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The Continuing Saga of the Google Book Settlement

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Sometimes it feels as if the Google book digitizing project has been with us all of our professional lives, and the Google Book Settlement not much less than that. In fact, Google began its digitization program early in the decade; the Authors’ Guild suit was launched in 2005, and the Settlement was proposed in late 2008. A great deal of the Settlement story remains to be written, to say nothing of its impact on many individuals, organizations, society, and the future of books. It seems that everyone connected to learning and knowledge production — not just attorneys and authors — has a view about Google’s activities, offerings, and strategies. The Google Settlement has even become a topic of conversation among strangers seated next to one another on long airplane flights.

Is the Google digitization program a boon for all, leveling the playing field for have-not users, fostering creation of new knowledge, accelerating the research process, saving libraries money, and much more? Is it a fiendishly crafty way for Google to make even more money than so far? Recently Michael Cairns, former president of R.R. Bowker and Managing Partner, Information Media Partners published a paper titled “Database of Riches: Measuring the Options for Google’s Book Settlement Roll Out.” In it he estimated that Google’s annual subscription revenue for licensing to libraries could approach $260 million by year three. Some of our airplane conversations address matters such as:
• Will Google enjoy a monopoly unlike any heretofore seen in the publishing world?
• Will Google exploit its tremendous digital assets within the blessing of legal precedent?

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- Will other businesses rush to do the same, following Google’s precedent, thus introducing useful competition into the digital marketplace?
- Will Google enhance the role of libraries as the new destination? Will libraries become passé?

Many have views about these matters, and Against the Grain thought to solicit and represent some of them for its readers. Here you will find Ivy Anderson’s opening piece, in which she argues the benefits of having millions of books available to readers and responds to several key librarians’ and scholars’ concerns (such as long-term preservation). Pamela Samuelson offers an author’s viewpoint, based in her legal expertise; as a classical scholar, James O’Donnell values Google, but he does not want to lose the added (and enormous) metadata value that librarians add. The international view is not often heard in the United States, so ATG invited Paul Whitney to write from the perspective of one of the U.S.’s major partners, Canada, our neighbor to the North.

Stuart Hamilton provides a broad international view, grounded in his work as policy advisor for IFLA. Finally, Jonathan Band has given us permission to reproduce his “March Madness” flow chart, showing possible paths forward for the Settlement. Perhaps by the time this ATG issue is published, some of the paths forward will be clearer, but by no means will the Judge’s ruling be the end of the story. You will read more in these pages as time passes. And you will be better informed for your next plane trip! 


Rumors
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in Philadelphia to Meredith Jane Pettersons at 12:55 AM, April 5th. (8lbs. 15oz.) The births were only a few hours apart. Almost seems like they were coordinated to allow the grandparents time to be there! Whew! Everyone is healthy and doing well. Steve, his wife Anna, and son Will, hung around for a few days, and Anna even stayed on a week with Jane to help out!

Steve was telling me that he was chatting with an old Dickinson colleague, Valrie (Val) Davis who is now at Florida University. And Valrie plans to attend the Charleston Conference this fall and has submitted a proposal for a paper. Hoo-ha! http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/mls/about/faculty/valdavis.html

This whole talk of pregnancy and travel and youth reminds me of how young and crazy my husband and I were once instead of the mature, intelligent human beings we are now. We traveled all over Greece when I was 5½ months pregnant with our daughter Ilena. We didn’t even have hotel rooms booked. I remember a nice older lady renting us her bedroom so we would have a place to sleep for the night, I think it was on the island of Skiathos. Youth! Isn’t it grand!

Have been traveling a lot this spring. Noticed in the Delta in-flight magazine, Sky, a big spread on Brussels, Belgium, where the 12th Fiesole Retreat was held (actually the Retreat was in Leuven, but nowhere is far in Belgium). Seems that Brussels is the birthplace of Hergé (the artist of Tintin) (real name Georges Remi) and the inspiration for much of the artwork in the Tintin comics of which there are over 24 titles translated into over 50 languages. But why am I telling you all this? Apparently, Steven Spielberg’s The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn is due to hit movie screens next year. Reportedly Spielberg bought the rights in 1983 but was waiting for animation technology to become good enough to film the adventures. You heard it here!

And, the 13th Fiesole Retreat will take place in St. Petersburg, Russia, May 12-15, 2011. If you are interested in receiving an invitation contact me or Becky Lenzini.