting as a football match, and the book is really an attempt to convey something of the drama and excitement of politics.”
DAY TRIP: Richard Ford’s new novel is *The Lay of the Land*, which takes place in New Jersey. For an article in The New York Times, the author drove around the New Jersey shore with Charles McGrath, who wrote that Ford had not lived in that state while he worked on the book.

McGrath wrote: “Mr. Ford, who says he is not one of those authors who make a ‘fetish’ of where they write, began *The Lay of the Land* in Montana roughly a decade ago. For the first year or so, the work consisted simply of making notes in a big three-ring binder. He also worked on the book in New Orleans, where he and his wife, Kristina, used to own a house, and in Maine, where they now spend most of their time.”

Ford said the hard part was finding the right language for the attraction he felt for the Jersey shore. “You’re trying to write about this, and a), it’s New Jersey, so it’s faintly risible. And b), a lot of people have had the experience of going to the shore when they were young; they have very warm recollections. So I thought I should try to find a feasible language of affirmation, and the idea of doing something improbable like that—and also improbabilities like having a Tibetan real estate agent—became the torque of the book.”

The fictional Tibetan, Lobsang Dhargey, goes by the name of Mike Mahoney.

DUELING BOOKS: Last fall, the political races were hot. It was the first time that a senator (George Allen of Virginia) accused a rival candidate (Jim Webb) of being a (gasp) novelist.

Webb, a Vietnam veteran, is the author of six novels about the military and war, including *Fields of Fire* (1978). Allen put out a press release that said Webb’s writings were filled with “chauvinistic attitudes and sexually exploitive references.”

Webb replied with, “You ought to read what George Allen’s sister wrote about him if you want to read about attitudes toward females.”

Jennifer Allen is author of an autobiography. In it, she described her brother as a bully who once dragged her upstairs by her hair because she had defied her father at bedtime.

The New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd jumped into the fray with “Senator George Allen of Virginia unleashed a vicious attack on Jim Webb Thursday night. He called him a fiction writer.”

Dowd wrote, “Gary Hart, who used to write novels with another former senator, William Cohen, once told me that politicians are suspicious of other poles who read novels, much less write them. ‘They thought I was strange,’ he said, ‘because I was caught reading Tolstoy and Kierkegaard.’”

Webb won the election and is now a senator who says he plans to continue to write too.

SUPPORT: Meanwhile, John Grisham and Stephen King held fundraisers for their fellow novelist Jim Webb. And when Grisham appeared on the Charlie Rose TV show to promote his new nonfiction *The Innocent Man*, Grisham said, “You can love this country, you can be a patriot, you can love its soldiers, and you can still be very much against a war in Iraq and not be soft on terror . . . You know, we’re all Americans.”

NOTED: On the used book site abe.com, John Updike’s copy of *Tom Wolfe’s Man in Full* was priced at $4,750. The New York Times said the copy had been marked up before Updike wrote a negative review in The New Yorker. According to abe.com, margin notes include: “ha,” “vulgar writing” and “whole book is lecture by stories.”

WHAT’S HOT: The magazine The Writer asked some people in publishing what they were looking for these days.

Thomas Colgan, executive editor at Berkley Books, said: “We’re looking for something wholly new that will resonate with readers in a big way. What that is, however, I don’t know. I’m not sure that ‘commercial blockbuster’ and ‘literary gems’ are mutually exclusive terms.”

Charles Spicer, executive editor at St. Martin’s Press said, “I’d like to find a big commercial thriller, especially one with a female protagonist and female angles. Another on my wish list would be a juicy historical about someone everyone recognized . . . In nonfiction, books that deal with crime angles.”

Aaron Wehner, editorial director at Ten Speed Press, said that he was looking for “how-to books focusing on nonfiction topics: food, wine, careers and business . . .

“We strive to bring out books of substance that take the subject to another level, whether it’s cooking, career, business or mushroom hunting. We’re always looking for a book that’s the best of its kind, by an author who has a platform and can draw media attention in print, radio and television . . .”

SOLD: A manuscript written by Truman Capote the day before he died on August 25, 1984, was one of more than 300 personal effects sold by Joanne Carson, second wife of Johnny Carson. Capote, who was staying at her house, asked Joanne Carson what she wanted for her birthday, and she said, “Truman, I just want you to write. If you’re writing, I’m happy.”

What he wrote was 14 pages in a spiral notebook entitled “Remembering Willa Cather,” his account of a chance meeting with Cather when he was a teenager. The memoir appeared in the November issue of Vanity Fair.

The New York Times reported
that other Capote items stored in Carson’s house and sold in the auction included his passport and a signed Richard Avedon portrait.

HOT POL: Senator Barack Obama’s new book, The Audacity of Hope, went on sale on October 17 and in less than a month had sold 182,000 copies and was No. 1 on the nonfiction lists. The fact that he had appeared on Oprah Winfrey’s show, Today and 60 Minutes didn’t hurt.

Mark LaFramboise, book buyer at Politics and Prose bookshop in Washington, told The New York Times, “Obama is out of the ballpark completely. Even comparing books by administration officials, nothing comes close. We’re expecting this to just build and build and build.”

Michiko Kakutani wrote in The Times that Obama is “that rare politician who can actually write.”

DOC WINS: Vincent Lam, an emergency room doctor in Toronto, won the Scotiabank Giller Prize for a collection of short stories, Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures. The prize is worth about $35,000. Dr. Lam, 32, told The New York Times, “I thoroughly enjoy writing and I thoroughly enjoy being a physician and I’m proud to do both. My intention is to continue to do both.”

LONGHAND: Nelson DeMille’s 21st novel is Wild Fire. On November 6, the day it was published, it jumped to No. 3 on Amazon’s list. DeMille, 63, has more than 30 million copies of his books in print worldwide. He was described in The New York Times as “a conspiracy theorist of jovial disposition, someone who assigns truth to the most horrifying avenues of speculation without, it would seem, allowing his darker convictions to dampen an otherwise fine time.”

DeMille lives with his fiancée and their child in a mansion on Long Island. Each of his novels takes about a year to research and write, so he turns out one about every 18 months. He writes in longhand, and an assistant types his drafts. DeMille said he was asked to comment on the manuscript of The Da Vinci Code. “I said, ‘This is ridiculous! It makes no sense. And, well, we all know what happened with that.’”

MODEST: Los Angeles crime writer James Ellroy served as host of a Court TV series, “Murder by the Book.” In a New York Times Magazine interview, Ellroy said, “I do not follow contemporary politics. I live in a vacuum. I don’t read books. I don’t read newspapers. I do not own a TV set or a cell phone or a computer. I spend my evenings alone, usually lying in the dark talking to women who aren’t in the room with me.”

Asked if he thinks of himself as a novelist or as a crime writer, he said, “I am a master of fiction. I am also the greatest crime writer who ever lived. I am to the crime novel in specific what Tolstoy is to the Russian novel and what Beethoven is to music.”

Told that he was oddly cheerful for a self-described hermit, Ellroy said, “I am happy by and large. I work hard. And I love life. I am having a blast.”

PROMOTION: In November, Bantam Dell ran three commercials starring a faceless Odd Thomas during the TV show “CSI.” They were promoting Dean Koontz’s thrillers. The third book in the series is entitled Brother Odd. Koontz called the commercials “mini-biofilms” about his fictional character, Odd Thomas.

OOPS! Judith Regan had her own imprint at HarperCollins. She published books—by and about celebrities, criminals, athletes and strippers—that often made news and became bestsellers. But finally she went too far, even for her boss Rupert Murdoch.

O. J. Simpson’s ghost-written If I Did It, which apparently described how he would have killed his wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman—if he had been the killer—created such an uproar that it was cancelled even as it reached bookstores. An interview with Simpson, filmed for Murdoch’s Fox channel and conducted by Regan, was cancelled too.

Regan defended herself by saying that it was her responsibility as a publisher to bring Simpson’s words to the public. She was quoted in The New York Times as comparing herself to “the mainstream publishers who keep Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf in print to this day.”

In December, news broke about a book starring Mickey Mantle, the baseball legend. Regan was editor of 7: The Mickey Mantle Novel, and the author is Peter Golenbock. The Times said the author wants “readers to believe that only fiction can fully convey the Boschian life of Mantle, who emerges as a baseball Caligula, guided happily into group sex by a predatory Billy Martin.” Shortly after 7 was announced, Regan was fired, amid charges that she had made anti-Semitic remarks about some of her colleagues.

BIG BUCKS: The Nobel Prize for Literature provides an annual award of about $1.4 million.

In November, a new Russian national book prize was presented to Dmitry Bykov for his biography, Boris Pasternak. The prize, which is expected to become an annual award, was three million rubles, or just over $113,000. There was also a second prize of 1.5 million rubles to Aleksandr Kabakov for his novel Everything Can Be Put Right, and a third prize of one million rubles went to Mikhail Shishkin for Maidenhair.

The prizes were financed by a
number of Russian business leaders and oil tycoons. Critics, according to The New York Times, described the awards as an attempt by the oligarchs to get some public relations mileage out of literature.

Why don’t some of the really rich in the U.S. give it a try?

THE END: Philip Roth’s ninth and final novel about Nathan Zuckerman, Exit Ghost, will be published next October. The New York Times said that “it will be a portrait of Zuckerman as an old man returning to New York after living more than a decade in the rural isolation of western Massachusetts.”

FAST: This year, about 80,000 people agreed to try and write a 50,000-word novel in 30 days. That’s an average of 1,667 words a day during November, which, according to The New York Times, was National Novel Writing Month, a.k.a. NaNOWriMo.

Chris Baty, 33, of Oakland, Calif., started the novel-writing event in 1999. Twenty-one people participated that year, but only six finished. This year, nearly 13,000 writers reported completing their novels by deadline.

In at least a dozen cases, novels that began during NaNOWriMo have been published. These include two romance novels by Lani Diane Rich, who said the experience helped her banish her perfectionist tendencies, which had been a problem.

DEATHS


Isadore Barmash, 84, died Nov. 9 in Jamaica, Queens. The former business news reporter for The New York Times was author of Welcome to Our Conglomerate—You’re Fired (1971); Great Business Disasters: Swindlers, Bunglers and Frauds in American History (1972); More Than They Bargained For: The Rise and Fall of Korvettes (1981); and A Not-So Tender Offer: An Insider’s Look at Mergers and Their Consequences (1995).

William Bright, 78, died Oct. 15 in Louisville, Colo. The linguistics professor at the University of Colorado was the author of American Indian Linguistics and Literature (1984); A Coyote Reader (1993); 1,500 California Place Names: Their Origin and Meaning (1998) and Native American Placenames of the United States (2004).

Bebe Moore Campbell, 56, died Nov. 27 in Los Angeles. She was the author of Successful Women, Angry Men (1986); Sweet Summer: Growing Up With and Without My Dad (1989); Your Blues Ain’t Like Mine (1992); Brothers and Sisters (1994); Singing in the Comeback Choir (1998); What You Owe Me (2001); and 72 Hour Hold (2005).

Eli Cantor, 93, died Oct. 17 in Sarasota, Fla. He was the author of the novels Love Letters and The Nest, a bestseller. He was also a playwright, an attorney, a graphic designer and a composer.

Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, 98, died Nov. 4 in Fresno, Calif. She was coauthor, with a younger brother, of Cheaper by the Dozen (1948).

Rosamond Carr, 94, died Sept. 29 in Rwanda. The American fashion illustrator was the author of Land of a Thousand Hills: My Life In Rwanda (1999).

Curtis Cate, 82, died Nov. 16 in Paris. He was the author of Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1970); George Sand (1975); The Ides of August: The Berlin Wall Crisis, 1961 (1978); Andre Malraux (1995) and Friedrich Nietzsche (2005).

Maureen Daly, 95, died Sept. 25 in Palm Desert, Calif. She was the author of Seventeenth Summer (1942); Acts of Love (1986) and First a Dream (1990).

William Diehl, 81, died Nov. 24 in Atlanta. He was the author of Sharky’s Machine (1978), Primat Fear (1993) and other novels.

James Whitfield Ellison, 77, died Jan. 9 in Manhattan. He was the author of seven novels, including I’m Owen Harrison Harding (1955); The Freest Man on Earth (1958); Master Prim (1968); and Descent (1970). He also wrote five nonfiction works, adapted several screenplays into novels, and was a member of the Consulting Editors Alliance.

Albert B. Friedman, 86, died Nov. 11 in Los Angeles. He was the author of the books The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World (1956); The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry (1961) and other books.

Clifford Geertz, 80, died Oct. 30 in Philadelphia. The Princeton anthropologist was the author of...
Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author (1988), which won a National Book Critics Circle Award. He also wrote The Interpretation of Cultures (1973); Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (1983); The Religion of Java (1960); and Peddlers and Princes (1963).


Herman Klurfeld, 90, died Dec. 18 in Boca Raton, Fla. Ghostwriter for columnist Walter Winchell for 29 years, Klurfeld was author of Behind the Lines: The World of Drew Pearson and Winchell, His Life and Times.

Norman Lewis, 93, died Sept. 8 in Whittier, Calif. He was the author of Word Power Made Easy (1979); 30 Days to Better English (1985); and 30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary (1971).

Eric Newby, 86, died Oct. 20 in Guildford, England. The travel writer was author of The Last Grain Race (1956); A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush (1958); Love and War in the Apennines (1971) and Round Ireland in Low Gear (1978).

Elizabeth Ogilvie, 89, died Sept. 9 in Cushing, Me. She was the author of High Tide at Noon (1944), a series of novels about Scotland and 14 books for young adults. Her last novel was The Day Before Winter (1997).


Ann Richards, 73, died Sept. 13 in Austin, Tex. The former governor of Texas was the coauthor of Straight from the Heart: My Life in Politics and Other Places (1989) and I’m Not Slowing Down: Winning My Battle with Osteoporosis (2003).

Robert Rosenblum, 79, died Dec. 6 in Greenwich Village. The curator and art historian was author of Transformations in Late 18th Century Art (1967) and The Dog in Art from Rococo to Post-Modernism (1988).

Norman Salsitz, 86, died Oct. 11 in Boston. He lived in Springfield, N.J. He was the author of Against All Odds (1990), A Jewish Boyhood in Poland (1992) and Three Homelands (2003).


Mary Stolz, 86, died Dec. 15 in Longboar Key, Fla. She was the author of more than 60 books, including Ready or Not (1953), And Love Replied (1958), Some Merry-Go-Round Music (1959) and Leap Before You Look (1972)—all YA novels. Among her books for younger readers were The Leftover Elf (1952), Emmett’s Pig (1959) and The Bully of Barkham Street (1963). She also wrote a novel for adults: Truth and Consequence (1953).

William Styron, 81, died Nov. 1 on Martha’s Vineyard. He was the author of Lie Down in Darkness (1951); The Long March (1955); The Confessions of Nat Turner (1967); Sophie’s Choice (1980), which won the American Book Award; Darkness Visible (1990); and A Tidewater Morning: Three Tales from Youth (1993).

George Tindall, 85, died Dec. 2 in Chapel Hill, N.C. The historian was the author of The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945 (1967); South Carolina Negroes, 1877–1900 (1952) and The Disruption of the Solid South (1972).

George Trow, 63, died Nov. 24 in Naples, Italy. A New Yorker writer for nearly 30 years, he was the author of Within the Context of No Context (1981); Bullies (1980); The City in the Mist (1984) and The Harvard Black Rock Forest (2004).

Frederic Wakeman, 68, died Sept. 14 in Lake Oswego, Ore. He was the author of seven books on Chinese history, including The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in the 17th Century (1985) and Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service (2003).

Jack Williamson, 98, died Nov. 10 in Portales, N.M. He was the author of more than 50 novels, including The Stonehenge Gate (2005); Wonder’s Child: My Life in Science Fiction (1984), which won the Hugo Award; The Humanoids (1949); Darker Than You Think (1948); Star Bridge (1955); Manseed (1982) and Lifeburst (1984). In 1986 he was named a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers of America.

Ellen Willis, 64, died Nov. 9 in Queens, N.Y. She was the author of Beginning to See the Light: Pieces of a Decade (1981); No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays (1992) and Don’t Think, Smile! Notes on a Decade of Denial (1999).
Rilla Askew’s *Fire in Beulah* was chosen by readers to be the centennial book for Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma in 2007. Oklahoma Reads is a one book-one state program sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Humanities Council.

The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art announced the first four recipients of its new awards, The Carle Honors, at a benefit last September in New York City. The awards recognize Artists, Mentors (editors, educators and designers), Angels (those providing financial support) and Bridges (individuals and organizations that have brought the art of the picture book to larger audiences through work in other fields). The winners included Ann Beneduce, Mentor, and Rosemary Wells, Artist.

Kelly Bennett’s picture book *Not Norman*, received the Texas Institute of Letters Friends of the Austin Public Library Award for Best Children’s Book for 2005, an Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Gold Medal Award, a Family Fun Magazine Best Children’s Book for 2005, and a Children’s Choice Award from the Children’s Book Council.

The Southern California Booksellers Association presented their fifth annual SCBA Book Awards at a ceremony in Los Angeles in October. Tony Cohan received the Nonfiction award for *Mexican Days: Journeys Into the Heart of Mexico*, Celeste Davidson Mannis received the award for Best Children’s Book for *Snapshots: The Wonders of Monterey Bay*, and T. Jefferson Parker won in the Mystery category for *The Fallen: A Novel*.

Ken Derby’s novel, *The Top 10 Ways to Ruin the First Day of 5th Grade*, was voted by Alabama students as their favorite book in the grades 4-6 category and received the 2006 Emphasis on Reading Award, presented by the Alabama Department of Education.

The Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, in Gettysburg, Pa. awarded E. L. Doctorow the 2006 Michael Shaara Book Prize for *The March* at a ceremony on November 19. The award, given annually to the best novel about the Civil War published in the previous year and carrying a $2,500 prize, is named after the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Killer Angels*, the basis for the film *Gettysburg*.

The Outreach Endowment Fund of the University of Illinois Foundation presented Michelle Edwards the 2006 Gryphon Award for Children’s Literature for her illustrated book *Stinky Stern Forever. Babymouse: Queen of the World!*, by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm, received an honor book award. Edwards was also a co-winner of the 2006 Patterson Award and a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award in the Children’s Fiction category, as was Marion Dane Bauer for *A Bear Named Trouble*. Bauer was also a finalist in the Children’s Picture Book category for *If Frogs Made Weather*. First place went to Kristine O’Connell George, for *Fold Me a Poem*. Marsha Qualey’s *Just Like That* was a finalist in Young Adult Fiction.

Karen English was a recipient of the 2006 Highlights for Children Annual Fiction Contest for her story “Rukiyah’s Ramadan.”

The Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, a grant-giving organization supporting individuals working in the arts, presented Joan Frank with an award in support of her novel-in-progress, *Scarlet and Melanie*.

The 38th NAACP Image Award nominees include Dwight Fryer, in the category of Outstanding Literary Work from a Debut Author, for his novel *The Legend of Quito Road*. The awards were presented at a ceremony on March 2.

George Garrett was awarded the 2006 Carole Weinstein Poetry Prize. The $10,000 annual prize goes to a poet with connections to central Virginia who has made significant contributions to the art of poetry.

Tess Gerritsen’s novel *Vanish* received the 2006 Nero Wolfe Award for best mystery novel published in 2005. The award, presented by the Wolfe Pack at the annual Black Orchid Banquet on December 2 in New York City, honors an author for literary excellence in the mystery genre.

David Grinspoon was awarded the 2006 Carl Sagan Medal for Public Communication of Science by the American Astronomical Society, for *Lonely Planets: The Natural Philosophy of Alien Life and Venus Revealed*.

The 16th Annual James Beard Foundation Awards Ceremony was held on May 8 in New York City. Madhur Jaffrey was a winner in the Cookbook Hall of Fame category for *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*; Nick Malgieri, *A Baker’s Tour*, was a nominee for Baking and Desserts; and Nina Simonds, *Spices of Life: Simple and Delicious Recipes for Great Health*, was a winner in the Healthy Focus category.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee’s *On the Altar of Greece* received the seventh annual Gival Press Poetry Award.

Julius Lester’s *The Old African* was a recipient of the 2006 Africana Book Awards, presented by the Outreach Council of the African Studies Association. The awards were given at a ceremony on November 18 in San Francisco.
The 57th National Book Awards, presented by the National Book Foundation, were held on November 15 in New York City. Runners-up included Patricia McCormick’s Sold, for Young People’s Literature, and Jess Walter’s The Zero, for Fiction.

Katherine Paterson received the 2006 Astrid Lindgren Award for Literature, presented by the Swedish government. The award is the largest international award for children’s book authors, about $640,000.

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) awarded the 2006 Alex Awards to 10 adult books that will appeal to teen readers. Nancy Rawles’s My Jim and Jeannette Walls’s The Glass Castle: A Memoir were among the winners. The awards, cosponsored by the Margaret Alexander Edwards Trust and Booklist, were announced at the American Library Association’s Midwinter Meeting. YALSA also announced the winners of its annual Teens’ Top Ten booklist, which included Maureen Johnson, 13 Little Blue Envelopes; Melissa Kantor, If I Have a Wicked Stepmother, Where’s My Prince?; and Gabrielle Zevin, Elsewhere. The books were voted on by teens across the country during Teen Read Week, October 15-21.

Ana Maria Rodriguez’s book Edward Jenner: Conqueror of Smallpox, from the Great Minds of Science Series, is among the SB&F Best Books of 2006, chosen by Science Books & Film Online, a journal published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The Haunting of Swan’s Fancy, by Brenda Seabrooke, received the 2006 West Virginia Children’s Book Award. The winner is chosen by vote of the children of West Virginia.

Richard Dean Smith was a finalist in the Health: Medical Reference category of the Best Books 2006 Awards, presented by USA Book News, for Trust in a Medical Setting.

The Fund for Women Artists awarded Susan Stinson an Individual Artist Grant. The $1,500 stipend is awarded twice a year to feminist writers through the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund.

Richard G. Williams Jr.’s 2006 book, Stonewall Jackson: The Black Man’s Friend, is the basis for a documentary film currently under production, tentatively titled “Stonewall Jackson: His Fight Before the War.”

BULLETIN BOARD

So to Speak, a biannual feminist journal of poetry, fiction, nonfiction and art published by George Mason University, is accepting entries for its 2007 Annual Fiction Contest for short stories. First place is $500 and publication in the journal; two runners-up will also receive publication. Send stories of up to 5,000 words with a $15 entry fee for each story. Deadline: March 15, 2007. For full submission guidelines and information about the journal’s mission, visit www.gmu.edu/org/sts/contests.htm or e-mail sts@gmu.edu. So to Speak (Fiction Contest), George Mason University, MSN 2D6, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.

The Marguerite and Lamar Smith Fellowship for Writers, at the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians, and Columbus State University, GA, provides semester-long fellowships for writers. During the September 1–December 1, 2007 semester, the Smith/McCullers Fellow will receive a $5,000 stipend and residence in a private apartment in Carson McCullers’s childhood home. Fellows must give readings or workshop presentations, and a final presentation. To apply, mail an application form and writing sample by April 1, 2007. Two references are required, using forms supplied by the McCullers Center. To download an application form, visit www.mccullerscenter.org/fellowships.htm, contact Cathy Fussell, Director, at (706) 568-2054, or write to The Carson McCullers Fellowship Program, Department of Language and Literature, Columbus State University, 4225 University Avenue, Columbus, GA 31907. There is no application fee.

Writecorner Press will accept submissions for the 2007 E. M. Koeppel Short Fiction Contest until April 30, 2007. The press will award $1,100 to the winner and $100 to two “Editors’ Choice” picks, all of whose work will be published on www.writercorner.com and considered for archival in the press’s permanent online archive. If the winning story’s author is currently enrolled in a college or university, the $500 P. L. Titus Scholarship will automatically be added to the prize. To enter, submit unpublished stories of up to 3,000 words with a $15 entry fee for a single story and $10 for each additional story. Include one typed copy of the story and two typed title pages, one with the title of the story only and the second with the title, the author’s name and contact information, and a four-line author bio. 2007 Koeppel Contest, PO Box 140310, Gainesville, FL 32614. www.writecorner.com/award_guidelines.asp.
Orchid: A Literary Review is holding its annual Short Fiction Contest, awarding $1,100 and publication in the Spring 2008 issue to the first prize winner, and notation and possible publication to four finalists. Submit stories of up to 7,000 words with a $15 entry fee for each story. All entrants will receive a free issue of the journal. **Deadline: June 1, 2007.** For more information, or to apply online, visit orchidlit.org/_wsn/page4.html, or send entries to Orchid: A Literary Review, Attn: 2007 Short Fiction Contest, PO Box 131457, Ann Arbor, MI 48113-1457. editors@orchidlit.org.

The University of Michigan Press is reviewing submissions for its 2007 Michigan Literary Fiction awards for novels by authors who have published at least one literary novel or story collection in English. The award was created in response to the unwillingness of the part of publishers to risk taking on a second book with an author whose work hasn't sold enough copies. To be considered, send a typed, double-spaced, single-sided, numbered manuscript with the title on every page between **February 1 and July 1.** The author's name should be included on a cover letter, with the title of the book, but not on the manuscript. There is no entry fee, but submissions must include a copy of a previously published book of literary fiction. The winner will receive a $1,000 advance and publication by the University of Michigan Press the following fall. For full submission guidelines, visit www.press.umich.edu/fiction. Michigan Literary Fiction Awards, University of Michigan Press, 839 Greene Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-3209. ump.fiction@umich.edu.

Memoirs, Ink. is seeking personal essays, memoirs, or stories based on autobiographical experiences and written in the first person. The contest carries cash prizes of $1000 for first place, $500 for second, and $250 for third. Send previously unpublished entries of up to 3,000 words, with an entry fee of $15 (check or money order made out to Memoirs, Ink.), by **August 1, 2007.** Submissions should include a contest submission form, which can be printed at www.memoirsink.com/docs/testmain.html. Memoirs Ink Writing Contest, 10866 Washington Boulevard, Suite 518, Culver City, CA 90232. www.memoirsink.com; Memoirs ink@gmail.com.

**BOOKS BY MEMBERS**

**Chris Abani: The Virgin of Flames; Aberjhani: Visions of a Skylark Dressed in Black; Michael Agar: Dope Double Agent: The Naked Emperor on Drugs; Kathleen Alcalá: The Desert Remembers My Name: On Family and Writing; Jenny Allen (with illustrations by Jules Feiffer): The Long Chalkboard; Susanne Alleyn: A Treasury of Regrets; Rudolfo Anaya: Curse of the Chupacabra; The Man Who Could Fly and Other Stories; Kim Antieau: Broken Moon; Derek Armstrong: The Game; Jennifer Armstrong: Once Upon a Banana; Sandy Asher: What a Party!; Rilla Askew: Harpsong;**


**A New Look at America's Story: Betsy Byars: Boo's Dinosaur;**

Carolyn Meyer: Loving Will Shakespeare; Harold Burton Meyers: The Death at Auahi; David Milgrim: Another Day in the Milky Way; Stephen Moore (and Johnny Holliday): Hoop Tales: Maryland Terrapins Men’s Basketball; Kate Morgenroth: Echo; Lisa Moser: Watermelon Wishes; Walter Dean Myers: Street Love;

Radine Trees Nehring: Wedding to Die For; Martina Newberry (and BamDev Sharma): The Banyan and the Elder; Alyson Noel: Fly Me to the Moon; Michael Norman: The Commission; Haunted Homeland; E. Lee North: Eyes that Haunt;

Carol O’Connell: Find Me; Ron Offen: Off-Target; Diana O’Hehir: Erased from Memory; T. L. Orcutt: That’s What I’m Talkin’ About: Awakening in the Land of Human Beings;


Mary Quattlebaum: Sparks Fly High: The Legend of Dancing Point;

Pearl Rance-Reardon: Little Back Room: A Collection of Caribbean and Other Short Stories; Doreen Rappaport: Nobody Gonna Turn Me ’Round: Stories and Songs of the Civil Rights Movement; Sam Reaves: Homicide 69; Victoria Redel: The Border of Truth; Anna S. Redsand: Viktor Frankl: A Life Worth Living; Lynn Reiser: You and Me, Baby; Luanne Rice: The Edge of Winter; Lori Ries: Fix It, Sam; Mrs. Fickle’s Pickles; Judith Merkle Riley: The Water Devil: A Margaret of Ashbury Novel; Ann Rinaldi: An Unlikely Friendship: A Novel of Mary Todd Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley; Mary Russell Roberson (and Kevin G. Stewart): Exploring the Geology of the Carolinas: A Field Guide to Favorite Places from Chimney Rock to Charleston; Gillian Roberts: All’s Well That Ends; Ana Maria Rodriguez: Eduardo Jenner, Conqueror of Smallpox; A Day in the Life of the Brain; Phyllis Root: Lucia and the Light; Susan L. Roth (and Angelo Mafucci): Do Re Mi: If You Can Read Music, Thank Guido d’Arezzo; S. J. Rozan: In This Rain; Susan Goldman Rubin: Andy Warhol: Pop Art Painter; Brent Runyon: Maybe;


Patricia Volk: To My Dearest Friends;


Philip Yancey: Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?; Jane Yolen (and Heidi E. Y. Stemple): Sleep, Black Bear, Sleep; Alexandra York: Over the Years: Poems, Lyrics, Songs & Prose; Lynn York: The Sweet Life;

Jane Breskin Zalben: Leap; Mark Richard Zubro: Everyone’s Dead But Us; Connie Zweig: A Moth to the Flame: The Story of Sufi Poet Rumi
The Authors Guild Interview

Continued from page 10

and what they’re interested in. We’re experiencing a kind of “hurried child” syndrome. Charlotte’s Web is something that is probably read to a five-year-old, whereas a few years ago, children wouldn’t have read Charlotte’s Web until they were eight. There are distinctions in reading abilities, and whether you’re a publisher or a bookseller or a librarian, you’re hip to the fact that you’re not going to hand a seven-year-old a book that is for 11-year-olds. To make those distinctions in terms of age levels seems to me pretty smart. And of course it’s also completely opportunistic. You have a publishing program that has picture books, nonfiction, teen—those are different categories in publishing now.

Do you think that authors have begun to classify themselves differently, or have they always wanted to be very clear about which age group they write for?

I think some do and some don’t. If you’re a picture book writer, it’s very clear that you’re a picture book writer. But sometimes I get material that appears to be middle-grade to me, but the author is thinking it’s teen, or it appears to be teen to me but the author is thinking it’s teen/adult. I don’t think that authors always know who they’re going for. In the best sense, they’re just writing their stories, and it’s up to us to figure out where they belong.

But I remember when Junie B. Jones first came out, and it was a book about a kindergartner that was written on a second-grade level. The question at first was, How can you sell a book about a kindergartner to a second-grader? We had become so narrow and “grade-levelled” in our thinking that we didn’t think second-graders would read about kindergartners. We were wrong.

As publishing houses become larger and more interested in double-digit sales returns, are they less willing to take risks on children’s or young adult titles than they were 10 or 15 years ago?

It depends on the publishing house. Certainly from my perspective, houses are about making the business bigger this year than it was last year. They’re concentrating on growth and on success. But everybody does it a little differently. It would seem, from the outside looking in, that everybody talks about taking risks or being innovative, or valuing originality and risk-taking, but in fact, when push comes to shove, it’s hard to do that. Everybody wants the Big Book. They want the bestseller, the big series, the big idea. But I don’t know if that’s really acquirable. I think it’s “build-able,” but it really takes a lot of time and effort, and the luck of the moment. If there were a formula for success, I’d bottle it and sell it. But there isn’t. There’s always that one, indefinable quality in something that becomes hugely successful that you simply can’t know or capture.

The big challenge for successful publishers today is to manage the success they have. It’s not about managing failure, it’s about managing success. What happens at the end of a big series? What happens at the end of A Series of Unfortunate Events? Now it’s the challenge to the publisher to say, “OK, how can we not completely freak out,” and build for next year? It’s really, really difficult, whether it’s Magic Treehouse or Junie B. Jones or Harry Potter—all those things will leave a huge gap in the marketplace when they end, and the immediate response to the gap is to fill it up with something. Well, that something is not necessarily going to be a good idea, if it’s just filler.

Has anything dramatic happened in the world of children’s book publishing over the past year—or even recent months—likely to stimulate more changes in the market?

The end of A Series of Unfortunate Events is already having people running around and saying, “What does this mean?” We’ll see.

It will be interesting to keep an eye on things with that in mind. It’s hard to conceive of what another bestselling series would be.

That’s the thing. I always felt, having worked on a number of best-selling series, that you can’t look in the same place—lightning doesn’t strike the same place twice, in terms of the category, or even the author. As much as you think, “No, it can, it will,” my experience is that it won’t.
Legal Watch

Continued from page 15

ber 2001 in Texas. On January 5, 2006, the Texas Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Harvest House and the authors, concluding that the references made to The Local Church in *The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* are not defamatory as a matter of law. The Texas Supreme Court has now refused to take another look at the case.

In its decision, the court of appeals determined that *The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* made no defamatory statements concerning The Local Church. The book, approximately 700 pages long, contains a chapter on The Local Church and the Living Stream Ministry that is no more than one and one-quarter pages long. The only other references to either The Local Church or the Living Stream Ministry are contained in one chart, one list, and a footnote. To maintain a defamation action, a Texas plaintiff has to prove three things: (1) the defendant published a statement; (2) the statement was defamatory concerning the plaintiff; (3) the defendant acted with actual malice (if the plaintiff is a public figure) or negligence (if the plaintiff is a private individual) regarding the truth of the statement. In this case, simple as it seems, the question boiled down to whether the statements contained in *The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* could be categorized as defamatory and whether the statements were even about The Local Church.

Not all unpleasant statements are actionable. Statements that are obviously presented as opinions rather than cold fact are not defamatory as a matter of law. The book’s Introduction, which does not mention The Local Church by name, presents a list of negative activities, including physical abuse, child molestation, fraudulent fundraising and drug smuggling, that the authors claim are often displayed by groups they characterize as “cults.” According to the authors, “cults” are groups that claim compatibility with Christianity but engage in behaviors that contradict historic Christianity and biblical Christianity.

The court of appeals considered whether identifying an organization as a “cult” as that term is defined in *The Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* is actionable. In its ruling, the court determined that “the issue of whether a group’s doctrines are compatible with Christianity depends upon the religious conviction of the speaker.” In this case, in order to decide whether calling a certain group a “cult” is both factual and false, a court would have to evaluate the quality of the speaker’s religious beliefs. Therefore, the court concluded, “being labeled a ‘cult’ is not actionable, because the truth or falsity of the statement depends upon one’s religious beliefs, an ecclesiastical matter that cannot and should not be tried in a court of law.”

The court also decided that the list of negative behaviors attributed to “cults” could not be reasonably construed to be a statement about The Local Church in particular, the second element of a defamation claim, because the Introduction makes no direct mention of an organization, and does not indirectly lead the reasonable reader to believe that all of the organizations mentioned throughout the book engage in the activities described in the Introduction. The court engaged in the same analysis to determine that the discussions of “acceptance of occult powers” and “promotion of idolatry” in the Doctrinal Appendix are matters of religious belief that cannot be evaluated for truth or falsity by a court of law. Furthermore, the references to human sacrifice, murder, prostitution and snake worship that appear throughout the Doctrinal Appendix could not be said to have been made about The Local Church.

It looks like the other cheek won’t be turned any time soon. The Local Church plans to ask the Texas Supreme Court to reconsider its decision.

—Anita Fore

Director of Legal Services

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Legal Services Scorecard

From October 24, 2006 through January 24, 2007, the Authors Guild Legal Service Department handled 227 legal inquiries. Included were:

- 31 book contract reviews
- 10 agency contract reviews
- 9 reversion of rights inquiries
- 40 inquiries on copyright law, including infringement, registration, duration and fair use
- 4 inquiries regarding securing permissions and privacy releases
- 3 electronic rights inquiries
- 5 First Amendment inquiries
- 125 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)
Native Son

BY MICHAEL DORMAN

For six decades William Bradford Huie—author of 23 books that sold more than 30 million copies worldwide—was an outcast in his hometown of Hartselle, Ala., and the entire state of Alabama. Although he was a ninth-generation Alabamian, he would not bend to local sentiment. He fought segregation, George Wallace and the Ku Klux Klan.

But now, 20 years after his death, the Hartselle City Council has finally come to terms with his greatness as perhaps Alabama’s most prolific author—a man who walked the streets of the town with everyone from Richard Burton to Truman Capote. The council voted unanimously, despite past vitriol, to rename the local library the William Bradford Huie Library. The vote came in the face of stern opposition from some unreconstructed members of Friends of the Library. They contended that Huie had never done anything to promote Hartselle and that other residents were more deserving of the honor. Perhaps some of them remembered him standing guard on his lawn with a shotgun as hooded Klansmen circled his house with flaming crosses.

At the dedication ceremony November 10, his widow, Martha Huie, said: “He loved his people and this place.” But Alabamians took 60 years to recognize that—making him anathema from the time he wrote his first novel, Mud on the Stars, which became the movie Wild River with Montgomery Clift and Lee Remick. Hartselle residents and University of Alabama students, alumni and faculty members claimed he belittled them in the novel.

A devotee of the controversial practice of checkbook journalism, Huie broke several major national stories by paying killers to tell him their stories. He paid the murderers of Emmett Till—already acquitted by a Mississippi jury—to describe the killing for a Look magazine article. He paid $35,000 to James Earl Ray, convicted killer of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., for his story.

Huie wrote both nonfiction books and novels, seven of them becoming films. Among them were The Execution of Private Slovik, an Emmy-award TV play starring Martin Sheen; The Americanization of Emily (Julie Andrews and James Garner); and The Revolt of Mamie Stover (Jane Russell).

He also worked for H. L. Mencken on The American Mercury, succeeding Mencken as its editor, and moderated a national TV interview program, Chronoscope, that was a precursor of Meet the Press.

Huie was my mentor in the book-writing business. We once collaborated on a book that became the movie The Klansman, starring Richard Burton in the unlikely role of an Alabamian, and O. J. Simpson in his first film role. “It was one of the worst bombs I ever saw,” Huie told me more than once.

He gave me the best advice I have ever received about writing—advice he said he had received from W. Somerset Maugham: “You have to write every day of your life because, once you stop, it’s damned hard to start again.”

Authors Legacy Society

We invite members of the Guild to join the Authors Legacy Society, a group of authors who have elected to benefit the endowment of the Authors Guild or Authors Guild Foundation through their wills or estate plans.

There are a number of ways Guild members can make an estate commitment, including naming the Authors Guild or Authors Guild Foundation in your will or naming either organization as a beneficiary of your retirement plan or life insurance policy.

For more information on the benefits of The Authors Legacy Society and how to make an estate commitment, please contact Julia Berney, Director of Development, 212-594-7931, or write her at the Guild offices at 31 East 32nd Street, New York, NY 10016 or jberney@authorsguild.org.
skim a book, looking for the facts they’ll need to pass a quiz, rather than to dive in and savor it. Kids are taught to stay on the surface, just as they’re taught that reading is merely a means to the end of getting a goodie. No wonder research on AR and other reading incentive programs confirms the counterproductive effects found with rewards more generally. (For citations, contact me in care of www.alfiekohn.org.)

Our goal isn’t just to put our books in children’s hands today; it’s to help them grow into lifelong readers. Programs like AR make that less likely, and we ought to go out of our way to refuse our cooperation.

Alfie Kohn
Belmont, MA

Shortly before my article about Accelerated Reader (“Off-List Books Score No Points with Students”) appeared in the Fall 2006 Bulletin, I attended the World Fantasy Convention at Austin, Tex., and had some of my worst AR worries confirmed. Literary agent Barry Goldblatt leaned into the microphone and proclaimed: “AR is evil.” Mark London Williams, whose middle-grade “Danger Boy” series is published by Candlewick Press, told of taking the AR quiz for one of his books—and failing it. The test was so poorly written that a student who had actually read and understood the book would be unable to answer questions posed by a test preparer who, apparently, had done neither. Not only am I convinced that AR is bad for writers and readers, I wonder about possible copyright infringement. Does a third-party, commercial venture have the right to develop and sell quizzes for copyrighted books without the rights holders’ permission or participation? How can authors who never see the quizzes for their books know whether those quizzes are accurate or well written? I think this subject is one that the Authors Guild’s legal services department might want to explore. Professional librarians and educators offer insights into AR’s good and bad aspects at: chickenspaghetti.typepad.com/chicken_spaghetti/2007/01/want_readers_ge.html

Deborah J. Lightfoot
Crowley, TX

I thoroughly enjoyed your article on the British Way of Libel. When my novel The Man from Marseille was initially published in the UK, my editor brought to my attention the fact that the names of real people—John Gielgud, Anthony Burgess (both of whom were then still living), Tom Stoppard and others—were mentioned at various points in the narrative. None was portrayed in a negative light, merely as someone the narrator happens to meet in the corridors of the BBC or at various cocktail parties. Apparently, even mentioning a name could invite a lawsuit, and so names were dropped in favor of such usages as “a certain knighted actor” or “a clever-clever playwright.” As my editor pointed out, everyone reading would instantly recognize whom I was alluding to. “Let the reader enjoy his moment of recognition,” he said, and on that he rested his case.

J. P. Smith
Newburyport, MA

Misspelled, Britannia!

To the Editor:

I suppose you’ve already gotten 500 e-mails pointing out that you misspelled “Britannia” on your fall Bulletin’s cover and table of contents, although not on the piece’s headline. Kind of stunning.

I suggest, at the Bulletin, you keep your Art Department away from the copy. Anyway, best wishes.

David Sacks
Ottawa, ON, Canada

The editor, not the “art department,” is to blame. Her only excuse is that it’s getting harder and harder to keep the Britannies, or Britannies, of the world straight.

—Ed.

From top: Britannia; Britney; Brittany, France; Brittany spaniel.
I don’t know what to make of Campbell Geeslin’s remark (Bulletin, Fall 2006) that the average vocabulary today is 2,000 words and that most authors have a vocabulary of 7,500 words.

I think that if you check, you’ll find the vocabulary of an average five-year-old is over 2,000 words, and I believe the average high school grad knows about 10,000 words. There is a difference between active vocabulary (the words a person uses in his speech and writing) and passive vocabulary (words he recognizes when he sees or hears them), with active vocabulary being much smaller than passive. But even if Geeslin’s figures are for active vocabulary, they are surely too low.

I haven’t seen figures on authors’ vocabularies, but I doubt seriously if a person with a vocabulary of 7,500 words could be much of a writer. I’m also very skeptical about the idea that the average vocabulary in Shakespeare’s time was 500 words. True, most people at that time could not read, but today there are chimpanzees with vocabularies larger than that, and most of them don’t read either.

If Geeslin has a source to support his extraordinary numbers, I’d like to see it. Or maybe he was just trying to see if anybody reads his column?

Paul Chance
Seaford, DE

After consulting The Story of English by McCrum, Cran and McNeil, Geeslin renounces his dubious original source in favor of Story’s: “Shakespeare had one of the largest vocabularies of any English writer, some 30,000 words. (Estimates of an educated person’s vocabulary today vary, but it is probably about half this, 15,000.)”

“A book with three authors,” he says, “can’t be wrong.”
Membership Application

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How did you become interested in joining the Guild? (check one)
☐ Invitation ☐ Writing journal ☐ Other
☐ Referred by ______________________ ☐ Support and advocacy efforts ☐ Legal services ☐ Other

What is your primary reason for joining? ☐ Site-builder and other Web services ☐ Other

 Writers may qualify on the basis of being book authors or freelance journalists. Book authors must have been published by an established American publisher. A writer who has a contract with an established publisher for a work not yet published may join as an associate member. A contract with a vanity press does not qualify a writer for membership in the Guild. Freelance journalists must have published three works, fiction or nonfiction, in a periodical of general circulation within the last eighteen months.

**Book(s)**

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**Freelance articles**

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