Further Rustlings in the Groves of Academe

By JULIE TETEL

Carol Thurston’s article in the November issue of Novelists’ INK struck a highly sympathetic chord in me. Like Thurston and many others among us, I have long been invested in finding ways to counter the negative valuation of romance and popular literature that is so deeply rooted in our culture. Although we writers of popular literature have seen our respectability profile rise during the past decade, we are also aware that a certain amount of the “snicker factor” remains in the public at large, and that, as Thurston has suggested, an elitist view of literature continues to dominate many English departments on university campuses.

I am happy to offer the counterexample of Duke University as a place where the traditional and elitist view of literature no longer dominates. I offer Duke’s example not to contradict Thurston’s general critique of academic literary studies. Rather, I wish to bring to the attention of the members of Novelists, Inc. exciting new ways that popular literature is being thought about and taught in a progressive institutional environment. I wish to suggest that writers of popular literature and academics are not “natural enemies” and do not necessarily operate with conflicting sets of questions, presuppositions, interests, and sensibilities concerning the reading and writing of literature.

It so happens that I teach linguistics in the English department at Duke University. It also happens that I have “the temerity” (as Thurston has put it) to actually produce popular literature in the form of historical romances—an activity which few if any English departments (as Thurston has also put it) are willing to tolerate. Not only am I tolerated at Duke, I feel completely accepted and even encouraged to develop the range of my reading and writing interests. That makes me lucky, and that prompts me to share the work of my colleagues with you.

The best part of my colleagues’ reaction to the range of my writing and reading interests is that it’s no big deal. They understand that my love of my craft and my promotion of my genre fits well with what they are doing. They are taking risks. They are breaking stereotypes. They are reading and writing from the heart and the gut as well as from the head. They are questioning conventional boundary lines between “popular” and “serious” reading experiences. They are questioning conventionally conventional boundary lines between “creative” and “commercial” and “academic” writing experiences.

The following four articles by professors of literature at Duke University attest to dynamic ways that the reading and writing of popular literature can be studied and valued without the usual condescending mis- and preconceptions. It’s no wonder that I tend to name the heroines of my romances after my wonderful colleagues.

Cathy N. Davidson:

Popular literature and popular writing . . .

I am aware that at many universities distinctions are made between “popular” and “serious” literature, but I do not feel that these distinctions are either clear or defensible. The very formulation of the question overlooks contradictions: there are many unpopular books that are of poor quality; many excellent books are popular. The terms are used loosely, and almost pejoratively at the expense of popular literature and, in particular, popular literature by women.

At Duke, many students study popular culture, everything from the first popular novels in America...
A Wake-Up Call

One of my predecessors in this office, Jasmine Cresswell, checked in the other day with a wake-up call. I hadn’t even realized that I was asleep.

Jasmine called my attention to a report in the January 3 edition of Publishers Weekly that ought to be required reading for all of us who write books. The articles are a tour of the brave new world of publishing technology. I always thought I was doing a good job of staying up to date with such things, but I was wrong.

PW’s most startling revelation was that “on-demand printing” is not the wave of the future. That wave is already starting to break. It is here.

On-demand is such a simple thing. From the reader’s point of view, it works like this: You walk into a bookstore, pull an exemplar copy off the shelf, leaf through it, and decide to buy it. When you’ve paid your money, and not before, the clerk punches a code into the controls of a laser printer. The printer acquires the data that is the book from the publisher through a modem and prints it out as you watch.

According to the report, college bookstores are already using on-demand technology to create electronically assembled and printed textbooks called “coursepacks.” Literally millions of textbooks are being created each year in campus bookstores. No more publisher warehouses, no more wholesalers, no more shipping, no more stockpiles of mass-produced volumes, some of which are inevitably remaindered.

On-demand publishing could rearrange the book business in the way Gutenberg rearranged the goose-quill business. Warehouse-sized bookstores may become obsolete before Barnes & Noble gets their next stock issue placed. Wholesalers may disappear completely. Independent booksellers with four-color laser printers and high-speed, down-loading modems will be able to produce a finished book faster than your average superstore clerk can figure out how to take a credit card impression.

We are some distance from custom-printed mass-market paperbacks, but that distance is a lot shorter than most of us thought. Other technological changes are also coming down the pipeline. There’s a new editing system that will allow copy editors to make handwritten manuscript changes on computer screens, show them to the author via floppy disk, and then set type for the final version. All that will be done without killing a single tree to provide paper for a hard copy.

I’m not sure how I feel about these changes. I’m not even sure what some of them may mean. In truth, I still haven’t figured out what the multi-media and electronic publishing clauses in my latest contracts mean. I would guess that most writers are in the same predicament—and that’s the dangerous part. Microsoft and Bertelsman and the rest of the futurist corporations in the world are already turning those electronic publishing rights into neat little profit centers. If we don’t pay attention, we’re going to be left standing around like Luddites.

The PW report made some interesting observations about publishing corporations, as well. All of us know that there has been an implosion of publishers in the past few years, as one after another medium-sized corporation has been swallowed whole by one conglomerate or another. Much of this consolidation is connected to technological change. Multimedia is the name of this game; traditional book publishing is being supplanted by electronic media. We writers may already use tools like CD-ROM Thesauruses, but there will come a day soon when we’re writing for these media, as well.

We must also confront changes in communication technology. Movie tie-ins and world-wide publicity through CNN or Sky Television can have a staggering effect on the sales of a book. One guest shot on Oprah will sell ten times more books than all the independent booksellers in the country can peddle by word of mouth in a month. Think about the success of Crichton, Grisham, Walker, Clancy, Steel. They are fine writers, all, but their success is media-generated. They have word-of-mouth that can be heard from New York to Shanghai and back again.
Publishers Weekly did an exceptional service in rounding up the trends and putting them in the day-to-day context of the book business. Now, we as writers have to start guessing what those trends may mean. As an organization, Novelists, Inc. ought to be in the forefront of this guessing game. Our livelihoods depend on it. That’s why I would like to ask for input from the membership on technology issues.

What issues do you think we need to explore? What technological changes do we need to pay attention to? What kinds of changes should we be considering in our contracts? What kinds of new technology should we be learning to use? What kinds of technology should we be fighting?

We have all seen how the digital technology and the compact disc have revolutionized the music business. Compact discs don’t degrade, which means that discs can be copied on tape, then resold time and again. The big losers in that process are the artists and the publishers. As writers, we have a similar problem in the resale of used books.

But technological change in the book business means more than used books. On-demand printing, multi-media exploitation of creative intellectual property, data-base royalties. Such things may sound esoteric, but they aren’t futuristic. They are NOW.

Many of us are just beginning to understand how little we understand about the new world of publishing. Let’s start asking questions of ourselves, of our agents, and of our publishers. In the next few months, I’d like to hear directly and through the letters to the editor of the newsletter about your concerns. It’s the only way we’re going to begin to cope with the new world that is being created while we have our heads firmly wedged inside our computers.

— Evan Maxwell

**LETTERS to the editor**

LETTERS to the editor is the most important column in our newsletter, since it is the monthly forum in which we can all share our views and express our opinions. Anonymous letters will NEVER be published in NINK. Upon the author’s request, signed letters may be published as “Name Withheld.” In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue. Letters may be edited for length or NINK style.

**Be Wary of New Ventures**

Sometime ago, romance authors were contacted by Playgirl Magazine about a new periodical they hope to begin, called “I’ll Take Romance.” The introductory presentation letter asked for input and offered incentives for participating authors. Though I did not contribute an article, I spent dear time naively suggesting that the emphasis of the new magazine be on authors/their books and not male models. I received a complimentary issue of Playgirl and later another letter requesting my bookmarks. After scanning Playgirl, I have decided that this is not how I want to present my career or my novels. (I’m not casting stones, I’m just stating that it isn’t for me.) From the original contact letter, I had a different impression of presentation in a separate, less graphic magazine. This experience, rather others’ experiences, has made me wary of promotional opportunities. After all the work done to elevate thinking concerning the romance genre, I would rather my material was not presented in a photographic, very graphic, meadow of studs. Other writers have different opinions and that’s great. My question is this: When contacted for a new, proposed magazine, how can an author determine if he/she will be reviewed or presented in the original way (or their impression of the original way) offered by the contact? What questions can we ask to define exactly how our articles, materials (i.e. bookmarks), etc. will be handled? Can we ask for written explanation of use, and what clauses, etc. can we require to have some control?

Name Withheld

**Zebra Royalty Statements Late Again**

In spite of recent promises to treat authors more fairly and to pay them in a timely manner, Kensington Publishing (Zebra Books/Pinnacle Books) has once again sent out their royalty statements late. Kensington contracts stipulate that “The Publisher shall render to the Author semi-annual royalty statements...on or before November 30 of each year...” In mid-December of 1993, authors and agents received a form letter dated December 7, 1993, stating that Kensington had recently upgraded to a new computer system and would be sending out more detailed royalty statements. It further stated, “Unfortunately, the preparation and verification of this data has taken slightly longer than expected and, therefore, delayed the November statements. We fully
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expect to complete this process and issue updated statements and payments within three weeks."

A few authors and agents received their statements via express delivery on December 31—a month late but just in time to count in 1993 income. The majority of authors and agents did not receive their checks until after the first of the year, however; some not until January 15, fully six weeks late.

The statements were hardly an improvement over the old ones, either. True, the sales figures were broken down into Domestic, Foreign, and Book Club, but writers who receive a different royalty rate for Book Club sales already received separate Book Club figures, and Kensington foreign sales range from negligible to nonexistent.

Novelists, Inc. members should be aware of the way Kensington continues to do business in spite of promises to improve.

— Name Withheld

Editor's Note: In the interest of fairness and in the belief that more can be accomplished by writers and publishers talking with one another rather than about each other, when a letter addresses the policies of a particular publisher, the house in question may be invited to respond in the same issue.

Walter Zacharius Responds:

I don't understand what is meant by not treating our authors fairly. In my estimation we have always bent over backwards to work with authors. Any author who calls me personally, I call back personally. There have been authors who needed money before they delivered their manuscripts or before their royalties were due, and we have tried to help these authors out financially because I understand some of their problems.

I would like to point out that our previous royalty statements went out on time based on our contracts. I would like to know which authors complained about not receiving our previous royalty statements when they were due.

This year we decided to update our entire computer system, which unfortunately turned out to be a much larger undertaking than I had anticipated. Anyone who has ever been involved in changing a computer system will definitely understand the problems. To compound the situation, we switched distributors from Simon & Schuster to Penguin and had to convert their information into our language. There were some serious problems. I had hoped that the authors would understand that updating a computer system cannot be done overnight. I did send out a letter to all authors and agents telling them our problem. It is also true we sent out some royalty statements by Federal Express to those authors who called and said they needed the money quickly or were worried about tax problems.

No one in this company ever tried to duce the issue. Frankly, I don't know whether three or four authors complained or 50, but bear in mind that we had to convert over 4,000 titles. We had to rewrite an entire new royalty program. However, it is interesting to me that while some romance writers complained, we had calls from some of our biggest romance writers and largest agents who complimented us on our royalty statement and said it is the clearest royalty statement they have ever received. On our next statement I hope that all the sub rights will be listed as well. This is also a matter of reprogramming an entire system. I know that some other publishers spent years updating their systems and we tried to do it in about eight months. Maybe I miscalculated the extent of the problems.

Your letter writer stated that our foreign sales are negligible to nonexistent. I don't know where Novelists, Inc. got this information. Is it possible that those authors who complained did not sell very well overseas? Bear in mind that Penguin handles our foreign sales. In my opinion, in the trade area, they are the most knowledgeable and most successful in the foreign market. Over the last two years we built a new sub rights division and are now selling foreign rights very successfully throughout the world. In fact, some agents have turned their foreign rights back to us.

The letter disturbs me because I know the fortune expended converting our system and I also know we have probably one of the most sophisticated and updated systems in the publishing industry. I am sorry that those authors who are disturbed about royalty statements did not call me direct. As I stated before, I never duck phone calls and I understand authors' problems. I hope the authors will understand ours.

— Walter Zacharius, Chairman of the Board
Zebra Books/Kensington Publishing Corp.

Weighing In on Reissues . . .

I'm ticked off because one of my assets is threatening to turn into a liability. Having been writing for a number of years, I have a large backlist. That's supposed to be an asset, isn't it? Not enough to retire on, but something to "lay by" for the future.

But what happens when newsletters start warning readers about certain books that are reissues? What happens when a writer gets an unfan letter accusing her of greed for trying to trick unwary readers into buying the same book twice? Worse still, what happens when the writer, as reader, buys two big new books by her favorite authors, only to discover that they're both reissues?

I can't remember everyone's stories—I have trouble remembering my own. When a reissue is gussied up with a new cover, I'll fall for it in a minute if I like the author. But it leaves me feeling as if I've been cheated—which, of course, is not the case. Caveat emptor.

The first time I heard from a reader informing me she would never again buy a book with my name on it, because I had cheated her by making Silhouette put out my book twice, two years apart, I suggested to my editor that they put a warning on the cover. Bad idea. Too negative. Revamp the cover, and they'll never know.

Well, they do. And they don't like it. So before more newsletters are forced to issue warnings, let's see if we can't come up with a compromise that will be fair to the reader, the publisher . . . and our valuable backlists.

— Dixie Browning
Candy Lee Responds:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to answer Dixie’s letter. There are two reasons that I really appreciate this opportunity: (a) I’m sensitive to the issue and (b) I greatly admire Dixie’s writing.

Romance publishing by all publishers encounters a stigma by the non-romance reading public. The romance end of the business is somehow not “real” publishing. The pejorative comment usually refers to “those” romance books—a realm of reading apart from “real” books. I find this attitude irritating. However, we still want to treat the genre as if it has a need for special rules—one of which is to warn the reader that a book is a reissue.

Whenever I meet a fan of Dick Francis, one of the first comments made to me will be that inevitably the reader has bought a book read previously. Never does the reader say that the cover ought to carry “reissue” warnings. When I go to buy any author with backlist capability, the books are well displayed. The perceptive reader will know John Le Carre’s Night Manager is his latest by looking at the copyright page—not because his other books carry a notation on the cover.

Yet in romance, we continually face the request to “warn” the reader that this may have been a book that she has read before. This poses a conundrum: how to publish romance as “real” publishing and yet advise the reader that the title under consideration may have been read. We do not want to fool the reader and will not do so as long as the author’s name, the original title, etc. are clearly on the books.

On the other hand, I get many letters complimenting us on bringing out books by authors when readers have not been able to find those books and would really like to collect them and are asking for more. Certainly the multitude of letters from readers thanking us for bringing out a book outweigh the few from people who have been unhappy. Exposure to the strengths and variety of an author’s writing skills creates momentum for authors to break through. Browsers see the prominence of the display, the author’s “look” in the marketplace, the sense of importance given to an author and say “I should try this author.”

I have received complaints by members of your organization about the economic results of sending people into used bookstores. Authors deserve an equal chance to build a backlist following in a place where new books are sold.

Harlequin and Silhouette are placing increasing importance on backlist opportunities to encourage readership and to contribute to an author’s earnings.

I certainly appreciate Dixie’s letter since it raises an issue that should be discussed and appreciate the opportunity to respond. I hope we can continue the dialogue on any issues of interest to our authors.

— Candy Lee, Vice President, Editorial and Retail Marketing
Harlequin Enterprises, Ltd.

Conference Detectives Offer Service

We would like to extend a sincere “thank you” for having us as one of your guest speakers at your fourth annual conference in San Antonio, Texas. It was indeed an honor to share our experiences and knowledge with the “creme de la creme” of the literary world! We saw some old friends from Port Jefferson, met a lot of new ones, and were very impressed with the family type of atmosphere that your organization has—where everyone truly is willing to help one another.

At the present time, we are involved with Bill Brohaugh of Writer’s Digest in regards to a book covering the “modus operandi” of the criminal element. It is a professional challenge that we are both looking forward to. A special thanks is in order for JoAnn Ross who, as subtle as a scud missile, brought about this partnership, as well as Victoria Thompson and all those who mentioned us in good favor to Bill so that he would be interested in us in the first place.

Additionally, we have broken new ground in the State of New Jersey by recently teaching a three-part course at Brookdale College whereupon, for the first time, an actual open and unsolved homicide was presented. The original crime scene photographs as well as the videotape of the scene were presented in the hopes of generating any new leads, as this homicide has been unsolved since 1990. All cable companies and newspaper agencies in the state were issued a press release prior to the class so as to build up public awareness. Keep your fingers crossed for us!

As was mentioned in San Antonio, we will gladly assist anyone desiring our area of expertise while in the process of writing. Just give us a call—Detective Paglino, (908) 370-5953; Detective Corvasce, (908) 576-1555—you can be assured of total confidentiality.

We are constantly updating our slides, videos, and class material so that each presentation is fresh for both veteran attendees as well as newcomers. We intend to focus more on the criminal mind as well as the criminal act in future presentations.

We sincerely wish all members of Novelists, Inc. health, happiness, and continued success in 1994!

— Detectives Joseph Paglino and Mauro Corvasce

On-line Services a Vital Link

“. . .[the on-line service’s] real importance is its ability to form new communities made up of people who share specific interests. In an increasingly fragmented society, computer networks are re-creating a small-town America where groups of folks lean over the electronic fence to swap stories and share information. Many of these ‘virtual’ communities have the warmth of a campfire gathering of old friends.”

— USA Weekend, 21-23 January 1994

Some people on-line, and many others off-line, have been known to worry about NINC, NINK, and related issues being discussed in so public a forum as a computer bulletin board. A few have even gone so far as to protest public discussion.

I don’t know about you, but I’m not comfortable being patrolled by the Thought Police. Yes, I understand that it might be nonproductive to talk about NINC issues among

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non-NINCers, and that our concerns are best addressed amongst ourselves. By the same token, must I cease talking politics simply because I don’t work for the Clinton administration?

And can we expect people to cease chatting on-line? Nope. No more than we can expect them to stop yakking on the phone or faxing each other.

To those who do not subscribe to a service, I offer a list of just a few of the benefits I’ve found on one network:

1. Help with research, word processing, and desktop publishing, using downloading to capture new fonts and graphics.
2. Networking with agents, editors, illustrators, writers, and many other industry professionals.
3. Instant access to late-breaking industry news, including editor job changes.
4. A huge library of files to download—including a list of 2000+ book sellers to capture for a label database.

So rather than worry about on-line chatter, why not explore the information highway for yourself? If you have a PC and a modem, you’re all set. To sign on to GEnie ON LINE:

1. Set your communications software for half duplex (local echo), at 300, 1200, or 2400 baud.
2. Have your modem dial toll free: 1-800-638-8369, or in Canada 1-800-387-8330. Upon connection, enter HHH.
3. At the U#= prompt, enter XTX99009,ROMANCE then press.

(Note that there is no space between the XTX99009, and ROMANCE.)

4. Follow the prompts to give your name, address, and billing information.

If you call client services, they will tell you the 800 number above to sign-up with.

The rate is $8.95 a month, $3 an hour with up to 4 hours free a month.

—Susan Wiggs

Used Bookstores: Action Plan Needed?

There were actually several advantages to hawking shirts at the San Antonio conference—I enjoyed Laura Resnick’s great stories and photos of her African journey, heard Steve Axelrod’s and Barbara Keller’s jokes, and sat in on numerous gripe sessions that even evolved solutions occasionally. One possible one came up for used bookstores, and I wish I could remember who said what so I could give proper credit (blame?), but I can summarize.

First, one must decide if used bookstores are a problem. Some writers see used bookstores as an advantage because the stores carry their “backlist” and are a convenient source of out-of-print books. Readers who discover a writer in a used bookstore may like her or him so much that they will buy all future books new. Many used booksellers also sell new books and are very supportive of local writers. Some authors also liken the resale of a book to the resale of a car where the manufacturer receives no “royalty” on the sale of the used car. There is a fallacy in that argument. Some new/used booksellers make as much or more profit on resales as on new sales, so they offer new and used copies of the same book simultaneously; car dealers don’t. Cars are also not purchased new, driven for a few days, then resold at half or less their original price while still virtually new. The so-called “program cars” that are new and driven for a few days during a golf tournament, etc., are discounted before sale, but the manufacturer still gets a healthy cut or royalty.

Other writers see used bookstores as income stealers. To determine if you personally are losing income, spot check used bookstores in your area for a few months after the publication of your next book to see how many copies show up used and how fast they turn over. If your book is available through a book club before it is available in stores, start checking as soon as the book club books are shipped. Do keep in mind that not every one of those used sales would have been a royalty-producing retail sale for you if used bookstores didn’t exist.

If used bookstores are responsible for significant lost “royalty” sales in those first few months, the next question is what can be done about it. Collecting royalties on used sales just isn’t feasible for several reasons. The most obvious is that there is no instant, cost-free way to determine if royalties are being paid. However, there is a way to curtail resales of newly published books that can be monitored easily. A federal law that bans resale of a book for less than cover price for one year following its publication would end the majority of lost royalty sales. If such a law were passed, monitoring compliance would frankly depend on us, but violations would be obvious and easy to determine if we made sure the law mandated that the month and year of printing appear on the verso. Currently, some publishers list the month and year of printing, some only the year and some only the year of copyright which is even less useful since a book may be copyrighted in one year but not printed until a year or more later.

Banning resale for one year would seem to be an acceptable compromise. It wouldn’t put used booksellers out of business or impose onerous bookkeeping that is virtually impossible to check anyway. It would also keep “backlists” and out-of-print books readily available. The resale of college textbooks was a matter of concern to several people. When the average price of a new college text is $50, there wasn’t much sympathy for authors’ protesting used sales of textbooks, but here the idea of collecting resale royalties could actually work. With the limited number of used textbook outlets, collecting royalties and monitoring would be fairly easy, and the law could address that. Students doing business among themselves would be impossible to regulate, but, like garage and flea market sales, the sales aren’t significant.

The issue of used bookstores has been a half-healed scab picked at for years. Most of us, no matter our opinion, would agree, I think, that it’s past time to let it heal up. The Atlanta conference could be the venue for determining member interest in trying to apply some legislative “ointment” through a nightowl session or workshop. A few months ago, a number of country music artists were especially interested in finding a way to prevent the resale
of CD's. Perhaps by joining forces, we could compound an "ointment" that would help both groups and have a good chance of passage, given the country music performers' high visibility.

Whatever your side on this issue, I would make this observation. None of us has time to fight on several fronts. While you may be losing income to used bookstores, you are virtually guaranteed to be losing far more if your publisher offers your books through a book club. The royalty rate is nearly always lower on book club sales. Maybe the Advocacy Committee could compile information sent in by members telling whether they have had book club sales, what the royalty rate was in comparison to the retail sales rate and what percentage of their total sales were book club sales. No names would be necessary, just the sales and royalty rate information. When it was compiled, we might see that this would be a battle more worth fighting and could discuss ways in Atlanta. A number of us belong to another organization that recently put $50,000 in a legal fund for published authors. That's quite a war chest, and one that, if we had the sales and royalty figures to contribute, we might be able to share.

— Patricia Gardner Evans

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(INTROducing

The following authors have made application for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 30 days of this NINK issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC:

Carol I. Wagner (Marisa Carroll), Deshler, OH

(MINUTES summary

Highlights of the January 12, 1994 Board Meeting

1. Victoria Thompson reported that the '94 Conference will take place October 13-16 at The Terrace Garden in Atlanta, Georgia. The Conference will be one day shorter than in previous years and the fee will be $175.

2. Standing committees of the organization were reviewed by the new Board and names were discussed for the '94 Membership Committee.

3. In future issues, NINK editor JoAnn Ross will list her fax number in the newsletter in order to facilitate member contributions to NINK.

Exciting Plans for 1994 Conference

By VICTORIA THOMPSON, Conference Coordinator

We've listened to our members once again, and—as you saw in the preliminary brochure you received within your last NINK—we’ve made a few changes to meet the needs our members have indicated. First and foremost, the 1994 conference will be less expensive than previous conferences. The hotel room rates are significantly lower this year, and we’ve lowered the conference fee, as well.

For our members who couldn’t spare too much time away from their computers, we’ve made the conference shorter. Instead of starting on Wednesday night, the conference will officially begin after lunch on Thursday with the business sessions and NINC’s Annual Business Meeting. The discussion groups will start after supper on Thursday evening, making it possible for members to travel on Thursday without missing conference events. This will save members one day away from home and help in cost-cutting, too. And we’ve somehow managed to make the conference a whole day shorter by cutting only one hour of meeting time, so you’ll basically be getting the same conference as before.

For the past two years, we’ve noticed many of our members have chosen to forego the Saturday afternoon speakers in favor of escaping to sample the delights of whatever city we happen to be visiting. In San Antonio, some of our members suggested we make such trips part of the conference program, so that’s what we’re going to do. Instead of bringing speakers in, we’re going to take our members out to visit points of special interest to writers. Watch for more details in upcoming issues of NINK and your conference brochure.

And by all means plan to come a day or two early if you can see the parts of Atlanta not covered by our conference activities. Our hotel, The Terrace Garden, is located in Buckhead, Atlanta’s prestigious business and entertainment district. Shopping is just a short walk away at Lenox Square and Phipps Plaza, the city’s most exclusive shopping centers. Nightclubs and award-winning restaurants are also nearby, and MARTA, Atlanta’s transit system, allows easy access to downtown Atlanta and the historic district. Tours can be arranged for the Governor’s Mansion and several other landmarks, and those with the time might want to plan a day trip to Stone Mountain Park for hiking, historical tours, museums, train rides, and fishing.

The Terrace Garden also offers a Health & Racquet Center, including an indoor tennis court, two racquetball courts, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, sauna, steam rooms, and fully equipped Nautilus weight room. Oh yes, and the hotel offers complimentary morning coffee. What more could we ask? Mark your calendar: October 13-16, 1994 in Atlanta.
Further Rustlings . . . .

(Continued from page 1)

(such as Susanna Rowson’s bestselling Charlotte Temple) to contemporary cyberpunk fiction or romances. We’re much more likely to ask the question “Is it interesting?” than to ask the freighted question “Is it good?” This doesn’t mean that we neglect aesthetic issues. Rather, it means that my students and I tend to be more interested in the ways in which literary forms (of whatever degree of popularity) address many of society’s most important issues about men and women, social roles, class, and racial tensions.

It is also interesting to me that many of the early American writers I analyzed in Revolution and the Word were popular, bestselling novelists (many of them in the so-called sentimental mode) and were also educators. Most American novelists who wrote before 1820 also wrote advice tracts on education, especially on ways to improve female education. I can identify with this. While I am a professor who publishes scholarly work, I also write books for a wider general audience. I know from this experience that the popular books are just as difficult to write as the scholarly books. What is different is the style—livelier, more accessible, more personal in the books written for a general, non-academic audience.

In writing for different audiences, I have the opportunity to explore many different voices and moods. There was a time when I felt I needed to disguise these different voices under a pseudonym, but I have felt no pressure whatsoever to censor myself since I came to Duke. Rather than being ashamed of my non-academic life, Duke University celebrates it—with supportive articles in the faculty newspaper or the alumni magazine and so forth. It’s very exciting teaching at a university that has a wide appreciation for culture in its many aspects, “popular” as well as “serious.”

Janice Radway:

All writers validated

I am a lucky participant in an innovative program at Duke University called the Program in Literature. Designed deliberately to be international in scope and comparative in focus, the program has also tried to rethink the very definition of the word, literature. Rather than use it as an exclusionary term of praise for works only of the very highest quality, we aim to think of literature as a broad category that encompasses the full range of writing done in society. We are as willing to discuss popular romances, science fiction, and the recent spate of mystery stories written by women as we are to study the novels of Gustave Flaubert, the political writings of Simone de Beauvoir, or the popular stories published by Edgar Allan Poe. We are as interested in the ideas, fantasies, and dreams debated and developed in widely-distributed “popular” forms as we are in the aesthetic patterns and intricate verbal art of “avant-garde” texts read only by a relative few. And we are especially interested in the ways in which different societies and different cultures discriminate among different kinds of writing.

In the courses taught in the Literature Program, all writers are considered worth reading and investigating because, as articulate members of complex societies, they give expression to some of their culture’s most basic beliefs. At the same time, they also debate and discuss major issues of concern and controversy by conjuring fearsome problems for their characters which they then imaginatively resolve in instructive, thought-provoking ways. We are as likely to ask our students to consider the kinds of moral decisions made by Sara Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski as by Herman Melville’s Bartleby the Scrivener. At the same time, we endeavor to teach our students to think critically not only about the intellectual and artistic functions writing can perform, but also about the many ways it brings pleasure as well. We do not assume that all writers agree with each other about what their society’s major issues are. Nor do we believe that writers always concur about what writing should accomplish, about what makes a good story, or about what readers should take away from the reading. You might say, then, that what we want our students to understand is that there are as many models of the individual we call “the writer” as there are types of writing and roles for writing to perform. Writing fantasies of escape, we want them to realize, is as interesting and important a social activity as questioning the status of enslaved Americans in abolitionist writing done in the mid-nineteenth century.

To give a very brief example of how our inquiries sometimes proceed, let me tell you just a little about a class I taught last semester. This course focused on the role of writing and reading in women’s lives over the course of the last two centuries. We were particularly interested in the fact that the career of writing was one of the first to open up to middle-class women once they achieved both education and literacy. Thus we read several works written by women that were among the most widely read in nineteenth century America. At the same time, we considered the fact that reading played a crucial role in women’s lives, in part because the world of culture and sensibility was thought to be their special province. We wondered, then, how reading about Louisa May Alcott’s Jo March, E. D. E. N. Southworth’s Capitola Black, and Carolyn Keene’s (a pseudonym used by the Edward Stratemeyer syndicate) Nancy Drew might have affected the way women thought about themselves and the nature of their lives. And we treated feminist writing of the 1970s and ‘80s as a particular form of writing engaged in by some women who understood themselves to be in debate and dialogue with another form of writing popular in the same period, that is, romance writing. What we were most interested in, finally, was how writing and reading functioned differently at different times for different women. The “popular,” as it is understood in the Literature Program, then, is not a lesser form of writing, but one among many different kinds, each with its own function, reading public, and appropriate set of norms.
Further Rustlings . . . .

Jane Tompkins:
The Curse is Off

The great thing about teaching popular literature is, it's not surrounded by the air of piety and veneration that hangs about classic texts. The curse is off it. Students can get next to popular novels, feel familiar with them, relax. They can be more vocal and more honest both in their hatred and their love.

The hatred is important. I discovered this in my course on "Popular Women's Novels of the Twentieth Century." Some students detested Scarlett O'Hara. Others hated the heroine of Forever Amber. One after another they would testify passionately to what they couldn't stand about these characters, often repeating what someone else had said. It was obvious that they needed to get these feelings off their chests and out in the open. Then, on the second day, they would settle down to a real discussion of the books; the direction they took, when given their heads, was often fascinating. We spent a class period talking about gossip in Peyton Place, the effects of gossip on them when they were growing up, their parents' need for the approval of friends and relatives, the extent to which what other people might think ruled what

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Once the hatred is out, the love can have its day. Strong negative remarks provoke equally strong positive testimonials. People's emotional involvement with their reading gets a chance to be expressed and the sharing is at a different level from that in a purely intellectual discussion. I remember one student who wasn't afraid to keep on reiterating her love for, I think it was a Danielle Steel novel, though almost everyone else was tearing it apart. Somehow, this fiction enables people to believe in their own reactions and stick to them.

I feel freer to say what I think about popular literature, too. I can let my ideas just be what they are and not struggle to meet impossible standards of thoroughness and comprehensiveness. If I don't know what something means or don't like it, I can just say so and ask the students what they think.

Part of the reason for all this, of course, is that Westerns and romances aren't surrounded by the mountains of criticism written about the literary classics. Students don't feel intimidated by the far-fetched theories and complex analyses that surround the old masters like a hedge of thorns. Instead, it's a level playing field: people feel their opinion is as good as the next person's, so everybody can get in there and pitch. This can be empowering for students; though sadly, some don't appreciate their own or each other's ideas, since they've been conditioned to believe that the professor's must be worth more.

By the same token, even after a whole semester, a handful still believe that they've been slumming, and that the real books are being studied in other English courses. But for most, I think studying popular literature turns out to be a validation of their own tastes and abilities as readers. And besides, it's so much fun.

Marianna Torgovnick:
Freedom in the novel

I am an English professor with a penchant for art, anthropology, psychology, and religion. Recently, I have been writing autobiographical essays, too—about being an Italian American female—which I plan to publish in fall, 1994 in a collection called Crossing Ocean Parkway. More and more, when I read from my work at lectures or get letters from people about it, people talk about my writing and ask questions about intention, point of view, movement between fact and what sounds like fiction. There was a time when I would have been surprised by such questions—which should be asked (or so we've been told) only about "creative" rather than "critical" writing. I no longer believe in the distinction. I am writing creative criticism or writerly criticism: I share a bond with writers who work in journalism or fiction, or freelance—at least as much of a bond as I share with other university professors.

When I was in graduate school and for some years after I entered the profession, professors were expected to write about a single chronological period (the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century) or about a special author. I was very resistant to such niches, and specialized instead in the comparative novel—a vast and nebulous field. I think I was seeking freedom.

Full freedom did not really come until I had been in the profession a while, and interdisciplinary studies and cultural studies widened the sense of what English professors could be expected to write. I like to think that my own work has been part of the process and can help other people. But I am also aware, painfully and with some embarrassment, that I have conditions available to me that other writers do not. I have a job with a stable salary that doesn't interfere with my writing all that much and sometimes even helps it. I teach at an institution which (for the time being, at least) is receptive to letting its faculty develop in the ways that seem appropriate to them. I have a writing group which reads my work regularly and makes comments that improve it; I have other people in the community who help, too. I feel very lucky.

At the same time, I think that this kind of "luck" doesn't just happen and doesn't necessarily last. It requires work and effort—sometimes in areas rather far from the actual arena of writing. I know that professional writers pay dues all the time. They have to hustle, they have to write for deadlines and money and (sometimes) bosses and editors who loom more immediately in their lives than mine do. Readers of this piece will be able to supply additional hurdles and hassles—and personal horror stories. I suspect that professional writers are braver than I was, more willing to get out there, and at least initially, without the safety net of a job, salary, and tenure. But those of us who write from within universities sometimes need to be brave, too—and we also need to pay our dues: in classrooms, on committees, as ad-

March 1994
We Need
Your Letters!

I was pleased to hear through the grapevine that online writers have been talking about NINK. But since not all of us are racing along the information superhighway, and I've always perceived the newsletter as a way of generating dialogue among members, how about some of you pushing print after writing an opinion, folding the paper, sticking it in a stamped envelope and sending it my way. Or, better yet, fax it to (602) 863-6812. Don't forget, Novelists, Inc. works best when everyone is involved.

Quote of the Month:

"Romance novels are sex-information services... They help women expand their sexual repertoire in a good, clean and harmless way." Dr. Gay Guzinski, chief of gynecology at University of Maryland in Baltimore, who "prescribes" romance novels for patients trying to put sizzle into their sex lives, in The Arizona Republic.

Heartfire Torched

Zebra is discontinuing the Heartfire line of Historical Romances. Some of the authors were "released" and others were plugged into the Lovegram line which will be going from four to six books a month.

Upcoming in Future Issues:
- An open letter from Nora Rawlinson, editor-in-chief of Publishers Weekly
- Protect your data (and your sanity)
- Staying out of legal trouble—keeping your courtroom scenes accurate
- Tales of the unexpected—the challenge of genre writing
- A quiz to test where you stand on the burn-out scale
- Travel tax tips for writers
- Collaboration—are two heads really better than one?
- Agents—the good, the bad, and the ugly
- And, as always, more exciting conference updates!

All coming soon, to a mailbox near you! (But only if you remember to renew.)

Rustlings . . . .
(continued from page 9)

ministrators, on those occasions when we hire colleagues or promote them.

When I wrote Gone Primitive and Crossing Ocean Parkway, I wasn't thinking about good "career moves"—I was writing what I wanted to write. Same thing with my new book, Primitivism and the Quest for Ecstasy. I'd like to think that writing what you want is automatically a good career move—but I know that may be wishful thinking. To hedge my bets, to provide a little insurance, I do the drudge work at my university. I'm not just there at the word processor. I'm there in selecting graduate students, training them, hiring professors, and seeing them through the system. My hope is that I am giving other people some of the freedom I have.

Contributors:


Cathy N. Davidson is professor of English at Duke University. In addition, she is editor of the journal American Literature and president of the American Studies Association. She has published Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America (Oxford, 1986), Reading in America: Literature and Social History (Johns Hopkins, 1989), The Book of Love: Writers and their Love Letters (Pocket, 1992), Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji: On Finding Myself in Japan (Dutton, 1993), and several other books. She is currently working on The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States (with Linda Wagner-Martin) and a novel, Air Kisses.

Janice Radway is professor of Literature at Duke University. She is the author of Reading the Romance. Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Press, 1984). She is working on a book about the Book-of-the-Month Club from its beginnings in 1926 to the present.

Jane Tompkins is professor of English at Duke University. Her most recent book is West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (Oxford, 1992). She is currently on leave and is writing a weekly column for the Raleigh News and Observer and working as a breakfast cook. Her current book project, A Life in School, is an account of her experiences as a student and a teacher.

Marianna Torgovnick is professor of English at Duke University and author of three critical books, most recently Gone Primitive: Savage Intelligents, Modern Lives (University of Chicago Press, 1990), which the New York Times called "superb . . . a kind of gift to its own culture. Several other books are forthcoming: Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter (University of Chicago Press) and Primitivism and the Quest for Ecstasy (Knopf).
The Author Appearance: 
Getting Organized

By Susan Wiggs

Things to send to a bookseller in advance of a scheduled signing:
1. An advance reading copy of the book—ARC, bound galley, page proofs, or clean copy of the manuscript. Make sure it’s autographed, and make sure the cover page contains ordering information*.
2. Publicity photo (put name and address on back)
3. Cover proof — ordering information on back
4. Personal letter to the bookseller — include ordering information
5. Pre-order reserve sign-up sheet for customers
6. Bookmarks
7. Bibliography with ISBN, cover price, publisher, and pub date listed for each book
8. Poster and/or flyer featuring the book’s artwork (ask your publisher to send a foamcore easel poster)
9. Author newsletters
10. Short bio or press release about the author
11. “Bag stuffers”—announcement of the upcoming signing with date, time, and place. Make a master copy for the bookseller to reproduce and distribute.
12. In-store announcement poster with date, time, place
13. Press release with details of the signing
14. Address labels of readers in the area so the bookseller can do a mailing
15. Address labels of media contacts in the area
* Ordering information: ISBN (most important!), cover price, title, author, publisher, release date

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2. Mailing list sign-up sheet or guest book
3. Dish of candy
4. Bookmarks
5. “Meet the Author” easel poster
6. Copies of reviews and/or articles about the author

Things to send when you can’t be there in person:
1. An advance reading copy of the book—ARC, bound galley, page proofs, or clean copy of the manuscript. Include ordering information.
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Baker, Madeline: Cheyenne Surrender, Leisure
Brondos, Sharon: The Luck of the Irish, Harlequin Superromance
Brownley, Margaret: Rawhide and Lace, NAL Topaz
Campbell, Marilyn: Pretty Maids in a Row, Villard Books (Hardcover)
Casstevens, Jeanne Savery w/a Jeanne Savery: A Reformed Rake, Zebra Regency (sequel to The Widow and the Rake)
Chekani, Loretta w/a Loretta Chase: Captives of the Night, Avon Romantic Treasure
Kleinsasser, Lois w/a Cait Logan: Night Fire, Berkley Diamond
Maxwell, Patricia w/a Jennifer Blake: Wildest Dreams, Fawcett (Reissue)

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The Novelists, Inc. conference was one of the high points of my writing career (so far). I think I learned more in those four days than I had in the last four years. What a wonderful warm, informal, sharing environment!

—Brenda Hlatt Barber

In my experience, no other conference can match the casual, easygoing friendliness and openness of NINC. It’s a conference of peers who understand, share, and help.

—Fayrene Preston

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