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Book Pricing Update / A Good Book is Good to Find

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Book Pricing Update

A Good Book is Good to Find
by Celia Scher Wagner (Blackwell)

You could be reading a good book right now. Failing that, you could take this quick quiz on pricing in Literature. The works considered are trade titles only — mass market titles have been excluded.



- 1) Which cost more in 1993:
A volume of poetry
A book of essays
A collection of short stories
A play
A novel
 - 2) In the past five years, which of the above categories has shown the greatest price increase?
 - 3) Adjusting for inflation, which categories (if any) cost more now than they did five years ago?
 - 4) Within trade fiction, novels can (arguably) be classified as “Literary”, “Popular”, or “Genre”. Do “literary novels” cost any more than their popular/genre counterparts?
 - 5) Of the genre fiction published in hardcover, which category is the least expensive?
Science fiction
Horror
Mystery
Spy/Thriller
Fantasy
Western
Historical
Biographical
Other
 - 6) Name any four wonderful novels you have read in the past five years. Approximately what did they cost per page?
 - 7) Name any four current novelists whom you consider to be awful. What do their novels cost per page?
 - 8) Is it silly to look at novels on a price-per-page basis?
 - 9) In what price-per-page range do Sci/Tech/Med titles fall?
 - 10) Aren't you glad literature is still priced to sell to individuals?
- Answers:**
- 1) Plays cost the most, at \$25.47. Short stories collections cost the least, at \$20.41.
 - 2) The price of a volume of poetry has gone up 22% over the past five years. Plays, while the most expensive, have seen the smallest jump in prices, only 3% from 1989's \$24.83.
 - 3) Novels, poetry, and short stories had price increases higher than inflation, though all were less than 10%. Factoring for inflation, essays and plays cost less in 1993 than in 1989.
 - 4) Yes, trade literary novels average about \$1.40 more than trade popular or genre novels.
 - 5) Mysteries are still the least expensive fictional genre, averaging less than \$19, even in hardback. The most expensive (over \$26) are “biographical novels”, fictional treatments of the lives of real people. Recent biographical novels have treated, among others, Ghengis Khan, Christopher Marlowe, Sarah Bernhardt, and Catherine of Braganza.
 - 6) I chose *Possession*, by Antonia Byatt; *Mating* by Norman Rush; *Gospel*, by Wilton Barnhardt; and *The Fever*, by Wallace Shawn. Three are hefty books with one-word titles, while the last is an intense 68-pages. The prices per page: *Possession*: four cents; *Mating*: five cents; *Gospel*: three cents; *The Fever*: twenty-nine cents.
 - 7) No names, but I picked four household words: two popular-general, one genre, and one literary. Prices per page, respectively: four cents, four cents, six cents, ten cents.
 - 8) Yes. Some things don't quantify very well, and some quantifications are not very enlightening.
 - 9) The range is broad, but upwards of thirty-five cents per page is not at all uncommon.
 - 10) I am. ☹