

# Novelists' Ink

*The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc.—a professional organization for writers of popular fiction*

Volume 8, Number 12

December 1997

## *Tom McCormack's Take on the World of Publishing in the '90s*

Public speaking is a lot like writing, but there are differences. One is that the speaker has to worry about his *appearance*. Imagine if, while you were writing, you had to worry about your appearance. Uh-uh, don't let your hand touch your nose, what will the computer think? And your outfit! Sweat-pants and a torn Elvis T-shirt?! Who'll take your writing seriously? Public speaking reminds me of the line from Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*: "One nice thing about masturbation: You don't have to look your best."

Speakers also have to worry about delivery. Picture Puccini, if he not only had to compose the thing, but then had to sing soprano. Still, you'd think I'd find speaking easy enough—I'm always talking to myself, making speeches. When I retired from publishing earlier this year, I told people I was going to be a playwright, so when they saw me walking along the street talking to myself they'd say, "Oh that Tom, always working."

I don't get any better though. Once I gave a publishing talk, and there were two speakers, and I was the second. I noticed a friend of mine come in late, so late that he missed the first talk entirely. I said to him afterwards that I felt bad for him because, I said "You missed a really good speaker."

"Aw, Tom," he said, "I didn't come here to listen to a good speaker. I came here to listen to you."

Another time—true story—I was asked to give the keynote address at a librarian's convention. They had a printed schedule of the events, and I saw I was to go on at 9:30, right after dinner. Ah, I said to

**Speaking Out at the NINC Conference is the "retired" St. Martin's Press Publisher and Editor, now playwright and PW's Cheerful Skeptic**

myself, prime time. Then I noticed the next note on the schedule. It said, "Hospitality suite opens at 9:30 sharp!"...

Now, what was I doing with those introductory paragraphs? I was working on my persona. You know what a "persona" is: It's the voice and personality of the narrator of the novel. Imagine a novel told in the first person. The reader is listening while the voice on the page says, "Last night I dreamt I went back to Manderley." Who's talking to us? Well, the narrator. But almost inevitably we tend to fuse, amalgamate, the narrator with the author of the novel. Oh, we don't think that Daphne DuMaurier actually had that dream last night, and, sure, we know the narrator's name is Mrs. De Winter, but we also know it's really Daphne we're listening to. Which is why, like Holden Caulfield—whom we do fuse with J.D. Salinger—like Holden, we wish we could call the author up and get to know her personally.

We're inclined to feel that the author is as warm and romantic, as keen in feelings and insights as the persona, but you, as novelists, know how untrue this can be. Oh it's true in your particular case—you're all those nice things your heroine is—but you happen to know that one of your fellow writers—she's not ten feet away—is a snarling selfish beast in real life. Amazing what a *performance* her warm-hearted writing is! Same goes for actors. We're astonished when we learn that so-and-so is a cold and callous egotist hated by everyone on the set. "How can that be? When she played Sister Mary Angela I wanted to convert!"

Well, folks, non-fiction writers also construct personas for themselves. Occasionally the novelist will create a narrator who is a shrewd and nasty fortune hunter, and an actor who's actually a good guy in real life agrees to play a black-hearted villain. But the non-fiction writer—and speaker, a speech is a kind of non-fiction—he almost always wants to seduce you into thinking he's just like the persona he's projecting. You never see him bent on conveying that he's a lying poseur looking to con

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

This Month  
from the  
President:

...one last  
word:  
"Thanks!"

### THE END IS NEAR:

As I write this, my last president's column, I can now tell you without doubt why no president before me has ever run for a second term. It's not the work load or the pressure or the demands of the job. It's writing these \*&^%\$#@ president's columns! If writing twelve of them is difficult, writing twenty-four is pure torture. Imagine trying to wax eloquent for other writers once a month on demand. Now imagine my relief that I don't have to do it anymore!

This is also the time when I get to mention everyone who worked so hard all year so that people would say what a wonderful president I was. I will now admit I didn't do much of anything except select excellent folks to fill the important jobs in NINC, and I will also make a feeble attempt to properly thank them.

First of all, I couldn't have done anything at all without the other board members. Steve Womack made a lot of noise in the beginning about being a novice in NINC, but he learned so quickly, we decided to put him in charge of the whole thing. We all feel very confident turning over the reins to Steve.

Candace Schuler was a terrific secretary who probably never bargained for also becoming an expert on insurance during her tenure. Soon all of our members will be able to benefit from her new-found expertise, too.

Phyllis DiFrancesco spent two years getting NINC's finances organized, and she did such a good job of making the treasurer's job easier that when our newly-elected treasurer had to withdraw, she was willing to stay on for yet another year.

Anne Holmberg and her two able assistant editors, Marj Krueger and Kathy Lynn Emerson, have proven that NINK can indeed keep getting better and better. This was the first year we divided the workload among three people, and I once told Anne that either having assistant editors was a marvelous idea or else she was a genius. She admitted to being a genius.

And finally, Janice Brooks who, as our Advisory Council Representative, was always there with the answers when we needed them.

But even these fine board members couldn't do everything that needed to be done to keep NINC up and running, so we had to depend on our committee chairs as well. Sometimes it's hard to decide which of these people worked the hardest, but this year, there's no contest. Laura Resnick wins that title hands down as our intrepid Conference Coordinator. Without her tireless efforts we might have been forced to hold our New York Conference in a homeless person's cardboard box while paying \$100,000 a day for the privilege. Well, okay, it wasn't quite that bad, but pretty close. Only a few of us know the true story behind that excellent conference, but we all know it's Laura we have to thank for making it possible.

Since Laura has already thanked all of her assistants, I'll move along to our other committee chairs. Alysse Rasmussen and her crew have kept Ninc-link alive and well through trials and tribulations second only to those Laura suffered.

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## **....SO LONG, FARE WELL, AUF WEIDERSEHN, ADIEU.....**

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Julie Kistler has spent the entire year trying to find a suitable location for our 1999 conference, and after many disappointments, she's still on the job. After finding us New York and Lake Tahoe, we can only wonder how she will top herself.

Bill Bernhardt and his crew on the Nominating Committee worked really hard putting together this year's slate of officers, and Barbara Keiler and her helpers on the Elections Committee got those ballots counted even before the keynote speech was finished.

Cathy Maxwell and her Advocacy Committee have only just begun their work. They have so many exciting projects in the works that it's impossible to name them all here, but everyone has already benefited from the Advocacy Column in *NINK*, which was also Cathy's brainchild.

Georgia Bockoven once again chaired the Audit Lottery Committee, and a new winner has been selected. Watch for a full report early next year.

As Membership Chair, Diane Chamberlain followed up on each person who failed to renew last winter, keeping our attrition rate unbelievably low, and Outreach Chair Pat Kay conducted a membership drive that brought our membership to over 600 for the first time ever.

My heartfelt thanks to all of you and to everyone who helped in any capacity to make this such an exciting year. We are where we are because of each of you.

**-Victoria Thompson, president**

### **RESULTS OF 1997 ANNUAL ELECTION**

1998 President: Steve Womack; President-Elect: Julie Kistler; Secretary: Candace Schuler; Treasurer: Phyllis DiFrancesco (the 1998 Board will formalize this continuation by appointment due to the resignation of the elected treasurer); Advisory Council Representative: Janice Young Brooks.

1999 Nominating Committee: LaRee Bryant, Debby Camp, Evan Maxwell, Laura Resnick, and Joan Wolf.

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## **INTRODUCING...**

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*The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:*

### **New Applicants**

Debra Cowan (*Debra Marshall*), Edmond OK  
Amy J. Fetzer, Laurel Bay SC

### **New Members**

Carolyn Brubaker (*Carolyn Lampman*), Riverton WY

Helen Cavanagh, Marco Island FL  
Maureen Caudill (*Marissa Hall, Chloe Hall*), San Diego CA  
Carol Caverly, Colorado Springs CO  
Megan Chance, Poulsbo WA  
Lynn Kerstan, San Diego CA  
Martha S. O'Connor (*Martha Schroeder*), Wayne PA  
Heather Graham Pozzessere (*Heather Graham, Shannon Drake*), Coral Gables FL  
Ron Sarti, Dayton OH  
David J. Walker, Wilmette IL  
Cindy Harris Williams (*Bess Willingham*), Metairie LA

# McCormack's Take

(Continued from page 1)

somebody into something—which is what he often is. Sometimes all he wants to con you into is simply believing that he's a wonderful fellow. Not necessarily so he can get close to you and, let's say, pick your pocket. He just basks in being thought a great guy.

Most of the time, though, the non-fiction writer is trying to create a persona that's not only likable, but smart, reliable, informed, and competent—someone who knows what he's talking about. Because ultimately it's key to his agenda that he be *believed*—preferably without question. That's the persona he works on. I'm here to tell you, listeners, that often he's none of those things he's projecting.

The phrase “non-fiction” is an interesting one. It rather conveys that there's no fantasy here, what's being told here is the truth. Now I want to focus on one species of non-fiction writer about whom I've got something to tell you—news reporters, in particular those reporters and commentators who write about the book industry. They would have you believe that you're listening to someone smart who has in hand the facts, the truth. But too frequently the alleged facts you're hearing are wrong, and the inferences drawn from them are not the truth.

The reporters aren't necessarily lying. There are two kinds of untruth—witting and unwitting. Some of you may have noticed that my quotation of the first line of *Rebecca* was wrong. It isn't, “Last night I dreamt I went back to Manderley.” It's, “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.” Those of you who don't know that line by heart never even questioned that I had it right, did you? Now, was the misquote caused by my bad memory and my laziness in not going back to check it? Or was I being an officious editor who believed the author buried the key word mid-sentence—“Manderley” deserves climactic last-word emphasis. Or did I make the mistake intentionally, to serve some unexpected purpose? Whatever the reason, I was successfully conveying as non-fiction something that didn't correspond to reality.

Back to my introductory bits. Why'd I tell such stories? In part to make you laugh, give you a good time. But it was also to make myself look like a self-effacing good-guy—a guy with a sense of humor, someone you could sort of relax with, trust a little. And what I've said since then has been aimed in part at making you believe that, despite all those jokes at my own expense, I'm really a pretty smart guy, informed, perceptive, someone you can trust a *lot*. First I try to disarm you, and then seize you with my seeming knowledgeability. In other words what I was trying to do was to create a persona that's trying to manipulate you, get you to believe, assent, with no questions. The way reporters and commentators and pundits about publishing do. Which

leads to one of my favorite old-world sayings—which I invented: *Beware of the articulate*.

All of you people are involved in book publishing. So when reporters and columnists talk about book publishing, they're talking about your livelihood, your future. And these people usually write in a smooth, confident, articulate style—a style that amounts to a seductive persona. The persona is intended to persuade you that this guy is smart, has done his homework, and *knows* something as he strolls his beat. Beware of the articulate, because—though we word-lovers hate to admit it—the ability to write or speak well can exist in someone who is not smart, is lazy, and is ignorant—not about the language, but about the subject. The articulateness—and the trustable persona it conveys—serve to veil the unreliable mind that is working on you. How many of you have created a heroine who was not dumb but who lacked skepticism and so was seduced by a knave because he talked so well, made her laugh, seemed to know things she didn't know?

Though I'm retired from publishing now, I'm still intricately involved with that world because I'm writing a column for *Publishers Weekly*. It's called “The Cheerful Skeptic.” The last-word emphasis is given to “Skeptic,” because my aim—and my natural inclination—is to question the usually unquestioned received opinion and conventional wisdom. But the qualifier “Cheerful” is just as important because again and again my investigations uncover a truth that is much more optimistic than the story being told.

That's why one of the things I want to do today is to persuade *you* to be cheerfully skeptical toward anything you read or hear about your business—publishing. And promoting that healthy skepticism is what all this trickery in the first part of my speech was aimed at. I want you to be slow ever to judge solely from the persona you're encountering that the non-fictioneer is telling you the truth. The reports you read about book publishing are almost always written by very articulate people.

For examples, you can read a long piece that appeared in the *New Yorker* just ten days ago [Oct. 6 issue], or *The Nation*, or regular articles and news stories in the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* about “crises” in publishing. And they are wrong—dumb, uninformed, drastically misleading. The fact is that trade book publishing—your kind of publishing—is alive, well, and prospering. Regardless of every impression they would give you, there are more independent publishers in America right now than ever before in history. There are more books being published—and there are more books being sold—than ever before in history. There are more novels being published, and more *first* novels than ever before in history. Your livelihood is a lively one indeed.

But how can that be? For instance—independent publishers: every month or so we read about another house being absorbed by one of the giants. True; that's always news. Whenever a former president of the United States dies, it makes the front page. But when have you ever seen a story headed, “Future president born today in Small Town in Arkansas!” Deaths you hear about; births you don't. A lot of

you are familiar with *The Literary Marketplace*—the fat volume that Bowker puts out annually. The first section lists American book publishers. Compare the number in the latest edition to the number from ten years ago, from twenty years ago. For decades now—and throughout the 1990s—the number of newborns has outpaced the number gone to the velvet-lined resting-place with the bronze exterior.

New novels? Ask *Publishers Weekly* or *Library Journal* or your local library or any book wholesaler how the number of new submissions compares to the past.

As for books being sold, everything you read through the first eight months of this year about sales being down in 1997 was wrong. Every single one of those pieces based their pronouncements on sales figures issued by The Association of American Publishers. The figures were wrong. Don't blame the AAP, blame the publishers. They seldom submit the data needed, and when they do they are often incorrect or inconsistent. Most dismaying is how small and therefore non-indicative the sample is. All the stories of gloom and doom you've read have been from the unreliable data of just 25 trade book publishers in America. And how many such publishers are there in America? Well, *LMP* lists 900. The Small Press Center tells me it believes there are tens of thousands of them. And the twenty-five are dominated by big old established houses that are often static from one year to the next, while effectively none of the recently-born and dynamically growing American publishers is represented. The number crunchers then extrapolate from the balled-up data of just 25 publishers to the total sales of the entire industry—with absolutely no sure information about what percentage of the industry sales those 25 comprise, or how typical they are of the rest of the industry. This is comparable to going to Clancy, King, Grisham and Steel and asking them, "What do you think about the size of author advances these days?"—and then writing a story that begins, "A survey of authors shows satisfaction with current advances among American writers today."

**B**ut even with that small sample of 25 publishers to keep track of, the aggregate numbers for 1997 were wrong from January until finally corrected in late summer. All year we read about the sharp decline in trade book sales. Then: Oops! "Well, actually, heh-heh, sales are up, and probably have been up all year." All that would be needed is for one or two publishers who hadn't checked in all year suddenly to submit their six-month numbers. As currently constructed, the so-called "industry-survey" figures are very near to useless indicators of how book-publishing is doing.

Earlier I mentioned the recent *New Yorker* piece. This I guarantee: All across America, people reading that piece believed the data it was putting forth. Readers never questioned the writer's reliability, because his voice was so confident, so authoritative—and look at all the people he interviewed! And *The New Yorker* is so sophisticated! The *New Yorker* writer—one Ken Auletta—is not alone in his be-

nightedness. Every single article in the media about book publishing this year relied on the AAP data—and not a single one of them checked the validity of those figures. How long did it take me to uncover the fact that the figures are effectively worthless? Weeks of diligence research? No; I learned it all in just one morning of investigation. One morning's work by one similarly skeptical reporter could have prevented nine months of deeply erroneous bulletins from all the media. But they didn't have the minimal brains and responsibility required to do it. Yet, O! how smart and authoritative their voices seem as they talk about your business.

Sales figures aren't the only thing they get wrong. There's almost nothing of importance they get right. How far astray can this lead them and their readers? I'll give just one instance. The *New Yorker* article said that Simon & Schuster "earned" \$3,000,000 for itself from the success of *Angela's Ashes*. The truer number should have been not \$3,000,000 but \$9,000,000. That's how wrong they can be. And how wrong they are, when they talk about the "crisis" in publishing.

"Oh, but I hear that returns are killing publishers." No, they're not, no matter what the ignorant media say. Two of the wild mistakes that Ken Auletta made were that he assumed the cost of one physical copy of *Angela's Ashes* was \$2.50 when in fact it cost \$1.60, and he believed that it cost the publisher \$2.00 for shipping and billing the copy when in fact that cost was less than fifty cents.

What that means is this: Suppose you're a publisher who has a \$25 bestseller, and you're told you can stop shipping right now, and have a hundred percent sell-through, no returns. Or you could ship another million copies and get 50% of them back. What should you do? You should ship the million.

Because it makes you, the publisher, \$4,800,000 richer, despite the hugely higher returns rate. And the dark truth is, as authors you certainly would rather have overdistribution than underdistribution. Would you prefer your publisher sell 100% of a 4,000 copy printing of your book, or 60% of a 20,000 copy print? On the 12,000 sales, you earn three-and-a-half times as much. And what about the poor publisher? He also makes three-and-a-half times as much. I wish I could assure you that when you're in the hands of a publisher you're with someone who understands the physiology of his own business, but too often you're not.

And no, returns are not killing the stores either. I could spell this out, but I think I've inflicted enough arithmetic on you for one day.

"Oh but I hear that superstores are killing the small independent bookstores." Well, if you're a small independent bookstore—a SIB—in a neighborhood where a super now opens up, yes, you're probably killed—unless you're a specialist store. There are more superstores in Manhattan than anywhere, and yet there are also over 500 independent book outlets on this island. Many of those 500 specialize—in theater, cooking, mysteries, gay and lesbian—areas where even a superstore can't adequately compete with them.

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# McCormack's Take

(Continued from page 5)

And here is a second dark, almost indiscreet truth: Almost everyone in this room would prefer as her local bookstore a Tattered Cover, or my own local—the Barnes and Noble superstore at Lincoln Center. My local carries 160,000 titles—that's *titles*, not books. A typical SIB carries thirty to fifty thousand *books*. Don't say—because you read it in the newspapers—that the Barnes and Noble superstores carry only bestsellers and remainders. That's totally false. For example, my local has a poetry section with over 3,000 volumes by over 500 poets from over 125 publishers—most of them the tiny obscure houses, the kind that the reporters who haven't done their homework say Barnes and Noble never stocks. In fact, my local carries titles from over 7,000 different publishers. Barnes and Noble has had their brains beaten in in the PR war, there's no question. But when the target is their superstores, it's a bad and wickedly distorted rap. I'm immensely happy that I've got one of their supers just one block away. You read about culturally pillaging the neighborhood. Well, it would truly culturally pillage my neighborhood if our local were to shut down and be replaced by a SIB one tenth its size. Ask: How would you feel if the librarian of your one-room local library were to block the opening of another library ten times bigger because it would put her out of business? And big stores like the Lincoln Center super and The Tattered Cover—which is a superstore—are good for publishers and authors too, because they sell far more books than a SIB would.

I'll give one final example of the media thinking that is shallow, and in part motivated by the journalists' age-old insight that a hurricane makes more compelling copy than another sunny day. In the *New York Times* this week one Dinitia Smith reports, "According to the American Booksellers Association, 50 to 60 independent bookstores went out of business nationwide in 1996." The obvious question that this alleged datum prompts is, "And how many new stores were opened in 1996?" A less obvious question—but a necessary one given her theme that the independents are today an imperilled species—is: Okay, 50 or 60 in 1996, but how many went out of business in 1986? Still another pertinent question is, "Okay, sixty, but out of how many? 2,000? 3,000? 8,000?" Now either Smith asked these questions, and didn't like the answers so she didn't report them—or it never occurred to her to ask them. So either she's duplicitous or she's dim. And so are the *New York Times* editors who continually pass-for-print reports like this. Of course if Smith were now to go look into these questions, she'd no doubt ask the American Booksellers Association and take their word for it—but the ABA doesn't know the answer. They know how many *members* they have, but consider this: The AAP has about 150 members and that includes every kind of publisher—trade, college, school, medical, the lot. One hundred fifty out of how many thousands of actual publishers?

To sum up what I've said so far: Be assured, novelists,

that the industry you're in—while it has its warts and blemishes—is healthy, and is growing, no matter what you've been reading in the articulate papers.

There is another kind of person who regularly writes or speaks alleged nonfiction to you. That person is your editor. The second—much shorter—part of my talk is about that person.

I once wrote a book called *The Fiction Editor, the Novel and Novelist*. The very first line in that book is a quote from someone who was, I feel, as good a fiction editor as ever lived. His name was Maxwell Perkins, and he edited Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Taylor Caldwell, Marcia Davenport, and lots more. The line of his I quote is, "Editors are extremely fallible people, all of them. Don't put too much trust in them."

The book I wrote is quite short—forty thousand words or so—and yet it took thirty years of working at the craft of editing, and it took four years of thinking and writing, during which I bought and read forty to sixty books that touched on the craft of fiction. By the time I was done, I probably knew as much about the editing of orthodox narrative fiction as anyone around—and I knew about sixty percent of what I ought to know.

Despite the Perkins quote and my own confession, I won't be as pessimistic about editors as I am about journalists. I will be skeptical, but I'll be cheerfully skeptical. On the opening page of my book you'll find this line:

The fiction editor who has the needed talent and skills can be a combination doctor, teacher, coach, and conscience who could benefit any writer who ever lived.

Don't blame Perkins for that line—I wrote it. And I believe it. What are those talents and skills? Editors do four things. They *acquire* (go out and find authors, manuscripts, and book ideas, and sign them up). They help *publish* (i.e. they influence the promotion, the jacket, the selling tactics). They *support*, comfort, and retain authors. But the job they're classically identified with and the one I've always felt to be their quintessential role, is: they work on the manuscript. They *edit*. I want to focus solely on that assignment.

The editing of a novel has three stages: reading, analyzing, and prompting revision if it's needed. First comes reading. The good editor reads and she responds aptly, where "aptly" means "as the ideal appropriate reader would."

The faculty that responds we'll call "sensitivity," the apparatus-within that *reacts*—to a good (or bad) sentence, to a vivid, exciting (or blurred or flat) scene. It's what registers dismay, joy, relief; what purrs in the presence of wit, drama, and poetry. The good editor's sensitivity is such that she's gripped, bored, delighted, confused, incredulous, or satisfied by the same things as the appropriate reader would be. This quality—apt sensitivity—is absolutely essential. Without it, the editor with a script is like an ape with an oboe: You can be sure no good will come of it, and the most you can hope for is to get it back intact. Here is a basic postulate: The only valid measure of an editor's sensitivity is the degree to which her responses replicate those of the appropriate audience for the book. As a publisher I would

never give the manuscript of an orthodox manor-house mystery to an editor who didn't enjoy Agatha Christie.

On to analyzing—which might better be called *diagnosis*. One difference between a private reader, whose responses can be right on, and an editor is this: The editor ought to be able to identify what is *causing* the response. The private reader may be unengaged, deflated, frustrated, or baffled by a book—but he probably can't specify what events, passages, lines, are making him so. Anyway, why should he have to? It's not his job. It is the editor's job.

It's not easy—this diagnosing, this detecting exactly what in the script is causing undesirable effects in the reader. It's far harder than most writers—and editors—suppose, especially when the faults are not lying right on the surface of the script, as obvious as something printed in red type. When the fault is internal to the novel, buried in its structure, sensibility is necessary, but it's not sufficient. Sensibility tells you *that* something is wrong. To discern exactly *what* is wrong, you need editorial *craft*. An editor is like the doctor who taught Conan Doyle at medical school—and on whom Doyle modeled Sherlock Holmes. The great man could sometimes tell just by looking at you what your ailment was. But other times he had to run tests. Mere instinct was not enough. The editor's book of craft—and, alas, there is no such textbook yet—would catalogue symptoms—the bad feelings the reader has—and list the internal faults that are often the cause of exactly this sort of bad feeling. No young editor—any more than a young medical student—is born knowing such things.

It's extraordinary how many big old senior editors resist the notion that there can be any aspect of *craft* to the editing of fiction. He'll say, "I don't think there should be rules for creative work." You dance and jabber that your point is not to tell an author how to write right; but if it's written wrong—that is, having an effect the writer does not want—it's the editor's job to tell him where and how it's gone wrong. If it ain't broke, if the fiction works, get away from it with any diagnosis. But if your novel is broke, you better hope your editor has gone to fiction medical school.

**O**r Senior Editor will say, "No two books are alike." No two human beings are alike either, but they can both have measles. Many unlike novels have failed for this identical reason: the author made promises to the reader that he didn't fulfill. Chekhov said that if the author brandishes a gun in the first act, he damn well better shoot it off by the end of act three.

Or Senior Editor will say, "Your instinct is your craft." No; your instinct is your sensibility; it registers symptoms. It takes craft to diagnose the cause of those symptoms. I've often in my career heard an editor say, "There's something fundamentally wrong here, I *know* it, but I'm damned if I can put my finger on it." Do the systematic medical checkup and you discover the ailment is a premature flashback, or a serial rather than a simultaneous resolution, or a superfluous character, or the lack of a ticking clock. Could an editor discover these things without a textbook? Sure, he could, but you'd be dismayed to see how often he doesn't.

The third part of the editor's task—prompting revision where it's needed—requires sensibility, craft, and even—at an editor's supernal best—a touch of art. Most of the time the editor is confined simply to pointing out the difficulty. "Look, the reader just doesn't like Jane. So we don't care about her plight. You've got to make her more likable." If her diagnosis is specific enough, it often indicates the remedy. "Reader doesn't like Jane because she strangles the puppy with piano wire....No! It doesn't fix it if she uses a shoe lace instead!" Frequently, just having the problem pointed out is all the writer needs. She sees the solution immediately, on her own. Sometimes the editor may say, "You might try this" or "You might try that," but the editor should only do this if she also makes clear that she's only trying to indicate the *kind of effect* needed here; the editor should urge the writer to throw out the editor's specific suggestion and come up with something better. My own experience throughout my career was that if I was working with a really good writer she usually came up with something that was far better than my idea. Or, if she adopted a general suggestion of mine, she fleshed it out with detail beyond any of my imagining. I should also say that sometimes even the best writers have accepted certain things verbatim; they—and I—saw no shame in that if the insert, or the change in the order of the chapters, simply did the job needed.

Sometimes an editor who knows her craft can suggest a remedy not only for something written, but for the very act of writing. One quick example: If a writer halfway through the book runs into a terrible wall, a writer's block, try this: Don't keep staring at the page where everything came to a halt. Go back in the script, and change an important earlier element—an event, a character, a character trait, delete a character, add a character. Occasionally, just by diverting the course of the river, you enable it to flow happily down to the ocean of art. In effect, the block was not in the writer's nervous system; it was a fault in the original set-up—the cast selection, or the structure of situation, or the relationships—the wiring—between characters, or between characters and the setting.

There's lots more to say about all of this, of course. I say some of it in my book, but not all of it. In the education of the editor the initial lesson is: First do no harm. There is no final lesson. The learning is as endless as the learning of medicine, and the learning of art.

I came into publishing for several reasons, and one of them was how much books meant to my mother. As a boy, I'd go the library and come back with eight or ten novels at once for her. Later, when she had a television, she seldom watched it. She preferred a book. When my father died, I was already living in New York, working in publishing. I went back home, to Stamford, Connecticut, for six months to get her back on her feet. When I returned to New York, I knew that in one sense I was leaving her alone, but in another sense she was not alone: You were with her. And I'm deeply grateful to you.

So I had my reasons for telling editors that their assignment is to serve the author. I explain that there is a >>>

# McCormack's Take

(Continued from page 7)

diaspora of writers, comprising those isolated scribes for whom artistic seclusion is not liberty but exile, and for whom the absence of someone to talk to about their work is a loneliness beyond loneliness. All these riven spirits deserve better, and I wrote my book in part to promote an education of editors, a world-wide cadre of writers' aides who are up to the job, a sensitive and informed guild, of which each member could be the doctor, teacher, coach,

and conscience that writers and readers so vitally need.

In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, the trainer-coach Sam Mussabini sees Harold Abrahams run a hundred meter dash, and lose for the first time in his life—by one step. Mussabini approaches the despairing Abrahams, who has just declared aloud that he can't run any faster.

"I beg to differ, Mr. Abrahams," says the trainer, smiling up at him and chewing on a cigar. "I can find you two steps in the hundred."

If you are a writer with the innate gifts, that's what a good editor might do for you. It should be what he is there for, it should be his life's work: to find you two steps in the hundred.

Thank you.

## *1997 NINC Conference Play by Play with your Intrepid Reporters at Large:*

### **Terey daly Ramin... Reporter at Large:**

#### **A Conversation with Betty Prashker**

Vice President and Editor at Large, Crown Publishing Group. In her capacity as editor, Prashker works with Dominic Dunne, Jean Auel, Edward Rutherford—and Judith Krantz before Krantz fired her.

This session provided a look at Prashker's very dry take on the industry from the perspective of a long-time editor. When asked, she opined that the publishing cycle is turning once more in the direction of big historical fiction (Rutherford's *London*) and points out that it's a "matter of picking your subject and treating it properly." She also feels that writers learn from formula fiction (particularly romance) to deepen characters and background and emphasized that characters and background are the key elements for readers until the author has "achieved the plateau of a brand name...then you can get sloppy."

When asked, Prashker defined Women's Fiction as "any novel with women as main characters that deals with women's issues and fantasies." She finds the gender of the author significant to the success or failure of a work but, much to attendees' surprise, she thinks that successful male authors are aberrations; that a Woman writer or a Woman's name on what is branded Women's Fiction makes a book more successful. She also thinks (pay attention here, gang!) women writers have an edge on being bought, because "In publishing houses, all but the top dog are women, so women have an advantage." And, yes, Crown would be very interested in having thrillers written by women.

Prashker believes the biggest change in publishing is the Oprah Phenomenon; other changes are less radical:

more authors and managers, fewer publishers. Also, authors know how to do some things (promotion) better than publishers because publishers don't have the resources to promote every book. Authors, however, are the same in terms of "wants."

Other types of fiction defined: serious v. literary. Serious fiction (*Birdsong*, *The English Patient*, *Mirror*, *Girls*, *God of Small Things*) has no formula, the authors are stylists in one way or another, the stories deal with complexities that aren't included in genre fiction and they deal with subjects, situations, events that don't deal with the "commonality of popular fiction." Subjects can be abstruse and not commercial. Literary fiction is about style (and little else) and is now being classed as its own genre (a pronouncement this listener found fascinating.)

What bowls Betty over in a book? Brilliant writing. Affecting romance, affecting description, seamless quilting. Style and energy. Story, character, uniqueness—a sense that "no one else could have written this book."

What sets Crown apart as a publisher? "It's a very eclectic organization that does books ranging from commercial to literary to serious to nonfiction," and they are "promotion minded and have a stable staff," with an emphasis on team orientation behind their books.

#### **Silhouette Intimate Moments Roundtable**

Led by Silhouette's Leslie Wainger

This session was a chance for Intimate Moments and other Silhouette authors only to get together and brainstorm the direction of the line into the millennium. Topics ranged from writers wondering how to get paranormal elements into their work, to asking if Silhouette would be open to cross-cultural and/or biracial couples, to wondering if it's possible to deal with aging parents within the confines of

what Wainger defines (and has always defined) as “the most mainstream” series books.

Wainger’s wonderings were along the lines of will character ages need to revert to the younger and more innocent, just-starting-out theme. The most prevalent theme of the discussion was “If you’re sick of seeing something and you want to see something else, *write it*.” She wants variety—please! Just tell her how you’ll make it work, whether it’s humor or other traditional series romance taboos. She suggested writers “look for hooks” to balance against the taboos, and that IM authors both play to the market at the same time as they define it. The “play to” aspect buys the author the chance to experiment.

Bottom line—and this was a line I heard over and over throughout the conference from every editor I listened to or talked with: *Take the risk*. You’ll never know if you don’t.

### What’s New in Historical Fiction Panel

Editors Ann LaFarge of Kensington, Shauna Summers of Ballantine, and Carrie Feron of Avon, along with agent Jean Naggar (who was absolutely wonderful, and who had a few of the authors present ready to get on their knees and beg her to take on their work. This is a lady who truly loves historical fiction. She had a speech prepared and I’m working on getting her notes from her, I promise.)

Topics covered in this session ranged from what’s hot (historical mysteries and memoirs—both true memoirs and fictional) to the second pronouncement I heard at this conference that historical fiction (what authors have long called romantic historicals as opposed to historical romances) is cycling back in. Also ancient history is beginning to find an audience. Certainly both “romantic historical” and ancient history are more difficult to publish, but the hook is it’s the Women’s Fiction end of the historical romance. Suggestions were made that authors go back to basics and read, that what makes a book like the *Shell Seekers* or those by Anne Rivers Siddons different is “a secret and a really good dramatic arc.”

Prognostications into the millennium from the editors point of view was a unanimous, “What is the story you’re burning to write?” Once again the bottom line was take the risk. And from Ann LaFarge, “And don’t say it’s because it’s written by a man.”

### FBI and International Crime

Lewis D. Schiliro, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Criminal Division in New York.

This fascinating session is impossible to summarize adequately in 250 words or less. Primarily Schiliro gave an overview of the type of cases the NYC FBI handles: taking apart the Cosa Nostra, dealing with the Sicilian Mafia and Russian Organized Crime, Asian and other youth gangs, and work they perform in cooperation with the NYC DEA.

Schiliro told attendees that NYC FBI handles approximately four to five drug related kidnappings per month, and discussed the difficulty the Bureau has keeping up with the criminals technologically. NYC FBI has thirty-nine separate task forces, many of which work in cooperation with

the NYPD; they experience very few jurisdictional non-cooperation problems. Task force personnel are deputized marshalls so state lines can be crossed if necessary and police officers on the task force are protected.

When asked, Schiliro specified that “balance is available,” especially in corrupt areas of the world where it’s not always possible to “play by the rules.” (In other words—and I’m quoting—if someone has, for instance, killed a DEA agent on duty, then that someone may simply wind up “not available to collect.”)

Schiliro suggested writers with specific questions contact the media liaison officers available in most of the FBI’s 56 offices. The officer can direct you to Organized Crime or elsewhere if necessary.

### What’s New in Science Fiction and Fantasy

Editors Patrick Nielsen Hayden of Tor and Laura Anne Gilman of Roc, and agents Shawna McCarthy of the Russell Galen Agency and Lucienne Diver of Spectrum Literary Agency.

This session covered a discussion of the current science fiction, science fantasy, fantasy, and romantic fantasy genres. Hayden suggested that some fantasy is labeled SF simply because fantasy is considered “little girl” fiction—even though fantasy has the largest audience of the genres here. The comment was made that SF is definitely a niche genre, with most modern SF writers making their living on continuing characters because readers are invested in continuing characters.

What is selling? Series books seem a solid market. Is SF looked at differently in Europe? (This is a question that would never have occurred to me.) Yes, SF is considered different in Europe because it’s not considered totally separate from the mainstream. On the one hand the Brits ghetto it, on the other, the French love it like Jerry Lewis.

Editors and agents alike said whatever you write in SF/F, be entertaining. Also that people read fantasy for spiritual transformation, spiritual emotion—which means the work itself needs something of a dangerous edge that includes philosophy, a quest, and personal self-transformation for good or evil in the main characters. Current subgenres include: Fantasy cozies, funny fantasies, women’s fantasy, boy fantasy, contemporary fantasy, romantic fantasy, and the baby boomlet of alternate history and time travel fantasies.

### Scene of the Crime/Who Dun It?

Joe Paglino and Mauro Corvasce of the Monmouth, New Jersey forensics team.

The boys were, as always, in rare form, providing attendees with a gory, funny, and totally fascinating look at crime scenes, cases, equipment and techniques to help the writer make her/his work more real. They also plugged their newest book *Murder One*, now available through Writer’s Digest Books. I have pages and pages of notes on this special three hour session and there’s no way I’m going to get it all in here, so I’ll be brief. *Buy the book*. Their first book, *Modus Operandi*, sits on my “most used” reference

# 1997 NINC Conference Play by Play

with Terey daly Ramin, Intrepid Reporter at Large

(Continued from page 9)

shelf. A couple of quotes: "Don't be afraid to make police officers human and fallible" in your books, "Fingerprints are only as good as the surfaces they're on," and "Keep your investigation simple."

If you've got any questions, email the guys at: mvc2@aol.com or jrpag@webspan.net

Let them know you're a member of NINC and you should have a response within a couple days at most. Due to their long and productive history with us, NINC members are close to these guys' hearts.

## The Artist's Way

Discussion with Zita Christian and Kathy Chwedyk.

Based on the book by Julia Cameron, this session covered a great many of the elements used to allow creative people to admit that "yes, by God, I am creative. I am an artist." Some of the elements in Cameron's book are: morning pages, which is a three page brain dump done first thing in the morning that gets all the crud from the night out of the way so you can work; artist's dates which must be done alone, once a week, and take the artist out to do something she might not usually do (no cost need be involved), and therefore help refill an empty well; saying no to crazy makers (when I read this part of the book, I was sure Cameron had met my then fourteen year old son, who literally was making me crazy.)

The primary goal of this session was to let writers know it's okay to play with our art, that we're not alone, and that there are a great many tools available to us if we find our creative wells running dry. Cameron's book is one of the best tools available. (And, as an aside, Eric Maisel's *Fearless Creating* is another I've used—it has a lot of good stuff in it.)

## Building an Author Web Page

Do I know how to build a Web page after this session led by Jennifer Crusie? I could tell you what to put on it, yeah. Does the very idea still scare me to death? Well, no, but it is overwhelming. Anyway, briefly, here goes...

Building a Web page is like building a press kit: you have to decide what your audience needs to know and go from there. You may want to add a picture, credits (including anyplace you've lived, but *not* where you currently live), your books, awards, FAQ's, book covers, reviews, background info about your recent book, chapters from the book, teasers, speaking engagements, and how to get you to come speak.

Contents: page one sets the mood; make sure it downloads *fast*, in thirty seconds or less. Include something to indicate your personality. At the bottom of every page indi-

cate what's next, what's past, and links to the next page. Including a "Text Index" list of topics in alphabetical order is helpful for blind internet users who can then hear what's available on the pages. Also include an icon to click on that will return the reader to the home page. The reason to do more than one page is to simplify the downloading and organizing for the reader. Include your e-mail address. Software is available that makes setting up a homepage simple. Be creative and Keep It Simple.

And get Jenny to do the entire talk as a column because I've got tons of notes that don't fit in here either.

## The Bottom Line: Selling More Books, or Hiring a Publicist

Kathy Onerato of Creative Promotions; Jennifer McCord, publishing consultant; Jennifer Richards, publicist for Ballantine/DelRay/Fawcett/Ivy; and Judy Spagnola of Book Trends.

Okay, I'll be blunt. While the majority of this session's attendees might have gotten a great deal out of this discussion, I have to say, been here, done this, found out it's either promote or write books, and much as I love an audience, I'd rather write than promote. However...what this session dealt with was the facts about reinventing the writer as "author," getting a makeover, and putting the lipstick on our careers.

Although none of the publicists present could definitively state that something they did caused more sales for the author than s/he might have had without the publicist on board, one of the things they can often do is find a way to get around an uncooperative publisher and go through the back door to get the information required to better promote an author. Publicists, like publishers' promotional departments, however, often rely on the author to do a great deal of her own work—because she has her own local and regional contacts.

Suggestions on how to handle the "tight" market included: go to regional bookshows; stay current; remind people who you are; participate in "odd" venues (like the Southern Women's Festival); target your audience for best financial benefit. Publicists do have their own Nielsen-type groups to help with an author's sales and can also act as a liaison between author's own promo material and her audience.

Some things the "small" author might do to promote her career: (these things, of course, depend on personal goals, and the place you're at in your career) First, define what you want to accomplish then call a publicist for *free* recommendations. Six simple suggestions are: 1) coordinate with your publisher; 2) build a local following; 3) be active with local reading and writing groups; 4) use an on-line Web site; 5) cultivate a fan base with a mailing list; 6) join professional writers' organizations and let your pub-

lisher know you've done so.

Bottom line cautions from the entire panel: "Everything builds gradually, it's a slow process," "Court your local press," and "Writing is the most important thing a writer can do for her career."

### **Slideshow: Tom Hallman**

Freelance cover artist Tom Hallman talked about his work from age two to the present, showing slides of his drawings and paintings that include covers for Jayne Krentz, John Saul, Joseph Wambaugh, and many of Bantam's top authors.

I was impressed with how like a writer's life Hallman's is: he works at home in the middle of the traffic area with three teenagers. He Fed-Ex's his work to the publisher; his kids (word for word like mine) tell him they want to be just like him when they grow up so they can go to work in sock feet and grungies. It took Hallman two years of constant monthly promotion of himself to break out of advertising art and into the publishing world. His clients send an idea of what they're looking for (some verbally, some art directors send a quick sketch), and Hallman generally takes Polaroid shots of the pieces he needs for a scene then figures out how to piece it all together. He's still learning as he goes, too.

As happens with writing, today's art departments have a tendency to typecast artists the way publishers do writers. In other words, if you start working SF and you do well, you stay there; nobody thinks of you for something different.

Hallman came in at a time when he was able to do different things and found himself challenged constantly.

Hallman spoke of occasionally receiving actual manuscripts from the publishers which he'd read for ideas, then recycle into drawing paper for his kids. He collects references for his work from the world around where he lives: his children posed for the cover of John Saul's *Darkness*; he used his paper girl for another cover, etc. And, as with all of us freelance novel writers, freelance artists have no security, and suffer from phone paranoia and the worry "will this be the last one?"

He suggested authors who want more input into their cover art break down a synopsis to the bare image of a book, and if possible, let the artist know the type of feeling you want to present—give them the mood of the work.

And one more aside, artist to writer...when I went up to tell Tom how much I enjoyed his presentation, his first question to me was, "Have you found the right chair, yet?" No, I haven't, yes he has, and I found out what it was because my back's killing me from too much sitting, too...

### **Art Show Saturday Night**

Although a logistical nightmare for Laura Resnick and crew (you'll have to get Kathy Chwedyk or Deb Stover to tell you the story of the midnight warehouse raid, and the angry women and the seven foot lengths of pipe someone forgot to deliver), for attendees it was a treat made to look as though nothing had ever gone wrong.

## *1997 NINC Conference Play by Play hands off to...*

**Kathy Lynn Emerson...**  
**Reporter at Large:**

### **The Smart Writer's Guide to Being on Tour**

Catherine Coulter, Iris Johansen, Stella Cameron, Ann Maxwell and Nora Roberts led the discussion on touring to promote a book and shared anecdotes and advice. Catherine began with the suggestion that writers plan on a month between books to do nothing but promote the book which has just been published. The way books are ordered and reordered these days, getting out there in a timely manner has become an economic necessity.

Several types of promotion were suggested. One recommended by everyone was the "drive-by shooting" which involves stopping at every store in an area to sign stock. Do your own area first. Then, if you are going to be in a certain city, call your publicity department and ask for an escort who knows that area (the local sales representative, for example). The publicity department may be able to set up formal signings and/or interviews. Also check into the possibil-

ity of going to warehouses to sign and sticker books before they go to stores.

Touring does not always involve leaving home. You can do satellite tours, staying in one place and giving interviews to television or radio stations all over the country for several hours at a stretch. A Web page is another way to get name recognition, the goal of all promotion. All the panelists and several members of the audience had been in chat rooms on the Internet, answering fan questions. If you are asked to do this, however, make sure you are the one typing in your answers.

Other promotional activities strongly encouraged? Go to as many conferences as you can afford, to speak, network, and sign books. If you're thinking of buying an ad, consider *PW* or *People*. Ask your publicist for things, even if you don't think you'll get them. However, publicists can let you down. You need to check things out for yourself, particularly whether accommodations are in a safe area and how to get back to the hotel late at night from a bad neighborhood. Also watch travel times and tightly scheduled signings. New York seems to think places in the rest >>>

# 1997 NINC Conference Play by Play

with Kathy Emerson

(Continued from page 11)

of the country are much closer to each other than they really are. And of course, look like a professional when you go out in public and be sure to thank people, particularly booksellers, if not with a personal note after you get home, then at least on the spot and with sincerity.

## Non-Fiction Markets

Linda Hayes (agent), Tracy Bernstine (Kensington), Jane Chelius (agent) and Elizabeth Pomada (agent) specified cookbooks, true crime, Americana, and narrative non-fiction (such as memoirs) as types of non-fiction that often hit bestseller lists. Books on health, spirituality and religion, and parenting are also in demand. Perennial favorites are books on pop psychology, career books, and financial books.

Non-fiction proposals should include an overview, a chapter by chapter outline, a sample chapter, and a title that "tells and sells." The overview includes such things as special features of the book, your credentials for writing it (or the endorsement of some well-known authority who will give the book credibility), markets for the book (non-fiction needs a clear target audience), subsidiary-rights possibilities, and a promotion plan. Having a hook or angle is a major selling point. Analysis of the competition is also crucial.

Best advice if you are seeking a topic for a non-fiction book? Use personal experiences as a starting place for ideas or hook up with an expert in some specialized field who has an interesting topic and needs your help to shape it into a book.

## What's New in Mystery?

Joe Blades (Ballantine), Sara Ann Freed (Mysterious Press), Jennifer Sawyer Fisher (Avon), Alice Orr (agent), and Vicki Bijur (agent), began with an overview of some of the changes in subgenres, a shift in which the hard boiled detective has become "medium hard boiled" and the female sleuth has become less macho than in the 1980s. Historicals are still doing well.

The best news is that the market is supportive of mystery in general. In light of this, Avon will be relaunching its mystery program in the fall of 1998, bringing out four original paperbacks a month and more hardcovers. With more than 100 independent mystery bookstores around the country, a new author can be launched successfully without the chain stores.

As it has been for some time, romantic suspense is a dangerous area, apt to get lost in the bookstore because it doesn't clearly fit into romance or mystery. The panel seemed to agree that including romance elements but making them secondary to the mystery works better than using equal parts of mystery and romance. If romantic suspense

is what you want to write, try to sell it as mainstream fiction rather than as mystery. Call it thriller or suspense, but not romantic suspense.

Strong characters, a sense of place, and a passion for whatever the series involves are essential to selling a mystery series. Superficial research is not enough. Draw on your own interests and strengths and don't try to go by what's selling in 1997. They're buying now for 1999 and beyond.

## Where Should Category Romance Go in the 21st Century?

Candy Lee (Harlequin) and Isabel Swift (Silhouette) used this forum not to tell us what was going to happen over the next five years, but to ask for our input. After taking a survey of where we buy category fiction and where we might like to, they determined that we think Harlequin/Silhouette's efforts should go into making sure category romances are available in grocery stores. Price clubs and Wal-mart type stores had less support, but the majority felt books should be available in any venue that would save the shopper time and money. Additional places where people would like to find category romance included hospital gift shops, airports, and QVC. One suggestion was that advertising for books be put as an insert in telephone and credit card bills.

The second survey listed thirteen choices for the type of romance that will be most successful in the future. They were Glitz and Glamour, Against all Odds, Space Mission: 21st Century, The Bonds of Family, Mini-Saga, Romantic Vacations, Women You Know, Thriller/Suspense, Small Town Heartland, Medical Romance, Adventurous Women, Paranormal Romance, and Erotica. Of these, "The Bonds of Family" was the clear favorite, and several other categories seemed also to fit into this one. Harlequin/Silhouette research indicates that covers with extra characters (not just babies) seem to sell better since they tell readers there will be more to the story than just the hero and heroine falling in love. The conclusions: readers want to believe in functional families and will continue to make romance-in-the-context-of-family popular.

## What's New in Romance and Women's Fiction?

Kate Duffy (Kensington), Irene Goodman (agent), Diane Moggy (Mira), Lucia Macro (Avon), Helen Breitwieser (agent), and Claire Zion (Warner), provided a variety of answers to that question. For Kate Duffy, nothing is really new, but she urged writers to respond to ongoing changes in the market as a challenge rather than a death sentence. For Irene Goodman, what's new is what's old. She advised staying with what you do best, building on strengths you already have, but finding fresh ways to do classic settings and plots. Big hardcover fiction is her choice for an author with a strong voice. She advised against switching to hard

sells such as paranormals, anything too deliberately weird or off market, or anything deliberately depressing. Claire Zion suggested that authors need the vision to see what book they can write best and who will read it. She also urged writers not to feel confined by genre.

From Mira there is good news. After three years, the imprint is expanding to include trade paperbacks and a limited number of hardcovers. And at Avon in 1998 there will be one romance a month in the top slot, the Romance Super Leader. Ideally, an author will be able to grow through the romance publishing program to the Super Leader slot.

### Historical Weapons and Combat

J. Allen Suddeth, who has directed fights for Broadway plays and for over 600 television shows and is also the author of *Fight Directing for the Theatre*, brought with him a selection of stage weapons used prior to 1776, including an eight pound mace and a number of swords. He conveyed way too much information to squeeze into this report, but he also made some recommendations for books on the subject: Robert Baldick, *The Duel*; Alfred Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries*; and Jay Keegan, *The Face of Battle*.

The page has great advantages over the stage in that we can control so many elements of a fight scene, such as the skill of the participants, the weather, and which participant is facing the sun. We can also focus on details, such as small twitches and beads of sweat. And we can endow our swords with special powers if we happen to be writing fantasy. Speaking of fantasy, sorry to say he could not recommend that we watch swordfight scenes in *The Highlander* to get ideas for realistic swordplay. Instead, he suggested the following movies for realistic duels, fight, or battle scenes: *Dangerous Liaisons*; *The Mark of Zorro* with Tyrone Power and Basil Rathbone; *The Sea Hawk* with Errol Flynn; and *Braveheart*. In the latter, they actually pulled back in the battlefield scene and didn't show as much blood and gore as there would have been. Those pikes should have been about 23' long and would have done a lot more damage to the horses.

A bit of trivia for cat fanciers: all cultures had dogs of war, particularly mastiffs, but there were also cats of war, Siamese bred to ride into battle on the shoulders of warriors and attack the enemy's face on the way by.

### Putting Together a Dynamite Press Kit

Binnie Syril Braunstein brought a variety of samples to this session, including one 5x8" folder. The basics for any press kit were exemplified by each of them: a pocketed folder (usually to hold 8½x11" pages) with a place for a business card, a black and white photo, a press release, a current bio, a reverse chronological list of books, copies of reviews, and promotional material such as bookmarks, postcards, and/or fliers. You might also include a list of awards, a list of lectures, copies of articles in which you were featured, a digest of industry statistics, and a copy of your latest book. If this is too big to go in the pocket it can simply be enclosed in the press kit envelope. The most important items go in the right hand pocket. Everything must

have a unified look and also look professional (nothing hand written, photocopied material lined up on the page, etc.) and the author's name should be prominent, especially on the bio page.

The price range to hire someone to do a press kit for you is high, \$500 to \$3000, but doing it yourself is much cheaper even if you use top of the line materials. Ten to twenty-five press kits are the usual number an author needs for any given book. A press kit is particularly recommended if you are launching a career or changing pseudonyms or genres. Press kits are generally the most cost effective way to make contact with reporters, booksellers, television and radio talk shows, and acquisitions librarians. And if you are scheduled to speak somewhere, send a press kit to the group you will address for use in their publicity.

### Perchance to Dream

Janece Hudson, who did her doctoral dissertation on dreams and has taught college psychology, led a session on dreams and their meanings and discussed how to "incubate" a dream as a source of inspiration for plots and plot problems. She advised keeping a dream journal, which allows you to work with each symbol. Write it down, then figure it out, remembering that although dreams can be analyzed on many levels and have many interpretations, most are about the dreamer and what is going on around him or her. Janece gave several examples to illustrate that dreams always make perfect sense, although they are not always easy to understand until we have tapped into the language of the unconscious. They use not logic, but symbolic and/or sensual language.

One fairly universal symbol among writers is the baby or child representing a writing project. Recurrent dreams need to be dealt with. One example was the recurring dream of a baby that always needed to be changed. Translation—a project the writer was considering doing was a really crappy idea. Flying dreams are also common and usually indicate freedom after a period of being upset.

### Slideshow: Stephen Youll

Artist Stephen Youll talked about his career while showing slides of his work over the last ten years. In the process, he revealed that artists and writers have a lot in common. He talked about how heartbreaking it is to find copy covering up detailed artwork, and how difficult it can be to make both the front cover and the entire painting work. He mentioned letting the painting take him where it's going as we sometimes let a story take us where it's going. He's also begun painting when he had no idea what would come out. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. "Agony and ecstasy" defines his creative process on some complex paintings. He can visualize what he wants to do in advance, but sometimes then feels as if he has already done it. Once he physically hit a painting when he couldn't get the effect he'd been looking for. The bubbles this created in the paint worked perfectly. He often has to stop and have a cup of tea and think about the work in progress when he's stumped. He works secluded in his own world >>>

# *1997 NINC Conference Play by Play*

*with Kathy Lynn Emerson*

*(Continued from page 13)*

most of the time. He feels constricted by the publishers who see him as capable of doing artwork for only one genre. He also explained that when the author and the publisher have different ideas about a cover, the publisher wins. He gave the example of one hero who would have looked like a Russian figure skater if he'd been in the clothing described in the text. Changing his attire upset the author, but was ultimately better for the book's sales.

## **NINC Business Session**

Fewer than thirty people stayed for this session. In future, since these meetings are so poorly attended even when they are at the beginning of the conference, they may be dropped.

Discussions led to the following conclusions about being in New York: More people would have had more access to greater numbers of editors and agents had they been trapped in a hotel with us in some remote location (next year in Lake Tahoe, for example). We could have saved some \$5000 had we known how many people would not be at meals. Those forty uneaten meals Thursday night cost us \$2000. Should we return to New York in future, we can plan more accurately for meals, but costs will still go up.

The minimum we can expect to pay for rooms three years from now is \$230/night, and for each room we reserve in a block and don't use, we have to pay cancellation penalties. Steep ones. Unfortunately, we are not a desirable group from a hotel's point of view. We take up too many meeting rooms and too few sleeping rooms and we don't drink nearly enough.

On the plus side, we will not lose as much on this year's conference as we might have, and we had programming not available elsewhere, particularly from genres other than romance. If we come to New York again, we might run the conference from Saturday through Tuesday, or from Monday through Friday, to obtain maximum opportunities to see editors and agents during their work week, but also allow more time for retreat-style sessions.

Next year's conference is in Lake Tahoe. 1999 was to have been San Antonio, but the wonderful hotel we stayed in last time has doubled its prices since then and no other suitable hotel was found. At the moment the site committee is looking into locations in Charleston, Nashville, New Orleans, and Savannah.

New President Steve Womack's goal is to recruit more members from all genres. Long term goals of the board include increasing membership, diversifying membership, and increasing NINC's visibility with agents and editors.

# *1997 NINC Conference Play by Play*

## *wraps up with:*

**Cathy Maxwell...**  
**Reporter at Large:**

## **Career Planning**

Agents Steven Axlerod and Damaris Rowland:

"The responsibility to plan a career rests with the writer and not the agent or editor," Steven Axlerod said, and added Irwin Applebaum's advice to determine who does what well and align yourself with that person. Three areas Axlerod feels a writer must evaluate before making career moves are: the writer's skill, the writer's tolerance for risk, and what the writer is willing to do to reach to her goals.

Damaris Rowland defined career planning as "your vision of your career." Acknowledging that there are many factors in publishing over which a writer has no control, she

urged us to think about the following factors we do control when putting together a career plan:

- 1) Identify the book you are good at. This is the book on which you'll build your career.
- 2) Define your voice; develop it. "Writers make the *NYT* List because they create a world which becomes their identity in the marketplace."
- 3) Decide how many books you want to write in a year.
- 4) Determine how important money is. Are you looking for long-term goals or short-term cash?

## **Making the *New York Times* Best Seller List**

Linda Howard, Mary Jo Putney, Iris Johansen, Catherine Coulter, Nora Roberts, Ann Maxwell, Jayne Ann Krentz:

Our panel of Bestsellers had these answers to moderator Pat Gaffney's questions:

How important is making the *NYT* List?

"New York lives, breathes, and runs on the *NYT* List." . . . "You don't have to make the *Times* List to make a living, but the *Times* will take you up to the next level of your career." . . . "Other lists are more accurate but they don't matter." . . . "Target and Anderson News have started reporting figures for the *NYT* List."

*What was the most effective marketing tool to help you make the List?*

"Incentives from the publisher like placement on the store shelves and a good laydown." . . . "Remember that the opportunity nowadays for advance orders is one to two months compared to six months years ago, so you have to know how to prove yourself quickly." . . . "My agent calls it building a foundation. It wasn't that one book that got me on the List, it was the book before that and the one before that. Being consistent is important." . . . "To have a really long career, reinvent yourself every ten years."

*Do you follow trends?*

"Don't bother with them." . . . "Next year there will be fifteen *Cold Mountain* knockoffs and none will make the List because [making the List this year] has to do with the atmosphere of that particular book."

## The Rights of Writers

Kay Murray (Author's Guild), Steven Womack, and Evan Maxwell

Attorney Kay Murray warned that publishers are canceling contracts more and more. Flatly stating that a writer doesn't have to take whatever the publisher hands him, she recommends close consideration be given to these areas of the publishing contract:

1. "Delivery" clause: Writers *must* take deadlines seriously now. Do not let the contract read "Time is of the essence" because this means if you are one day late, you have breached the contract. Strike that phrase, if possible. Make certain a realistic delivery date is set—then add three months to it. However, late delivery should not automatically mean the contract is terminated....make sure the publisher must provide you written notice when you are in breach of contract and must give you a grace period in which to respond or comply. Get everything in writing. If the editor won't put it in writing, then you confirm the agreement in a letter to the publisher.

2. "Acceptance" clause: Ask for an objective standard of acceptability. The best language is "author shall deliver a manuscript that is professionally competent or acceptable in form and content." Insist on language in the contract that states the publisher has sixty days after you turn in your manuscript to respond with necessary changes or the manuscript will be deemed acceptable. You also want to include the sixty days time factor for revisions.

3. Include a "Key Man" clause. Consider your editor's role and think about the need for a key man/editor clause: If your editor leaves the publisher, you have the option to leave with the editor if you wish. In such a case, you will have to repay the advance.

4. Include a "Publication" clause. This clause gives the

publisher X number of days to publish the book once it is turned in. If the deadline is not met, the writer keeps the advance and all rights revert to the author.

Murray predicts the courts will someday have to decide the issue of what constitutes "damages" when a contract is canceled. She feels an author should receive not only the advance but also damages for the time a manuscript spent on a publisher's shelf.

Steven Womack and Evan Maxwell echoed her concerns. Maxwell pointed out that we are no longer a cottage industry and cited the "corporatization" of publishing as the single biggest change in the industry. Maxwell finished by urging everyone to join the Author's Guild.

## Other Avenues to Explore

Panelists Leigh Riker, Diane Chamberlain, Laura Hayden, Deborah Dixon, and Julie Kistler talked about ways they supplement their fiction income. For fun we rated them: \$\$\$\$=super money \$\$\$=good money \$\$=nice money \$=it's cash. (We've also factored personal satisfaction into the \$ signs.)

*Leigh Riker, Instructor, Writers' Digest School of Writing.* Pros: You get to meet interesting people (35-100 students) and it's a flexible schedule. Besides cash per student, you receive a free subscription plus free or discounted writing books. Cons: It is labor intensive. (p.s. The school is looking for Mainstream, Fantasy and Literary teachers.) \$\$

*Diane Chamberlain, Story Line Consultant for soap opera.* Pros: It's television! And covered by the Writer's Guild so you get paid per Writer's Guild guidelines whether they use your work or not. Cons: The soap business is fickle. Diane spent three months developing a story line that, due to management personnel changes, wasn't used. \$\$\$\$

*Laura Hayden, Television writer.* Pros: It's television (think Writer's Guild)! A chance to realize dreams by meeting the right people. Cons: Fickle business . . . but even things that don't work out, mixed with "dumb luck, fate, and shooting your mouth off," create new opportunities. \$\$\$

*Deborah Dixon, Non-fiction writer and speaker.* Pros: Being the author of a textbook on writing has opened doors that writing a string of successful fiction books could never reach. Royalties are better. Has led to a successful speaking career. Cons: None. \$\$\$\$

*Julie Kistler, Drama critic.* Pros: Free theater tickets. Short term deadlines with immediate gratification. Cons: You may have to sit through some bad plays. \$\$\$

## The TV Interview

Barbara Brilliant, Media Consultant and award-winning television Host/Producer:

Highlights from Brilliant's excellent talk:

- Note cards. Always carry a note card with three "must air points" and back up facts.
- Listen. Respond. Bridge. If a host attempts to dominate the interview, remember TV time is not "real" time and the rules of cocktail conversation do not apply. You do not have to wait until another guest stops rambling to >>>

# 1997 NINC Conference Play by Play

with Cathy Maxwell

(Continued from page 15)

speak. *Listen* to what is said, *respond* to the speaker, but *bridge* the dialogue into one of your three “must air” points.

- Think color. Wear colors that match your eyes to draw the viewer to your face.

- Off the record. There is no such thing as off the record.

- Press kit. In your press kit, include a suggested introduction and always carry extra copies of your books.

- On-air book presentation. The best way to display a book: freeze frame, shoot it on a table or easel, or if they want you to hold it, hold it steadily for a decent amount of time—but don’t cover your face.

## Turning Your Downtime into \$\$\$

Loree Lough uses the research she does for her novels to write non-fiction articles that sell, and pay, well. Author of more than 1,700 articles, she demonstrated how, by changing the lead and slant of one article, she resold it to thirteen different publications and earned...well, I lost count after \$13,000. The secret to her success is a great query letter. Lough confesses she often spends more time on the query than writing the article. She recommends the feature on query letters in the *1998 Writer's Market*. Other insight:

- Money. Don’t be afraid to set your own price based upon research in the *Writer's Market*. Lough always insists upon a kill fee of one third of the contracted price.

- Contracts. Magazine editors often verbally contract for a story, but Lough confirms the phone conversation in writing with two copies of the confirmation letter, one for the editor’s files and the other for the editor to sign and return to Lough. The signed letter documents the editor’s agreement to the terms. Lough also submits an invoice with the article and hasn’t had a problem getting paid.

## Organizing Your Time and ABC’s of Money Management

Lucy Hedrick, professional time-management consultant, said the key of organizing your time is to turn a task into smaller tasks or, as she put it, “eating the elephant one bite at a time.” As for money management, she likes to think of ways of reducing expenses and had a list which is from one of her books (*365 Ways to Save Money*). One of the points self-employed people must remember is that any time you receive income, at least 20% of it is already earmarked for the IRS.

## The Cover Process

Bantam Books Art Director Jamie Warren Youll, and cover artists Cliff Miller, Stanley Martucci, Cheryl Griesbach, and Deborah Chabrian:

Jamie Warren Youll kicked off the workshop by dis-

cussing the process followed to put together the cover. She likes to receive a synopsis of the book and a description of the characters. An artist is then chosen and it is the artist who often does the research for the cover. A sketch is approved and the illustration is done.

Stanley Matucci described a good cover as “one you would like to lick.” He said he emphasizes the elements of good design on his covers but it can be difficult to get editorial approval since editors are very literal whereas art directors and illustrators are visual.

When asked about the dreaded “green book,” colorist Cheryl Griesbach assured us that all colors are good for a cover. She felt it was the way colors are used to make a seductive picture that catches the reader’s eye.

Cliff Miller stressed simple covers are the best. Youll said that the sales force reports if a cover is doing well.

## Artists and Art

Jael, Jill Bauman, Elizabeth Finney, Bob Savin, Ronald Chironna

Cover artists share many of the same problems authors experience: the danger of being stereotyped, the desire to break into new genres and build a name, the fear of being replaced by in-house computer “art,” and having publishers decide that what they approved, isn’t what they really wanted.

When questioned why some books end up with horrific covers, the panel cited covers by committee as the number one reason. All of them have received assignments where they are given an idea that won’t work, but are told to do it anyway.

All of the artists agreed it would be nice to receive royalties for their work. Often, their art is reprinted numerous times without permission. Moderator Bertrice Small pointed out that one way the writer can help is on foreign editions. Cover artists get paid when their work shows up on a foreign edition—if they know about it. She recommends notifying the artist (through a letter via the Art Director) along with a copy of the book.

When asked how they would feel about working with the writer, everyone on the panel agreed they enjoy the feedback from the authors. **NINK**

***“Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.”***

*William Shakespeare*

**Members:** to obtain a copy of the full minutes of the Board of Directors’ meeting, send \$2 plus SASE to the P.O. Box. For an updated copy of the Bylaws, send \$2 plus SASE. For a copy of the Treasurer’s Report, send \$1 plus SASE to the P.O. Box.



## ONLINE

My theme this month will be Really Useful Stuff You Can Do Online. You already know you can use the Internet for research and promotion and to share late-breaking industry news with other writers—at least, if you’ve been reading this column, you do. Now I’m going to share a few other things the Internet can do for your career—two of them gleaned from the (fabulous!) NINC Conference in October.

As you may have heard by now, more than one speaker at the conference stressed the importance of discovering your unique voice and strengths as a writer, and then emphasizing them to grease the skids for success. Some (now bestselling) authors have done this by talking to readers on cross-country book tours and by analyzing their mountains of fan mail to find what it is in their writing that resonates with their fans. But most of us, of course, don’t get reams of mail or publisher-sponsored tours, so . . . it’s the Internet to the rescue! What better (or cheaper) way to get feedback from a wide spectrum of readers?

On listservs such as RW-L and on message boards on various online services and Web sites, readers discuss what they like and dislike about various authors’ books all the time. Make this work for you! Services/sites with message boards for discussion of individual authors’ books include AOL, Genie, and the Painted Rock Website.

At the conference I was also struck by the similarities between how cover artists work and how we work—and by how much we might gain by sharing information. It occurred to me that a listserv might be the best answer, since artists, like authors, tend to be scattered across the country. Imagine, if you will, a listserv dedicated to published novelists and established cover artists. We can find out who painted what covers so that we can request specific artists for future books.

We can also work more directly with an artist while he/she is working on one of our covers so that our “vision” isn’t lost in the translation through various middlemen. This could greatly benefit authors and artists alike (though the publishers may not like it much <g>). I mentioned the idea to several artists and NINC members as the conference was winding down, and most seemed very interested. No, I’m not

volunteering to set up this listserv, but I’m willing to help if someone else wants to get the ball rolling.

On a slightly more concrete front, the Harlequin/Silhouette listserv is about to do a second royalty survey. This is much like the RWA Publisher Survey, but in much more detail, including figures on foreign sales, book club sales, etc. Anyone contributing their information will be e-mailed a copy of the completed survey—an immensely useful tool. So if you’re a H/S author and not on the listserv, now is a great time to join! The instructions have changed slightly since I last posted them in June. To subscribe to Hslink send an e-mail:

TO: **majordomo@majordomo.pobox.com**

CC: JoLeigh1@aol.com

SUBJECT: Your name and the line you write for

BODY: subscribe hslink-digest (or just hslink to receive individual e-mails)

Of course, Ninclink remains a Really Useful thing, too. Gleanings this month include the Web address for the National Writer’s Union ([www.igc.apc.org/nwu/](http://www.igc.apc.org/nwu/)) for those who want to learn more about what they offer, *USA Today*’s bestseller list ([www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb1.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/enter/books/leb1.htm)), which is updated Wednesday afternoons, and the number to call to order the AliMed Ergonomics catalogue (1-800-225-2610), which is full of items to make the sedentary writing life less painful. More and more, Ninclinkers are posting synopses of various articles on the industry, or Web addresses for the entire article—it’s like subscribing to your own special writers’ news digest! Interesting topics discussed lately include book rentals, whether romantic suspense is dead or just renamed, and how much profit publishers *really* make. Remember, to subscribe, all you have to do is send an e-mail:

To: **Majordomo@ninc.com**

Subject: Subscribe Your Name (as it appears on the NINC roster)

Body: subscribe Ninclink-Digest Your-Email-Address

Once subscribed, post messages

To: **Ninclink@ninc.com**

Send your late-breaking online news to me at **BrendaHB@aol.com** for future columns. See you online!

**—Brenda Hiatt Barber : )**





## EAST OF THE HUDSON

### Christmas Comes Early

Not that the publisher admits anything, but Penguin Group USA decided not long ago to brighten the holiday season for America's independent booksellers by passing around \$25 million.

That's right. Twenty-five million smackers, half of which will go directly to booksellers. The other half will go to the American Booksellers Association's war chest for activities to benefit the independent bookselling community.

All this was in settlement of a flap that developed earlier in the year between Penguin and the independents. At the heart of the dispute were credit and discount practices that the publisher said were not its fault. The firm said the shady business was all part of an embezzlement scheme perpetrated by a Penguin employee.

The booksellers maintained from the beginning that the employee was probably a convenient explanation for what they believed were discriminatory pricing policies by the publisher.

I can't begin to untangle all the threads of this little knot. My guess is that no one else ever will, either. Penguin already took a \$163 million write-down to cover expenses from the credit fiasco and, so far as I can tell, the legal case is still proceeding against the credit manager. I don't know who's right, who's wrong, and who's wronged, but the settlement puts "paid" to lots of accounts Penguin would rather forget.

The ABA trumpeted the settlement as "the largest antitrust discrimination settlement" in history. It will start dispensing payments to individual booksellers shortly, with those payments apportioned on the basis of 1996 business with Penguin. The prorated \$12.5 million could amount to as much as \$100,000 to some big independents.

That will help these stores, I'm sure, but what I really want to know is how the ABA will use its half of the settlement. Earlier in the year, the group picked up another good chunk of change from publishers in a similar action. Their war chest is pretty fat. I wonder if they are planning on using it to sue someone else.

Which brings us to the next item:

### Shot in Both Feet

The campaign by independent bookstores to discredit what was once their greatest ally, the *New York Times Book Review* Bestseller list, is turning into a war.

Wordsworth Books of Cambridge, Mass. has created an online independent bookstore bestseller list. The list is intended to replace the indies' past reliance on the *NYT*, to

which many of them provided sales figures. The long-time arrangement has eroded in recent months, ever since the newspaper's online review section incorporated a hotlink from reviews to the Barnes & Noble online bookstore.

Some indies began withholding their numbers late in the summer, right after the *NYT*/B&N link was forged. I originally recorded it as a quaint and defiant little gesture by renegade booksellers in Oregon and Northern California.

But since then, the campaign has spread nationwide and seems to be gaining momentum. If I recall correctly, I suggested that the booksellers were simply shooting themselves in the foot by diluting what little influence they wielded over American cultural life. Frankly, I expected them to see the illogic of their position fairly quickly.

Obviously, I was too quick in my judgment. (I know, I know. That's a *real* first.) Now it looks as though large numbers of indies are withdrawing, leaving the *NYT* to rely almost exclusively on numbers gathered from superstores, warehouse clubs, and other intellectually inferior book retailing establishments. Next thing we know, the *Times* list will be made up of nothing but authors who sell a lot of books, instead of being larded with authors who sell a few books at key independent bookstores around the country.

I was wrong. I admit it. I've always regarded independent booksellers as an arid, even bloodless lot. Their tastes in books seem to run toward the intellectual. I certainly never expected them to act in such a clearly emotional, even passionate, way.

But since they do have their wind up, they may well do something else to make themselves feel better. Why don't they take that big new war chest, the one with the Penguin settlement in it, and hire Johnny Cochran to sue the *New York Times*?

After all, look what the head of the Dream Team has already done for American literature.

### Negatory, Negatory

Doreen Carvajal of the *New York Times* reported last month that there is a new trend in book publicity: negative blurb.

Instead of gushing editorial endorsements from an author's best friend, or from someone beholden to a publisher or editor, these negative blurbs seek attention by splashing acid in an author's face.

My favorite example was the blurb on Christopher Hitchens' new study of Mother Theresa, a book entitled *The Missionary Position*.

Verso, the British publisher of the book, chose for its



## EAST OF THE HUDSON

jacket copy a blurb from a New York review: "If there is a hell, Hitchens is going there for this book."

I like this new trend. I like everything about it, particularly its sense of irony.

I guess that's why I never made it in the advertising business.

### Brave New World

*The Economist*, one of the more intelligent magazines in print today, reports that liberation from Soviet intellectual repression has not elevated the literary tastes of the Russian people.

In fact, the magazine reports that there is a burgeoning book business in the former Soviet Union. But alas, the boom seems to be in what the *Economist* so archly describes as "downmarket" works.

Under the headline, "From Marx to Mills & Boon," the magazine's Moscow correspondent reports that freedom has brought about a boom in "trashy" books, thrillers, romances, and celebrity bios. One of the foreign authors who has done well in this market is Barbara Cartland, but the *Economist* reported that the grand old dame of British romance would have positively blushed at some of the covers the Russkies have slapped on her demure stories.

There are, the *Economist* reports, only 30 bookstores in all of Moscow, and most of the new books are sold in stalls at metro stations or beneath street underpasses.

My kind of folks, these new overseas publishers. It makes me proud we fought the Cold War.

No, the Irony Light is not lit. I am quite serious.

### Someone Else Noticed It, Too

A thoughtful little piece ran in the *NYT* the other day. Under the headline, "Can't Anyone Play This Game," Martin Arnold explored a perplexing question: Whatever happened to good editing?

In my bleaker moments, I regard "good editing" as an oxymoron approximately equivalent to "respected journalist." I never met Max Perkins, but nobody, I mean *nobody*, could have been that good.

Arnold seems to share my view. Surprisingly, so do some of the best brains in publishing.

Arnold questioned top publishing executives and discovered that most of them feel there is a dearth of talent, particularly at the entry and intermediate levels of publishing.

Phyllis Gran, president of Penguin Putnam and widely

regarded as one of the best in our game, claims that while there are fewer and fewer top spots in the field, thanks to consolidation, she and other top managers are finding it harder and harder to hire seasoned and talented editors.

As a matter of fact, top-flight publishers are increasingly forced to use head-hunters to scout out good prospects.

Martin quotes another top editor as blaming the '80s for the problems of the '90s. This editor cited two reasons: bad entry-level pay and poor prospects for advancement through ranks already congested with experienced folks who were 20 years from retirement. As a result, talented youngsters selected themselves out of the publishing job pool, often for jobs in multimedia and computer-related fields.

The sole dissenter in Arnold's survey was Irwyn Applebaum, president and publisher of Bantam, who said that book publishing has always been a round hole difficult to fill with the square pegs of the world.

Eccentricity has been and will be the mark of book people, he said, and businesslike eccentrics will always be hard to find. He told Arnold, "Loving books is not enough. You can join a reading club. You have to enjoy making books. You have to be able to get others to pay for reading what you read free of charge."

Applebaum is not always right. (We'll talk another time about what he and Bantam have done to writers for the *Star Wars* series.) But I think his take on the books business has application to writers, as well. We should all remember that we write because it pleases us. The trick is finding a way to make what pleases us please other people as well. There are no guarantees of success in the second, but even if we fail, we will at least have the satisfaction of pleasing ourselves with our stories.

And with that, I wish all and sundry a thoughtful and joyous holiday season. We've survived another year, by jingles, and that is quite an accomplishment in the uncertain passage called life. So kick back on Christmas Eve, and maybe even on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Congratulate yourself and congratulate one another.

Then, while everyone else is watching the Rose Bowl on the afternoon of January 1, sneak off to your computer and tell yourself a story, one that you really enjoy. With luck, you'll find someone else to enjoy it, too. If not, you'll have an afternoon of fun yourself.

— **Evan Maxwell, resident curmudgeon**



# The Fast Track

Compiled by MARILYN PAPPANO

## NINC Members on the USA Today List

The Fast Track is a monthly report on Novelists, Inc. members on the USA Today top 150 bestseller list. (A letter "n" after the position indicates that the title is new on the list that week.)

Members should send **Marilyn Pappano** a postcard alerting her to upcoming books, especially those in multi-author anthologies, which are often listed by last names only. Marilyn's phone/fax number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: [pappanor@gorilla.net](mailto:pappanor@gorilla.net). Internet surfers can find the list at: <http://www.usatoday.com>

Members who write under pseudonyms should notify Marilyn at any of the above "addresses" to assure their listing in "Fast Track."

Member	Title	Oct 2	Oct 9	Oct 16	Oct 23	Oct 30
Sandra Brown	<i>Hawk O'Toole's Hostage</i> , Bantam		186	137		
Jill Churchill	<i>War and Peas</i> , Avon				120n	137
Catherine Coulter	<i>The Offer</i> , Topaz	38	41	74	111	129
Diane Mott Davidson	<i>The Grilling Season</i> , Bantam	135	148			
Tami Hoag	<i>Dark Paradise</i> , Bantam	83	102	148		
BJ James	<i>Journey's End</i> , Silhouette					148n
Joan Johnston, et al	<i>Lone Star Christmas</i> , Silhouette					126n
Elizabeth Lowell	<i>Winter Fire</i> , Avon	54	74	107		
Debbie Macomber	<i>Three Brides, No Groom</i> , Silhouette	119				
Ann Major	<i>Nobody's Child</i> , Silhouette					136n
Judith McNaught	<i>Remember When</i> , Pocket	21	23	34	60	74
J. D. Robb	<i>Vengeance in Death</i> , Berkley	50	70	139		
Nora Roberts	<i>Hidden Star</i> , Silhouette	62n	97			
Nora Roberts	<i>The MacGregor Brides</i> , Silhouette		130n	4	4	10
Sharon Sala	<i>Ryder's Wife</i> , Silhouette					119n

Et al: written with other author(s) who aren't members of Novelists, Inc.

Beverly Beaver, writing as **Beverly Barton**, was inadvertently omitted from the Sept. "Fast Track" listings. *Roarke's Wife*, Silhouette, was #118 on Sept. 3. NINC regrets the oversight.

### Novelists' Ink

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An organization for writers of popular fiction

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