November 2002

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Recommended Citation

Fast, Barry (2002) "Talk of the Trade," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 14: Iss. 5, Article 25.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3774>

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Talk of the Trade

by **Barry Fast** (Deltabooks, 186 Cross St., City Island, NY 10464; Phone: 718-885-9563) <barry0112@aol.com>

Memo to Library Directors: Stay Home If You're In a Bad Mood

The *New York Times* reports on the re-emergence of the revenge literary genre, first made famous in the last century by **Mommy Dearest**. Tell-all books are thriving in the post-Enron blame game world. A host of anti-boss memoirs or thinly disguised novels are about to hit bookstore and library shelves. These include: **Lizzie Grubman's** (tabloid babe of Hamptons crashing SUV fame) assistant will tell us what an awful person she is (duh), two novels and a screenplay describe what a witch **Vogue's Anna Wintour** is (double duh), **Graydon Carter** of *Vanity Fair* is skewered by his former assistant, and hedge fund manager, **CNBC talking head**, and author of *Confessions of a Street Addict* **James Cramer** throws phones and destroys monitors, according to his assistant. The award for hypocrisy goes to **Richard Blow** for his *American Son*, a profile of his boss **John Kennedy's** years editing *George* magazine. When **John-John** died in the plane crash, **Blow**, the managing editor, forbade his staff to write anything about their famous boss. He then broke his own rule. The *Times* says that most of these memoirs reveal the moodiness of bosses, not their malfeasance. So stay upbeat in the office, or, as **James Cramer** says, never hire anyone "with a literary bent."

Or Maybe It Was Linda Lovelace

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the **Watergate** scandal, **John Dean** has published an eBook naming five suspects as the whistleblower dubbed Deep Throat. **Woodward** and **Bernstein**, the *Washington Post* reporters who relentlessly pursued the story, have vowed never to name their informant until he/she is dead. Guessing the identity

has become political sport inside and outside Washington (A group of **University of Illinois** journalism students has been working on this mystery for three years). Prior to publication **Dean** intimated that he'd solved the puzzle, but in fact he names five people as contenders in his *Unmasking Deep Throat*. They are columnist, anti-immigration Neanderthal **Pat Buchanan**, former press secretary **Ron Ziegler**, Nixon assistant **Steve Bull**, special assistant **Raymond Price**, and **Ziegler's** assistant **Jerry Warren**. Others nominate **Henry Kissinger**, **Al Haig** and even **Diane Sawyer**. **Woodward** stays firmly above the fray, saying in the *New York Daily News* "it's about keeping our word for thirty years." Refreshing, isn't it.

And You Thought They Were Celebrating the Queen's Jubilee

According to *The Guardian*, Brits are "celebrating" the inclusion of the word "bonkbuster" in the online *Oxford English Dictionary*. This new literary term describes a best-selling novel where the characters have "frequent sexual contact" with each other.

Dumbing Down Achieves New High

C'mon, confess. We all used *Cliff Notes* in college. Especially when we hated the assigned books or prepared for an exam by staying out until 3AM at the local bar. It was dumb, but it was an EMERGENCY. Not any more. Those familiar yellow and black life-savers, and onrushing competitor *Sparknotes*, are now squeezing 500 page popular novels like *Harry Potter* and *Midnight's Children* into fifty page summaries for busy social climbers. If you are not content with seeing the movie to fool your friends into thinking you read the book, you'll be able to find *Cliff*

Notes or *Sparknotes* editions of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cold Mountain*. If you followed **Oprah's** recommendation and read *A Lesson Before Dying*, but had trouble following the plot, *Sparknotes* will explain it to you. For a mere \$4.99 a *Sparknotes* **Harvard-educated** writer will demystify *Jurassic Park*. If you ever thought book discussion group members had too much time on their hands, think again. They constitute a significant minority of *Cliff Notes* and *Sparknotes* buyers. A New York ad executive explains "I'm the typical 40 something professional, I have the same case of Attention Deficit Disorder my colleagues do." He buys *Sparknotes* to avoid embarrassment at his book club gatherings. And high achieving college students report that in 2000 *Cliffs* were used by 32.5% of them, up from 24.5% in 1993.

But, complains the *New York Times*, all too often the *Cliff* or *Sparknotes* writer exhibits his or her own brand of ADD, elucidating a theme or psychoanalyzing a character incorrectly. **Frank McCourt** found a *Cliff* copy of his *Angela's Ashes* while on a book tour: "Something about the inevitable search for the father, **Telemachus's** search for **Odysseus**. The old, old story. Only I didn't know it."

Metaphor Attack: Are Books Pop Tarts or Chicken Cutlets?

More on **Borders Bookstore's** category management approach to ordering and displaying books: **Ralph Nader**, **Noam Chomsky** and other similar experts on the retailing business have sent a letter to **Borders** attacking their plan to appoint publishers to help **Borders** manage book categories, a widely practiced merchandizing program in supermarkets. Their fear is that large publishers will shut out small publishers in the categories they co-manage with **Borders'** buyers. "There is a difference between books and Pop Tarts," the letter explains. They gripe that publishers are required to pay fees to manage a category, but **Borders** says these fees are charged to cover the costs of market research that will be shared with paying publishers. Ultimately, they say, most of the research will be shared with all publishers, including smaller non-paying presses. An organizer of the protest letter conceded that their fears "might be overblown," but went on to fault "too much market research" as damaging to unpopular books. "It's all right for chicken cutlets, but this as all about ideas."

With book sales increases at an all time low, and general agreement in the industry that too many non-selling new books are com-

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There are many excellent reviews for *The Giant's House* at **Amazon.com** with a few comments about the strangeness of the plot. Most found the story touching, tender, intriguing and most agree that **Elizabeth McCracken** is a writer to watch with a real gift for language. She has been compared to many Southern writers such as **Carson McCullers**, **Harper Lee**, **Walker Percy**, and **Eudora Welty**. **Susan Kamil**, her editor, describes her as a fierce romantic and calls her writing "magical." She further compares her to **Alice Hoffman** and **Anne Tyler** but states that she really isn't like anybody else she has ever read before. (<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0397/>

[mccracken/](http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0397/mccracken/)). While I am not generally drawn to the romance genre, I found her writing appealing. She writes with humor and wit about subjects that would not normally be described from that perspective. And she can certainly turn a phrase, e.g., "she had a rear end as big as an open dictionary..." (p.23).

For more information about the author and the book, check out **Bob Goodman's** "The Novelist-Librarian: An Interview with **Elizabeth McCracken**." Originally published in *The Beacon Street Review* (10:1, 1997), it is reproduced at **Natterbox.com** (<http://www.natterbox.com/mccracken/mccracken1.html>) where **McCracken** "reflects on her collection of family tales, her obsession with outcasts, and her ongoing love for the life of the librarian."

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ing to market, many publishers think that publishing suffers from too little, not too much, marketing research. "I think this is pretty snooty" says **Peter Osnos**, a publisher at **Perseus Book Group**. "We need to sell more books and this may help."

World's Fastest Writer Scores Big At St Martin's

"I think people have been waiting a long time for a book like this," gushes her agent. *Describing Dirty Girls Social Club* as both "mainstream" and "speaking to this Hispanic population", the literary agent goes on to say the book "toys with the stereotype of what it means to be Latin." The author, **Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez**, wrote the book in just six (that's 6) days. Yet "the characters dance off the page" according to the editor at **St Martin's Press**. "I can see women all over the country adoring this book." Reporting on this accomplishment, the *Washington Post* seemed underwhelmed that this future blockbuster was completed in less than a week. Do the math: If **Valdes-Rodriguez** continues to write a book a week, rests on Sundays, and takes two weeks vacation a year, in just a decade or so she alone will exceed the total publishing output of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

World's Fastest Reviewer Scores Big At Amazon

Librarians quite rightly value book reviews as reliable, if not timely, resources for book selection. With over three thousand (that's 3000) reviews posted on **Amazon**, **Harriet Klausner** has to be the most prolific reader and reviewer the world has ever known. According to **Wired.com**, **Harriet** pumps out an average of two reviews a day, many of which she also posts on **AllReaders.com**. She does have a day job, as a columnist for a couple of online magazines. Imagine her life, furiously reading and writing from the minute she awakes until the darkest hours before dawn. Then, in her moment of triumph, the earth's fastest reviewer sends her literary criticism to the earth's biggest bookstore. It's possible that **Harriet** has influenced more book buying decisions than *Choice* and **Oprah** combined.

It's a Good Thing

Busy **Martha Stewart** has no time to write her autobiography, as she bakes, decorates, gardens, sews, knits, paints, collects, gathers her blue eggs and battles insider trading suspicions. Scheduled to be published in 2003, *The New York Post* reports that the "publishing date has now been put off indefinitely."

But Will They Start Paying Full Retail and Avoid Retirement in Miami Beach?

The Remnant: On the Brink of Armageddon, the latest in the blockbuster "Left Be-

hind" series, predicts that many Jews will become Christians as the Apocalypse arrives. The evangelical authors, **Timothy LeHaye** and **Jerry Jenkins**, penned *Desecration*, the first volume in the series, and topped the best-seller lists last year. In their latest work, the authors say the People of Israel will at first welcome the Antichrist, but 144,000 Jews will see the light and convert.

Even Dead Parrots Are Grateful to Celebrity Photographers

An arresting jacket photo of an author can boost a book's sales, according to a recent *Wall Street Journal* article. The Creative Director of **Little Brown** warns, "If you leave an author alone, they'll go to **Sears** and pop into a booth" to have their dust jacket picture taken. These "deer in the headlights photos"

are as passé as TV anchormen without blow dried hair. Publishers pay as much as \$3,000 to professional photographers who specialize in creating haunting pictures of deep-thinking writers. **Marion Ettlinger** is one of the most successful photographers, and her work is even sold in art galleries. The right kind of photo prompts newspapers and magazines to feature the author, and the resulting publicity can impact sales significantly. Writer **Susan Issacs** disdains this trend, complaining she has become an "ambulatory ad" for her own work. But the late **Ken Kesey** was so pleased with his jacket photo, showing him with his pet parrot on his shoulder, that when the bird died he sent a feather to the photographer.

Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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EL SEVERE DRIVES A HARD BARGAIN by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

Despite the 24/7 access and a break on costs over print or individually subscribed journal titles, universities such as **Cornell** and the **College of Charleston** [our very own **Katina** is quoted in this article!] and consortia in Virginia and Ohio are thinking twice about renewing contracts with **ScienceDirect**, the electronic database owned by **Elsevier Science**. Increasing costs, reduced budgets, and restrictive contractual requirements are pushing institutions to consider canceling their contracts and return to print or purchase cheaper non-**Elsevier** online titles. The collective action of libraries will be a definite factor for the publishing giant, who hopes to have 75% market penetration by the end of 2002. Still, new customers who include small colleges continue to sign on.

See — "Second Thoughts on 'Bundled' E-Journals," by **Andrea L. Foster**, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sep. 20, 2002, p. A31 (<http://chronicle.com> Section: *Information Technology* Volume 49, Issue 4, Page A31.)

NATURE'S CHECK DIGIT by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

Nature made use of error coding systems long before your credit card company. **Donall Mac Donall** of **Trinity College Dublin** suspected the four nucleotide bases A, T, G and C chosen out of 16 possible base combinations incorporated a tactic for minimizing the occurrence of errors in the pairing of bases. Using binary representation for each bonding site and a "check digit" for the type of nucleotide (single-ringed pyrimidine or double-ringed purine), he shows that nature banished any odd-parity nucleotides from the DNA alphabet. Essentially the A-T and G-C choices form the best pairs that are the most different from each other, thus minimizing errors.

See — "The Genome Chose Its Alphabet With Care" by **David Bradley**, in *Science*, Sep. 13, 2002, p.1791.

HAVE PH.D., WILL A-B-C by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

Just got your Ph.D. and want to work with kids? The **National Research Council** has proposed two-year \$35K per year fellowships to train scientists to use their skills in classrooms, offering a tremendous specialist resource for elementary schools as well as alternate career paths for budding researchers.

See — "New Path for Ph.D.s" in ScienceScope section, in *Science*, Aug. 16, 2002, p.1107.