



Talking Agents Ezine

So Where Were We?

Let's see...

- The US economy tanked
- Taxpayers bailed out the insurance industry
- Insurance company execs took a spa vacation
- The US elected its first African American president (prompting *The Onion* to run the head: Black Man Gets Nation's Worst Job – proving that good writers can always find the *mot juste*)
- The global economy tanked
- Taxpayers bailed out the bankers
- Bankers awarded themselves bonus billions

Meanwhile:

Simon & Schuster published Beverly's new novel *City of God* about the Turners and the Devreys in nineteenth century New York during the decades before the Civil War. (To listen to Francesca Rheannon of NPR's *Writer's Voice* interviewing Beverly about that book, the series, and writing in general, click [here](#).)

And staying with bragging rights for a moment, as we speak the trade paperback edition of the first book in that series, *City of Dreams*, has gone into its eleventh printing.

We had a blessed holiday season with friends and family and hope you did as well.

Mel Croucher added some super live links to the AR&E site: [The websites](#) of a few of the authors we've worked with recently. Why didn't we do this before? Didn't think of it. But old – and future – clients take note. We're delighted to include you. Just drop us an e-mail.

Beverly got the mother of all colds. Then another one on top of it.

So no e-zine for three months. Hope we make up for our absence by shedding some light in the midwinter darkness.

How Fares the Book Biz?

Not good, obviously, but maybe not as bad as other segments of the economy. Books, after all, are a lot cheaper than dinner and a movie. It is, however, a business undergoing a good deal of change.

Like many of you we have been watching the hard copy version of the long established trade press slide further and further into oblivion. The loudest of

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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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the giant sucking sounds is currently being made by the gradual fade into nothingness of the US's long time bible of the business, *Publishers Weekly*. Parent company Reed Business Information has been trying to sell the magazine for some time with no takers (and that was before the crunch) and has now fired the editor. Read the *Times* story about that [here](#).

The *Times* also did a [story](#) about self-publishing recently.

In both stories the *Times* unwittingly put on display the problems we in publishing have with the coverage of our business by our hometown paper. Mostly the people writing these articles are simply ignorant of the way we work. The stories are superficial at best and misinformed in a number of instances. Still, these two are worth a quick read if you haven't seen them.

Here, however, is the real skinny:

Books are not going to go away. Remember the obits written at the advent of the "talkies" and later TV?

Publishers are not going to go away. Their editorial and marketing expertise is the glue that links writer and reader. Without the filter they provide, reading *would* go away. No one could struggle through the amount of wannabe rubbish that would be generated by the fact that everyone thinks writing a book is easy.

Agents are not going to go away. Publishers have known for some time that turning the job of first reader over to agents was a good thing. Those first readers are no longer on the publishers' payrolls. The authors pay them. For their part writers are willing to do so because A/they have no concerted voice and hence no clout, and even if they did most would vote against changing the system because B/those who make the cut wind up netting more money for their work, notwithstanding the 15% commission paid to the agent. And yes the publishers know they're paying more for the books they take on. They're still saving piles of money over the old "over the transom" system. Case closed.

How the book is sold to the public after the writer acquires an agent (see AR&E's [Customized Fingerprint](#) and a publisher is changing.

See that [Links page](#) we reference above. Author websites are hugely important and getting more so every day. And the video trailers are cheaper and more effective than any six figure print ad in a prestigious book review. (See [Beverly's](#). In our view no one does this better than Mel Croucher (the guy who invented Internet viral marketing) and his website designer Ricky Foyle. Check out their work [here](#).

Publishers are ecstatic about having these videos to link to in their own online promotions. (The latter have been slow in coming and not very good when they arrived, but they are both speeding up and improving.) And once more, why not? As with the agents, the writer pays. But again, the problem with publishing's ability to use print advertising was always the prohibitive cost. A good ad campaign required six and frequently seven figures. Or more. In the always marginal world of publishing that was simply never a viable option for 99.99% of books. A first class, professionally done website is eminently affordable. So is online advertising – and for this the publisher can be made to pay. (Cutting that deal is the agent's job, not yours.)

Final proof of this argument for web dominance in promoting high quality published books is a stunning figure just released. Sales at Amazon defied

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the general economy and increased 18% in the fourth quarter of 2008. Most important in this context, nowadays Amazon does a bigger book business than Barnes & Noble, the US's leading bricks and mortar bookseller chain. And not just a bit better. The e-tailer is ahead by many hundreds of millions of dollars.

So Are Agents Still Selling Books?

In that immortal campaign phrase: You Betcha!

Here are some of the latest sales made by the best agents. (Who, remember, are the ones who make 90% of the sales to major royalty paying publishers.) And just to keep it interesting, we'll stick to sales by debut authors.

Stephen Barbara just sold Sam Munson's *The November Criminals* to Doubleday. The novel is said to have begun as an answer to a question on the admissions application of the University of Chicago, where Barbara and Munson were in fact classmates. (Yes, it probably helped that Munson could grab Barbara's attention with that fact – for all we know they're bff's – but the deal would not have happened if the novel wasn't very good.) Still more interesting, the sale – done via an auction – was Barbara's first since joining the very go-go Foundry Literary + Media. He came over from the almost entirely SF and Science Fantasy Donald Maass Agency.

Foundry was started in May 2007 by Peter McGuigan and a former client, Yfat Reiss, for whom he sold a book while he was still at S. J. Greenburger. Foundry's been adding agents and clients and major deals very quickly ever since. And while both Reiss and McGuigan were non-fiction folks, the agency is tilting toward novels of late. Barbara did a fistful of Y.A. deals while at Maass. Other agents now at Foundry are leaning the same way. Stephanie Abou and Mollie Glick are good examples.

Trident's Alex Glass recently sold St. Martin's Thomas Dunne imprint a first novel by Cortright McMeel, an energy trader as well as founder and publisher of a literary magazine (the latter being less likely to pay the bills). The book is titled *Short*, the logline is *Wall Street meets Glengarry Glen Ross*, and it's about – what else? – the down and dirty world of energy trading. There has to be literary merit or Glass wouldn't have been interested. Dunne is, however, a very commercial imprint. So the timeliness of the tale was probably an important bridge linking these two realities.

Sally Wofford-Girand sold Avon a love story by debut author Ilie Rubie. *The Diamond Trees* is said to have a family secret at its heart. Okay, that could describe countless books, but looking at Wofford-Girand's track record you can assume high quality writing and a non-formulaic approach. That m.o., however, has to be stacked against the fact that she took the book to Avon, where genre romance reigns supreme. So this is not a literary novel. NB: It's important to spend as much time analyzing the publishers as the clients on an agent's track record. And if you don't know the profile of the house just go to their website and take a look at their current list. Publishers – or at least their individual imprints – have fingerprints as distinctive as those of the agents.

Lisa Bankoff at ICM has a record second to none when it comes to selling debut fiction. Even a cursory look at her database with us indicates that she has literally built her career on launching those of first time novelists. Once more, the way to get to her is with highly evolved novelcraft and shining talent. One of

Bankoff's most recent sales was to William Morrow, a book by a first-generation American, Ghita Schwarz, who is herself an immigrant attorney. Her book, *Displaced Persons*, is about two Jewish couples who arrive in the US just after WWII. Bankoff describes it as, "exquisitely crafted."

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