



Talking Agents Ezine

Welcome

Welcome to *Talking Agents Literary E-Zine*, the free successor to the hard copy/subscribers-only-online *Talking Agents* newsletter we published ten times a year for ten years.

Our mission is as it has always been: To help writers both new and well established find the best possible representation by giving them both inside information, and relevant advice. Much has changed in publishing in the past decade, but a topflight literary agent is still absolutely necessary if you're going to get shelf space for your books in every major bookstore from coast to coast (and in the end that's the only kind of published you want to be).

IT'S (SIGH) THE FIRST TIME...

New writers often think they have to scrape the bottom of the barrel to sell a debut work. That ranks with alligators in the sewers. An urban myth. Here is a quick recap of a few of the agents who in the last thirty days have sold a first novel from someone who had never before written book length fiction.

Elyse Cheney - a distinguished agent with a very classy list of mostly, though obviously not exclusively, non-fiction - sold Riverhead a first timer's literary novel. Cheney has her own NYC agency now, but she was with Greenburger Associates when she sold Dave Eggers's *A HEARTBREAKING WORK OF STAGGERING GENIUS*.

Bill Clegg, also an agent for literary work, is at the NYC office of William Morris. Clegg has sold two virgin efforts recently. He was with Kathy Robbins' (Robbins Office NYC) for a time, then opened his own agency, Burns & Clegg, then went to Morris. Regularly does six figure deals.

Joe Veltre at Artists Literary Group NYC has a selective and mixed list of popular culture non-

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Ezine is a complimentary resource for writers (and sometimes their agents) from Agent Research & Evaluation, Inc., the firm established in 1996 by Bill Martin and Beverly Swerling Martin.

This Ezine is an occasional mailing meant to serve the interests of writers relative to (a) finding the right literary agent (b) understanding how to work with a literary agent (c) building a platform to assist in marketing via author's web sites, (c) staying abreast of web neutrality issues and (d) various developments in our business.

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fiction and some light fiction, which is *not* what the trade calls literary. (That's an elastic term, by the way. Hard to define, but publishing pros know it when they see it.) Veltre's sale was of a debut novel about a guy who is trying to get his wife back by making her jealous. Diane Bartoli, Veltre's colleague at their small, boutique agency, has also announced the sale of a work of debut fiction in the past month. Her list includes business and investing and kids books. The novel was again a fairly lighthearted romp. Point to note: Almost invariably the agents at an agency have similar profiles.

Susan Golomb at her own agency (also - no surprise - NYC) just announced the sale of yet another debut book. Golomb is about important fiction and some particularly thoughtful, slightly quirky non-fiction. She has been known to refuse a book as being too middle-brow. Think Franzen's *CORRECTIONS* (and his not wanting the Oprah book club choice on his cover!), David Gold's *CARTER BEATS THE DEVIL*, and most recently Marisha Pessl's (debut novel) *SPECIAL TOPICS IN CALAMITY PHYSICS*. The latest Golomb virgin novelist is writing about Cuba before the revolution, and the book went to Knopf. (NB: Always look hard at where the agent is selling. And familiarize yourself with what it means. Example: Knopf, Grove Atlantic, Little, Brown - classy non-genre stuff. In other words, literary. St. Martin's, Ballantine, Dutton, maybe Kensington, genre books across a wider but still limited quality range.)

Finally, Mollie Glick at Jean Naggar is a newer agent than any of the above, but she's with a reliable, reputable, and well thought of agency. And she's in NYC. And she very recently sold Counterpoint (small press and part of the Perseus Group) a book said to be about the author's relationship with a murderer. Nonetheless, listed as a novel. The issue of when it's a memoir and when it's fiction is, as ever, fraught. That new writers should avoid like the plague those "agents" with websites saying they're looking for "new writers" is a no-brainer. Don't go there.

Just to be sure you get the point:

Top agents at top agencies.

New and unheard of before writers.

If you think you have to take just anybody because you have no publishing history, you're drinking the Kool-Aid. What you must have is a terrific book of whatever type the book is. There is no parallel publishing universe in which unheard of agents sell

provided in this newsletter when the following statement is included in its entirety: "Bill Martin and Beverly Swerling Martin are matchmakers for you the writer. The goal is to direct you to the literary agent who is right for your work. The Martins can be contacted at their website www.AgentResearch.com or at 215-563-1867. Copyright 2007, AR&E, Inc. All rights reserved."

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mediocre books to "small" unheard of publishers. Legit small publishers (Counterpoint above being a case in point) are just like the big boys; they only buy really good books. Write such a one and you can have a really good agent.

PS: In the print version of *Talking Agents* we listed the addresses of the agents. We're not taking up space with that any longer because you can easily Google the info.

FROM OUR E-MAIL:

That story makes a perfect segue to this one.

We had an Agent Verification request from someone who wanted to know if Nathalie Scott at Gotham Literary is a wise choice. Short answer: by our standards, no she is not. No public record of sales to any kind of fully-fledged royalty-paying publisher. (And remember we've been tracking in the trade and general press of the US, UK, and Canada since 1980, and the Internet to-the-trade sites since their inception.) Plus, her contract involves the writer in what is apparently a monthly fee to be paid to her while she tries to sell the book.

The writer who contacted us is trying to place a debut book, so was disappointed in our response. But smart enough to be grateful for the information. She did, however, wonder about the fact that Ms. Scott lists her Manhattan Upper Eastside address and phone number, and both are readily checkable. Might we be misjudging Gotham Literary?

No, we might not. We're not accusing Nathalie Scott of any kind of criminal activity. To the best of our knowledge and belief she is breaking no laws, and she may indeed believe with all her heart that her impeccable literary taste will allow her to sell a wonderful ms, if only someone gives her one to sell. But even with that best-of-all-possible faces put on the thing, she is claiming expertise she apparently does not have. If she knows how to sell books, i.e. has a network of editors at major houses who take her calls, meet her for lunch, and are happy to read what she submits, why isn't she selling enough books to appear on the radar that now lasers in on virtually everyone in the business? Why doesn't she list the clients whose books she has sold, and the

(recognizable) publishers to which she has sold them? And - the smoking gun using our long established criteria for a legitimate agent - why is she taking *any* money from a writer before selling the writer's book? This is contrary to the norms of the industry and no agent worth having does it. According to a copy we've seen of a Gotham contract, Scott does make such charges.

Agents earn a living by taking a commission on the money a book earns, beginning with the advance paid on signing a contract with a publisher. Legit agents may indeed pass through certain copying or mailing/courier costs, maybe even some long distance phone calls. But only *after* the book is sold and that long awaited check arrives. (And bear in mind that it will show up first in the agent's mailbox, not yours. By long established convention, you get your 85% after the agent deducts commission.) Until then the expenses incurred while looking for a sale are the agent's cost of doing business.

If you claim you're a doctor or a lawyer and you are not, you can be arrested. There are no laws whatever about claiming to be a literary agent, and should any writer be defrauded in this regard by any agent - the ms is never actually submitted to proper publishers, or the writer is led down various so-called editing paths which wind up costing a great deal of money for no/inferior results - it will be extremely difficult to prove. Be warned and be aware. If ever there was a case of *caveat emptor*, looking for a literary agent is it.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING...

Despite the hype one hears more and more often, we would never suggest that self-publishing is a good option for writers at any stage of their career. The instances when it leads to great results are as a drop in the bucket when compared to the occasions it does nothing but frustrate and disappoint. Even Stephen King soured on the notion after something like one and a half tries. What odds are faced by the writer not already a household name?

We are, however, firmly convinced of the necessity to self promote. Even when you get a six figure deal from a top publisher, you cannot be assured said publisher can make a meaningful effort to sell the book. Publishing budgets are ludicrously small, and yes it does sound crazy, but trust us, that's how it is. The only way you can count on there being a decent campaign to promote your book is to mount one yourself. Thanks to the

Internet that has become a great deal easier to do.

Author's websites are moving out of the shadows and taking center stage. One thing that makes them work is a really well-designed effort looked after by a professional webmaster who will then actively promote it. We're not talking about using the paint-by-numbers method of some amateur web-building kit, then allowing the site to languish on the likes of Geocities or a similar bargain-basement ISP.

We are now trying to come up with some criteria for judging whom to hire to do this for you, but it's not easy. (And since we know that many of you are Internet pros in your day-job, we'd be happy to have your thoughts about how to know how good a site-builder really is. [Contact us](#).)

What we can do for starters is point you to [Beverly's site](#). This one went up in November as a way to support her Simon & Schuster historical fiction. The newest book in the current series, *City of Glory*, was out in January, and we're absolutely convinced that the site is contributing enormously to how well it's been doing. The video trailer got such great press she decided to spring for two more for the first two books in the series.

You can also take a look at <http://www.sallynicoll.com> for another version of a terrific Internet book trailer. This was done by the same company that did those on Beverly's site, <http://www.MelCroucher.com>. It's instructive to see the difference in the styles. One is for fiction, big wide-canvas novels, while the other is selling a romp through the world of something called spread-betting: How to have a great time and avoid losing your house as you chase a fortune. Nicoll's *Bets and the City* is from Harriman House in London. It's not in US bookstores, but you can get it from Amazon wherever you are. (And if you want to know how and why, despite their nasty habit of selling used copies on which neither author nor publisher makes a penny, Amazon is the writer's Dow Jones, take a look at [Beverly's blog on the AR&E site](#))

[Here's another site we like](#). It too makes the point about writers doing it for themselves because they know their supposed-to-be-highly-professional publishers simply cannot: Matt's site was set up to support the June release of *Hooked*, Richtel's first novel from Jonathan Karp's exciting new house, [The Twelve](#). Karp was editor-in-chief of Random House (the publishing company, not the mega-glomerate, i.e. the entity the trade calls Little Random) before he resigned to create a publishing company committed to issuing twelve life-changing books a year. (Life-changing as in blockbuster.) Richtel, an IT reporter for the *NY Times*, is on the new house's 2007 first list, along with such folks as Christopher Buckley, John McCain, Christopher Hitchens, et al. Incidentally, *Hooked* was sold by Laurie Liss at Lord Literistics, and she got six figures for the book.

Finally, [a site you must take a look at](#) if you're thinking about how you should be using the net to go beyond your publisher's marketing efforts. Not just because it was put up to spread the word about a new book, *Small is the Next Big Thing* by Andy Hobsbawm, due in 2008 from Atlantic Books Ltd, the UK imprint of [Grove Atlantic](#). In this case the book itself is about how the net can

be used to change the way we do business (and more than business) in a world that still only glimpses the implications of this remarkable new technology. Hobsbawm's latest blog on the subject is tailor-made for a writer looking for not just the hows but the whys of using this new tool to make a real difference in how the book sells.

OH, THE HORROR OF IT ALL...

If you read our last issue of the *Talking Agents* e-zine you'll know about Scott Sigler, who published his first two horror novels as podcasts and wound up with a hefty 30,000 regular (free) downloaders, who got the books in read-aloud 45 minute segments. Comes next, Byrd Leavell of the Waxman Agency (we also told you about him in the last issue) took on Sigler after the author's self-promotion efforts had found him a tiny Canadian publisher called Dragon Moon. The latest news is that Leavell has sold Sigler's as yet unpublished *INFESTED* - a strange parasite hijacks a man's body - and a sequel called *CONTAGIOUS* to Random imprint Crown for something in the \$500,000 range. Appears to be a world rights deal, and while we're not usually too high on those, when the publisher antes up half a million, it's hard to argue. One thing about which there can be no argument: If the books hadn't been genre worthy in and of themselves, the deal would never have happened, regardless of the podcast success.

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