

HISTORICALS: Where the Market Is Now

BY JO BEVERLEY

On reading his obituary in the paper, Mark Twain cabled the Associated Press: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." I have been saying the same thing about historical romance over the past years simply from observing my own career and that of others.

However, when the *NINK* editor asked me to write a piece on the genre I wanted to reflect a range of opinions and invited a panel of new, old, and past writers of historical romance to spend a week chatting about it. I have had to boil down a novella's worth of wisdom and insight into this article so I've rarely been able to quote anyone, but I want to thank Cheryl Reavis, Elizabeth Doyle, Julia Quinn, Kat Martin (who was away most of the time, but sent me e-mail), Mary Jo Putney, Loretta Chase, Maggie Davis (Katherine Deauxville), Jim and Nikoo McGoldrick (May McGoldrick), Pat Ryan, and Teresa Medeiros.

I started with my basic question—*is historical romance as popular as ever, more popular, or less?* I was pleased to find that the group more or less agreed with me, while accepting that things aren't rosy for everyone. The

evidence, however, is clear. Avon has recently put five authors on the *New York Times* list (top 15) for the first time, and they were all historical.

Julia Quinn, with bookselling experience, pointed to the rise of contemporary single title, and also romance writers moving into mainstream women's fiction, as giving the illusion of shrinkage. "If you just look at straight *romance*, it starts to even out. Take Iris Johansen, Patricia Gaffney, etc. out of the picture (and I think you can remove Nora Roberts, too, because she's a phenomenon unto herself), then you start seeing even numbers. And you start seeing that historical romances are often charting higher."

Yet there are still many authors who cannot sell their historical romance, or have seen their sales drop. What seems to have happened is a different allocation of the pie. Perhaps once there were a lot of authors selling 50-100K of a title without any great fanfare; now there are fewer authors, but some are selling 200K and up. Way up."

Another factor is The Period That Ate the Genre. Writers unable or unwilling to write Regency-set historicals have had trouble. Those not interested in writing books set in Brit-

ain have had a lot of trouble.

I asked some editors to comment on the state of the genre. Kate Duffy of Kensington, Tracy Farrell of Harlequin Historical, Chris Keeslar of Dorchester, and Shauna Summers of Ballantine all thought that the genre was healthy at the moment, though Keeslar expressed concern at a lack of innovation. (More on this below.)

Farrell wrote that Harlequin was definitely encouraging new authors and diversity. She reported buying new authors from the U.S., Canada, and New Zealand and that the company is publishing several of their Mills & Boon authors in the Harlequin Historical line in North America.

(Mills and Boon is the England-based arm of Harlequin. Does this indicate a possible increase in authors from outside North America? This might be good for the genre, but would reduce slots for North American writers. It would probably hit historicals hardest because of the popularity of British settings, a natural milieu for these writers.)

We have other evidence that publishers are looking for new writers. Avon has been running ads in the books with instructions on how to submit, and they eliminated their usual two midlist historical romances

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THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

You would think after all these years that I would know everything there is to know about writing. If this ten-page revision letter in my hand is any indication, you would be wrong. Obviously, I am an idiot who knows absolutely nothing about craft or marketing or who reads my @#\$\$% books. Based on this letter, I'm thinking my readers may be junkyard dogs. Sex-crazed ones.

Right now, while buried beneath this heap of rewritten, revised scribbling, I am convinced I want to write science fiction. Or mainstream literature.

My agent laughs at me when I bring this up. I'm not sure she can tell the difference between my science fiction idea and the mainstream one. Could it be I've reached incoherency?

I have this trick I employ when my right brain goes numb and my Muse crawls off into the swamp, weeping. If I'm feeling really productive, I'll go balance my checkbook.

Unfortunately, there is no way I feel productive while convinced I'm an idiot. So, my next trick is to find a happy counterbalance to my weeping Muse by digging beneath the layers of tear-stained manuscript on my desk to locate the Ninc conference brochure. Just reading the list of panelists reminds me that I am a writer, and—contrary to my current opinion—I am a writer who has some control over my career. The Ninc conference could be the reason I have a career.

I attended my first Ninc conference as a backwoods writer who had never been to the big city. I knew no one, but I arrived filled with equal amounts of ignorance and determination. What I remember best about that conference isn't the impressive array of industry professionals, although we had those, but the well known authors who sat me down and told me, in no uncertain terms, what an agent really does. Since I'd just come out of an eye-popping session where authors I respected revealed their advances and explained how they were calculated, I grabbed the opportunity to pick brains on the best agents in the business. With that ammunition in hand, I went home and fired my agent.

After that, you couldn't beat me away with a stick. Ninc conferences are not only enlightening, but fun. Only at Ninc have I stayed up half the night in bull sessions discussing subjects like why screenwriters could form a guild and we can't. (It involves breaking legs.) I've sat down at tables with representatives of the Authors Guild and discussed subjects from used bookstores to pseudonym issues. I've learned how to read my contracts, how to calculate advances, and how to kill a man without leaving a trace. (That last might come in handy one of these days, she says ominously, eyeing revised manuscript.)

All those subjects were vital to my understanding of this business (well, maybe not the killing part—yet), and probably saved me from starvation on more than one occasion. That's not all, though. The networking and the camaraderie have saved my mental health and aided and abetted my idiocy—otherwise known as my career.

With a membership of around 600, we can expect roughly a fifth of our membership to show up at a conference, a high percentage, but in terms of

numbers, that means less than 150 people most years. When I walk through the hotel doors into one of our conferences, I see people I haven't seen in a year, maybe more, but I know these people. We've argued over breakfast tables, picked each other's brains, shrieked in protest, and cried over rejections. We've discussed agents and adjectives, markets and frustrations.

The Ninc conference could be the reason I have a career.

Because we know each other, we read each other's books, learn about each other's markets, and have people to call on when we have questions. If one of us hears of an opportunity opening up, chances are, we know the perfect Nincoid to fill that slot. This is called the good ol' boys' network, and honey, we're it.

In Ninc conferences, the person you're sitting next to is just as likely to be an editor, an agent, or a publisher as another author. I've struck up a friendly conversation in an elevator and ended up a year later with a book contract out of it. In this business, as in any other, it's all about who you know. Sure, you have to write the book—I'm not promising rainbows—but I'm talking about opportunities.

Even though at my first conference I was a naïve hick who couldn't say boo to a goose, I made friendships that last to this day. Those friends keep me sane on days like this one when I'm considering a funeral pyre made of revised pages and my computer. Those friends assure me I really am a writer.

Or maybe they're simply afraid of my ability to kill without leaving a trace.

— **Pat Rice**

From your editor:

Sandy, our publisher, and Craig, our webmaster, have between them posted the last four issues of *NINK* to the website. Most Nincoids have indicated that they prefer to receive the newsletter as hard copy, rather than online, but if your office is like mine (i.e., buried under mounds of paper) you may find the online edition of *NINK* useful for referring back to articles you meant to clip and file but didn't.

In addition, we are specifically asking all Nincoids who live out of the U.S. to check out the website and see if they might be willing to read *NINK* online or download/print your own. Foreign residents who choose to forgo a hard copy of *NINK* will have the postage surcharge removed from your membership dues starting next year.

Please note—the ability to access *NINK* online is intended as an added benefit, not as a change members are forced to accept. The decision to forgo the hard copy of *NINK* is entirely up to the individual member, and the reduction in next year's dues applies only to Nincoids living overseas who currently pay a surcharge.

In Memoriam

With regret, we report the passing of Patricia de la Fuentes, who died at her home in Edinburg on May 6, 2002. Writing as Patricia Oliver, she published several highly acclaimed Regencies with Signet/NAL. She taught college and was an active member of Ninc, serving as a back-up moderator for Ninclink.

INTRODUCING.....

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 15 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of Ninc:

New Applicants:

Barbara Dunlop, Whitehorse, Yukon
Canada

Donna Fletcher, Jamesburg NJ
Kathleen Holzapfel (*Lauren Bach*),
Durham NC

Jill Limber, San Diego CA
Janice MacDonald, Vista CA
Julie Ortolon, Austin TX
Tara Spicer (*Tara Randel*),
Palm Harbor FL

Sue-Ellen Welfonder, Longboat Key FL
Lea Wait, Edgecomb ME

New Members:

Jessica Benson, Brooklyn NY
Kathy Carmichael, Palm Harbor FL
Janelle Denison, Rialto CA
Janet Justiss (*Julia Justiss*), Dangerfield TX
Susan Kearney, Brandon FL
Kathleen O'Reilly, Cedar Park TX

**Ninc has room to grow...
recommend membership to
your colleagues.**

**Prospective members may
apply online
at www.ninc.com.**

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from their August '02 line-up due to a reported lack of good manuscripts. Also, Ballantine reportedly was recently looking with some desperation.

However, I expect that a) they were looking for British-set, possibly Regency-set historicals, and b) they would prefer new voices—new to publication, or new to the North American market, with perhaps an emphasis on young. After all, many of the established writers are, like me, middle aged, and variety is important.

We talked about career longevity.

A number of long time historical romance authors have moved into contemporary romance, mainstream women's fiction, and historical mysteries. Some of this movement is for career expansion or even rescue, but some is for variety. Some authors have continued to write historicals while branching out.

Overall, the panel did not think authors come stale—dated but we worried that tight marketing restrictions, especially if they discourage authors from writing the books of their heart, could create problems. Keeslar's comments above and other developments suggest that the publishers are aware of the problem, but someone needs to find and develop new settings the readers will flock to.

So why is historical romance enduringly popular, and why has the Regency period come to dominate?

We mostly agreed that the distance from today's reality was important—escape into the past, generally with the harsher elements glossed over or ignored. The past also offers story possibilities that are difficult to make convincing in a contemporary. Forced and arranged marriages for one; warrior and/or dominant males for another.

As Teresa Medeiros wrote:

“Under the appropriate circumstances, our medieval hero can still get away with dragging the heroine astride his horse and carrying her off to his castle. A contemporary hero who stuffs her into his Corvette and drags her off to his condo is likely to be arrested for stalking, kidnapping, and sexual harassment.”

Historical romance is also ideal for heroic storytelling with larger-than-life protagonists. Men and women are more likely to be thrown on their own resources and face life-or-death decisions.

It also presents different opportunities for sexual tension. In most British historical periods, and especially among the upper class, sexual adventures were forbidden to women and the risks could be enormous. High stakes lead to gripping stories.

A wilder setting, such as the frontier, imposes fewer constraints. A more fantastical one, such as a slave/harem storyline removes most of the restraints. There's probably a thesis in this and that changes over time.

Could readers from our unruly age be flocking to Regency balls because they enjoy watching the game played out within strict rules? In a time when many believe that the adult female virgin is rare, is the viewpoint of the sexually inexperienced yet intelligent, mature heroine refreshing? Someone should analyze how many of the most popular historical romances feature virginal heroines.

Of course, sex isn't everything—really!—but at the moment, historical romance is a sexy genre. Most historical romance readers seem to expect to follow the lovers to consummation. A historical romance that shuts the bedroom door in the reader's face feels incomplete to most since the reader has followed the characters through so many other momentous developments. Elizabeth Doyle summed it up

nicely. “Taking the sex out of historical romance is like taking the alcohol out of a fine wine!”

However, it is worth noting that though some of the bestselling historical romances are very sexy, some are not, and some very sexy, even erotic, books do well, but not spectacularly. It's still the story and the writing that counts. The readers said the same. Those who liked very sexy books still wanted a strong story in an appealing setting.

Up above, the appeal of the dominant and/or warrior male was put forward as part of the appeal of historicals. Interestingly, however, this does not mesh with the popularity of the Regency, which is not strikingly amenable to uncivilized male behavior. The most arrogant duke will have trouble abducting his partner at Almack's. If the dominant male was an important part of the appeal, the medieval should rule.

However, this could explain the strong appeal of Scottish settings, which mostly seem to feature rugged Highlanders. I don't know of a single historical romance set in the elegance of Regency Edinburgh even though it did rival London for its balls, salons, and yes, its lords and ladies.

When I asked readers about the appeal of the Regency period they pointed to elegance, luxury, civility, and hygiene. One said that she liked to read about a time and place where she could imagine enjoying herself, if only in her dreams. Regency historicals rarely move out of upper class settings, even if the lord and lady spend time slogging through ditches, pursued by a villain, so the elegance and luxury aspect is probably spot on.

While sales of historicals are healthy, books with American settings are struggling. Could the above be the reason?

American-set historicals have

nearly always been about ordinary people, often in gritty frontier circumstances. Colonial Williamsburg, Federal Washington, and Gilded Age New York have never been major players. However, it's possible that even the most luxurious American settings can't compete with the familiar English mystique of royalty and titles. Readers don't seem to go in numbers for France, Spain, Italy, etc., though see the reader poll on that.

So why are the readers voting with their dollars against some previously popular times and places?

First we have to consider that the Regency setting is quite new. Certainly the traditional Regency has been around for a long time, but the Regency historical has not. About a decade ago it was a given that Regency high society was only suitable for "comedy of manners" books after the style of Georgette Heyer. Then Amanda Quick demonstrated that big historical Regency romances could become bestsellers. So perhaps it would have been as popular for decades if it had been around. Or perhaps it's still a novelty due to burn out.

But what other factors could be harming other settings?

Indian romances ranked lowest on my reader poll. Most people are increasingly aware of Native American problems, especially the injustices of the past. This might make the "escape into fantasy" less easy. Also, most historical romance readers want the possibility of a rosy future for the couple, and the reality of Indian history mars that, especially with a mixed race couple.

Modern reality might have undercut the American frontier myth as well. The gunman has lost his heroic aura, and perhaps ecology has given people a jaundiced view of settling the land. Now we'd call it trashing nature.

As for the Civil War, perhaps the Ken Burns's TV program snatched away the veil of fantasy. The suffering was great, and the aftermath bitter, and slavery hangs over it. It's also possible that Americans simply don't want

to revisit such a divisive time.

What new settings might take off?

Some authors and readers are looking toward the early twentieth century. Some of the panel wanted to see these books, especially set in the world wars, but others thought it might be still be too real for the readers' taste. World War II is still a living memory. However, Mary Jo Putney thought it might become of interest in connection with the "Greatest Generation" and the appeal of clearer goals and values.

Even though we perceived historical romance sales are strong, it never does to be complacent, so we looked for potential problems. We zeroed in on sameness, especially the emphasis on the Regency period. Of course, editors can't ignore the sales figures, but we wished the houses could put out more variety to give readers more selection, so new writers and settings would have a chance to grow.

As we all know, contemporary category has suffered from the brides/babies/cowboys trend. Yes, many readers like those stories, but those who don't tend to stop reading the genre because their tastes aren't being satisfied. Perhaps there's a danger of losing the historical romance readers who want books set in the West, or Australia, or India, or amid Barbary pirates.

Maggie Davis wondered if political correctness was weakening plots, whether the drive to offend no one is leading to a lack of edge. Cheryl Reavis agreed. "That's certainly a comment/complaint I've gotten from fans—that, in their opinion, historicals as a whole have become far too standard and predictable."

We also have a reputation. Historical romance is the sub-genre most connected with the clinch cover and the label "bodice ripper." All of us would like to shed the tackiness that can come with this. We'd like to see more cover diversity, and more covers that truly reflect the nature of the book. This would surely encourage readers, since at the moment there is a

sameness that befuddles them. If a reader goes into a bookstore looking for a Colonial America romance, she would be unlikely to find it by cover or title, or even back copy, where the publishers seem to try to conceal unusual settings with blandness.

What about the Internet? How is it affecting the genre? We all hoped that it would encourage diversity by making readers aware of books that are different, and also making them available through online bookstores when local bookstores might not stock them. However, the Web Age has seen the shrinkage of most settings and the dominance of one or two. It would appear that the web is enabling readers to zero in on what they want. If so, that trend will probably continue.

E-books, of course, were the great hope for the unusual settings and those with small, committed readerships, but that technology hasn't found a solid footing yet.

So, how do we see the future?

Pat Ryan: I'm hopeful that historical romance will continue on the trajectory it's been on for the past two decades or so: getting more sophisticated, more diverse, and better written, and therefore attracting more readers who never thought they'd be reading and enjoying romance.

Mary Jo Putney: The genre will still be here in one form or other. It wouldn't surprise me if 9/11 produced an uptick in interest in the Colonial era, where we defined ourselves as a nation. It's far enough away to have some glamour, too.

Me: I think readers are going to burn out on Regency over the next few years, which is a shame, and I think medieval may be where many of them go, especially High Romance Medieval with some glamour along with heroic storylines. Regency historical won't die, and the best writers will continue to thrive.

Jim and Nikoo McGoldrick: Historical romance will become the last bastion of explicit sex within the romance sub-genres—even more so than erotica, which will always have

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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ less appeal because romance readers want character and context. Single title contemporary will have less explicit sex as it becomes more mainstream.

To tie up this article I ran a rough poll in an online reader's group. This is not at all scientific, but here are the results.

I asked people to check off periods they were "really interested" in. They could check off as many as they wished. It's interesting that medieval is so strong when editors are still resistant to it, and that Scottish settings ranked lower when they are considered very strong.

Regency	64%
Medieval	50%
Scottish	33%
Western	27%
Ranch and Frontier	24%
Irish	22%
Welsh	20%
American	19%

Civil War	9%
Indian	6%

I asked whether a good historical romance must have explicit sex, and was surprised by the result. Only 32% said yes. I suspect that the definition of "explicit sex" varied. In our discussions, the panel commented how subjective this is to readers with one calling a book too sexy or even pornographic when another complained it was too tame. Some rank sexiness by quantity, others by what the couple do.

Most respondents, 67%, thought the length of the books was fine. 32% would like historicals longer, and only one person wanted them shorter.

39% said they'd like more foreign and unusual settings. I believe that the problem here is which ones. For any sector of the genre to succeed it has to draw a body of readers, but the possibilities here are close to infinite. Different readers could want Australian

outback, Moorish Spain, Mayan pre-history, and Tsarist Russia, with none of them willing to buy the others.

15% said they'd like more fantasy elements—magical type fantasy. There is a lot of resistance to that for some reason.

To sum up, historical romance is roaring along but mostly in a few channels, but editors may be looking beyond the "same old" for the new that will work. However, from the evidence, that new needs to have some glamour, elegance, and perhaps indoor plumbing!

Jo Beverley was born and raised in England and grew up reading historical romance, so she's bemused by the fact that so many North Americans write historical romances set in Britain, and so few Britons do, and why the current market for them is so small over there. As they said in Shakespeare in Love—it's a mystery. But then, what about publishing isn't?

ACROSS THE POND: Historical Sagas, UK Style

BY SHERRY-ANNE JACOBS

When I tell people outside the UK that I write sagas, they rarely understand what I mean, so I thought you folk might like to know more about one of the most popular historical genres over there.

The main parameters are:

1. Working class heroine

This is crucial. It's as if the upper classes had dominated popular fiction for long enough and after WW2, readers (mainly females) wanted to be able to relate to their heroines, as well as see themselves and their families/neighbourhoods in the books they read.

Catherine Cookson's books were the first sagas I ever read and I found them refreshingly different, with poor women struggling even to feed and

clothe themselves, not ladies in fancy costumes.

2. Heroine fighting against great odds

As in the old Norse sagas, the heroines of these books succeed against overwhelming odds—and usually go through hell in the process. Rapes are common, as are beatings and hunger. Maybe this gives readers hope that ordinary people like them can do more than just survive. A reader wrote about one of my books on Amazon.co.uk, "To come from a home as she did where there was little love and then to escape and make a life for herself..." And my editor applauds when I offer her a story idea that has lots of what she calls "heartache" in it.

3. Strong UK regional flavour

I grew up in Lancashire and it's

formed my character. By sheer chance (thank you, kind fates!) I stressed that in my first synopsis because I didn't even know I'd written a saga. I grew up in small terraced houses like the ones I write about and when I want to include some dialect, I only have to remember how my grandmother spoke. I don't think someone not imbued with the flavour of a specific UK region could write this sort of book credibly, by the way. Fortunately for sales, UK readers don't stick to sagas from their own region, but relish the different regional flavours.

4. A romance included

There is always a romance, but since we're following the heroine's life story, the heroes are perhaps less macho than in pure romances. The romance is only one plot thread amongst many and its importance, and

therefore that of the hero, varies from book to book. But the books do not usually include graphic sex.

5. Good historical research behind the tale

This element is not as crucial as I'd like and some of the best-selling saga writers of all time have not had a lot of historical flavour or even accuracy. However, most of the present generation of writers are more careful about this aspect, perhaps because readers are better educated nowadays.

6. Complex tales

All my contracts specify a book "of at least 120,000 words," which requires quite a complex plot to sustain interest. These are not linear tales, but are usually told "herringbone fashion" with plot threads, characters, and POVs alternating—this does not mean "head hopping"! As a reader, I sometimes wonder how it'll all come together, but it always does in the end. As a writer, I find it stimulating to keep so many plot threads alive and weave them together into an inevitable conclusion.

CLOG AND SHAWL SAGAS

Sagas set in the northern industrial areas of England, e.g., Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland are the most popular of all and have become known as "clog and shawl sagas," mine among them. Mind you, none of my heroines actually wears clogs, which were very noisy, unromantic things! Shawls now—they're OK. I wear 'em myself in winter!

LITERARY SNOBBERY—AS USUAL

Not surprisingly, writers of sagas suffer from literary snobbery and put-downs similar to those offered to romance writers. Only it's worse: we not only write for women and include soppy stuff like love, but we write for the lower classes—and uneducated folk are bound to only appreciate bad writing, aren't they? One reviewer said firmly, "I don't enjoy sagas but Anna Jacobs is exceptional." I suspect this was to justify guilt at enjoying my book.

However, we who write sagas laugh all the way to the bank at this elitism. Readers like our tales, which is what really matters, and it's possible to make a very comfortable, full-time living in this genre area. Even if you don't top the bestseller lists, books can stay in print for years. My first saga came out in 1994 and is still going into reprints and selling steadily.

THE DISADVANTAGES

I see two main disadvantages to writing sagas. Firstly, it's not as easy to sell foreign language rights—presumably because sagas have such a regional "Englishy" flavour. Secondly, it's not easy to sell to the U.S. because editors at American publishing houses seem to think sagas won't sell. (Tell that to my regular U.S. readers!) So I haven't seen a U.S. version of this genre. Pity. I'd enjoy reading them. This attitude is even more surprising because LaVyrle Spencer's *Morning Glory* is archetypally saga-esque in format, as well as being a brilliant story, and we all know how well her books have sold.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

You can push the boundaries a little if you're careful. I had always wanted to write stories set in Australia, my adopted country, but my editor wasn't keen—it might disappoint reader expectations. However, once my name was established, my agent negotiated for me to write a Lancashire/Australian saga—which was allowed as long as I produced a "pure" Lancashire one within six months. It felt like risk-taking, but was a book of the heart, so I did it. It amused me, though, that the marketing folk chose the title *Lancashire Lass*! OK, the heroine comes from there and I'm known as a Lancashire writer, but I'd have preferred a more Australian flavour to the title.

In fact, that book has sold better than any of my other books and my contracts now specify that I must alternate Lancashire and Australian settings.

If you want to get a flavour of

what sagas are like, I have all my first chapters up on my web site at <http://www.annajacobs.com> Go and meet some of my poor "agonised heroines", especially those in *Like No Other* or *Our Lizzie*. And would somebody please tell those U.S. editors that sagas would sell in America, too!

Physically Sherry-Anne lives in a small country town in Western Australia, but mentally she divides her time between exploring the 1730-1925 period for her novels and enjoying world friendships on the Internet. Which led to her standing up from the computer one day and moving a non-existent crinoline!

Bits'n'Pieces

IT'S JULY AND THE RUMORS ARE AS HOT AS THE WEATHER.

Which means at press time tongues were wagging over a terse item in a mid-July *Daily News* about the possible sale of Warner Books. For those who didn't see it, the paper noted that one scenario for the fumbling AOLTW rescuing itself would have the company dividing into three units, and "the book division including Warner Books would be sold off to raise cash and reduce debt." No real buyers were mentioned though several companies with the means to cover Warner's contracts came up, including Bertlesman and Viacom. Other options to selling off the entire Warner Books program might be selling off only Bookspan. When I hear more, so will you.

— **Terey daly Ramin**
...More Bits
throughout this issue.

≡ Tricks of the Trade ≡

BY RONN KAISER

VOICE Part One

A few years ago in a keynote speech at a Ninc conference, **Jayne Ann Krentz** said something that changed my career, if not my life. She said, “Believe in yourself and in your own voice because there will be times in this business when you will be the only one who does.” At the time the remark struck me as a bit odd, though I sensed it was layered with meaning. But believe in myself? With my ego, how could I not?

During the months that followed I would often think of Jayne’s comment as I wrote, and I would ask myself, what is my voice and did I believe in it? Slowly it dawned on me that what Jayne was talking about was the danger implicit in self-censorship. I came to the conclusion that maybe I wasn’t being true to myself in my writing and that it therefore lacked integrity. The “me” in my work was hidden because I was hiding. I was being guided by the acquisition editor, the reviewer, and the reader, which spawned a whole range of external and internal expectations and desires built around my belief about the way my work “ought” to be. Albeit unconsciously, I didn’t believe in my voice; I was afraid of being me, just what Jayne had warned against.

Not every writer has had this problem, of course. Some people seem to have been born with the ability to be their genuine, distinctive selves unabashedly whether at a cocktail party or on paper. But for the rest of us, finding our voice and using it to optimum effect is, it seems, of crucial importance to our success. Next month we’ll explore some of the ramifications of voice, how it develops, the role it plays in our work, how (if at all) it differs from style. Our object here is to define and understand just what voice is.

To begin, let’s consider this from Nincoïd, **Barbara Samuel**, (“A Soundtrack for Popular Fiction: Using Voice to Score,” *Novelists’ Ink*, July 1997): “Voice comes from the belly and from the mysterious river of the unconscious, not the brain or the mind, and therefore it is hard to control, and probably impossible to change enormously.” (Those into “further reading” might wish to check out Barbara’s article.)

The comments submitted by Nincoïds for this column

ranged from the philosophical and sublime to the pragmatic and substantive. First, the philosophers.

S. K. McClafferty says, “Voice is the quintessential essence of the author.” To **Brenda Jernigan** it is “...your personality coming out in your words.” **Pat Rice** has written in three different genres and has used “different sentence structure, pacing, and word usage in each....But underneath these surface manipulations is a strong current of Me. My characters and my subjects,” she adds, “reflect this most strongly.” Similarly **Pat McLaughlin** says, “What I feel is “the ‘me’ going through all my books, whatever the voice, whatever the style...is my world view. What’s funny, what’s not. What’s important, what’s not. What’s a compromise, what’s a sellout. What’s worth writing about, what’s not.”

Nincoïd **Claudia Welch** believes “Authorial voice is in the very tenor of the story, in the consistency of the themes, and the clarity of the author’s world view.” **Tricia Adams** says voice “goes beyond just the use of language. It includes what each writer chooses to write about, how that writer sees the world and the perceptions that filter that seeing, and her or his ‘take’ on how the world works. It’s the writer’s underlying sensibilities that guide him or her in choosing *what* is written, not just how it is written.”

Pat Roy believes Eileen Wilkes said it best: “Voice is not only the words you choose and the way you decide to string them together. It’s drawn from the unique way you see the world outside, as well as the world you build inside. Voice comes from deep within. It’s the confident assumptions you make about reality. It’s the conscious and unconscious choice you make every moment. It’s your version of the truth.”

Judy Gill has a similar take. Voice is “a means of communicating the same thing as other writers, but in a way unique and peculiar to each one of us....Each of us,” she says, “has a certain way of looking at the world....Voice comes from world view and it’s that world view that colors our vocabulary, our thought-processes, and our means of conveying our message.” **Cheryl Wolverton** regards it as “that voice inside a writer, that part of themselves that a writer allows to break free and express ideas.”

Jean Brashear thinks of voice as an “inner ring,” something she has learned to recognize, indicating that, as she says, “...what I’m writing is true to who I am.” Voice, Jean believes is “like a fingerprint; you’re born with it and it’s unique to you....[T]he power and uniqueness of a voice is directly related to how much it comes from the deepest inner part of you. **Suzanne Simmons** says voice has to do

“with the way our individual brains are wired and the internal rhythm to which we each march....[It] is what we are in our innermost self....”

Elizabeth Doyle thinks, “the writer’s voice is the color of the window pane through which we peer at the story. If the writer’s voice is sullen, no matter what’s happening outside, we see it through a hazy gray. If it’s quirky, we see it through a funny kaleidoscope.” **Judith Bowen** says of voice, “I think of it this way: Sense and Sensibility. Sensibility is ‘voice’ and Sense is how the book is written, plot, themes, style, etc.”

Coming down a bit off the mountain we come to those Nincoids who focus more on what voice is in a functional sense. Not surprisingly, *sound* is the key metaphor. **Karen Harbaugh**, for example, believes people are born with an ear for language—the sounds, the cadences, the turns of phrase that make language musical.” Says Karen, “It’s the way I hear people speak. I hear the rhythms, the tones, the silences between the words, the measured intake of breath.” Of her writing Karen says she has her own “polyglot voice that adapts to whatever voice cadence/style is appropriate at the moment. Beneath that, however, is my own ‘native’ voice cadence that will surface when I’m just writing something on the fly....”

Tracy Grant agrees “that voice is something writers are born with (much as singers are) but that, like singers, writers can hone and sharpen and refine their voice and even stretch it on roles that would have been considered out of their range when their career began.”

Linda Howard also chooses a musical metaphor to describe voice: “It’s something internal, a rhythm, an unheard song, that comes out during the writing process. Of course,” she adds, “it’s also word choice and sentence structure, but those grow out of that internal rhythm.” In-

terestingly Linda says, “I can’t see any particular style or voice in my own work, though I definitely can ‘hear’ that silent song while I’m working. I just can’t tell if it comes through in the execution.”

The musical analogy was also used by **Keith de Jong** and **Ruth Schmidt**, and three Nincoids use other art forms to express their views on voice—**Julia Ross** the visual arts and **Tess Gerritsen** and **Laura Resnick** the theatre arts. Since all five compared and contrasted voice and style, we’ll defer consideration of their comments until next month when we explore that distinction, an issue addressed by many other contributors.

William Zinsser (*On Writing Well*) writes about “style,” but the comment might as easily have been about “voice.” (A semantical issue perhaps?) He says, “Style is organic to the person doing the writing, as much a part of him as his hair, or, if he is bald, his lack of it. Trying to add style is like adding a toupee....You lose whatever it is that makes you unique. The reader will usually notice if you are putting on airs. He wants the person who is talking to him to sound genuine. Therefore a fundamental rule is: be yourself.”

If my voice is the “me” in my writing, then can I have but one? Is voice something deeper than style? Do I have one voice, yet enjoy the possibility of multiple styles? Who am I, anyway? The answers here next month.

Note: *The potpourri topic of “quick tips” (see the July issue for details) will now appear in the October issue. Please submit your tips anytime between now and August 25 as follows:*

Email: ronn.kaiser@prodigy.net

Fax: (916) 681-7155

Snail mail: 8133 Ibanez Court
Sacramento, CA 95829

Bits'n'Pieces

BUY.COM TARGETS AMAZON.COM...In this month’s Amazon news, rival Buy.com is specifically going after Amazon with a new discount program. The e-tailer sells books at 10 percent below Amazon’s price and guarantees a refund if a book is priced lower at Amazon. (Buy.com has a shopping engine that automatically compares prices with Amazon’s.) Company president Robert Price explains, “Amazon has 25 million customers, we have 5 million. We want to go after a place where we know the

customers are at.” Recently Buy.com introduced free shipping, which has apparently increased orders tremendously. (I’m sure it has. <g>) Book orders are drop-shipped from distributors, including Ingram and Baker & Taylor.

PLUS, WHO NEEDS COFFEE WHEN YOU CAN HAVE A REAL DRINK? A Borders in Farmington Hills, Michigan has won local approval for a liquor license in a restaurant within the store. State approval is required. Credit for the concept is given to New York based Cosi, which is said to have created similar bookstore restaurants in New York and Paris. So, writers who visit me can shop for books in style...<g>

— TdR

Freedom to Write



Sunday thru
Tuesday
Sept. 22-24, 2002

New York
Marriott Marquis
Times Square,
New York City

This article is the third installment of, “In Their Own Words,” answers from our esteemed conference speakers to questions posed by your conference coordinator.

The Questions

- 1. What type of stories do you have your eye on as possible favorites in the market?**
 - 2. Do you see lines blurring between genres or sharpening to meet readers’ expectations?**
 - 3. What did you find most distinctive in your last favorite read?**
 - 4. Who in the industry, whether colleague or author, has most inspired you?**
 - 5. What one thing can a writer do to increase his/her chance of success in the market?**
-

I hope all of you have enjoyed the last two articles featuring answers from conference speakers. I’ve been impressed by their candor and insight. This month’s group is no exception.

Once again, they all agreed on only one thing (all those who answered every question, that is). And, once again, what these speakers agreed on was different from last month’s group, and from the one before that. (I swear I didn’t plan it this way. Just publishing the answers as they come in.) A reminder: last month, the favorite answer was that lines are blurring. The month before, possible favorites in the market drew the consensus: contemporary, upbeat, and fresh.

This time, the answer evoking the consensus was #3. Every one of them mentioned character as the most distinctive in their last favorite read.

Laura Blake Peterson: “A writer’s ability to make a character come alive and make me care about what they’re experiencing is crucial. I’ve just reread a forthcoming novel from Viking called *River Season*, by new author Jim Black. It’s set in the 1960s in a tiny town in Texas and I never wanted that one to end.”

Joan Schulhafer agrees. “For me it is almost always characters and their relationships—regardless of genre.”

Jill Conner Browne’s books are nonfiction, but, arguably, they are all about characters. “I read hundreds and hundreds of e-mails from readers every week—I am like some kind of international cyber bartender. They tell me everything. So I’m pretty much absorbed with characters and situations—settings don’t get a lot of development.”

For **Dianne Moggy**, what she found distinctive was a combination of character and situation. “I’m generally a very character-driven reader, but it was the situation of saving the loggerhead turtle in Mary Alice Monroe’s recent novel, *The Beach House*, that really captured my attention and delivered just that much more to my reading experience.... how she wove the life cycle of the loggerhead against the life cycle of her characters.”

And for **Natalee Rosenstein**: “My last favorite read was a new mystery I am publishing called *You’ve Got Murder*, by Donna Andrews. I loved its originality and, in particular, the creation of a warm, vulnerable, appealing main character who is an AIP (artificial intelligence personality). Donna has really created a new sub-genre: the techno-cozy.”

Which provides a nice segue to what **Rosenstein** has her eye on as possible favorites: “Right now in the mystery genre, we seem to be having the most success with cozies (mysteries lighter in tone without explicit violence). In particular, anything with cross-over appeal to non-mystery readers seems to be working really well: e.g. our new needlecraft mystery series, tea-shop mysteries, as well as our established herbal and quilting mystery series.

Schulhafer says, “From a publicity point of view, erotic romance is getting the most attention from non-genre press and from readers and booksellers....Romantic suspense seems to be holding major positioning with readers and booksellers.”

Moggy also mentions romantic suspense: “We’ve had great success with three particular types of novels: relation-

ship stories, thrillers, and romantic suspense. I happen to be a fan of all three genres, but certainly coverage in the trade, appearances on bestseller lists, and our own sales results seem to suggest that readers agree!”

Peterson, however, does not look “for any particular type of story or genre when considering material to represent. For me, it’s the quality of the writing and the story elements that I am drawn to, not one part of the market or the other.”

A notion that **Browne** shares: “I already know that what I will write about is myself and my friends and it doesn’t matter what the market wants—that’s what I’m doing and I hope to God the market wants it...it’s not as if I can modify anything to suit [it].”

As for whether she sees lines blurring or sharpening between genres, **Browne** says, “I just tell the truth and make it funny—that’s all the readers expect from me, truthfully. If they decide they want something different, they’ll have to read somebody else. I’m pretty much a one-trick pony.”

Peterson says, “Readers always appreciate great storytellers with great stories to tell, no matter what the genre. The market shifts and changes depending on current events, but always these are the things that readers support.”

Schulhafer agrees. “You see authors refine those traditions [of a romance novel] in their own way with their own voices and they end up speaking, not merely to reader expectations, but with such an intuitive talent that, while their work embraces the great traditions of the genre, they also strike such a chord with readers that their books transcend the core audience and reach many more occasional readers of romance.”

Moggy says, “I see the lines blurring between some of the genres—as an example the difference between romantic suspense and thrillers seems to be blurring.”

Rosenstein also mentions romantic suspense. “Many romances are now really suspense novels with a lot of romance in them; one of our most successful “mystery” series, Charlaine Harris’ books about vampires, is published in our science fiction imprint. And even on the more literary end of the spectrum we are seeing more and more mystery/suspense novels like *The Instance of the Fingerpost*, by Iain Pears.

So what do these speakers offer as advice? **Moggy** has two answers: “Write the very best book you can. Your book, not an imitation of a current bestseller. And know the market.”

Speaking of “the market,” **Richard Curtis** says, “The

most important thing an author must be aware of in a book contract is the subsidiary rights provisions....Though it’s hard to quantify, sub rights income generates a significant percentage of a publisher’s bottom line, and it is not uncommon for a book to earn more money from sub rights than from sales of the original edition....In the foreign market, there is still lots of opportunity. However, foreign publishers are becoming more and more bestseller-oriented like American publishers, and it’s harder for new authors to gain a toehold overseas....Authors can assist their agents or publishers in this area by studying reports of sales in *Publishers Weekly* or Publishers Lunch and noting the names of companies that have acquired the rights to books similar to their own.”

The Respondents

Jill Conner Browne - Author, *Sweet Potato Queens' Book of Love*

Barb Burg - Senior Vice President of Publicity and Public Relations, Bantam Dell

Richard Curtis - President, Richard Curtis Associates; President, e-reads

Dianne Moggy - Editorial Director, MIRA Books

Laura Blake Peterson - Agent, Curtis Brown

Natalee Rosenstein - Vice President, Senior Executive Editor, Berkley

Joan Schulhafer - Director of Publicity and Public Relations, Kensington Books

The notion of teamwork is also addressed by **Peterson**: “The one thing an author can do is understand completely that writing is a solo event, an individual sport. Publishing is not; it’s teamwork. They are very different endeavors whose goals often intersect but sometimes are at odds with each other.”

In **Schulhafer**’s words: “Keep information and ideas in context.”

On a personal level, **Rosenstein** offers, “I know it sounds trite, but just keep on writing. Don’t let rejections discourage you. No one can accurately predict what will be successful in the marketplace tomorrow, so keep writing what works for you.”

That approach has worked well for **Browne**. “We (one of the Queens and I) started our website purely to entertain ourselves—the fact that it’s been an amazing success is wonderful but we had no idea in the world of what we were doing when we started it....we’ve been successful just by entertaining ourselves. We don’t really think about what They might like. We do what ▶ ▶ ▶

Freedom to Write



Speaker Update

Roger Cooper, Executive Vice President, iBooks Inc and Preiss Visual Publications

Donna Hayes, President and Publisher, Harlequin Enterprises

Libby Jordan, Vice President, Associate Publisher, Avon and William Morrow

Byron Preiss, President, iBooks Inc and Preiss Visual Publications

Isabel Swift, Vice President, Editorial, Harlequin Enterprises

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ makes Us laugh and figure the people like us will respond accordingly. So far, so good.”

The final words of advice are offered by **Barb Burg**, who suggests not one thing, but three, a writer can do: “Be realistic, be patient, and be nice!!! I think the biggest mistake authors make is that they don’t understand how the process works: what’s realistic for their particular book at that particular time, and how important it is to be nice to everyone: at your publisher, in bookstores, everywhere! Although a very, very, very few authors hit it big the first time, the reality is: most who hit it big have been writing for a long, long, long time and the ones that have taken the time to be nice (not demanding, aggressive, or unapprecia-

tive), seem to have an even better pay-off. Be realistic, keep writing, and be patient and be nice—it will pay off in the long run. I’ve seen it enough times in 17 years to know it’s true!”

I want to express my sincere gratitude to these speakers for giving time and thought to their answers: just a taste of the candor and insight to come at the conference.

Speaking of Insight...

I’m calling on all Nincoids to share Your insights. You, there, skilled storyteller and savvy author, what questions would you love to have posed to these panelists at the conference?

Some of the most dedicated, brightest, well-respected names in the industry will be sitting on the panels. What do you want to know from them? We will get the sessions rolling with prepared questions before opening up to the floor, so send in your suggestions....Now.

Speaking of deadlines...

The conference is little more than a month away. Early registration cuts off August 15. Mislaidd your brochure? You can print the registration form off the website. **Have any questions? Email me: lbaker10@aol.com.**

Network with These Publishing Professionals

A galaxy of stars from the publishing world are planning to attend this year’s Ninc Conference as panelists and visiting professionals.

These industry leaders are already registered. Are you?

Publishers and Editors

Irwyn Applebaum, President and Publisher, Bantam Dell

Meena Cheng, Choix Publishing

Beth deGuzman, Editorial Director, Mass Market, Warner

Tom Doherty, President and Publisher, TOR & Forge
Natalee Rosenstein, Vice President, Senior Executive Editor, Berkley
Nita Taublib, Executive Vice President and Deputy Publisher, Bantam Dell
Daniel Zitin, Freelance Editor

Literary Agents:

Maureen Moran, Maureen Moran Agency
Mary Sue Seymour, Seymour Agency
Pattie Steele-Perkins, Steele-Perkins Agency
Karen Solem, Spencerhill Literary Agency
Mel Berger, William Morris Agency

Industry Representatives:

Barb Burg, Senior Vice President of Publicity and Public Relations, Bantam

Tania Charzewski, Public Relations Manager, Harlequin Enterprises

Bill Golliher, Director Corporate Book Sales and Marketing, Anderson News

Jennifer McCord, McCord & Associates, LLC and Partner in Media Weavers, LLC

Doug Mendini, Director National Accounts, Kensington Books

Marsha Spyros, Coordinator, Office of Adult Services, NYPL

Debbie Walsh, Coordinator, Adult Services, Geneva Public Library

Bits'n'Pieces

THIS MONTH'S AUTHOR JOB OP

comes from Lonely Planet Publications. The Australia-based company (no, you *don't* have to live there <g>) is looking for freelance authors who: "can write

with color and flair; have a passion for travel; have a strong editorial background; and preferably have Spanish or Portuguese language skills." Lonely Planet Publications describes itself as "the world's leading independent travel guide publisher with 400-plus guidebook titles." Contact: Cathy Lanigan at cathy.lanigan@lonelyplanet.com.au or by snail mail at Locked Bag 1, Footscray 3011, Australia. Send your résumé (including details of travel experience and any language skills) along with two examples of your published writing work by post or e-mail, by Friday, August 16.

— **TdR**



Sticky Notes from the Edge

How Many Nincoids....

BY CHERYL ANNE PORTER

All right, so, just in time for conference: we know what we are. We're Nincoids. Cool. Love it. Sounds like a new entry for the Table of Elements. Or maybe some kind of alloy. Anyway, being a Nincoid is much better than when I lived in the town of Moore. I was a Moore-on. And when I lived in Tampa, I was a, uh, well...Tamp-on. Of course, I did the only thing I could. Exactly. I moved to Sarasota. Can't come up with the first fun or disgusting thing to call myself here. And no you may not feel free to try, either. It's a dang good thing I have a cast-iron ego, that's all I'm saying.

OK, we're Nincoids. We have to brand this. Some related things come to mind. For conference, we need lapel pins: "I Ninc; therefore I am!" Bumper sticker: "Honk if you're a Nincoid—or have recently seen Elvis!" Of course, we need a kick-ass doo-wop girl band: The Ninc Wells! And a sha-na-na garage band for the guys: The Ninc Spots! And instead of a secret handshake (Aside: All right, y'all. I've got 20 books to my name, and yet I still do not know the secret handshake. There isn't one, right?): we have a secret elbow rub. We rub elbows and say "Ninc, Ninc, nudge, nudge."

And, yes, you knew there had to be one: A Ninc cheer. The cheerleaders (try-outs will be held in NYC;

bring your own pompons) are hereby known as the Nincoid-ettes. And here's the official cheer you must learn: "Two bits! Four bits! Six bits! A dollar! If you ain't a Nincoid, you ain't...supposed to be here at this conference!" Hmm. Sort of dribbles off there at the end, doesn't it? Like everything else, it probably could stand some editing. Well, we'll work on it at the hotel bar. Around eleven-thirty, say? We ought to be in fine voice by then.

And while we're on the subject of try-outs, shouldn't being conferred Nincoid status be just a tiny bit harder than merely having a few books published (like that's hard to do) and then simply submitting your name and waiting to see if anyone has anything to say about why you shouldn't be a member? "Not that Moore-on!" I mean, really. We have missed the party boat with this one. Here's what I'm thinking: OK, we keep the present system in place, but once the names are submitted, and we decide to accept these wannabe-a-Nincoids, we put them through a brutal initiation ritual. Yeah, a hazing of some sort! It's starting to sound fun, isn't it?! Make 'em dress funny and prank-call editors and agents. Do the Nincoid cheer—in public. Make up a skit or something. Or tell a joke. "How many Nincoids does it take to...?" Or a limerick. "There once was a Nincoid from Nantucket..."

Yeah? Whaddaya think? Good, huh?

OUTSIDE THE BIG APPLE

For the hordes who've been waiting for this month's column with bated breath, no reminder is needed. But for the three who have just emerged from lengthy comas, last month I looked at AUDIOBOOKS in a general way and promised to zero in on a closer shot next time.

It's next time, and I'm back.

I wish I could get everyone's blood stirring with a large list of audio publishers just waiting for Ninc members to submit either published work they've retained audio rights to or those "books of the heart" that hadn't found a home. Surprise, surprise, it's not that easy.

To lay the groundwork, this column isn't about the audio publishers tied into the big boys of the book world. Instead, we're going to focus on "the other."

Let me start with a true story as an example of why audio publishers need to be probed instead of rejected out-of-hand because of their stated purpose. I live in southern Oregon, in the same county as Blackstone Audiobooks, a venerable publisher known for tapes of classics. According to their URL, they offer everything from amazing true story to philosophy to sports, but the classics are their bread and butter. Highbrow stuff. So my marketing wizard writing friend decided, "What the heck?" and queried them via e-mail about a short Western of hers. I knew better than to tell her she was crazy since I've seen her in action. A day later, she received an answering e-mail asking to look at her "shoot-'em-up." She did. They accepted. When she asked why they were taking something outside their "box," they allowed as how testing the Western waters had long been on their to-do list.

My own audio story(s) is less direct, but because I'd retained tape rights (no easy feat and a long tale) of my historicals, I was able to offer them to Books In Motion whose own bread and butter is the trucking industry. As I mentioned last month, I'm not getting rich off the five titles, but it's better than nothing.

My second endeavor is with The Fiction Works run by Ray Hoy who gives most A types a bad name. Located in South Lake Tahoe, Fiction Works is a "C" Corporation that also publishes POD (print on demand) and ebooks and is sniffing around video titles. A number of their titles are full audio productions which keeps their production at a snail's pace but with some new bodies onboard, that's about to change. The list of outlets alone runs the gambit from RV parks, military PX, Over 50 Club, school librar-

ies, to Borders and Barnes & Noble. As you might guess, dealing with the backlog of contracted titles has Ray, etc, slamming the submission doors. However, who knows what a not-too-subtle mention of a track record might accomplish.

All right, now for the publishers I know only by reputation, the following is what I gleaned from online research so it isn't complete.

Piglet Press, as you might guess, concentrates on children's work and handles design, production, and manufacturing of audiobooks as well as the sales and marketing of the audiobooks/CD-ROMs they produce. They're somehow associated with Fiction Works but operate out of Issaquah, Washington.

New World Publishing identifies itself as "a small, eclectic company producing audio materials that make a difference in people's lives. They specialize in holistic health, children's literature, and music. The company hails from Nova Scotia.

Next up—the closely affiliated The Audio Partners and Audio Partners Publishing Corporation which has been in business over 14 years. According to Inc. Magazine, it's one of the 500 fastest-growing privately held companies in the U.S. They handle all aspects of audio publishing from conception to sale, specializing in mail order sales. Owners Linda Olsen and Grady Hesters initially worked for, and then purchased, Newman Communications. They've published over 200 titles (a lot of them classic bestsellers). Check them out at www.audioeditions.com.

NorthStar Audio Books concentrates on public libraries, as well as individuals. In business since 1987, they have more than 1500 unabridged titles, including novels. Everything is handled in-house. Yes, most of their list initially saw life as a book.

August House is in Little Rock. Their editorial mission focuses on world folktales and the art of storytelling. They're not now publishing fiction, but the folklore scene is a possible. Think about what turns on children here.

Finally, given my space constraints, there's Passion Press. As you might guess from the name, these are erotic audiobooks. They're primarily interested in manuscripts if they've been published as books, or unpublished material from a relatively well-known writer. Anyone up to the challenge?

— **Vella Munn**

Bits'n'Pieces

Fine-Tuning Booksellers

PROTEST LETTER TO BORDERS...

Petitioners including Ralph Nader, Noam Chomsky and Jonathan Tasini, president of the National Writers Union wrote to Borders CEO Gregory Josefowicz protesting the new category management program. The move was, of course, covered by the AP—and instantly countered by Josefowicz who said the letter “illustrated a fundamental misunderstanding of our approach.” The protest letter read in part: “There is a difference between books and Pop-tarts...Books are not just another consumer product. They form much of our society’s repository of ideas; they are the bloodstream for the life of the mind. You have a responsibility to serve as well as to gain, for your books have the protection of the First Amendment.” The letter further alleges that category management gives large publishers too much influence. Not only can they more easily afford the fees, but also they’re able to affect decisions involving books by competitors.

On the same subject, *Publishers Weekly* Does Tell Another Story—or at least alternate side to this one. In a piece titled “Borders’s Imperative: Reinvent the Company” (PW 7/8/2002) John Mutter reports that “An inaccurate *Wall Street Journal* article and a somewhat wild-eyed ‘open letter’ to Borders’s CEO Greg Josefowicz from Ralph Nader and others have made matters more confused.” According to Mutter, after spending two days in one of the workshops Borders hosts to train publishers and company employees in the application of “category management” (a singularly bad term for Borders’ true intentions, Mutter assures us), Nader and company’s fears appear to be misplaced. Instead category management comes across as merely a broad business plan that will take a num-

ber of years to implement and will simply change the way the company operates. Mike Spinozzi, executive v-p and chief marketing officer, calls it “a business practice and philosophy, a general approach to retail.” Speaking to publishers, he added, “Music and books are not on a tremendous growth path lately. We’re offering a plan.” Yes, well.

Hmmm. Borders.com is linked to Amazon.com, so the only thing I can say is, I guess in all good skepticism I’ll just have to wait and see.

BN.COM EXPANDS BESTSELLER LISTS...BN.com is now compiling bestseller lists in over 300 (three hundred, yes, you read that correctly, that’s a 3 and two 0s) categories. They’re covering everything from standard store categories to “top tens you didn’t even know existed” like Hail to the Chiefs and New York vs. Los Angeles.

The ace in the hole, compared to other e-tailer lists, is that most of the site’s data draws on results from both their online and their brick-and-mortar stores. The site’s Top 100 list is currently updated hourly, and the Top Ten titles across all categories are discounted online by 40 percent.

FREE AMAZON TRACKING SERVICE

If you’re one of those folks who can’t resist checking your book’s ranking on Amazon.com or are afraid your book will crack the top 1000 and you’ll miss it, have I got a web site for you! JungleScan.com (Formerly AmazonScan.com, but the guys in suits apparently were in touch) will automatically track your book’s ranking on Amazon.com. You can view charts and graphs or raw data by simply adding your book’s page. Then start tracking your ranking. Once again that URL is <http://www.junglescan.com/>.

— TdR

Online.....by Lorraine Heath

To digest or not to digest. This dilemma faces us when we decide to join NINCLINK or any other listserve. I was recently talking with an author who was becoming overwhelmed by e-mail. She was on several lists, each one set on digest. She couldn't keep up. I asked her if she was using Microsoft Outlook® or Outlook Express®. She was. I recommended she get off digest and use the e-mail tools to sort her mail into folders. The reason I suggested this is because:

When the mail is in a folder instead of my inbox, I don't feel an uncontrollable urge to read it right away. I don't mind letting it sit there for a couple of days.

With individual mail, I can see the subject at a glance when I go into the folder. I can quickly delete any mail that has a subject that doesn't interest me: Russell Crowe, Star Wars, or Buffy.

If I want to reply to the list, clicking reply puts the topic instead of "Digest" into the subject area so everyone knows exactly what I'm responding to, and I don't have to remember to replace "Digest" with the correct topic. With individual e-mail, I don't have to worry that I'll copy the entire digest into my post.

I'm not fond of scrolling. With individual posts, I can see the meat of the message as soon as I open the post.

She followed my instructions for setting up her folders and rules. She no longer feels overwhelmed by e-mail.

If you have Microsoft Outlook® or Express® and are still receiving digests, you might want to consider going to individual posts and using the tools to make your life easier. To go to individual posts, send a blank message to: NINCLINK-normal@yahoogroups.com. Then:

Right Click "Local Folders."

Click "New Folder."

Enter folder name: Ninc and click OK.

From the menu bar, select Tools.

Click Message Rules>Mail>Mail Rules>New.

In box 1, click "Where the subject line contains specific words" which puts the statement in box 3. Click the blue underlined portion in box 3 and in the first box brought up, type Ninclink. Click "ADD." Click "OK."

In box 2, click "Move to the specified folder" which puts the statement in box 3. Click the blue underlined "specified folder," click the "Ninc" folder, click "OK." Click "Apply now."

You're in business. Individual posts will go into the folder and you can read them at your leisure.

BUSINESS

Realrates.com is gathering information on author earnings. To participate in the survey or view the survey information that has been submitted, visit [http://www.](http://www.realrates.com/authors/)

[realrates.com/authors/](http://www.realrates.com/authors/).

Brad Templeton's Ten Big Myths about Copyright Explained, <http://www.templetons.com/brad/copymyths.html>, discusses copyright myths, especially those that concern posting on the Internet.

A WORTHY ENDEAVOR

Crumbs in the Keyboard: Women Juggling Life and Writing, organized by Pamela Johnson and Sheryl Hames Torres, is the compilation of some of the writing industry's most dedicated writers. All contributors have pledged to donate 100% of their royalties" to the Center for Women and Families in Louisville, KY. "Crowley, Texas-based publisher, Echelon Press will match the royalties in donations for the duration of publication."

"The seeds of the *Crumbs* Project, a two-year labor of love, were planted at the melding of two separate incidents, both illustrating what it is like to be an author and juggle being a woman, an author, a mother, a friend.

"In a moment of frustration, Pamela Johnson posted to her writer's list, 'How do you people juggle *it* all and still find the time and sanity to write?' The response was delightful. Everything from humor to heartfelt stories came flooding in and that served to inspire me at a low ebb in my writing. About the same time, gifted author, Nancy Richards Akers lost her life in a senseless act of domestic violence. She wasn't the first and unfortunately won't be the last. But her spirit lives on in each one of us who, as women, pursue this journey called writing." For more information, visit <http://www.crumbsinthekeyboard.com>.

SCREENWRITERS

Screenwriters Forum, <http://www.screenwritersforum.com/articles2.htm>, has an extensive selection of articles on character development, dialogue, research, and script format. It also offers information on a screenplay contest. It also has monthly columns.

RESEARCH

Did you know that you could get hamburgers and waffles in the 13th century or a hotdog in 1484? *The Food Timeline*, <http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food.html>, provides information on the origins of food and beverages. A really useful and interesting site.

The Best of British, The American's Guide to Speaking British, <http://www.effingpot.com/>, was created as a lark and now contains over 1,000 words that mean something different in Britain than they do in the U.S. The site gives a definition of the word and then follows with its use in a sentence.

Austentation Regency Accessories, <http://austentation.tripod.com/home.html>, is hosted by Laura Sauer. Laura's interests include costume design and she shares information on cosmetics, fans, gloves, jewelry, millinery, parasols, reticules, shawls, and games.

Victoriana.com, <http://www.victoriana.com/welcome/>, is a site dedicated to the Victorian era. It has articles and prints from *Harper's Bazar*. It also has articles on the Queen's clothing, cake recipes, and the darker side of London.

For information on sunrises and sunsets across the United States or around the world, visit <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/forma> or <http://www.mindspring.com/~cavu/sunset.html>.

OF INTEREST

Terey Daly Ramin shares with us *The World Time Server.com*, <http://www.worldtimeserver.com>, "a free atomic clock sync for the PC that'll keep your computer time accurate to within 15 seconds or it'll automatically recalibrate your computer's time. I've just downloaded the software. It's also a very cool website in terms of being able to find out what time it is—accurately—anywhere in the world anytime.

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Moderators:

If You Have Questions, E-Mail:

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Lorraine Heath	lorraine-heath@attbi.com

FOR FUN

Need a hug? Visit <http://www.roz.org/flash/bear.swf>. While at the website, if you send the URL to someone else, Avon will donate 10 cents to breast cancer research.

If you discover sites that you think would interest Novelists, Inc. members, I'd appreciate it if you'd e-mail them to me. I'm always looking for interesting and useful sites to include in the column. E-mail me at lorraine-heath@attbi.com. Thanks!

Bits'n'Pieces

"KIND OF LIKE THE BIBLE, BUT NOT REALLY"...

The School on Heart's Content Road, is a big book. It's not published yet, but it's big. Big, big, biiiig. As in 2,600-pages big. It took its author, Carolyn Chute, five years to write it) and it's been languishing in publishing limbo for another five years. "I agree that it's long for one sitting at the beach," Chute says. "It's got everything—kind of like the Bible, but not really."

She doesn't mind doing minor edits, what she refers to as "feather dusting" but objects strenuously to chopping out major portions of the book or shifting its focus from the conflict between powerful

business interests and the exploited underclass. In which case Chute and her agent are in the process of trying to speed up publication by breaking the novel in to a trilogy and seeking a new publisher. She anticipates having the first book ready before this *NINK* hits your mailboxes and the two others within months. Still, the delays are taking their toll. Chute is battling periods of depression, and worrying that she and her husband were sinking into the grinding poverty that she wrote about in her first novel, *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*. Chute has only recently bought a computer, but has no printer so can't use it to work on her novel. She also hasn't particularly mastered e-mail because she's too busy hauling water, lugging wood, doing work and taking care of her garden. I don't know.

Every time I think of abdicating all "this" and heading for the simple life, I think about all "that" and realize there are certain things I don't want to live without. Like my washing machine and my modem.

— TdR



Laura Resnick is

THE COMELY CURMUDGEON

“Going Public”

It's January in Detroit. Saturday afternoon. I'm visiting friends and, as long as I'm there anyhow, I've arranged a signing at a local new-and-used bookstore which has been recommended as a romance-friendly place.

(This is, you will gather, a Saturday afternoon in my innocent youth, back when I was romance writer Laura Leone—an era of my life which sf/f people, for reasons which elude me, sometimes treat as a dark secret, or else as so irrelevant that they refer to me as a “new” writer even though I've been in the business for years. So jumping genres and changing names is one way to keep the damask bloom on your fragrant cheek, I suppose. But I digress.)

Where was I?

Oh, yes. In Detroit. In January past. With a new romance novel on the stands, and a signing scheduled at a bookstore not far from the home of my tolerant friends Cindy and Bob—whose illusions about the glamorous life of a novelist were shattered long ago due to knowing me. The bookstore—in contrast to Cindy and Bob's warm, dry, well-lit house—is damp and chilly and dark. The few items of my wardrobe which are suitable for public appearances weren't made for Michigan winters, and I sit shivering by the radiator—which is the coldest thing in the store.

Within minutes of my arrival, the light snowfall outside turns into a heavy snowstorm. In my hometown of Cincinnati, we're notorious for abandoning our cars, shutting down our schools, and emptying our grocery stores of bread, milk, and beer at the first sign of snow. (We also did this throughout the week of race riots here in the spring 2001. If the Pentagon announced that an atomic bomb was about to land on our city, Cincinnatians would rush out to the store for bread, milk, and beer. It's our way.) However, I expected the hardy citizens of Michigan to be made of sterner stuff. I was wrong. Even in Michigan, people don't go shopping in a snowstorm.

So the store is completely deserted for the first ninety minutes of my two-hour booksigning.

In the absence of anything else to do, the bookseller tries chatting with me as I huddle and shiver. The essence

of her conversation is that last week's signing here went so well by comparison. The author on that auspicious day was Shelly Thacker, who is so charming and so pretty, and who has such a lovely figure and such a wonderful personality. Shelly Thacker is also so considerate, because she brought homemade cookies with her. And she's so popular and such a wonderful writer that there were lines around the block when she was signing here!

Are you out there Shelly Thacker? Don't take this the wrong way, but the next time we meet, I will be forced to kill you. I'm sure you understand.

Finally, after the longest ninety minutes of my luckless life, the snowfall thins out to flurries. And before you know it—hurrah!—a customer enters the store. A regular client, obviously, since she and the bookseller know each other. The bookseller introduces me and points out the piles of my new book which are sitting on the table in front of me. The customer brusquely rejects the suggestion that she might be interested in my book, and she disappears into the bowels of the store. She emerges from the stacks ten minutes later with a few books... including a second-hand copy of one of my previous titles.

As she's paying for it at the cash register, the bookseller suggests to her that I'd be happy to sign it for her. As I sit grinding my teeth in mute protest, the customer looks me over assessingly from head-to-toe, and then says, “No, I'm sure I'll be bringing it back next week.” And people wonder why I long ago gave up arranging signings for my books. (Cindy and Bob do not wonder, of course, because they had to spend the rest of that Saturday listening to me gripe.) Not that I'm the only writer whose signing ever went belly-up because of bad weather. Jill Marie Landis recalls being in a car with a driver on her way to do a signing at a Barnes and Noble in Oklahoma City once: “It starts pouring. Lightening. Thunder. Tornado warnings out. We are headed for a really huge black cloud. We get to the bookstore. The driver gets as close to the curb as he can but doesn't get out. It's a downpour outside. I step out of the car into a two-foot-deep puddle. I'm soaking wet by the time I run a couple of yards to the door.” When Landis gets inside, the bookstore is “a ghost

town. It's a weeknight and there's a tornado outside." By now, electricity is spotty, and there's no running water. The bookseller apologizes and, in the absence of functioning plumbing, expresses hope that Landis doesn't need to go to the bathroom.

Heigh ho, the glamorous life.

Not that good weather—nor even a good crowd—is any guarantee that you won't sit there alone and unloved at a signing. I once did a signing with Robin Wiete, a historical romance writer, a couple of weeks before Christmas. We were at a local author-friendly bookstore which had thoroughly publicized the event and ordered huge piles of our books for it. The shopping season, the fair weather that day, and the store's good location ensured there was heavy traffic in the store for the entire two hours Robin and I were there.

Neither of us sold a single book. And while we were there, someone actually came to the store to return a copy of one of Robin's books. If you don't recognize Robin Wiete's name, by the way, it's because she later took a long sabbatical from the business to pursue a Ph.D in psychology. One of her areas of interest is traumatic stress disorders. Coincidence? Maybe.

Ninc's current president-elect Anne Holmberg is another writer who knows how unpredictable signings can be: "I once signed books at a big book fair with Nora Roberts on one side and Nelson DeMille across the aisle. Just the three of us. Visions of glory danced in my head as I pictured a dozen pity sales, at least. But I did much better than that—I sold fully half the number of books that DeMille did, and 75% of the books that Nora did! ...DeMille sold 6, Nora sold 4, I sold 3."

That reminds me of the time I let Harlequin writer Toni Blake talk me into joining her at the Kentucky Book Fair, along with Teresa Medeiros, Elizabeth Bevarly, and several others. I wound up sitting next to a well-meaning but extremely dull self-published fellow who wouldn't stop talking to me, and browsers kept picking up my books, then dropping them and backing away with puzzled or disdainful expressions on their faces.

I needed a cocktail so badly by the end of the day. Writers are people who chose a profession, an art, a pursuit, a way of life which ensures that we spend most of our working lives alone. I mean, my idea of upgrading my workplace wardrobe was to buy several pairs of new pajamas last year; then another writer informed me I could order them online and not even leave the house to get them. And I'd never need to work again if I got a dollar every time a writer told me how exhausted and drained she is after a conference, a signing, a workshop, a tour, or the Christmas holidays because there are people everywhere and that's so tiring for someone used to spending every day alone in a room with her computer.

So it's doubly hard on a writer when public appearances turn out to be disappointing, depressing, or genuinely demeaning. I mean, actors and musicians chose that

lifestyle, so they're supposed to live with that kind of crap. But we chose a lifestyle deliberately designed to avoid these scenarios—yet, somehow, like a clichéd nightmare, we inevitably wind up naked in public anyhow.

And speaking of being unclothed in public...

Former CPA Jodie Larsen had to attend a bar mitzvah on the same day she was scheduled to do a signing at a convention center. So Larsen dug up and donned an old pair of panty hose and high heels from her previous 9-to-5 lifestyle, attended the ceremony, then rushed from the synagogue to the convention center. By mid-afternoon... the panty hose began to feel their age. As Larsen finished signing her books, "My panty hose slowly crept down until they were at mid-thigh level. After shaking hands with the men in the booth, I tried to waddle out, but it was impossible. Finally, I stopped in the aisle, kicked off my shoes, and rolled the darn things off. Three guys in another booth applauded as I put my shoes back on, blushed, and left as fast as humanly possible."

Lesson learned: Unlike fine wine, panty hose do not improve with time.

At yet another one of those signings where no one was buying books, Ninc's Dixie Browning was supervised by six representatives from the distributor who'd set up the signing. They were all male, all mid-thirties, and they all "stood behind me with their arms crossed over their chests." When Dixie took a powder-room break, she passed two women who'd noticed her six-man entourage. One of them said to the other, "She must be somebody important—she's got all those bodyguards."

I myself have never been mistaken for somebody important at a signing, though I have been mistaken for a bookstore employee, a bakesale hostess, and a loiterer.

When Susan Elizabeth Phillips was on tour with *Kiss An Angel*, a Wal-Mart in Texas set her up in—where else?—the sportswear section. Right in front of a sale-rack of sweatshirts. They'd thoughtfully ordered a hundred copies of her previous book, but not one single copy of the book she was actually there to promote. As it turned out, this "was no tragedy because hardly any of the customers seemed to speak English—or only enough to ask me to find the sweatshirts for them in other sizes. I sold one book to a store employee in a pity buy."

Of course, the good thing about even a bad signing is that all you have to do is sit there quietly minding your own business. Whereas speaking engagements and public readings are minefields of potential embarrassment for writers.

The World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) usually schedules "coffee klatches" for writers. It's a great idea for fans, who are the largest portion of attendees. Writers are scheduled to sit at a given table, usually large enough for at least a dozen people, and their readers can sign up to sit there and chat with them in a small group for an hour.

The first time I did a coffee klatch, one

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THE COMELY CURMUDGEON



person showed up. And he was only there because he wanted to be at Lois McMaster Bujold's nearby table, but it was full, and he was hanging out at mine in the hopes that a seat would open up at her table.

I told him to go open one up. And then I went to the bar.

Ninc member Carole Bellacera and two other writers once combined two evils by doing a signing along with a public reading. They read in the bookstore's café "to a bunch of people so rude they wouldn't even look up from their books." The only two people who even appeared to be listening... actually got up and left in the middle of the program." When our session was finished, no one even applauded. It was incredibly humiliating. I think, between the three of us, we sold four books."

I did a reading at an sf/f convention in Florida where only one person was in the audience—and he'd only come to hear the writer who was reading right after me.

Then again, you don't always want a lot of people present. In the one reading I did at a local bookstore, I had to explain to a friend's small daughter, in front of a decent-sized audience, that I appreciated her exuberant greeting but she needed to let go of my left breast now.

"Why?" she wanted to know.

When she is a teenager, I fully intend to torment her with this story.

Overall, I think we writers deserve a lot of credit for venturing out into the field, slogging through the trenches, and going public again and again, in support of our books, our work, our craft, year after year. I've had experiences

which would make any rational person curl up in a fetal position and refuse ever again to expose herself to public abuse. You probably have, too. Yet we tough it out and try again. Because we're brave? Because we're believers? Or because we have utterly flat learning curves? Maybe all of the above.

Much of the credit for our public reappearances, of course, goes to... the public. Not the public described in this article, but rather the public whose response to us makes us resilient enough to keep coming back.

Praise be to every reader who gushes gloriously about how much she loved your last book while getting you to autograph a copy of the brand new one. Raise your glass to every person who comes up to you after a reading, a speech, or a workshop to tell you how much she enjoyed it—and also to those people who, though they are too shy to speak to you, sit through your entire presentation in riveted silence with great eye contact. They, after all, make it worthwhile for us to venture forth into the cruel world year of public appearances year after year. **NINK**



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