



Talking Agents Ezine

Welcome to the latest edition of the *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.

WHAT YOU DO SPEAKS SO LOUDLY...

First, the apology. There was no e-zine in May and June is halfway gone. The usual excuse: Too much to do, and AR&E clients and Beverly's own books get first crack in the parceling out of time.

On the AR&E front, we continue to see new and exciting client-agent hook-ups. Two new novelists to Rusoff (one debut, one long established) and another to Zuckerman. A long time author of non-fiction moving into fiction and making a switch to McCarthy. Yet another to Fitzgerald. And those are just some we know about. Getting a new/first agent is such a rush that most often clients don't think to write us about it. We only know when we see news of a recent book sale and something rings a bell. Then we check, but we never tell unless you give us permission to - in which case we happily help you promote the book by bannering it on our website, in our blogs, etc.

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On the writing front, *City of God* by Beverly Swerling (Simon & Schuster) is in production (lots of painstaking reading and rereading of proof pages, etc.) and will be in the stores this fall. Plus, a new book is just aborning, so if the writing gods are kind it will maybe be in the stores sometime in 2010.

Back to useful-for-you stuff...

June 20, 2008

Talking Agents Literary 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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OR MAYBE NOT

Here's a story that's unlikely to be useful to any but the top .0001% of any sector of the human race, much less writers: The *New York Post* reported a rupture between Janet Evanovich and her long time agent, Robert Gottlieb of Trident. Which occurred right after he made her a said-to-be \$40 million dollar deal for books between now and 2010 (so three or four books tops seems a reasonable estimate). Evanovich has announced that in future all her deals will be made by her son, Peter.

And the fact that such stories always make us ask the question how much is enough, is probably why no one around here is ever going to be as rich as the people who are the subjects of such stories.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Historical fiction continues to sell in what everyone is calling a really tough market for fiction. In the last few days Irene Skolnick sold James Fleming's *THE BELLY OF THE NIGHT* which takes place during the Russian Revolution and is about a man who wants to avenge his murdered aristocratic family and locate a fortune in missing Tsarist gold. Fleming wrote *WHITE BLOOD* and *BELLY* is the sequel. Skolnick sold it to the same editor and publisher, [Peter Borland](#) at Simon & Schuster imprint [Atria](#).

In this instance Skolnick was acting for Felicity Bryan in the UK who is Fleming's primary agent, but Skolnick who has been around since the '70s - she was with Curtis Brown and Sterling Lord and now runs an independent small agency - has a well populated client list of her own. She does a fairly even mix of non-fiction and novels and in both instances takes on books that can claim some literary gravitas.

Another recent sale in the genre was reported by Stephanie Cabot of the Gernert Agency. This one for Mark Mills, author of *AMAGANSETT* and *THE SAVAGE GARDEN*, billed as literary historical suspense novels. The new one, *THE INFORMATION OFFICER*, is part of a two book deal made with Jennifer Hershey at Random House.

registration process.

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Cabot's an American but for ten years she was the head of William Morris's London office. She does a lot of popular but not strictly genre fiction and has been as effective in NYC as she was in London (extremely) since she set up at Gernert in 2005.

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22 West 23rd St.
5th Floor
New York NY 10010
(212) 727-3648

Stephanie Cabot
The Gernert Company
136 East 57th Street
New York, NY 10022
212-838-7777

SHOULD YOU SIGN WITH THE NAME AGENT'S ASSISTANT?

We get asked this a lot. The usual scenario is that you send a query to a big name agent and get back a response saying something like "I'm the big shot's assistant and she/he passed this to me..."

First: Don't make the mistake of confusing the above circumstance with one where the assistant is the one who writes asking to see more of what you have to offer, but doesn't specifically say that it is for the assistant not the big name. That's a very common practice and you should not assume that a request for additional material isn't coming from the person you originally queried unless you are specifically told that's the case. Later, if you're offered representation and it's still not clear to you who is doing the offering, you should ask. In as straight forward a manner as possible. As in: "Who is going to be representing my book?"

What we're discussing is the case where you're told up front that the assistant is building a client list and wants you to be on it.

This possibility is why people go to work for an agent. The pay is usually only slightly better than that of the publishers, where entry level jobs pay starvation wages, but working for an agent offers the possibility of far superior future earnings. (In the main big time agents make more than big time editors. They both make more than 95% of their authors. So, tell me again, why you are doing this writing thing?)

If you go with the assistant wannabe agent you're getting someone with much less experience and far less clout, but that same someone is being mentored (how well or badly you can't say and neither can we) by the very same big name agent you initially wanted to represent you. And frequently it works brilliantly. Our own New Agent List is full of agents who are still wearing the hats of both agent and agent's assistant and making sales. (Without some sales they don't get on the [New Agent List](#).)

To further make the point, here's a good story from the UK magazine *The Bookseller* that celebrates two such sales announced in the past week.

"Robert Dinsdale and Sue Armstrong, assistants to Patrick Walsh and Clare Conville respectively, have between them sold three first novels in their own solo deals, each for a "good five-figure" sum. (AR&E Editor's note: That's five figures sterling. So figure six figures US.)

Dinsdale has sold Elliott Hall's *THE FIRST STONE* at auction to John Murray's Kate Parkin in a three-book deal. The novel is set in an alternative New York controlled by evangelists and features an Iraqi private investigator.

Meanwhile Armstrong has sold world rights to Bodleian librarian Ali Shaw's *THE GIRL WITH THE GLASS FEET* to Sarah Castleton at Grove Atlantic, a novel set on a Scottish island and described as "on the edge of Susanna Clarke."

Armstrong also sold Justine Kilkerr's first novel *ADVICE FOR STRAYS*, about a girl revisiting her childhood imaginary friend, a lion, to Ella Allfree at Jonathan Cape."

And for any who don't know, this is a major UK agency and Clare Conville and Patrick Walsh are heavy hitters. Both Dinsdale and Armstrong are at:

Conville & Walsh
2 Ganton Street
London W1F 7QL, United Kingdom
44 020 7287-3030

THE MEASURE OF LEGITIMACY

Staying with the UK for a moment, here's a story with both general and particular interest. (And bear in mind that these days American and British agents - particularly the younger and more aggressive - frequently sell directly in both markets and take on clients based on both sides of the pond, so this has relevance for anyone writing in English.)

The Particular: Peter Tallack (as it happens until recently at the very same Conville & Walsh mentioned above) has opened his own agency, and after talking to him recently Bill was very impressed. He's calling his shop The Science Factory and billing it as, "a literary agency for curious minds." One group Tallack's after is the special universe that years ago put John Brockman on the map, i.e. heavily credentialed scientists with a book that has some hope of interesting the general public. So if you're one of those with one of them, this guy looks especially good. But that's not all he does.

Here are some recent sales:

ANIL ANANTHASWAMY is deputy news editor of *New Scientist* in London and has worked at the magazine since 2000. His new book *TO THE EDGE OF REASON: Dispatches from the Frontiers of Cosmology* went to Duckworth in the UK for five figures sterling and Houghton Mifflin in the US for high five figures in dollars. Publication is scheduled for 2009.

MICHAEL BROOKS holds a PhD in quantum physics and is a consultant editor of

New Scientist magazine. His writing has appeared in the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Observer*, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, and even *Playboy*. Tallack sold his *THIRTEEN THINGS THAT DON'T MAKE SENSE: The Most Baffling Scientific Mysteries of Our Time* to Profile in the UK for high five figures sterling. He also sold the book to Doubleday imprint Broadway in the US, and has placed the translation rights in many countries including Italy and Brazil. The book is scheduled for August 2008 in the US and 2009 in Britain.

Other Tallack sales include Jim Baggot's *THE RACE TO BUILD THE ATOMIC BOMB 1939 - 1949*, to Icon in the UK and Donna Dickenson's *BODY SHOPPING The Economy Fuelled by Flesh and Blood: The body as cash cow, an exposé of the international organ trade* just published in the US and UK by Oneworld.

The above selection makes it apparent that Tallack is not exactly like Brockman. You don't have to be a Nobel laureate to get a look-in (though it can't hurt). He also has some of the same instincts as, for example, Jud Laghi, Jim Fitzgerald, or Erin Hosier in New York, or Mark Lucas or Luigi Bonomi in London; he's after the zeitgeist zinger. If that's the sort of thing you're doing, you'll get what we mean. If you don't, it probably doesn't matter to you. But something else does.

General Application: When you run into an agent who has just opened an agency, particularly one not in New York, London, or Toronto (Tallack's in England's idyllic West Country, see address below) look first for either an anchor client - a big name in the area in which the agent hopes to specialize whose sales and royalties will pay the bills while the agent gets established - or a list of sales with authors, titles AND PUBLISHERS YOU RECOGNIZE. Do not be fooled by a bunch of never-heard-of-'em writers with books said to be sold to outfits that turn out to exclusively publish on-demand and e-books. (Why should you think an "agents" with such a dossiers is likely to sell your book to a good trade publisher, large or small?) Peter Tallack, on the other hand, has a backlist, a frontlist, and lots of irons in the fire. Full marks from us.

Peter Tallack
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44 020 7193 7296

INTERESTING POLL (NOT ABOUT POLITICS) AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

Pollsters Zogby International have been looking at book buyers. In the US, they say, fewer than half the population buy ten books a year and only 14% buy twenty or more for themselves.

Okay, most of us in this business already knew we were part of a world on the margins. What Zogby has pinned down that is maybe a bigger surprise is where the elusive book buyer is getting his fix: More people buy online from Amazon - 43% - than anywhere else, including the book chains which have a 32% share of

the market. Causing us to note the following:

- When we authors keep running to the Amazon statistics to see how the book is doing right this minute, we are not crazy.
- That kind of clout - i.e. 42% of market share - is what creates the chutzpa to demand that all pod publishers who want to list their books on Amazon use Amazon's facilities to do their printing-on-demand. (Which shouldn't be of interest to writer or agents reading this e-zine – except as proof of aforementioned chutzpa.)
- And though we suspect those are US figures and that they're somewhat lower in the UK, it's likely to be why Amazon had the cojones (a step up from mere chutzpa) to remove from the UK site the 'buy' buttons of books published by Hachette Livre UK. That means books from Orion, Gollancz, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Hodder, Headline... and we're just getting started. Which action Amazon took when Tim Hely Hutchinson, CEO of Hachette Livre UK, finally said no to deeper discounts. And deeper. And deeper. And...
- Not being for sale on Amazon is a huge blow to British authors and agents, and grievous insult is added to the injury when the site continues to offer those same titles as used books from other retailers and individuals (on which sales not a penny is paid to the publisher, the writer, or the agent). Nonetheless, a great many writers and their agents have been vocal in their support of Hutchinson's stand.

Clarification for anyone who merely writes books and doesn't obsess about all this esoterica: In the US Hachette Livre is HBG, created in 2006 when the French company bought Time Warner Book Group. HBG publishes David Baldacci, Nicholas Sparks, James Patterson, Rick Moody, Ron Paul, et many al, but the discounting system works differently over here, and so far the buy buttons on titles issued by the various HBG imprints are still in place on Amazon's US site.

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