

# january magazine



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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 02, 2010

## Death of a Crime Writer

*(Editor's note: In the two weeks since author Robert B. Parker [suddenly passed away](#), there's been a significant outpouring of appreciation for what he contributed to the detective-fiction genre. Most of that has come from American writers, but not exclusively. The*

*following tribute was penned by [Jim Napier](#), a mystery and crime fiction critic who lives in Quebec, Canada, and contributes to the Sherbrooke Record.)*

In the literary landscape of crime fiction, [Robert B. Parker](#) stood as tall and proud as a Sequoia, firm and never wavering, impossible to miss and commanding our

admiration and respect. But on Monday, January 18, the 77-year-old Parker died of a heart attack while sitting at his computer in his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home, working on the most recent of his numerous novels. Although it came far too soon for his many readers, it was a predictable and fitting end to an impressive life.



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Over the preceding 37 years, Parker had written 74 books, some award-winning, almost all of them bestsellers. The bane of creative-writing instructors, he was famous for writing without an outline or notes, even without a story line when he started a book; instead, he would begin with a simple opening premise and just see where it led him. Yet Parker was a disciplined writer, turning out five pages a day (others have said 10) for 50 weeks per year, giving his readers up to three novels annually. As he put it, “I don’t get better by taking my time. My second draft is not an improvement, so I don’t do one.” Hardly good advice for most aspiring writers, but in Parker’s case it served him well.

After a stint with the U.S. Army in Korea during the 1950s, Parker entered Boston University, where his doctoral thesis -- written in just two weeks -- explored the world of such hard-boiled crime-fiction writers as [Dashiell Hammett](#), Raymond Chandler and [Ross Macdonald](#). He might easily have remained an academic, but Parker chose instead to swim in the deep end of the pool: he abandoned teaching to turn out increasingly subtle yet readable novels that both developed the detective-fiction genre and entertained millions of fans for the next four decades.

Well into his writing career, Parker was approached by the administrators of the Raymond Chandler estate, who asked him to complete [Poodle Springs](#), a manuscript left unfinished at the time of Chandler’s death in 1959. He did so (the resulting book was published in 1989), and then followed that up with an entirely new Philip Marlowe novel, *Perchance to Dream* (1991), a sequel to Chandler’s 1939 first novel, [The Big Sleep](#). Both are tributes to his mentor, affectionately and impeccably written.

Although firmly in the hard-boiled camp, Parker gave the literary world a kinder, more romantic and far more complex hero than had most of the writers who came before him. His 37 tales about a Boston private eye known only as [Spenser](#) ([which inspired a popular late-1980s TV series](#)) include subplots that revolve around the P.I.’s private life, and show a gentler, nuanced figure (though he could be tough when he had to be) who treats women as women rather than as objects, and knows his way around a kitchen. And as society evolved, Parker transformed along with it: when his two sons acknowledged that they were gay, Parker found a way to explore that fact through his novels, and did so with insight and sensitivity.

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[Death of a Crime Writer](#)

[Prizes Lost, Heroes Found](#)

[SF/F: El Borak and Other Desert Adventures by Robe...](#)

[Amazon Capitulates](#)

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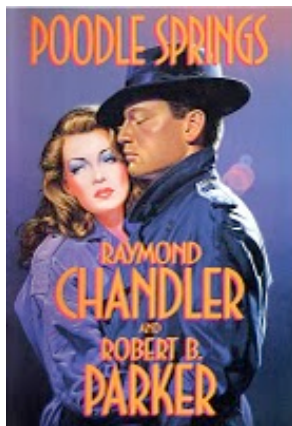
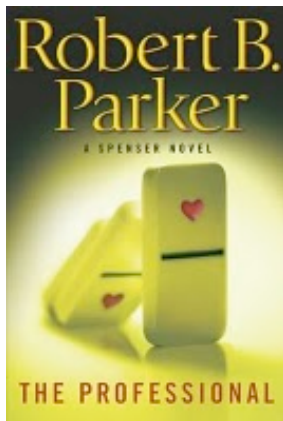
[David Middleton](#)

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While continually adding to the Spenser oeuvre, in the late 1990s Parker began to pen a couple of other series, including half a dozen stories featuring [Sunny Randall](#), a female Boston ex-cop turned gumshoe. Although some people criticized the protagonist as merely Spenser in drag, after awhile the series took on a unique persona, and now stands on its own.

Branching out in other directions, Parker also wrote nine rather darker novels about [Jesse Stone](#), a flawed small-town police chief based in New England, and more than a dozen standalone works.

Let's be clear: Parker's books don't qualify as great literature, whatever that may be. But they are well-written, entertaining yarns that often raise important issues, which is all Parker ever sought or claimed for them. If his plots sometimes seem a bit mundane, it's because he dealt with events involving believable people caught up in the ebb and flow of real life. And his seemingly light, breezy style often masks some tough questions more frequently found in so-called literary novels. Parker's skillful use



of a first-person viewpoint and sharp, witty dialogue recalls the best of the American hard-boiled, yet his books are unmistakably of our time. In the last Spenser novel published

before his death (2009's [The Professional](#)), the hero never uses his gun, and only uses his fists once, to avoid having a conflict escalate into gunfire. True to the hard-boiled mantra, the resolution of the conflict is by cosmic, rather than legal, means: a killer is made to pay for his crimes and justice is served, but in a way that the judicial system could never accommodate. It is a book that profoundly explores manipulation, guilt and accountability in the context of shifting social mores.

Not only did he receive two Edgar Awards for his novels, but in 2002 Parker was named a Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of

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America, an honor he shared with such luminaries as Agatha Christie, Alfred Hitchcock, John Le Carré, Ruth Rendell, P.D. James and Stephen King. The event acknowledged his place in the pantheon of great crime writers. Yet throughout his career he remained approachable and helpful to emerging authors.

Parker's influence in the crime-writing fraternity has been enormous. With Spenser he liberated the character of the hard-boiled protagonist from the one-dimensional portrayals of the 1930s and '40s, and transformed him into a likable, even admirable figure: an ex-boxer with an addiction to cinnamon doughnuts, who was also an accomplished cook, a dog lover, and not least of all, a man who could admire beautiful women while staying true to his partner -- all without weakening his hero's masculinity. This opened the door for other writers to take similar paths, adding to the richness of the genre. Parker's impact has been acknowledged by such renowned crime writers as [Robert Crais](#), [Dennis Lehane](#) and Harlan Coben. In a 2007 interview with *Atlantic Monthly*, Coben said that "When it comes to detective novels, 90 percent of us admit he's an influence, and the rest of us lie about it."

Survived by his wife, Joan (to whom he dedicated almost all of his books), and his two sons, David and Daniel, Robert B. Parker left the literary world a legacy that, happily, will continue to shape detective fiction for a very long time.

*(Author photo by John Earle. Used with permission.)*

LABELS: [CRIME FICTION](#), [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY J. KINGSTON PIERCE AT [11:11 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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## Prizes Lost, Heroes Found

In a week that seems likely to be filled with book news of the [maddening kind](#), it's fun to come across a story that celebrates books and reminds us of the excitement they can bring.

The announcement of Lost Man Booker, seems designed to help us refocus on what's really important about books and how they can influence our culture and our lives in beautiful and meaningful ways.

Here's the setup: two years after the Booker Prize began, it was no

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longer awarded as a retrospective. According to the Man Booker foundation, it became, “as it is today, a prize for the best novel in the year of publication. At the same time, the date on which the award was given moved from April to November. As a result of these changes, there was whole year’s gap when a wealth of fiction, published in 1970, fell through the net. These books were simply never considered for the prize.”

And what a wealth it was, too. When you look at the longlist, which has just been announced, the mind reels with possibilities and wonder. There is, quite literally, something here for everyone: for every reading taste in the English language:

*The Lost Man Booker Prize is the brainchild of Peter Straus, honorary archivist to the Booker Prize Foundation. He comments, "I noticed that when Robertson Davies's Fifth Business was first published it carried encomiums from Saul Bellow and John Fowles both of whom judged the 1971 Booker Prize. However judges for 1971 said it had not been considered or submitted. This led to an investigation which concluded that a year had been excluded. I am delighted that, even in a Darwinian way, this year, with so many extraordinary novels, can now be covered by the Man Booker Prize."*

Though the poll has still to be posted, you’ll get the chance to vote on the shortlist via the [Man Booker Web site](#). The shortlist will then be announced in March, while the winner will be announced in May.

Here’s the longlist:

- Brian Aldiss, *The Hand Reared Boy*
- H.E.Bates, *A Little Of What You Fancy?*
- Nina Bawden, *The Birds On The Trees*
- Melvyn Bragg, *A Place In England*
- Christy Brown, *Down All The Days*
- Len Deighton, *Bomber*
- J.G.Farrell, *Troubles*
- Elaine Feinstein, *The Circle*
- Shirley Hazzard, *The Bay Of Noon*
- Reginald Hill, *A Clubbable Woman*
- Susan Hill, *I’m The King Of The Castle*
- Francis King, *A Domestic Animal*
- Margaret Laurence, *The Fire Dwellers*

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- David Lodge, *Out Of The Shelter*
- Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*
- Shiva Naipaul, *Fireflies*
- Patrick O'Brian, *Master and Commander*
- Joe Orton, *Head To Toe*
- Mary Renault, *Fire From Heaven*
- Ruth Rendell, *A Guilty Thing Surprised*
- Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat*
- Patrick White, *The Vivisector*

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LABELS: [AWARDS](#), [CLASSIC FICTION](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [9:05 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

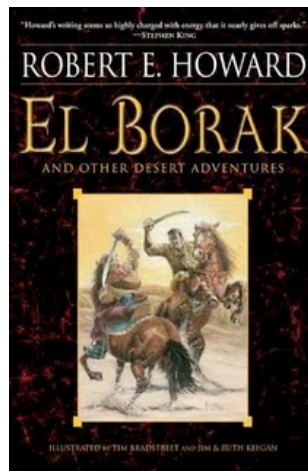
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 01, 2010

## SF/F: *El Borak and Other Desert Adventures* by Robert E. Howard

Don't get me wrong: I'm confident that 2010 will be filled with fantastic new books and even new voices in the twinned genres of science fiction and fantasy. Even so, I think it's going to be tough for me to get as excited about another book as I am about Del Rey's release this month of [El Borak and Other Desert Adventures](#) by the tragic and doomed Robert E. Howard, the prolific pulp writer-of-all-trades who, in 1936, died tragically and by his own hand when he was just 30.

That alone gives me pause. When you consider both Howard's incredible output as well as the legacy he left, it's very sad to think what he would have achieved had been given -- had he taken -- another 30 years. Our loss.

Howard was one of the most influential pulp authors of the 20th century. He is credited with the creation of the sword and sorcery sub-genre. In *El Borak and Other Desert Adventures* we are treated to a really terrific collection of Howard's stories, highlighted by one of his best-known creations, the Texan adventurer Xavier Gordon, known as El Borak and set on adventure in the deserts of the east.



Almost as special as this resurrection of some of Howard's most important stories are the illustrations that have been created for this volume. The art of Jim and Ruth Keegan and Tim Bradstreet are well known in SF/F and the inclusion of specially commissioned work here contributes to making this volume feel like much more than the republication of Howard's stories: it feels like a respectful celebration of his electric, irreplaceable voice.

LABELS: [LINCOLN CHO](#), [SF/F](#)

POSTED BY LINCOLN CHO AT [12:05 AM](#) [1 COMMENT](#)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2010

## Amazon Capitulates

Well, it looks as if Amazon has blinked first in [its big e-book battle against mega-publisher Macmillan](#). An announcement posted this evening by the "Amazon Kindle team" [reads](#):

*Dear Customers:*

*[Macmillan](#), one of the "big six" publishers, has clearly communicated to us that, regardless of our viewpoint, they are committed to switching to an agency model and charging \$12.99 to \$14.99 for e-book versions of bestsellers and most hardcover releases.*

*We have expressed our strong disagreement and the seriousness of our disagreement by temporarily ceasing the sale of all Macmillan titles. We want you to know that ultimately, however, we will have to capitulate and accept Macmillan's terms because Macmillan has a monopoly over their own titles, and we will want to offer them to you even at prices we believe are needlessly high for e-books. Amazon customers will at that point decide for themselves whether they believe it's reasonable to pay \$14.99 for a bestselling e-book. We don't believe that all of the major publishers will take the same route as Macmillan. And we know for sure that many independent presses and self-published authors will see this as an opportunity to provide attractively priced e-books as an alternative.*

*Kindle is a business for Amazon, and it is also a mission. We*

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*never expected it to be easy!*

*Thank you for being a customer.*

No need to [rub Amazon's nose in it](#). Let's just call this good news for all those Macmillan authors whose work will once more be easily available through the giant online retailer.

**READ MORE:** "[Looking Like a Fool with Your Foot in Your Mouth](#)," by Sandra Ruttan (On Life and Other Inconveniences).

LABELS: [BOOK BUSINESS](#), [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY J. KINGSTON PIERCE AT [6:37 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2010

## How to Publish, *Not* Perish

It sounds like a spam come-on, not the headline on an article in the blog of one of the most respected newspapers in the world:

*How to publish your own book online -- and make money*

Yet there it is: in backlit black and white, on *The Guardian's* technology blog. Technology and economics columnist -- and fledgling poet -- Victor Keegan takes a very personal approach to the topic of self-publishing for fun and profit in a piece that clearly comes from outside of the book industry and approaches the matter at hand from many angles.

*It doesn't have to be an embryonic bestseller because self-publishing is best suited to limited editions. Anything over 1,000 copies and you would be better off going to a traditional printer to take advantage of economies of scale. I know a lot people who are self-publishing a record of their own lives together with memories of their parents and grandparents as a bit of family history. That's not vanity publishing, just a great way to preserve memories for future generations and add to the archive of local history. Self-publishing is ideal for that.*

Despite Keegan's clear-eyed approach, I'm still not convinced you can do what the man said and "publish your own book online -- and make money." But if self-publishing *is* something you might take a run at, you could do worse than Keegan's primer.

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The Guardian [piece is here](#).

LABELS: [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#), [SELF-PUBLISHING](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [5:00 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Amazon's Kindle Not Ready to Lie Down

The day after Apple [released the device](#) some industry watchers are expecting to help kill Amazon's Kindle e-book reading device, Amazon released a statement seemingly set to diffuse the iPad's early impact:

*“Millions of people now own Kindles,” said Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.com. “And Kindle owners read, a lot. When we have both editions, we sell 6 Kindle books for every 10 physical books. This is year-to-date and includes only paid books -- free Kindle books would make the number even higher. It's been an exciting 27 months.”*

As much as that sounds like bravado to some jaded ears, the *Los Angeles Times* seemed to have no trouble rounding up a group of users who are standing fast by their Kindles:

*Since the Kindle was launched in late 2007 its advocates, including Amazon Chief Executive Jeff Bezos, have said that to reproduce the quiet, solitary experience of reading a book, e-readers should not tempt users with a panoply of digital distractions.*

*The iPad, on the other hand, is by design a multimedia device, equipped with dozens of entertainment features and primed to offer thousands more in the form of add-on applications.*

*Critics say that's not going to help anyone get to the end of the chapter.*

*“If you like your kids, get them an iPad so they can play games,” said Russ Wilcox, the head of E Ink Corp., which created the digital paper technology used by the Kindle and many other e-ink-based readers. “If you love them, get them an e-reader so they can actually read.”*

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The L.A. *Times* has much more to say, [and it's here](#).

LABELS: [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [12:05 AM](#) [1 COMMENT](#)S

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2010

## J.D. Salinger Dead at 91

Almost 60 years after the publication of his only novel, the seminal *Catcher in the Rye*, the mysterious and reclusive Jerome David Salinger is dead, just a few weeks after his 91st birthday. *The New*



*York Times* [obit is here](#):

*Mr. Salinger's literary reputation rests on a slender but enormously influential body of published work: the novel "The Catcher in the Rye," the collection "Nine Stories" and two compilations, each with two long stories about the fictional Glass family: "Franny and Zooey" and "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction."*

*"Catcher" was published in 1951, and its very first sentence, distantly echoing Mark Twain, struck a brash new note in American literature: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth."*

Last year, Salinger's name came up on these pages quite often in relation to an unauthorized sequel to *Catcher* that generated comment around the world. We talked about it [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Today, the world mourns Salinger, possibly as much for the novels we never saw as much as anything else: it's not as though we, as a culture, knew him as well as we would have liked.

*Time* magazine writes about [Salinger here](#). The CBC [is here](#). *The*

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*National Post* [is here](#). *The Guardian* [here](#). Expect many, many more still to come.

LABELS: [J.D. SALINGER](#), [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [11:42 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## What the iPad Might Mean for Book Publishing

Into a sea of stories on Apple's new iPad yesterday, covering everything from specs to speculation, the *New York Times*' Motoko Rich piped up with some book-related facts and figures:

*When Steven P. Jobs announced the new iBooks app, he said five of the six largest publishers -- Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins Publishers, Macmillan, Penguin and Simon & Schuster -- had signed on to provide e-book content for the new tablet.*

*In negotiations with Apple, publishers agreed to a business model that gives them more power over the price that customers pay for e-books. Publishers had all but lost that power on Amazon.com's Kindle e-reader.*

Rich's [piece is here](#). *January's* entry into the sea of introductory iPad pieces [is here](#).

LABELS: [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [2:30 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Eat, Sleep, Poop Will be DreamWorks Feature

DreamWorks Entertainment has plans to make a feature-length comedy out of a witty work of non-fiction by a Beverly Hills pediatrician. Scott W. Cohen's [Eat, Sleep, Poop: A Common Sense Guide to Your Baby's First Year](#) will be published by Scribner at the end of March. From Reuters:

*Nonfiction guidebooks on birthing and parenthood are hot in Hollywood. Two weeks ago Lionsgate and Phoenix Pictures teamed to bring pregnancy series "What to Expect When You're Expecting" to the big screen.*

The Reuters [piece is here](#).

[Authorship, Reading, and Publishing](#)

### ■ Online Publications

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[BookPage Online](#)

[Bookspot](#)

[Bookwire](#)

[Library Journal](#)

[Mostly Fiction](#)

[Publishers Weekly](#)

[Publishing News \(UK\)](#)

[Readerville](#)

[Reading Group Choices: Selections for Lively Book Discussions](#)

[Reading Group Guides](#)

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[The Thrilling Detective Web Site](#)

### BLOG ARCHIVE

[December 2006](#)

[January 2007](#)

[February 2007](#)

[March 2007](#)

[April 2007](#)

[May 2007](#)

[June 2007](#)

[July 2007](#)

[August 2007](#)

[September 2007](#)

[October 2007](#)

[November 2007](#)

[December 2007](#)

[January 2008](#)

[February 2008](#)

[March 2008](#)

[April 2008](#)

[May 2008](#)

LABELS: [BOOKS TO FILM](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [1:15 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

## iPad, iBook, iBookstore: the Works

Last week we asked if the much anticipated Apple Tablet [would kill Amazon's Kindle](#) e-book reader. The beast was unveiled this morning. We now know it looks just like a giant [iPod Touch](#), it's called the iPad (shown at right with optional keyboard), it costs about half as much as expected and the answer to the question is, "probably yes."



Everyone's talking about the iPad, of course, but *PC Mag* is best at boiling stuff like this down, and they do:

*After years of rumors, speculation, and leaks, Apple today announced its long-await tablet, the iPad.*

*Chief executive Steve Jobs complemented the introduction of the new device with a new e-bookstore, called iBooks, together with partnerships with four major publishers, and showed off new versions of its iWork application and third-party applications.*

*Jobs kicked off the company's launch event in San Francisco on Wednesday by highlighting the history of the company's mobile products. "We're the largest mobile device company in the world," he told the audience, showcasing the iPhone and the company's line of MacBook products.*

The [full piece is here](#).

LABELS: [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [1:00 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Louis Auchincloss Dies at 92

[June 2008](#)

[July 2008](#)

[August 2008](#)

[September 2008](#)

[October 2008](#)

[November 2008](#)

[December 2008](#)

[January 2009](#)

[February 2009](#)

[March 2009](#)

[April 2009](#)

[May 2009](#)

[June 2009](#)

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Louis Auchincloss (*The House of Five Talents, Last of the Old Guard*), the Wall Street lawyer and prolific author best known for his books about the waspier bits of America, died last night of complications due to stroke, according to his son, Andrew.



Born in Lawrence, New York, in 1917, Auchincloss was both well regarded and widely celebrated. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1965, received the National Medal of Arts in 2005 and held honorary degrees from New York University, Pace University and The University of

the South.

From *The New York Times*:

*“Of all our novelists, Auchincloss is the only one who tells us how our rulers behave in their banks and their boardrooms, their law offices and their clubs,” Gore Vidal once wrote.*

*“Yet such is the vastness of our society and the remoteness of academics and book chatters from actual power that those who should be most in this writer’s debt have no idea what a useful service he renders us by revealing and, in some ways, by betraying his class.”*

More from [the Times here](#).

LABELS: [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [12:10 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Crime Fiction: *The Bricklayer* by Noah Boyd

[Lee Child](#) spawned a new type of protag when he introduced former military cop [Jack Reacher](#). Well, new but old. With roots in Clint Eastwood’s [Man with No Name](#), Reacher is the contemporary drifter hero, a guy not really tied to law enforcement, but out to do justice nonetheless. Of course, that justice has some strange definitions. Lately, we’ve seen Matt Hilton with his ex-



British Army “problem solver,” Joe Hunter, and even Child’s younger brother, Andrew Grant, with his renegade MI6 op, David Trevelyan, emerge as the modern cowboy, the one writing his own rules because the system’s rules just don’t work.



Which brings us to newcomer Noah Boyd’s [The Bricklayer](#) (Morrow). In it, a clever killer has set up a plot to frame the FBI for slayings he commits in the name of a bogus terrorist organization, the “Rubaco Pentad.” A reporter who blew the lid off corruption in the Bureau’s Los Angeles office is murdered. Then, when the FBI attempts to pay the Pentad extortion money, the agent sent on that errand is also done in. Another one disappears, apparently part of this growing conspiracy to disgrace the Bureau.

What’s a beleaguered FBI director to do?

In Boyd’s tale, he rehires an agent who had been fired for his inability to respect authority. Steve Vail was canned not for political reasons, but because he preferred to see a cop-killer go to prison rather than take down a superior so obviously guilty of manufacturing evidence. Vail has since found employment as a Chicago bricklayer, a job that requires little supervision or human interaction. However, he is lured back to the Bureau by an attractive former colleague, now the FBI’s deputy assistant director, Kate Bannon.

Vail soon begins to justify his rehiring. But he isn’t satisfied with his success. He hates loose ends. Rather than congratulate himself on solving a case when everything falls into place, he pulls on the investigative strands that remain unconnected. His wariness keeps him from being killed when the Pentad demands a nearly impossible money drop in an abandoned L.A. subway tunnel. Thinking three steps ahead of his foes, Vail realizes they’ve booby-trapped the drop.

In the wake of his survival, Vail looks more closely at who might stand behind this escalating mayhem and apparent revenge. There’s a lot of pesky evidence leading to the involvement of that missing FBI agent. Yes, the agent is now dead, an apparent suicide. Vail, though, doesn’t like that solution.

“Too neat,” he says.

Author Boyd flirts with giving Vail superhuman intellect, but manages to balance his aptitude by simply making him shy of accolades. While the rest of the Bureau’s L.A. field office is celebrating what they think is the end of the Pentad case, Vail is still asking himself the meaning of one unaccounted-for piece of the puzzle.

Thanks to Bannon’s presence here, Vail is not just another lone wolf outsmarting a stupid bureaucracy. Even a rival admits to Vail that the FBI is a bit rigid in its thinking. With Bannon, this is a double-edged sword. Vail’s loose-cannon approach to the case is something she admires, but it also underscores trust issues that infuriate her. At one point, Vail is even fired and wanted by the cops for theft.

And let’s be honest, it’s not like Vail is invincible. Escaping death by the slimmest of margins quite often hurts like a mother, and both Vail and Bannon come out of the experience physically scarred.

There are certainly weaknesses in *The Bricklayer*. The presence of Assistant U.S. Attorney Tie Delson is somewhat annoying, as she throws herself at Vail, kind of like the office coworker who can’t hide her crush on the new guy. Her ardor for Vail is eventually explained, but it strains the story in places.

Still, the person behind the Pentad is one of the more clever villains I’ve seen in a long time. He’s not really all that brilliant, but he is just smart enough to anticipate what the FBI will do next, and foil its efforts. Eventually, even Vail makes mistakes. Indeed, there’s a place in this tale where he should have been killed.

Boyd’s writing is solidly paced with few, if any, inconsistencies. Probably his greatest strength is in conveying through his writing the action and tension of a Jason Bourne movie or *Casino Royale*. Taut, rapid-fire and relentless.

LABELS: [CRIME FICTION](#), [JAMES R. WINTER](#), [JIM WINTER](#)

POSTED BY [JIM WINTER](#) AT [9:00 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

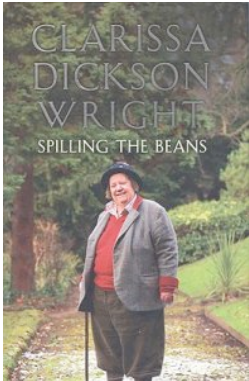
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TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2010

## Biography: *Spilling the Beans* by Clarissa

## Dickson Wright

Clarrisa Dickson Wright is one half of British television's [Two Fat Ladies](#) cooking team. When her autobiography was first published in the UK in 2007, it was met with wide acclaim. It's not hard to see why.



The first official U.S. edition becomes available this month from Overlook Press and it's a surprisingly complete book. In a way, [Spilling the Beans](#) has everything: fame, celebrity, addiction, heartbreak... and, of course, food. Lots and lots of food.

The only reason I can think of that it's taken this long for *Spilling the Beans* to get to this side of the water is the very real possibility that a lot of people in the U.S. have never heard of *Two Fat Ladies*, or at least, had not until 2008 when the series that ended in 1998 after the death of Dickson Wright's cooking partner, Jennifer Paterson, was released here.

*Spilling the Beans* recounts some of that time but the *Fat Ladies* years are only a small part of Dickson Wright's journey to date. At its core, *Spilling the Beans* is a story of redemption. About the little rich girl -- Dickson Wright, of course -- with an abusive, alcoholic father. She grows to be a brilliant young woman (and ends up being the youngest woman in the UK ever called to the bar), a dilettante (she ends up partying away a significant fortune), her recovery through AA, then traveling the English countryside in the sidecar of a motorcycle with the late Paterson.

This is a well told, joyous memoir that, for me, is all about finding your way back. Even those largely unfamiliar with Dickson Wright will enjoy her humor and wit.

LABELS: [AARON BLANTON](#), [BIOGRAPHY](#), [NON-FICTION](#)  
 POSTED BY AARON BLANTON AT [5:30 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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## Dictionary Banned for "Oral Sex"

Merriam Webster's 10th edition joins an illustrious group of books banned from some American schools, including selected titles by Maya Angelou, Maurice Sendak, Toni Morrison, [Judy Blume](#), [Margaret](#)



[Atwood](#), [J.K. Rowling](#), Stephen King, [Isabel Allende](#), John Steinbeck, William Golding and many, many others.

This newest ban comes after a parent in a Riverside, California, school district complained of a “sexually graphic” entry in the dictionary. *The Guardian* [sums things up](#):

*Dictionaries have been removed from classrooms in southern California schools after a parent complained about a child reading the definition for “oral sex”.*

*Merriam Webster’s 10th edition, which has been used for the past few years in fourth and fifth grade classrooms (for children aged nine to 10) in Menifee Union school district, has been pulled from shelves over fears that the “sexually graphic” entry is “just not age appropriate”, according to the area’s local paper.*

That [local paper indicates](#) that not all parents are happy with the decision to pull the book:

*“Censorship in the schools, really? Pretty soon the only dictionary in the school library will be the Bert and Ernie dictionary,” said Emanuel Chavez, the parent of second- and sixth-grade students. “If the kids are exposed to it, it’s up to the parents to explain it to them at their level.”*

*Board member Rita Peters questioned why one parent’s complaint would lead the district to pull the dictionaries.*

*“If we’re going to pull a book because it has something on oral sex, then every book in the library with that better be pulled,” she said. “The standard needs to be consistent ... We don’t need parents setting policy.”*

Meanwhile, the fate of the dictionary in that school system remains uncertain, while most of the thinking world laughs quite loudly, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) as well as [other places](#).

LABELS: [BANNED BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [12:08 AM](#) [1 COMMENT](#)

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MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2010

## A Final Good-bye to Parker

Just a week after the unexpected [death last week of detective novelist Robert B. Parker](#) at age 77, The Rap Sheet has posted more than 70 tributes from Parker's professional colleagues, friends, and critics. This collection was put together by Cameron Hughes and comes in two sections. Part I appears [here](#). Part II can be found [here](#).

POSTED BY J. KINGSTON PIERCE AT [11:47 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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## Happy Birthday, Virginia Woolf

The writer [Virginia Woolf](#) was born on this day in 1882. According to Garrison Keillor's wonderful [Writer's Almanac](#), the former Virginia Stephen "never went to school, but her father chose books for her to read from his own library."



*She was only allowed to move out of her family home after her father's death, when she was 22. She moved into a house with her brothers and sister, and instead of writing letters about what she'd been reading, she began to write literary criticism for the Times Literary Supplement, and she became one of the most accomplished literary critics of the era.*

*Woolf believed that the problem with 19th-century literature was that novelists had focused entirely on the clothing people wore and the food they ate and the things they did. She believed that the most mysterious and essential aspects of human beings were not their possessions or their habits, but their interior emotions and thoughts.*

*She considered her first few novels failures, but then in 1922, she began to read the work of Marcel Proust, who had just died that year. That moved her to write her first masterpiece: Mrs. Dalloway (1925), about all the thoughts that pass through the mind of a middle-aged woman on the day she gives a party. Woolf went on to write many more novels, including To the Lighthouse (1927) and The Waves (1931), but she was also one of the greatest essayists of her*

generation. In her long essay about women and literature, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she wrote: "So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters; and whether it matters for ages or only for hours, nobody can say. But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery."

The Writer's Almanac [item is here](#). While you're there, you might choose to contribute to support the Almanac. If you do, a \$75 contribution will earn you "the official The Writer's Almanac mug. The mug features Garrison's signature sign off -- Be Well, Do Good Work & Keep in Touch." Complete information on contributing [is here](#).

LABELS: [BIRTHDAYS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [5:00 AM](#) [1 COMMENTS](#)

## Children's Books: *F2M: The Boy Within* by Hazel Edwards and Ryan Kennedy

Eighteen-year-old Skye is a member of an all-girl punk rock band. Skye has never felt like a girl. Inside, (s)he is Finn, a boy. Making the decision to let Finn be outside as well as in involves a lot of



work. How do you tell your family and friends and the members of your feminist rock band that you're going to undergo female-to-male treatment and surgery? Fortunately, there's a family precedent: great-uncle Albert ... or is that great-aunt Alberta?

Skye/Finn could easily be a victim, but refuses. It isn't going to be easy for anyone, but (s)he decides, finally, that family, friends and rock band will just have to live with it. And they do.

*F2M: The Boy Within* (Ford Street) goes into enormous detail about the procedures involved in what is known as FTM. It's a lot less common than the other way around -- male to female -- although it has been in the news in the last couple of years, when a man who

had kept his female “equipment” had a baby because his wife couldn’t. I knew a female-to-male myself. Unlike Skye, Jan became “David” in her/his 40s. Nobody, but nobody dared to call Jan a woman, even when she was! And David’s family and friends accepted it as Finn’s family do in the novel. *F2M: The Boy Within* also explores the punk rock sub-culture, which is interesting in its own right.

Ford Street Publishing has become known for taking on controversial subjects. It probably needs an author as well-known and respected as Hazel Edwards to get away with this one. Ryan Kennedy, her co-author, is himself an FTM, so knows what he is talking about.

*F2M: The Boy Within* is well-written and answers a lot of questions. It will certainly appeal to those teenagers who are asking themselves questions about their own gender identities. There are some likable characters in it and some nice touches of humour. There’s even the whimsical presentation of a couple who are a female-to-male and a male-to-female. Who are, incidentally, managing just fine. Finn doesn’t like the FTM, Rodney, but hey, he doesn’t have to.

Whether or not it will have appeal for ordinary teenagers I am not sure. I suspect they will be uncomfortable with it, though this doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be out there. Will kids who say, “That is so gay!” about anything negative get enthused about characters who are not actually gay but have gender issues? I won’t know until I have put this in my library and seen how the students react. Watch this space.

LABELS: [CHILDREN'S BOOKS](#), [SUE BURSZTYNSKI](#)

POSTED BY SUE BURSZTYNSKI AT [12:05 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 2010

## NBCC Shortlist Is No Reader’s Choice

The finalists for the 2009 National Book Critics Circle Awards were announced Saturday night in New York. Once again, the titles that made NBCC’s final cut seem to comprise a list more intended to make a small group of people feel erudite rather than making a large group feel passionate about books and reading.

On the other hand, these are not the people’s choice awards. But

then, neither is the [National Book Award](#). So where is the place where the passion of readers and the choices of critics can come together? And isn't it time that the two become somewhat reflective of each other?

According to the [NBCC's Web site](#), the organization was "founded in 1974 at the Algonquin, is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization consisting of some 600 active book reviewers who are interested in honoring quality writing and communicating with one another about common concerns."

Some people feel that conversations about books are dwindling and, certainly, the inches offered to book reviews in newspapers are shrinking. What can we do -- what can all of us do -- to make discussions about books more vibrant and more relevant to an audience that seems to not be entirely convinced? I'm not sure of the answer, but I know that it isn't esoterica.

Here are the finalists in the fiction category:

**Bonnie Jo Campbell**, *American Salvage* (Wayne State University Press)

**Marlon James**, *The Book of Night Women* (Riverhead)

**Michelle Huneven**, *Blame* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

**Hilary Mantel**, [Wolf Hall](#) (Holt)

**Jayne Anne Phillips**, [Lark and Termite](#) (Knopf)

Others [shortlists are here](#).

LABELS: [AWARDS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [1:20 PM](#) [2 COMMENTS](#)

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## Green Gables Author Suffered Depression, Suicide

A book of essays to be published mid-2010 by the University of Toronto Press will look at Lucy Maud Montgomery's best known

work, as well as pieces of her own tortured life. From CanWest News Service:



*The scholarly collection of essays, co-edited by Ryerson University professor Irene Gammel -- Canada research chair*



*in modern literature and culture -- follows a recent revival of interest in the Anne Shirley phenomenon with the 100th anniversary of the 1908 publication of author Lucy Maud Montgomery's landmark work.*

*In Anne's World: A New Century of Anne of Green Gables, to be published this year by University of Toronto Press, contributors probe the "global industry" in Anne tourism, the multitude of film, television and stage productions inspired by the story, and the "timeless and ongoing appeal of L.M. Montgomery's writing" nearly 70 years after her 1942 suicide by a drug overdose at age 67.*

The [full piece is here](#). January looks at Gammel's 2008 [biography of Montgomery here](#) and Budge Wilson's 2008 [Before Green Gables here](#).

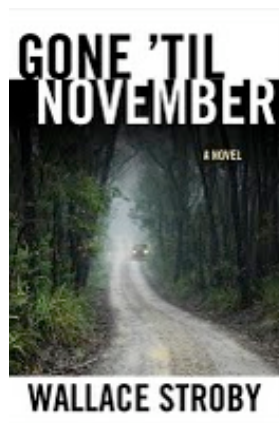
POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [12:20 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2010

## Crime Fiction: *Gone 'til November* by Wallace Stroby

Readers (especially the American variety) have grown accustomed to seeing villains in crime fiction portrayed in starkly negative terms, or else given such repulsive quirks that whatever humanness they manifest must be considered suspect. So Wallace Stroby runs some risk in making his killer for hire, Nathaniel Morgan, the most engaging character in [Gone 'til November](#) (Minotaur).

African American, 57 years old, and the veteran enforcer for Mikey-Mike, a New Jersey drug dealer whose wares just aren't as high-grade or in demand as they once were, Morgan has a girlfriend half his age, a vintage Monte Carlo he loves almost as much, and musical tastes that run to the rhythms of Sam Cooke, Walter Jackson, and the Impressions. He also pops Vicodin at an alarming rate, because he's suffering from a rare form of cancer



that may take him down long before any of his “business rivals” get their shot.

Lacking health insurance or even the prospect of appealing for limited social aid (how would he answer, after all, the application’s request for “current occupation?”), Morgan has made rather desperate plans for his future. He wants to ditch New Jersey, his girlfriend and her son in tow, and find a doctor somewhere far away who can administer the medical treatments he needs. If Mikey-Mike or his hired pistol-pushers try to track him down, Morgan figures “he could deal with that, too, protect what was his. What he’d earned.” All he needs before putting his plan into action is more money to add to the savings he has already hidden away. And that requires him taking on a last assignment for his narcotics-king boss.

Meanwhile, in far-off Florida, a late-30s sheriff’s deputy named Sara Cross has come to the aid of a fellow officer, Billy Flynn, who’s shot and killed a well-dressed young black man, Derek Willis, on the edge of a cypress swamp in the middle of a steamy night. Willis was driving a car with Jersey plates, and according to Flynn, when he pulled Willis over and asked that he open his trunk, the younger man made a break for it. Flynn thought his fleeing suspect had a gun, so plugged him three times in self-defense. Sara finds a zippered bag crammed with firearms and ammunition in the vehicle’s trunk, which might indeed have justified Willis’ actions. And though she has doubts regarding the incident -- why was there a baby seat in Willis’ car? Why didn’t Flynn call for backup before he approached the driver? -- she attests to her fellow officer’s account of the proceedings. It looks like a “clean shoot.”

However, as the immature Flynn -- who used to be Sara’s lover as well as her partner on the sheriff’s squad, but now has a new and jealous girlfriend -- tries to reignite their relationship, our heroine’s suspicions about the Willis shooting mount. Exacerbating them is the appearance of Willis’ “wife,” the mother of their child together, who comes to collect his corpse and “raise hell, most likely.” She tells Sara that Willis “never carried a gun in his life,” which is enough to provoke the conscientious sheriff’s deputy to look a bit further into the provenance of the dead man’s revolver.

Then there’s the mysterious guy who Sara thinks is following her, but whose face she can never quite make out in passing automobiles. She wonders what his role is in all of this -- not

knowing that in fact it's Morgan behind the wheel. His last job for Mikey-Mike, the one that's going to give him his nest egg for a new life, turns out to be retrieving \$350,000 that had been secreted in the car driven by Willis, who was also on Mikey-Mike's payroll. Why were the weapons discovered, but no reports of all that cash? Morgan wants to know where the money went -- and whether he can steal it for himself, add it to his nest egg. Accomplishing that, though, will put him in dangerous contention with a couple of trigger-happy twins and the considerably more competent Sara Cross.

Stroby, a former editor at Newark, New Jersey's *Star-Ledger* newspaper and the author of two previously praised crime novels, *The Barbed-Wire Kiss* (2003) and *The Heartbreak Lounge* (2005) -- both starring quondam state trooper Harry Rane -- is meticulous in entwining his narrative threads here, reaping drama, originality and suspense from what seem at first to be *Gone 'til November's* familiar themes. But it's his chief adversarial pair who keep one turning these pages: Morgan, the professional gunman who treats killing like any other occupation, and sees no percentage in surplus deaths; and Sara -- brave and smart, but flawed and too much on her own, struggling as her county's only female deputy sheriff while she cares for a 6-year-old son whose life is as much at threat from leukemia as Morgan's is from cancer. The older protagonist is certainly the more engaging -- it was worth every risk to make Morgan a nuanced, sympathetic figure -- but Sara Cross demonstrates potential for growth. That's good, because her appearance here isn't her last. As Stroby says, "there will be at least one more book about her, though it won't be [my] next one. Beyond that, I can't say, but she'll definitely be back."

Swiftly told but suspenseful, filled with moral choices and a bit of welcome ambiguousness at its end, *Gone 'til November* is a small story with a hell of a kick.

LABELS: [CRIME FICTION](#)

POSTED BY J. KINGSTON PIERCE AT [5:35 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2010

## Paul Quarrington Passes Away at 56

Award-winning Canadian author (*Whale Music*, [The Spirit Cabinet](#)) and musician died on Thursday of lung cancer. He was 56.





From [his Web site](#):

*In May 2009, Paul was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. From May 2009 to January 2010 he channeled his prodigious creative energy into the completion of many artistic endeavours, included his first solo CD release, the third PorkBellys Futures CD release, his memoir for Greystone Books, "Cigar Box Banjo," the documentary film inspired by the book, "Life in Music", and much more.*

*His brave battle ended on January 21, 2010. He passed peacefully at home in Toronto in the early hours surrounded by friends and family. It is comforting to know that he didn't suffer; he was calm and quiet holding hands with those who were closest to him.*

Contributions to the [Quarrington Arts Society](#) are being accepted in his honor.

LABELS: [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [10:32 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Will Apple's Tablet Kill the Kindle? (And Does it Really Matter?)

E-book watchers are betting that when Apple's much-anticipated tablet finally reaches consumers some time between now and this spring, the presently precarious e-book market will solidify. *The New York Times* [looks at recent developments](#):

*It's a formidable high-tech face-off: Amazon.com versus Apple for the hearts and minds of book publishers, authors and readers.*

*Amazon's Kindle devices and electronic bookstore now dominate a nascent but booming market, accounting for more than 70 percent of electronic reader sales and 80 percent of e-book purchases, according to some analysts. And on*

*Thursday it will take a page from Apple and announce that it is opening up the Kindle to outside software developers.*

Not only that, but Amazon will also debut a shiny new Kindle device. Between that and the newly opened source, Amazon insiders expect things to be shaken up, but in a happy way:

*Ian Freed, vice president for the Kindle at Amazon, said he expected developers would devise a wide range of programs, including utilities like calculators, stock tickers and casual video games. He also predicts publishers will begin selling a new breed of e-books, like searchable travel books and restaurant guides that can be tailored to the Kindle owner's location; textbooks with interactive quizzes; and novels that combine text and audio.*

Sound familiar? (There's an app for that.)

All of this, just as Apple is about to unleash a device that is much more expensive than the Kindle, but also much more capable: a creature that will likely be very much like an iPod on steroids, capable of all types of computing and -- by the way -- acting as an e-book reader.

While all of this Kindle-killing speculation is fun for the media and interesting for those of us who will ultimately end up schlepping such devices, we're still a very long way from fat ladies and singing.

Think of the epic battles between Betamax and VHS. Then think of what you're recording video with these days.

Or how about eight-track and cassette or even -- heaven forbid -- reel-to-reel. What about eight-and-a-half inch diskettes, versus mini-floppies, then on to zip drives and rewriteable CD-ROMS and all the other storage devices we ended up spending big bucks on in the time leading up to now: I have a flash drive smaller than a lipstick that I need to keep in a special drawer in my desk for fear of it getting lost.

My point with all this memory lane stuff is this: while we work towards the answer, don't anticipate that it's right around the corner. It is not. But here is what I predict: in the end the medium will not matter. Nor will we care about the puny questions we bandy back and forth so seriously now. What really matters never changes,

not in the long haul.

I want my full immersion reading experience. Work out the details, please. Fight quietly amongst yourselves. I need the quiet, because you see, I'm over here, in front of my fire, with my heart and my mind immersed in a book.

LABELS: [BOOK BUSINESS](#), [ELECTRONIC BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [8:30 AM](#) [4 COMMENTS](#)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2010

## Are Your Kids' Books Rated R?



In 1984, parents raised angry fists over [Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom](#), in which the villain pushed his hand into the chest of a man and yanked out the poor guy's beating heart. They said this sort of violence didn't belong in a PG-rated movie. The result? PG-13.

In 2009, a suburban dad -- that would be me -- read an advance copy of a new novel called *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* and came upon this instant-messaging reparté:

*boundbydad: thrust your fierce quivering manpole at me, stud*

*grayscale: your dastardly appendage engorges me with hellfire*

*boundbydad: my search party is creeping into your no man's land*

*grayscale: baste me like a thanksgiving turkey!!!*

This, in a book due in April 2010 from [Dutton Young Readers](#), an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., and intended, says an informational note, for readers aged 14 and up.

14 and up, I thought. 14 and up? *14 and up?! To me, “14 and up” is just another way of saying PG-13. And the excerpt above is no PG-13.*

Then, 30 pages beyond the quivering manpole, I came across this:

*cock + pussy = a happy rooster-kitten couple*

Um, would you want *your* pubescent child reading this?

### **Officially Worried**

As the father of boys aged 13 and 9, who both love to read, I am now officially worried. Is this the stuff of books for Young Readers? For 14 and up? When I was a kid, I was free to read pretty much whatever I wanted, and my kids have the same freedom. While I've steered my older son away from, say, [Disclosure](#), which is about sexual harassment, in favor of other, less sexually graphic Michael Crichton options, here's the thing: When I allow my son to read novels for grown-ups, I know what we're -- and more to the point, *he's* -- getting into. And until now, I thought the same thing about books for Young Readers.

My fear: He picks up *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* on his own, intrigued by its very intriguing premise. (Two high school students named Will Grayson meet each other, and each changes the direction of the other's life.) Eventually, he gets to page 70, then page 101. Before writing this article, I wondered if this was language he knew. But when I showed him the pages, he was so mortified that he didn't know what to say. Neither did I.

Ratings are made based on vocabulary and situations. In terms of the former, if memory serves, one of the [Motion Picture Association of America](#)'s lines in the sand for what separates a PG-13 rating from an R is the word “fuck.” Sometimes it's a question of how many times the word (or a form of it) is used, sometimes it's about context. For example, if the word is used sexually, the film gets an R. [ArtAndPopularCulture.com](#) says the word “cock” alone can move a film from PG to PG-13. Using these guidelines, *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* would be an R-rated movie.

But it's a book -- and for books, what's the standard? “There is no standard at all,” says Luann Toth, managing editor of the book review section of the [School Library Journal](#). “It's pretty arbitrary.

Publishers do their own thing. Unlike multimedia, which tries to have a standard, there is no equivalent in the book world.”

So-called book ratings, like “14 and up,” indicate reading level, *not content*. And even when such indicators are used, they’re buried on the back, in tiny type, near the barcode. Hardly responsible publishing.

### Driven by Ratings

Now, before you cry “Censorship!” understand that I am not advocating any form of artistic restriction. In 1988, Doubleday published my first novel, [Total Eclipse](#). It featured teens, but in no way was it meant *for* teens; it was marketed to adults. My point: as an author, I consider censorship abhorrent. I would never suggest the book’s authors edit the lines out, but I would urge their publisher to add a rating that reflects its content.

Much of our culture, after all, is driven by ratings. We accept and trust them; we would think carefully and search for more information before taking a young child to an R-rated film, for example.

Ratings, of course, are based on content, not interpretation. For as long as I can remember, television has aired “viewer discretion is advised” messages when programming content warrants it, and now there are actual [ratings](#), too. [Videogames](#) sport E (Everyone), T (Teens), M (Mature), and other ratings. And [music](#) wears on-pack parental advisory notices due to explicit lyrics. Such warnings have not discouraged sales, though some recording artists have produced “clean” versions of certain songs. In the end, all of these notices have simply created better-informed consumers. More, they have helped consumers maintain their own moral baseline, their own ethical center -- and no matter where your own ethical center happens to be, having the information you need to maintain it is the point.

If movies, television, music and videogames are rated according to their own systems, why aren’t books? Why are books marketed according to reading level but not content? Marketing books according to reading level alone is like rating videogames according to people’s ability to push the buttons on control devices. Imagine: THIS GAME IS RATED E BECAUSE, HEY, EVERYONE KNOWS HOW TO PUSH BUTTONS! Never mind that pushing those buttons shoots

machine guns that reduce characters to piles of digital blood and flesh.

Ratings are not censorship; they're a guide to what buyers will find inside the package. And before you accuse me of being homophobic, stop. While the IMs cited above happen to be between two male characters, would they be any less disturbing if boundbydad were a girl?

### **The Problem Is Marketing**

The problem with *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* isn't the book itself. John Green and David Levithan have written an entertaining novel that contains important messages about the power of self, creativity, friendship and love. It's got an innovative hook, a cool premise, a compelling narrative and complex characters.

The problem is the way Dutton Young Readers is marketing it. When I spoke with the book's publicist, she acknowledged that the publisher had anticipated this problem and told me I was the first of what they imagined would be many calls from parents about this book. She assured me that kids 14 and up have access to and use this sort of language all the time (this came as quite a surprise to my son). And she added that Dutton would be publishing the book on schedule.

Fine. But adding an honest rating to the book's front cover would help *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* find the readers it is intended for. Its publisher -- and all publishers -- should take more responsibility for the books they publish by creating an independent organization whose job it is to establish a clear, objective system for rating books, including front-cover icons that indicate content. Whether they're single-letter ratings or simply "explicit language" warnings, this level of honest publishing can only be good for everyone involved: authors, publishers, and readers. It would go a long way toward making sure that fiction is just in the books, not in their marketing plans.

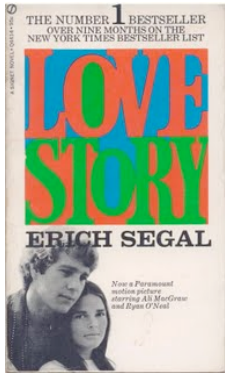
LABELS: [CHILDREN'S BOOKS](#), [TONY BUCHSBAUM](#)

POSTED BY TONY BUCHSBAUM AT [5:00 AM](#) [56 COMMENTS](#) [LINKS TO THIS POST](#)

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## **Love Story Author, Erich Segal, Dead at 72**

The creator of the iconic 1970s book and film has died almost exactly 40 years [Love Story](#)'s debut. [According to The New York Times](#), Erich Segal, who had suffered with Parkinson's disease for 25 years, died of a heart attack at home in London on the 17th of



January.

At his funeral, his daughter, the writer [Francesca Segal](#), delivered a eulogy in which she said her father had “fought to breathe, fought to live, every second of the last 30 years of illness with such mind-blowing obduracy, is a testament to the core of who he was -- a blind obsessionality that saw him pursue his teaching, his writing, his running and my mother, with just the same tenacity. He was the most dogged man any of us will ever know.”

From [The Guardian](#):

*Segal wrote the bestselling book about love and bereavement, which became a chart-topping film, in 1969 when he was 32 and a classics professor at Harvard. As its most famous line, “love means never having to say you're sorry”, entered popular culture, Segal became a celebrity and regular on TV shows, as well as a commentator on the Olympic games for the ABC network.*

LABELS: [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [2:05 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2010

## Terrorism Threat Derails Children's Book

The Christmastime terrorism threat in Detroit that led to a widespread misunderstanding about books [being banned on flights](#) to the United States out of Canada continues to have literary repercussions.

A book by renowned children's author [Robert Munsch](#) (*Love You Forever*, *The Paper Bag Princess*) will be postponed, at least for a while, though the author certainly understands why. According to the *The Toronto Star*, the story “about a child sneaking dolls on a

plane has been put on hold given the heightened security at airports after the attempted Christmas bombing of a plane in the United States.”

*Since then, airports have implemented a number of measures, from forcing travellers to undergo physical pat-downs or even body scans to a ban on carry-on luggage.*

*“We were going to do a story on a little girl who smuggles all these dolls onto a plane, but then that thing happened in Detroit,” said Munsch. “Scholastic calls me up in a panic saying, ‘Hold everything, that kid couldn’t smuggle anything onto the plane, she’s lucky to get onto the plane herself.’”*

Munsch said he had no problem with the change, and even chuckled about the coincidence of a story of his clashing with a real-life situation. He is now in talks with the publisher on his next project.

The Star [piece is here](#).

LABELS: [CHILDREN'S BOOKS](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [7:30 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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## The Passing of Parker

[Robert B. Parker](#), the Boston novelist who was highly influential in popularizing the detective fiction genre over the last four decades, died yesterday at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was 77 years old. The cause of his passing is being attributed to a heart attack, which took him in the midst of working at his desk.

Parker introduced his most famous series protagonist, Beantown private eye [Spenser](#), in *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1973). He went on to pen more than 60 books, in at least two genres and with several lead players.

The Rap Sheet has the full story [here](#). And there are links to many other Parker tributes at Sarah Weinman’s blog, [Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind](#).

LABELS: [PASSAGES](#)

POSTED BY J. KINGSTON PIERCE AT [5:12 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010

## Literary Lions and Lolita

Many thanks to *The Guardian's* book blog which, [in a fairly pointless anti-list piece](#), included a link to what is arguably one of the most significant pieces of literary television journalism. Ever.

Three literary heavyweights sitting around a table - books and cigarettes all over the place. The trio: über critic [Lionel Trilling](#), the author [Vladimir Nabokov](#) and -- since it's a CBC interview -- iconic Canadian broadcaster and cultural archivist, [Pierre Burton](#) is acting as moderator. What's under discussion is [Lolita](#) and the interview was broadcast at a time when it was *the* book that everyone was discussing.

A [Canadian television archive site](#) describes the episode in this way:

*Nov 19, 1958 - Short of a change of plans -- and this program occasionally has to switch without much notice -- viewers should get a live interview with Vladimir Nabokov, conducted in New York by critic Lionel Trilling. Nabokov is the author of Lolita, the most controversial novel of the year. On a recent edition of Fighting Words no less an author than Nicholas Monsarrat thought it ought to be banned. Others have violently disagreed, called it a work of extraordinary art.*

I have no idea why Burton isn't mentioned, but that's definitely him.

The episode did not air in two parts, but YouTube has it archived that way. The [second part is here](#).

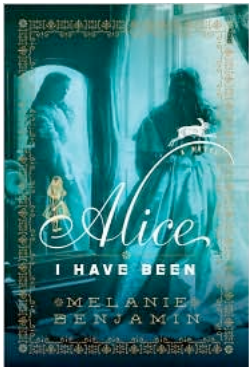
LABELS: [CLASSIC FICTION](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [9:00 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2010

## New This Week: *Alice I Have Been* by Melanie Benjamin

Readers who enjoyed 2007's [Loving Frank](#) by Nancy Horan are likely to be similarly enamored by Melanie Benjamin's view through the looking glass with [Alice I Have Been](#) (Delacorte).



Like *Loving Frank*, *Alice I Have Been* fictionalizes the life of a real person in a way that is more creative and artful than biographical. Benjamin's portrayal of the person Charles Dodgson -- who wrote as [Lewis Carroll](#) -- based his Alice character upon.

In her portrayal, Benjamin shows Alice Liddell's entire life to have been directly impacted by having being immortalized as that girl from Wonderland. In *Alice I Have Been* Benjamin focuses on three periods in Liddell's life: her childhood, when she actually met Dodgson; her young womanhood at Oxford; and as a wife and mother during World War I.

There has been much historical speculation about the nature of the relationship between the child who was Alice when Wonderland was created and Dodgson. Historically, there are loose ends in the story: ends that are unlikely to ever be tied up. In Benjamin's telling, however, Dodgson himself fares better than he might have done. For the most part, Benjamin has opted to make her tale a sometimes dark, but gentle one. Considering some of the whispers in the intervening years, Benjamin's choice was kind. But don't read *Alice I Have Been* as a biography, at least, not your first time through. It is a memorable and even magical book. A good story.

Sure, the historical relevance offers up some bonus tracks, but if you come to *Alice I Have Been* just to enjoy the feature, you won't be disappointed.

LABELS: [FICTION](#), [MONICA STARK](#)

POSTED BY MONICA STARK AT [5:30 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

## Cookbooks: *Ciao Italia: Five Ingredient Favorites* by Mary Ann Esposito

There are cookbooks that are so beautiful, so dream-inducing that you wonder if they're really meant to be cooked from at all. Gorgeous photos. Fanciful ingredients. Complicated instructions. Books you would be happy to purchase and just spend hours reading and day-dreaming and never even opening in the kitchen. [Ciao Italia: Five Ingredient Favorites](#) (St. Martin's Press) is not one of those books.

Author Mary Ann Esposito is well known to viewers of that *other* food network, PBS: the one that, arguably, made food shows happen in the first place.

Esposito's show, [Ciao Italia](#), celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. As anyone with a public television subscription will tell you, PBS cooking shows are stodgier and more of the earth than shows on other networks. That's not a criticism. Neither is it praise. It's simply a comment, and it's one that certainly applies here. *Ciao Italia* is not a book that's going to make anyone slip into raptures. It is, however, a earthy, absolutely foolproof and flawless cookbook. If you are a kitchen beginner who has a hankering to produce wholesome meals with a Mediterranean flair, *Ciao Italia* is the book for you.



The premise of the book is what makes this the perfect one for chefs low on experience, time or both. "When is less more?" Esposito asks in her introduction. "When you can turn just FIVE ingredients into something that is not only delicious but exciting, fun, and easy to make."

And what exactly *can* you make with just five ingredients? As it turns out, quite a lot. My favorite from this book is Zuppa alla Pavese or

Pavia's Poached Egg Soup. Gorgeous, simple and gorgeously simple: basically toasted ciabatta bread, Parmigiano-Reggiano, chicken broth and eggs. Think French onion soup without onions, but with an egg poached in it, right in the bowl. The Parsley Gnocchi are simple and beautiful and have forever altered the way I do my gnocchi. (Fresh parsley chopped in: who knew?) And Esposito's Mushroom Ragu is a perfect dish for those who want to entertain in simple but elegant style: some mushrooms, some cream and a handful of herbs and you have a dish that will impress anyone very quickly and simply.

LABELS: [AARON BLANTON](#), [COOKBOOKS](#)

POSTED BY AARON BLANTON AT [12:05 AM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2010

## Poet P.K. Page Dies at 93

The Canadian literary community is saddened today by news that one of the country's best-loved poets has died. [From CBC News](#):

*Canadian literary grand dame P.K. Page, long renowned for her poetry and other writing, has died at the age of 93.*



*Page died early Thursday morning at her home in Victoria, CBC News has confirmed.*

*A companion of the Order of Canada, the British-born, Canadian-reared Patricia Kathleen Page was considered among Canada's most esteemed writers.*

January Magazine most recently discussed Page's work last year when contributing editor Monica Stark reviewed Page's children's chapbook, [The Old Woman and the Hen](#) (Porcupine's Quill). "It's a tiny, special, lovely little book," Stark wrote, "clearly intended to be cherished."

Page's official [Web site is here](#). Wikipedia includes extensive [information on her here](#). The portrait of Page at left was done in

1947 by the painter, graphic artist and film producer Alma Duncan (1917-2004). It is held by Library and Archives Canada and can be [seen online here](#).

LABELS: [PASSAGES](#), [POETRY](#)

POSTED BY LINDA L. RICHARDS AT [3:35 PM](#) [0 COMMENTS](#)

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