

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

**Our  
10th  
Anniversary  
Year**

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February 1999

# Novelists' Ink

## ONE (but not the only) WAY TO STRUCTURE A COZY MYSTERY

By JILL CHURCHILL

First, I admit I'm a Capricorn. I want a road map before I start on the journey. But I don't feel compelled to follow the map if something more interesting beckons.

I used to write historical novels and had no trouble outlining the road map.

I'd pick a time and place, or start with an interesting character or area of business or politics. And as I did the necessary research, the other aspects of the story, characters, and events just fell into place.

For the sake of accurate historical chronology, an outline was necessary. As the historical novel market starting dwindling, and in my case crashing and burning, I turned instead to mystery novels. Specifically the genre called cozy. Not much on-stage blood and gore and violence.

I'd read hundreds of cozy mysteries and loved the genre. I'd reviewed them for the local paper.

But I realized after I signed the first contract (for which I'd submitted five one-paragraph possible plots and a list of continuing

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## Let's Talk about Nonfiction (It's Just Another Genre)

By JOYCE MARLOW

Fiction writers are missing out on a genre that's wide open to new talent. A genre where

you can use your creativity, know-how, and organizational skills to reach a huge audience. I'm talking about nonfiction and, in particular, "How To" books. These books are a huge segment of the publishing industry, and if you think there couldn't be room for one more cookbook, travel guide, or tome on how to marry a millionaire, you'd be wrong.

I think we'd all agree there's always room for a well written book, but we also know it takes something more to get published. My first step into nonfiction taught me a few lessons, but it also showed me the similarities between fiction and nonfiction writing. I learned that subject, audience, and marketability are essential in nonfiction, and that opens the field to any good writer with a marketable idea.

I'm also convinced that fiction writers have (at least) one big advantage when it comes to writing nonfiction. We know clever and ingenious ways to convey ideas to readers, and how to hook them into a story.

While not all nonfiction books require the writer be a good storyteller,

that quality obviously enhances any book. The "How To" genre of nonfiction is also fueled by

books with mass appeal. Fiction writers certainly know they have to grapple with that issue, so again, they have an advantage.

My first nonfiction book comes out in early February. My publisher (Warner Books) is planning a great publicity campaign, including radio interviews, ads in New York magazine, transit advertising in New York City, regional TV shows and book signings, and an early commitment from *Jane* magazine for a piece in their March issue.

That's pretty good, knowing that my career was stuck knee-deep in mud just two years ago. I kept revving my engine, trying to get somewhere, but those wheels just kept on spinning. I'd had three romance novels published, but the house was small and so were the advances and print runs. I'd tried writing "bigger books" and had enough rejection notices to paper my kitchen. After writing for seven years, I'd reached an impasse. I could no longer justify selling my books for small change, and the big houses passed on

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

### Fiction—now more than ever?

Truth is stranger than fiction, right?

But lately the truth has been so strange, there's no competition. Think about it. What with Viagra and El Nino; septuagenarians in space; septuplets and octuplets; presidential impeachments every 130 years whether we need them or not; everybody and their grandmother's uncle who has ever been associated with politics coming out of one closet or another; Ginger Spice at the UN; talk show hosts inciting riots on one channel and performing obscene barbering routines on another; people suing each other over the rights to sperm and eggs and frozen embryos; men suing woman for getting pregnant after they promised not to; women suing their paraplegic husbands for undergoing fertility treatments with them while having triplets with other women; directors reshooting classic films frame by frame and not getting sued... Is there anything left to make up?

I begin to despair that our collective imagination is exhausted—by reality, of all things. And it's a pretty ugly reality. So what does that leave for fiction? Here's what occurs to me: We could try to push the edge of the gross-out envelope. Naaah. I don't think so. Okay, so it's working for movies, what with the new scummier-the-better trend. But I don't see any point in trying to go lower, stupider, tackier, or more titillating. Even if the people who are into that stuff do read books, we'd lose our souls trying to write for that market. So I think that that ship has sailed, with Jerry Springer at the helm. Or at least I'm hoping.

We could make our fiction more upright, with a sort of pontificating and preaching theme, hoping to show the world the error of its scummy ways and shame them into behaving better. Well, if it works for you, that's fine. But in general, I don't think jumping onto the Good Ship Puritan is the key, either. Oprah has been taking the Holier Than Thou high moral ground big-time, and it's not getting her anywhere. In fact, I'm wondering if the books she chooses for stardom are going to be such sure-fire hits anymore, what with all the backlash.

How about "Salvation R Us"? No, I don't mean in the religious sense. I mean that we who write fiction—the kind of stories we've always told, the kind of stories that have always been told—may just be needed more than ever. When the world is in chaos and disorder (and when is it not?) where do weary, disillusioned people turn? To fiction, of course. Especially genre fiction.

We represent escape, yes, but also hope, joy, justice, imagination, and order. In mysteries, felons are punished and justice is served. In romances, compassion and love win out over cynicism, and happily-ever-after redeems dangerous loners and chilly commitment-phobes alike. In horror, good triumphs over evil and the world is saved. And in science fiction and fantasy, there is honor and logic, a sense of humanity, even in the most magical worlds.

It's always been true and it's looking better than ever—when the real

This Month  
from the  
President:

Reality  
vs.  
Fiction

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## ***PRESIDENT'S COLUMN***

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world drives you nuts, fiction becomes increasingly important.  
Isn't it nice to be needed?

### **NINC news**

We welcome new editor Terey daly Ramin with this issue. I'm sure you'll all join me in thanking last year's editor, LaRee Bryant, for a great year, as we also wish Terey much success this year.

Terey's assistant editors are Susan Wiggs and Jeanne Casstevens, and we also welcome them to what promises to be an energetic, exciting team. If anyone has an idea for a scintillating story or an amazing article, be sure to let Terey know. After all, NINC has always depended upon the kindness—and contributions—of its members!

— Julie Kistler

**Got questions?**

**Need information about  
specific projects and  
activities in the works  
or in the planning?**

**Got ideas?**

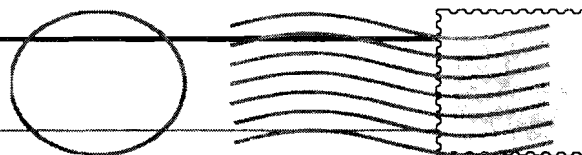
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the opportunities to  
write letters,  
ask questions, pose  
ideas here, too!**

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## ***LETTERS TO THE EDITOR***

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**Letters to the Editor** is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will never be published in NINC. Upon the author's request, signed letters may be published as "Name Withheld." In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue. Letters may be edited for length or NINC style. Letters may be sent to the NINC editor via mail, fax, or e-mail. See masthead for addresses.

### **Stalking the Wily Agent**

The agent-bagging safari isn't easy now; the markets are tight, and THE AGENT is at a premium.

While networking with other writers on a similar hunt, I concluded that Novelists, Inc. can do more for the members on the agent safari. With NINC's Web site and newsletter, we should have tremendous and pooled resources. We need more and broader information and quicker. We need to ask more intense and specific questions and get more answers, i.e. when my single title is published in the U.S., do you automatically submit it to overseas markets?

How film and overseas marketing is handled is important now, i.e. How and when do you submit to Holly-

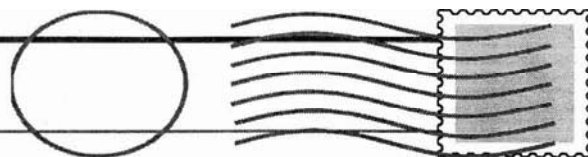
wood? Do you present a concept or a treatment with the completed book? Or if the book proposal strikes you, will you submit at that stage? Asking if a literary agent submits to films or overseas isn't enough; break down the hows. Ask how many writers this agent carries; who are they? (Do you feel you are competing at the agent level, rather than the publisher level?) Do you encourage those writers who want to try a different market?

We've shared the list of 25 questions to ask, but there are more. Not all literary agencies operate the same internally, or have the same S.O.P.s. This is really important to note; we assume too much. By pooling our questions and knowledge, we raise new, better questions.

Please pitch in with your ideas, but here are three ways I think NINC can help us to ask more informed questions of potential agents, or check agents we are currently using.

**1. A regular column** in the newsletter, devoted to agents or related topics. Interviews, writer questions, whatever might fall into that realm, also interviewing related agents, i.e. films—how do they want a book to be presented from a literary agent? West Coast literary agencies—more information about them and how they work. Interviews with established literary agencies—are they taking new agents? Who are the new agents? What genre is requiring more new agents? Interviews with editors, focusing on agents. An interview ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



with a successful agency *not* in New York—do they visit editors in New York? etc.

**2. Web site interaction.** A members-only section to post new agent names, add or subtract member names from agents already posted. We're so fluid in this tight market, moving from and to agents, that members would know who is on a client list, and who to call. Perhaps the online facility to take from Active Client, to Past Client, call within certain hours. My idea isn't full blown, but I'm certain that we could use our site for more up-to-date information on this primary element of our careers.

**3. Surveys.** Yuck. Double yuck. They take demand valuable writing time, but they perform a necessary information sharing service that writers need. We could also do these online and send mailed surveys to those who want them, but the rest of us could post online. The postage savings is appealing. At a fee, survey specialists could help us. (I've been reminded that we are a volunteer organization, after all.) For some reason, I'd sooner take a checkmark survey online than I would a mailer that has to be returned.

Agent hunting is not sweet. Writers don't want to deal with this time consuming, sometimes painful process until they have to—but when they must, perhaps *Novelists's Ink* can be there to help. My personal pick is a regular column in the newsletter, but someone more savvy might have ideas as how to better use our Web site for this information. What are your ideas?

— **Lois Kleinsasser**

*(Editor's note: In response to requests from other members, too, NINK would like to invite its membership to submit questions they would like to see asked of a variety of agents connected with the the Association of Authors Literary Representatives. The AAR has already agreed to participate in a column to be titled "Ask the Agent," but if you have questions you'd like to see addressed to specific agencies, please feel free to send those along, too. I can only promise we'll do the best for you that we can to get the answers you need. And since my middle name just happens to be Curiosity... <VEG> Cheers, Terey)*

## NONFICTION—JUST ANOTHER GENRE

▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1*

the relationship books I wanted to write. It was time to re-invent myself.

I was searching for new ideas much like a fisherman casts his line over and over, against all odds, searching for the "big one." Only in this case, I was praying for any nibble at all. My life partner took a stance early on not to offer advice in a business he knew little about, but he did suggest something we've all heard ever since first putting pen to paper—"write about something you know." I'll tell you what he thought that something was soon enough, but researching the idea moved my writing career from idle into brazen overdrive!

### Back Story

Let's start by going back almost seven years to another pivotal point in my life. I was living the single life in the San Francisco Bay Area, enjoying a challenging career as Recruiting Administrator for a major law firm. The future man of my dreams lived on a farm in Washington state, raising sheep and goats, giving talks on self-reliant living, and doing other interesting things with his life. We were both attending a conference on the California coast when we met. I was wearing high heels and a dress-for-success suit. He sported steel-toed work boots, faded jeans, and suspenders. "Odd couple" doesn't begin to describe our outward appearance,

but luckily we discovered that inside, we were cut of the same cloth. We fell in love during a whirlwind, letter-a-day, long distance relationship that combined all the best elements of a romance novel.

Within six months, I left my career in the city to move to a 100-acre farm and the culture of small town America. The first couple of years were tough—heck, I didn't even speak the same language as these people! It was as if I'd been dropped into a different world, with no road map and no compass. What I did have was my very own navigator and interpreter—my country man.

### The Old Mantra "Write What You Know"

And that's what he suggested I write about—the trials and tribula-

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## JUST ANOTHER GENRE

tions of leaving a career and the city to embracing life in the slow lane. I certainly knew about that! The last few years have seen a movement to “simplify your life,” and he thought my experience would fit right in. Although I found the general concept interesting, I wasn’t so sure the “city v. country” theme was very marketable. Besides, I’d never considered writing nonfiction.

The thing was, I also had nothing to lose. Dragging my feet all the way, I finally decided to spend some time researching both the field and the writing. By the way, if there’s a good “how to” book on writing nonfiction, I didn’t find one.

### What Next?

I turned into a bookstore sleuth, combing through large superstores and independents, roaming the aisles in search of—well, I didn’t know what. But I figured since I was a novice to nonfiction writing, I had nothing to lose but time, and the best thing I could do was investigate everything.

First, I wanted to get an overall view of the field. I studied subjects, titles, and topics, and when I narrowed down a particular topic, I took a look at how different authors tackled that subject. What angle did they use? Was there something about the author that enhanced the book or made it more interesting?

I knew that some nonfiction writers used interviews to prove and disprove points of views and opinions, and some didn’t. I looked at a number of books where that technique worked well, and others when interviews or quotes seemed superfluous or intrusive. Remember, I wasn’t looking at technical or scientific books because that isn’t my forte. I was considering a wealth of topics that could be tackled by a writer with a little know-how and a lot of savvy!

I took notes, I bought books that

I found interesting from a writer’s perspective (as opposed to the topic), and I utilized the large selection of nonfiction books available from the public library. I also checked into series books, which are very popular. Some are compilations of writing by other authors, like the *Chicken Soup* series, but others started with one idea that spilled into several books. I’m particularly fond of the series titled *Uppity Women in (Medieval, European, Renaissance) Times*, and the *100 Ways to Simplify (Your Life, Christmas, etc.)* series by Elaine St. James.

### Store Mechanics

Next, I looked into how nonfiction books were shelved. I discovered that sections vary from store to store, although there are some that seem pretty standard, and that all stores shelve nonfiction books alphabetically under each subject. I discovered the importance of targeting your book properly when I first went looking for books on moving from the country to the city. I knew there were some, but I had a lot of trouble finding them.

When I asked, the clerks muttered “humph,” checked various screens on their computers, and traipsed down aisles. They did find a few books, and I also found a few on my own. They were shelved differently in different stores, and in different sections (Regional, Travel, Nature, and oddly enough, Sociology). This was not encouraging. If there’s one thing that’s certain, if you can’t find a book, you aren’t going to buy it.

### The Shelving Issue

I wanted to know how nonfiction publishers positioned their books on those shelves. This

sleuthing exercise proved another important point—target your book to fit into a section that appears in “most” bookstores. There are many section titles to choose from—Cooking, Women’s Studies, Memoirs, Biographies, Nature, Home & Garden, Decorating, Entertainment, and Lifestyles are just a few.

I suggest you check out your favorite superstores and independents, both where you live and wherever you travel. Taking a look at Internet bookstores is a good idea, too. Although large publishing houses want books with broad mass market appeal, if your subject has a narrower focus, don’t rule out smaller, regional publishers.

One of the largest nonfiction sections I found wherever I looked was the Relationship section. Within that section were a variety of topics—everything from how to communicate with men from other planets, how to get over your love-hate relationship with your mother/father/sibling, and an amazing selection of books generally described as “how to find the man of your dreams.”

While standing in the Relationship section of Barnes & Noble, I had an epiphany. The light bulb went off, and my blank slate was suddenly filled with words! I could use my own story, my romance with a country guy, as the basis for a nonfiction book. And isn’t that what I really know how to write—romance? Isn’t that what I want to write—relationship stories? Bingo!

### The Importance of Titles

It’s the same for nonfiction as for fiction—a title should convey what the book is about. I had enough material to write a book detailing how to move to the country and find a man (or vice versa), the differences between country and city relationships, and how to fit into small town life. However, the title ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶

# JUST ANOTHER GENRE

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of my book doesn't reflect all that—I came up with a title that solved the issue of shelving within the nonfiction category. My title is: *Country Ways—Secrets for Finding and Keeping a Country Man*, and the book will be shelved in one of the largest sections of the bookstore—Relationships.

I'm convinced that nonfiction titles must convey answers to questions that will be asked by both the bookseller and the reader: What is this book about? Where should it be shelved? Will the reader find it? Remember, not every reader is comfortable approaching booksellers or clerks to help them find a book, and not every clerk is helpful.

## Credentials

Nonfiction writers usually have credentials or special knowledge about what they're writing. Well, I've been single most of my adult life and spent that time living in cities, so I know about meeting city men and city relationships.

Since moving to the country, I've met a lot of country men (besides my own), know where they are, how to talk to them (and when not to), how they respond to women, and why they're single. I know city women who've married country men, and I know couples who'd lived in the country all their life. I've also made all the usual "city gal" mistakes, been through a lot of good times, and some pretty tough ones, too. Somehow, I'd survived them all, settled into the landscape and now considered this land my home.

After five years, I knew a lot about country people and their way of life. I knew a lot about the men, women, and relationships that take root and thrive in the country. Now I have country credentials, and that I

can write about!

## Take A Chance!

If you're looking for a new direction, or a way to get more books on the market, why not consider nonfiction? If you think you don't know enough about a particular subject, or if you can't even come up with a subject—think again. Take a hard look at your self, your life, and your interests. Then take a look at our society and where you think it's going to be two years from now. As in fiction writing, you need to look ahead of current market trends.

I make a point of watching human interest shows like *Dateline*, *48 Hours* and *20/20*, and talk shows like *Oprah* and *The View*. I keep up on current events and the news. You never know when an idea will strike—whether from a reporter, TV producer or your own imagination.

On the other hand, there are a lot of books that don't necessarily depend on trends at all—cookbooks, travel, how-to-do-most-anything books, and subjects like relationships, recovery, biographies, and memoirs. Those are just a few—remember, there are dozens!

## The Proposal

When I wrote the proposal for *Country Ways*, I didn't know whether it should be different from a fiction proposal or not, so I took a logical approach. I wrote a one-page pitch letter and an 11-page outline with 27 chapter titles and one-paragraph "hooks" for each chapter.

I'd sold my other books without an agent, but I knew I needed one now. None of my writer friends wrote nonfiction, so asking for referrals wasn't a good answer.

I bought a copy of *Guide to Literary Agents* and combed it for agents who represented both fiction and nonfiction authors. I also read six months of the "Hot Deals" column in *Publishers Weekly* and chose a few agents who'd brokered big nonfiction deals. I sent off my package to 20 "name" agents, and started writing *Country Ways*. After all, I'd told all those agents the manuscript could be completed in 30 days!

Within a few weeks I'd received 18 rejection letters, one call from an agent who wanted me to change the "slant" of the book, and another call from Maureen Walters at Curtis Brown. She loved the proposal! I quickly wrote a 28,000-word abbreviated manuscript that seemed to write itself (which was a first for me) and sent it off.

Maureen shopped the proposal around, and, within a week, I was talking to editors from both Simon & Schuster and Warner Books. Just as quickly, I accepted an offer from Warner. I can't say enough about the pleasure of working with my editor, Caryn Karmatz-Rudy. She edits both fiction and nonfiction, is a true professional, and knows her job (and the industry) inside and out. Her suggestions, input, and savvy definitely made *Country Ways* a better book. She also listened, asked for my opinion countless times, and included me in the decisions-making process.

## The Bottom Line

Delving into nonfiction has boosted my self-confidence, my career, and my pocketbook. Writing *Country Ways* gave me the opportunity to write about a way of life that's vitally important to me, and a subject that's dear to my heart. Isn't that what we all want? Finding that something that sparks your imagination and makes the words fly across the page? There's no reason why that

something can't translate into nonfiction as well as romance, mystery, sci-fi, or any other genre.

Although I plan on returning to fiction, I'm currently working on two nonfiction proposals that share one core principle with *Country Ways*—the incorporation of life experiences into marketable ideas. I've decided that's a good place to start. **NINK**

*Joyce Marlow's first hard cover non-fiction, Country Ways—Secrets for Finding and Keeping a Country Man is a February, 1999 release by Warner Books. Joyce is also the author of three romance novels (Avalon). She lives on a farm outside Klickitat, WA, where she raises sheep, spins fleece into yarn, and weaves tapestries and rugs.*

*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.

## ONE WAY TO WRITE THE COZY

► ► ► **Continued from page 1, col. 1**

characters)—I realized with horror that I was completely at sea as to how to write one.

I started the first book knowing only whodunit and a pretty good understanding of the continuing characters. The first book was a real struggle. I think it came out well, but it was hard work, not fun. It was subsequently published and then republished by another house, and is still in print ten years later, so it must have been okay.

But when I got ready to start the second book, I started asking my mystery writer friends, "Tell me, how do you write a mystery?" I'd done it once, apparently adequately, but had learned little about how it worked. They'd just shrugged.

But I've finally found a way that works for me. It may not suit anyone else, but I'll share it for what it's worth.

I quite often dink around with a chapter or two, just doodling to get a feel for characters. This isn't finished writing, it's fishing. If it seems to be

a good idea, I then back off and start a plan.

(1) I need to know and believe the perp's motive is strong and believable.

(2) I need to have at least four really good clues to bury in the text somewhere.

(3) I need to know how my sleuth is going to hook these clues together

(4) And most important, I need what I call the "Ah-HAH" clue.

The Ah-HAH clue is an offhand, seemingly unimportant remark someone makes, as early in the book as possible. This comes back to the sleuth's mind at the end of the book and makes the other clues fall in place.

Once I have these items, I make a list of things that could happen along the way. They don't all have to happen (I underline the few that do have to happen), just that they might be useful.

Twenty to 30 events and/or revelations make me feel confident enough to get a running

start.

Many end up discarded, others are added along the way. Some turn into whole chapters, others are mere mentions. I make a somewhat feeble attempt to get them in order, but feel free to change the order as I go.

The best thing about this loose plan is that I never have to sit down, mind blank as lard, and say, "What on earth are my characters going to do today?" I have choices lined up and one or the other of them is always appealing.

I also discovered after the first book that I need at least a second murder or murder attempt, better yet, a third. After all, a mystery traditionally involves an unexplained death which can be summed up very briefly, such as "A murdered B because A believed that B had directly and maliciously caused the death or ruined the life of a person A loved deeply."

But that can easily become boring and you end up fearing that when you type "The End" you'll look up and find that you're only on manuscript page 87. ► ► ► ►

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# ONE WAY TO WRITE THE COZY

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 1, col. 1*

The first murder usually occurs early in the book, and the sleuth/s talk about it to people who might be involved or informed and formulate possibilities of who is guilty. But that wears thin. I love it when someone else, preferably the sleuth's favorite choice of perp suddenly becomes a second or third victim. This turns the sleuth's thinking inside out. It makes for chaos. If the circumstances of the second crime are sufficiently different, and the victim sufficiently surprising, the whole book starts over.

Early premises have to be examined and pitched out in light of new premises as to the perp and motive.

I made a few decisions when I started the first book. First, I would never put a child in danger.

I've stuck with this. I won't read books that feature this twist and wouldn't enjoy writing them. But this was merely a personal choice.

But another writing decision has become onerous. Since I was a bit insecure about a whole new genre, I backed off of the multiple viewpoints I'd used in historical novels and decided it would be easier for me to stay in one person's third person viewpoint. I'm sorry now that I did this. It's very restrictive. It makes for a lot of sentences like, "So-and -So said she didn't know anything, apparently thinking she sounded truthful." This is awkward. And it makes for rather short books because there's nobody else's head to get into and rummage around.

With the second series I'm now working on, I've decided to go back to multiple viewpoint and am enjoying it enormously. It makes a longer, richer, more realistic book. It allows for more characters because the reader and I both get to know

them much better.

Another thing I've learned along these journeys into murder is that there are two distinct kinds of mystery readers. One is like me as a reader, just going along for the ride, enjoying the characters, the writing, the background information, not feeling any need to figure it out before the sleuth does and liking to be surprised at the ending. About the only book I've ever figured out at the beginning was Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. It's the only book where I looked at the ending to see if I was right, and put away without reading because I was right.

But there's a much larger group of readers who feel that a mystery is an intense competition between the writer and the reader. They read very carefully. They underline what they think are clues. And mystery writers must write for them, too. For this

reason, in the early books, I gave all but the last two chapters to a friend who is an avid mystery reader of the competitive sort. When she's read it, I asked her to tell me who she thought was the perp and why.

If she had it right, I went over her margin comments and underlined clues and revised. As I got more confident, I didn't need to do this, but it was big help at first. So, if you're considering changing genres and trying cozy mysteries, you might want to adapt this sort of plan to your own writing habits and needs.

**NINK**

*"Jill Churchill" (a.k.a Janice Brooks) has written 15 historical novels; a history textbook; the last Gothic novel published in the '70s; 11 books in the Jane Jeffry series, about a suburban housewife/sleuth; and the first book of a second series set in the Hudson River Valley, Anything Goes, which will be published in July '98.*

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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**

Shirlee Busbee, Covelo CA  
Kay O. Cornelius, Huntsville AL  
Sandra Madden (*Sandra Coakley*), Las Vegas NV

### **New Members**

Barbara Cummings (*Ann Crowleigh, Leila Bercier*),  
Germantown MD  
Melitta Kit Dee (*Kit Dee*), Tucson AZ  
Dee Henderson, Springfield IL  
Eileen Putnam, Arlington VA

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## Resource Book List part 2

From the NINK Editor: *Continuing the resource/reference list from the January 1999 issue of NINK:*

*On Writing Well*, William Zinsser  
*Writing with a Word Processor*,  
William Zinsser

*Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie  
Goldberg

"Shut Up," He Explained: A  
Writer's Guide to the Uses and  
Abuses of Dialogue, William  
Noble

*Show, Don't Tell*, William Noble  
*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*,  
Renni Browne & David King

*Stein on Writing*, Sol Stein

*The Writer's Journey*, Christopher  
Vogler

A subscription to *Publishers  
Weekly*

A subscription to *Writer's Digest  
Magazine*

*The Random House Dictionary for  
Writers and Readers*, David  
Grambs

*Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia*  
(Third Edition)

*The Writer in All of Us*, June  
Gould

*The Complete Guide to Writers  
Groups, Conferences, and  
Workshops*, Eileen Malone

*The Joy of Writing Sex*, Elizabeth  
Benedict

*Writing the Blockbuster Novel*,  
Albert Zuckerman

*Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's  
Guide to Better English in Plain  
English*, Patricia T. O'Conner

— **Compiled by Jerry Gross**

Editorial Consultant & Book Doctor  
Jerry Gross may be reached by phone  
at 914-271-8705; fax 914-271-1239

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◆  
**Okay, have at us. What resource  
books can't you possibly survive  
without? Send your "keepers"  
choices to: [terey@ismi.net](mailto:terey@ismi.net)  
[or see Editor in the masthead]**

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# *MIDNIGHT in the GARDEN or SAVANNAH in 1999!*

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR:  
OCTOBER 7-10, 1999**

We are pleased to announce that our 1999 Conference will be held in beautiful, historic Savannah, Georgia. We can't guarantee that you will encounter all the colorful figures described in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, but we do promise an unforgettable weekend of networking with your peers and industry professionals. The conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency, located in one of the nation's largest historic districts on the waterfront of the Savannah River. The hotel is within walking distance of restaurants, entertainment, shopping, and the major attractions of the Historic District.

Plan to spend an extra day or two seeing the city and perhaps taking one or more of the many tours available. Watch for the preliminary conference brochure in the March *Novelists' Ink* for more details!

As always, we are interested in your ideas for the conference, so drop me a line or an e-mail to let me know what you'd like to see in Savannah. Besides that famous garden!

— **Victoria Thompson**  
**1999 Conference Coordinator**

e-mail: [VESTinPA@aol.com](mailto:VESTinPA@aol.com)  
snailmail: 563 56th Street  
Altoona PA 16602-1233

# Taking the Pulse of Fantasy

First in a new series, where we ask pundits in the field to comment on a particular slice of popular fiction. First up—fantasy.

By **JULIE KISTLER**

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## What's up with the market?

**Lawrence Watt-Evans** (author of *The Lords of Dus* and *The Legends of Ethshar* series, and *The Three Worlds Trilogy*): Fantasy seems to be doing pretty well right now, but it's narrower than I'd like—huge, fat books by established names are selling, but the quirky little stuff, which I like better, isn't.

Invented-world fantasy, with magical quests, dark lords, and lost heirs is selling; contemporary fantasy, with street wizards and urban magic, which I like better, isn't. In short, it's a very conservative, and to my mind boring, market right now. I'm hoping it'll broaden out soon; there are hints that that might be starting.

**Laura Resnick** (author of *In Legend Born* and its upcoming sequel, *In Fire Forged*): Fantasy has become much more commercially viable in the past decade. It's a fairly new thing for the genre to see fantasy writers on the *New York Times* Bestseller list. The downside is that a lot of fantasy writers feel pressured to write the traditional, commercial novel again and again.

**Sherry-Anne Jacobs** (aka Australian fantasy author Shannah Jay): Publishers are going along narrow-gauge rail tracks and only publishing stuff they're sure will sell lots, so we're losing our specialty stuff. I had a fantasy novel recommended for publication by a Commissioning Editor of a big name Australian publisher—only to have the book knocked back by the editorial committee because "it's not bestseller material."

All books cannot be bestsellers. And if they don't put more PR push behind the midlist authors, I don't know where they're going to find the next generation of bestselling authors.

At this rate we writers are going to have to wait for a new generation of small publishers to creep into the market and do "small" print runs of a few thousand, from which they can still make profits.

**Carole Nelson Douglas** (author of the *Taliswoman* and *Sword & Cirlet* series, as well *Midnight Louie* and *Irene Adler* mysteries): The science fiction and fantasy field was hit first and hardest by the disappearance of midlist titles.

Luckily (or unluckily, depending on your viewpoint), the field also had the most opportunity in place for

writing "franchise" novels: media tie-in novels in the *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* worlds, and those of a variety of other film/television-based works. The good news is that many writers are making way more money writing novels for these lucrative franchises than

they ever got for their own work. The bad news is that such contracts have steadily eroded percentages and rights, on the theory that writers making decent money are getting enough, even if the pay rate is one percent or below.

Some franchises pay flat rate with no royalties and no rights in foreign or film or other subsidiary sales. With these media universes and characters being embroidered on by dozens of writers, the notion that the writers are only using characters and situations already created in the film version and therefore need not be paid a fair share has worn very transparent.

The writers are now inventing whole worlds and new character sets from wholecloth to perpetuate the original storyline. Some midlist writers are managing to keep their own original work in print, but they may supplement their income with the occasional franchise book. Usually, a byline on a franchise book will *not* win readers for the writer's original work, but it can happen.

One fantasy writer who preferred not to be identified said: Nowadays the f/sf market as a whole seems to be oriented to movie and TV show tie-ins. On the other hand, one fantasy editor I spoke to recently said he was seeing altogether too many stories that were rip-offs of TV shows and movies.

**Christopher Stasheff** (author of *The Star Stone*, *Rogue Wizard*, and *Warlock* series): The market is definitely down at the moment—the distribution system has broken down because stores (like Barnes & Noble and Borders) have taken away the customers from the mall chains but they have not yet managed to make up the total number of sales.

**Carole Nelson Douglas**: Print runs here have plummeted to as low as 12,000 mass market, I have heard from a writer's mouth. The only bestselling major female fantasy writer is Anne McCaffrey. There is a second tier of women fantasy writers whose books perform well, but the bestselling fantasy books are global-war epics in the Tolkien tradition written by male authors.

What has happened in the field overall is a split into high-end and low-end product, much as has occurred in society in general: people make or purchase either

expensive designer goods (ambitious “literary fiction” that goes for the awards) or discount mass market entertainment (franchise and tie-in books and novelizations). Cadillacs or Kias.

### What are readers looking for?

**Christopher Stasheff:** What they’re looking for is what Robert Jordan is writing—the Middle Ages without Christianity. They want fantasy creatures and they want magic, but sparingly. I’m probably the only one left writing “science fantasy.” The readership wants magic and not science. Any hint of science and they’ll pass it up. One other trend—the readership across the board is at least 2/3 female now and it’s very important to have strong, independent female characters and to focus more on relationships.

**Judy Griffith Gill** (author/reader/bookseller): I detect a yearning on the part of readers for something other than cruel dragons, magic swords, and catastrophic battles. I see many people, very often women, pick up the latest Jordan or Goodkind, read the back of it, sigh and set it back on the shelf.

Then they begin to reminisce with me about books like the *Killishandra* series and many of the other McCaffrey series; some of the Heinleins; F.M. Busby’s *Rissa & Tregare* (though some might argue that those are SF rather than fantasy); and Kay Hooper’s *Wizard of Seattle* and *The Summer of the Unicorn*. We also remember fondly Zenna Henderson’s *The People Stories*. Mythical beings with good souls seem to be something many readers are looking for.

### And what about the future of the fantasy market?

**Russell Galen** (Scovil Chicak Galen Literary Agency): I’m afraid I don’t respond to this kind of request because I think, with all due respect, that it’s a fool’s errand. No one is asking me to comment on the weather for 1999

and no one should be asking me about the future of the fantasy market.

I have no idea, but what’s more, I don’t care. I’m an agent for writers, not a marketing executive. I respond to each manuscript put in front of me as a work of art. If I like it and I want it to be part of my life, I champion it with all I have, and if it doesn’t sell because of some large marketing trend, I never have any regrets about that.

**Louise Titchener** (author of *Greenfire*): I think fantasy is going to move in a more mainstream direction. That it, it will always be about magic and the struggle between good and evil, but the characters will be more complex and the issues more thought-provoking.

**Carole Nelson Douglas:** A number of fantasy authors, like myself with the *Midnight Louie* feline sleuthseries, have evolved into writing crossover books in other fields, such as mystery or romance.

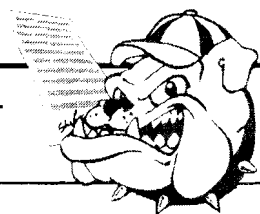
Horror writers, for instance, are writing *Buffy* or *X-Files*. Some sf/fantasy writers are coming up with futuristic thrillers.

**Carla Simpson** (author of the romance/fantasy/mainstream *Merlin’s Legacy* series, written under the name Quinn Taylor Evans): As we approach the new millennium I think ideas are going to be forward-turning, more toward the future of what lies ahead for us all and that may mean a blurring of the lines between romance, fantasy, and science fiction. We’ve already seen some steps in that direction in a few titles here and there over the past few years. I think there will be a demand for more.

At the same time there will be that old normal human instinct of push-pull; the quest to rush headlong into the future while holding onto the past. That’s where I think fantasy will remain strong—we will always have a need to hold onto the magic, legends, myths, and the unknown. **NINK**

## ASK THE LAWYER:

## :ASK THE AGENT



### *All the ???s Fit to Print*

This year, with the continued cooperation of Alan J. Kaufman and the new participation of the Association of Authors Representatives (AAR), we’ll expand the “Ask the Lawyer” column so you can direct your questions to Lawyer, Agent, or, when appropriate, both. Send in your questions now to the *NINK* editor: **terey@ismi.net** [or see Editor in the masthead, page 2].

*Alan J. Kaufman brings to this column more than 25 years of publishing legal expertise and a thorough knowledge of the business of publishing. He has been a literary agent/attorney and most recently for 19 yearss was senior vice president and general counsel for Penguin Books. He currently practices law with the New York-based intellectual property law firm of Frankfurt, Garbus, Klein & Selz where he specializes in publishing and media, with an expertise in copyright, libel, licensing, and contract negotiation on behalf of authors and packagers. For private, for-hire consultations, he can be reached by phone at 212-826-5579 and by fax at 212-593-9175.*



As I write this in the opening days of 1999, I'm snowed in—perfect websurfing weather. Well, it would be perfect for websurfing except for all of those folks who apparently received new computers for Christmas with Internet servers pre-loaded, slowing everything to a crawl. Still, persistence (and willingness to go online at odd hours) pays off, so I have plenty of great Web sites to share this time around. Most were suggested by various Novelists, Inc. members, though I always check sites out myself before reporting on them here (if only to make sure I copied the URL correctly).

The first batch are courtesy of Laura Resnick, who wrote, "Now that I have access to the Web, I found some sites (further to [sic] my article in *NINK* earlier this year about researching traditional weapons and combat) I thought I'd pass along for your column:

Historical Armed Combat Association: What you'd figure, from the title. <http://www.thehaca.com/>

Ring of Steel: an organization which teaches, develops, and promotes theatrical (stage) combat—seminars, workshops, articles, etc. about traditional combat and weaponry and resources. <http://maniac.deathstar.org/groups/ros/>

Martial Arts Resource Page: Links to information for more than a dozen styles of martial arts, as well as firearms. <http://www.middlebury.edu/~jswan/martial.arts/ma.html>

SCARS, info about the sort of hand-to-hand and hand-to-weapon training used by Navy SEAL and Special Ops types. <http://www.scars.com/home.html>

Thanks, Laura!

For other types of research, a great starting place is "My Virtual Reference Desk" at <http://www.refdesk.com> which gives lots of pointers for online research, as well as providing links to hundreds of informational sites and search engines. Speaking of search engines, a fairly new one at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) is particularly easy to use and does a good job of putting the best matches to your search up front. Not only does it give higher priority to those sites that have your search terms in close proximity to each other, it highlights your search terms on the pages it calls up. Definitely a nice feature. Thanks to Mary Kilchenstein and Sandy Huseby for bringing these to my attention.

Remember my tirade about "spam" (unsolicited "junk" e-mail) a few months back? If you're determined to bring the culprits to justice (such as it is), there's now a site that can help. [www.julianhaight.com/spamcop.shtml](http://www.julianhaight.com/spamcop.shtml) lets you report offenders to the "Spam Cop," who will decipher those encrypted headers for you and send a complaint to the appropriate server. This usually results in the spammers losing their accounts, which isn't as good as stringing them up by the thumbs, but is better than nothing.

Two of our own members have very useful Web sites you might want to check out, as well. Lois Kleinsasser, aka Cait Logan/London, has an excellent primer on creating your own Web site at <http://caitlondon.com> with tips, pitfalls, and useful links. And if Catherine Coulter's keynote speech on the Y2K problem (printed in the December *Novelists' Ink*) got you worried, you can find concrete steps to help you prepare, including a quiz and a checklist, at Eileen Buckholtz's site at [www.y2krun.com](http://www.y2krun.com)

The holidays (or maybe the winter weather) seem to have stimulated the NINCLINK discussions. Over the past month, we've talked about how we choose pseudonyms and character names (with some fun suggestions); fair royalties for e-rights; internal monologue (pros, cons, in-depth analyses); overcoming writer's block; viewpoint (again—and each time we dig deeper); tax deductions for writers; and why NINC is worth our dues (a very upbeat topic!).

Remember, to join us on the link, just send an e-mail:

To: [LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM](mailto:LISTSERV@PEACH.EASE.LSOFT.COM)

Subject: Your-Ninc-Membership-Name (as it appears in the roster)

Body: SUBSCRIBE NINCLINK Your-First-Name  
Your-Last-Name

Note: this will automatically give you the digest version (no need to specify "digest" anywhere). If you wish, you can switch to non-digest after subscribing.

Keep sending those great Web sites, tips, and news to [BrendaHB@aol.com](mailto:BrendaHB@aol.com). See you online!

— Brenda Hiatt Barber : )





# EAST OF THE HUDSON

## KEEP THE CHANGE

We're just back off the road, a triumphal tour of the left coast that took us to places we hadn't been since we retired to the woods. Lots of changes all along the way: the Dairy Queen store in Creswell, Oregon has become the haven of the local smokers and is no longer the culinary delight it once was; Jimmy Carter's double-nickel speed limit is officially dead, so dead that we averaged 78 MPH over one 150-mile stretch and never even drew a second look from the CHP; the Santa Ana Freeway is now sixteen lanes wide in some places and the interchange known as the El Toro Bullpen now consists of 28 traffic lanes, all of which move at warp speed.

But one of the most interesting changes didn't dawn on me until we returned and I started catching up on the news: the first item to catch my eye involved Internet commerce, e-trade, and modern retailing. The traditional merchants, of which there are thousands between Seattle and San Diego, reported a flat Christmas season, but the smart merchandisers, those who maintain Web sites and deliver their products via UPS, FedEx, and other such firms, reported staggeringly good sales, sales so good that they were almost unbelievable.

The *New York Times* reported that one analyst who monitors online retailing estimated that Internet sales in the Thanksgiving-to-Christmas period approached \$5 billion, a four-fold increase over the 1997 period and more than twice the optimistic estimates that had been floating around as the year closed out. Amazon.com, the big book retailer, had a 350 percent increase in sales.

In other words, it looks as though the world of online marketing is finally for real.

At first glance, the story was mildly interesting but not compelling. After all, the gurus of the WWWeb have been claiming for years that online retailing would dominate the world in the next decade, and it simply hadn't happened, at least not in the way that it would have to happen to make Sam Walton's heirs start selling their Wal-Mart stock.

After all, even the \$5 billion sales figure for all online retailers is quite modest, when compared to the \$118 billion in sales that Wal-Marts record every year.

But hard numbers are not what make economists sit up and take notice. Growth is what is fascinating, compelling and profitable. Growth is what's happening online.

I'm a pretty good example, I decided as I reflected on the issue.

By rough estimate, I purchased three dozen books online this year, including several I didn't even know I wanted until I discovered them while surfing/researching.

Now, I admit I probably bought a total of 200 books in the past 12 months. (I know, I know, addiction is an ugly thing.) So I indeed did keep my local independent bookstore and my nearby chain superstore in the black. But the important thing, economically, is that the year before last, I bought no books online. In other words, I probably bought about the same number of books in 1998 that I did in 1997, but I spent markedly more with online booksellers than I did last year, and growth is what the economy and the marketplace are all about.

Not only that, but I found the online shopping experience quite gratifying. Amazon.com delivered a hard-to-find just-released Christmas present in three days; I ordered two other books from my backwoods office in rural Washington and had them gift-wrapped and delivered to recipients in San Diego within five working days.

And not once did I have to interact with clerks who were snotty, incompetent, or both.

My point here is the same one I've been trying to make for the last five years: the snowball has broken loose and it's rolling downhill, faster and faster. I can't tell you precisely where it's going, but I can tell you that we're all going to look like Frosty, if we don't pay attention.

## KEEP THE CHANGE II

I think some other folks are starting to catch on, too. When I got back from the sunnier climes and sat down to catch up on my back copies of *Publishers Weekly*, I immediately stumbled across an article that was both forward-looking and intelligent. I was surprised.

No, that's not to say that *PW* is stupid and backward. But it is to suggest that as a publication, it has often reflected the outlook of its core constituency, independent booksellers, and for my money, that core constituency has been pretty badly mired in the early-to-mid-Twentieth Century at a time when the tsunami of change has been rolling over it.

The *PW* piece, by Paul Hilts and James Lichtenberg, started out to be an analysis of changes in the book distribution system. Until two or three years ago, that was not a subject that fascinated me, but ever since plague killed off four out of five independent distributors in the country, triggering a stunning cutback in the





## EAST OF THE HUDSON

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ *Continued from page 13*

number of paperback titles available, I've paid closer attention than I used to.

The two reporters from *PW* wandered around the warehouses of the book business, noting a tremendous amount of change that springs from a quickening of the pace of merchandising.

That pace has had to change because customers—readers—demand it. As the reporters noted, the availability of superstores that regularly stock 70,000 to 150,000 titles, and the rise of online booksellers like Amazon.com, which allows Web surfers to browse something like three million titles, means the customer is a hell of a lot more demanding than he or she used to be, back in the days when most bookstores stocked 20,000 of the proprietor's favorite titles. And if your tastes didn't coincide with the bookseller's, tough luck. You could do without or you could wait four to eight weeks for a special order.

Not any more.

Without flinching, without whining about the destruction of American Culture, and without contending that Barnes & Noble, Borders, and the other superstores are churches of the Antichrist, the *PW* reporters described the way the process of getting books from author through publisher and distributor to reader has changed. Since none of us will continue to exist if that process is interrupted, it is a worthwhile exercise to study.

It turns out that the forward-looking publishers and distributors have been expanding and upgrading their distribution mechanisms, even at a time of great uncertainty. Instead of the old system of hand-written or telephone ordering, hard-copy bills of lading and packing lists, and hand-picking and packing of individual volumes, the most progressive business people are now using the Internet to move orders around and robotic fork lifts to reach volumes that are stacked as high in the warehouse as the applesauce and toilet paper are stacked in your local Price Club.

Computers are key and bar codes are critical. In some of the most up-to-date warehouses, a bookstore's order is checked by weighing the shipping carton that contains it. Since the computer knows the weight of each title in the inventory to within a thousandth of a pound, it's pretty hard to mix up an order for 24 Clancys with

one for 24 Nicholas Sparks.

Maybe it's the guy in me, but I think that's waaaaay coooool! What it really means, for the book business, is that the old fourth-class book rate methods of doing things are gone forever. Customers are no longer willing to wait the three or four weeks that used to be required to move a book from a publisher's warehouse in the east to a bookstore in the west by snail mail.

If a distributor can't turn an order around in three or four days, and deliver a case of books or a single volume by second-day air freight, that distributor is going to be gone.

It turns out that may have been the thinking behind Ingram Industries' decision to sell its book group to Barnes & Noble. One source told *PW*: "With the ranks of independent bookstores—their primary customer—waning and digital processes threatening to make wholesalers less vital, Ingram Book Co.'s place in the market is declining."

The structural changes in the business end of book publishing extend from warehousing to order transmission to book delivery. Electronic data interchange (EDI) and other systems are being developed to facilitate communication between distributors or publishers and their customers.

Processing costs for orders have been reduced enormously. HarperCollins, for instance, now estimates that its e-commerce costs have been cut from \$2-4 per order to "mere pennies." At that rate, publishers will be able to compete directly with booksellers, and then independent booksellers will really begin to feel the squeeze.

Book delivery has become a horse race, with United Parcel Service, FedEx, Airborne, and the rest competing for business. Books are dense and sturdy, making them a very desirable commodity. As one shipping company executive said, "Carriers love books. They don't spoil, they don't break, and they take up very little space."

All these technological changes are not unimportant for us as writers. They mean that the progressives among publishers and distributors are going to become more powerful, and the folks who are standing pat in the face of challenge are going to get rolled up in a ball and punted for distance.

They also mean that all of us are going to have to pay closer attention or we won't recognize the process of which we are a part. Len Riggio predicted that the



change in the next ten years "will be much more profound than what has happened in the last ten."

So pay attention, damn it.

### DIRTY POLITICS

Hegel was right; thesis generates antithesis, power generates its own countervailing power. Just look at Bertelsmann if you doubt it. The German Giant which has come to dominate publishing is being nicked and cut and hamstrung and hog-tied like Gulliver.

Germany is still on probation in the public mind; Hitler is, after all, pretty hard to live down. But Bertelsmann has always maintained that it was part of what some call the "good German" camp. Its image polishers have claimed that the company, which got its start in the 19th century as a publisher of hymnals and bibles, resisted National Socialism and was even shut down by Hitler's minions in 1943.

Now, a German historian claims that story is bunk, and some of Bertelsmann's most vociferous critics in the United States are parroting the allegation.

Historian Hersch Fischler, writing in a Swiss magazine, charges that Bertelsmann published at least 15 pro-Nazi books during the 1930's and 1940's. Some of the 20 million copies of these "patently anti-Semitic" works were alleged to have been distributed in the German army as propaganda.

Apparently the charges have been circulating in Europe for some time, but they didn't have much effect until a left-wing U.S. magazine, *The Nation*, picked them up. That triggered a quick response from Bertelsmann. CEO Thomas Middelhoff immediately named a panel of three historians, one German, one American and one representing the Jewish community, to explore the matter.

Middelhoff promised that the investigators will have access to all Bertelsmann archives and internal documents and that their findings will be published, regardless.

Such are the problems of the new globalized world.

Oh, and by the way, Bertelsmann said, in another context, that it expects 40 per cent of future revenue to come from the United States. That may help to explain why a seemingly minor issue like books published more than a half-century ago can still cause a ruckus. New York is a town with a large and powerful Jewish community, and if Bertelsmann ends up being discredited by the

new research, there will be real, if ephemeral, consequences.

### A SMALL WORLD INDEED

The *New York Times* reports that some ideas have global resonance, but that their expression changes with geography. In Ivory Coast, one of the year's biggest publishing success stories is *Nouvelles Editions Ivoiriennes*, which publishes what reporter Norimitsu Onishi calls "African Harlequins," universal love stories with Sub-Saharan settings and characters.

The reporter uses the term "Harlequins" in a generic, rather than a brand-name way, but she correctly notes that romances require empathy.

Readers who live in Abidjan, setting for many of these novels and one of the most modern cities in West Africa, find traditional American and British romances jarring. As one black African reader said of the indigent love stories: "It's like we're living each moment, each location, each name. The books talk about sun and rain, not snow and autumn."

"In Harlequin novels," she added, "there's always a Prince Charming, blond and blue-eyed. That is not realistic."

The themes of these books are drawn from the lives of their potential readers. Heroines are flight attendants on Air Afrique or computer programmers in one of Abidjan's high-rise office buildings; candlelight dinners are French, in keeping with the Ivory Coast's colonial history, but the lovers also enjoy couscous and tchpdiene, a Senegalese dish.

One story, called "Sugar Daddy," involves the relationship between a female college student and a "tonton," or older, richer man.

The stories have some interesting sociological ramifications, particularly in Africa, where AIDS is rampant and female sensibilities have been subordinated. One of the novelists says the books are intended to change that:

"One of the goals...is to teach African men how to love. Women here have evolved. They want love with one man; they want tenderness. Men are behind."

That sounds like some of the conversations I heard a few years ago, when the Alpha/Beta Male issue was hot in romance-writing circles.

Maybe it's not such a big, diverse world, after all.

— Evan Maxwell



## 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 number is 918-227-1608, fax 918-227-1601 or online: **pappano@ionet.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	Dec 5	Dec 10	Dec 17	Dec 24	Dec 31
Sandra Brown	<i>Sweet Anger</i> , Warner Vision			46n	43	64
Catherine Coulter	<i>Midsummer Magic</i> , Topaz	114	128			
Jude Deveraux, Linda Howard, Stef Ann Holm, Mariah Stewart, et al *	<i>It Came upon a Midnight Clear</i> , Pocket	77	137			
Anne McCaffrey	<i>The Masterharper of Pern</i> , Del Rey		171	112	124	142
Judith McNaught	<i>Night Whispers</i> , Pocket	36n	62	101	99	96
Teresa Medeiros	<i>Lady of Conquest</i> , Bantam		113 n	120		
Nora Roberts	<i>The MacGregors: Serena-Caine</i> , Silhouette	22	35	69	112	123
Nora Roberts	<i>The MacGregor Grooms</i> , Silhouette	40	64	114	209	140
Nora Roberts	<i>Inner Harbor</i> , Jove		139 n	4	5	15

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

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### Novelists' Ink

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