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Talk of the Trade

by **Barry Fast** (Deltabooks, 186 Crooss Street, City Island, NY 10464;
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A Child Called Enron

With over two years on the bestseller lists, *A Child Called It* and its sequel, *The Lost Boy*, continue to provide big bucks for author **Dave Pelzer**. Because of his horrific childhood (which his own brother terms fictitious), **Pelzer** is a money machine, speaking to rapt audiences 270 days a year, sometimes several times a day. According to his wife, 25% of the crowd buys his books at these events. *The New York Times* reports that by his own accounting, **Pelzer** is selling between 40,000 and 400,000 copies of his books a year. This is quite a spread, even in our post-Enron world. To make matters more confusing, his publisher reports he buys only 1000 copies a year from them. So where is **Pelzer** purchasing the vast quantities of books he sells to his audiences? From book stores? From online book stores? Could these purchases create the impression that millions of people are buying his books from stores, keeping him firmly in the upper reaches of bestsellerdom? *The Times* wonders "how much is he healing and how much is he swindling...? Oh well, it's a Worldcom world, where numbers mean different things to different people, and now even the bestseller lists can't be trusted.

Book Pricing Update from page 78

\$93.75 to \$96.08 and from \$80.92 to \$82.63, respectively. They were joined in the 2% increase by titles in **Agriculture**, which rose from \$87.76 to \$89.13. Books in both **Physics** and **Medicine** rose 4%, from \$101.40 to \$105.62 for **Physics** and from \$80.44 to \$83.31 for **Medicine**. **Astronomy**, **Forestry** and **Human Biology** all rose 6%: **Astronomy** from \$77.39 to \$82.18, **Forestry** from \$90.06 to \$95.47, and **Human Biology** from \$87.37 to \$92.98. Interestingly, while the price of 2,805 **Computer Science** titles declined 2% (from \$57.03 to \$55.85), 1,092 of those titles in **Personal Computing** rose 3%, from \$37.96 to \$38.93. **Chemistry** titles, perennially some of the most expensive, rose 12%, from \$124.25 to \$138.71. And **Veterinary Medicine** titles rose 14%, from \$68.39 to \$78.16.

The price of the average **Mathematics** monograph fell nearly 1%, from \$83.98 to \$83.45. 2,045 titles in **Technology** (encompassing all of the **Engineering** disciplines) fell an average 3%, from \$108.48 to \$105.52, while **Pharmacy** titles fell 4%, from \$121.04 to \$116.65. The largest percentage declines in SMT publishing were registered in **Animal Husbandry**, which fell 13% (from \$72.98 to \$63.58) and in **Dentistry** down 18% (or from \$87.86 to \$72.06).

The next *Trends in Book Pricing* column will be a half-yearly update of pricing in scholarly publishing.

Teeny Books Yield Giant Sales

Despite a difficult book market this year, mini-books are prospering and morphing. Now there are mini-books in other formats, like hanging trinkets of little CDs, along with the traditional pages usually filled with handy, quotable aphorisms. Next time you're checking out of a **Borders** or **Barnes & Noble**, notice all those tiny titles arranged near the cash registers, just begging for an impulse purchase. Two maxi mini-book publishers are pumping out millions of copies, such as **Running Press** with 40 million in 13 years, and **Peter Pauper** a close second. The *LA Times* says we even have a mini-book on the moon, courtesy of Apollo 11. One more reason to go back?

Turned On by Wall Street, Turned Off in Texas

Earlier this year, when a new edition of a **Houghton-Mifflin** history textbook was discovered asserting that on the frontier "there were perhaps 50,000 prostitutes west of the Mississippi," the **Texas State School Board** insisted the words be excised in order for high schools to adopt the book in the Lone Star State. One has to wonder whether the **Board** would have reacted similarly to a lower number, say 20,000. Perhaps a recount is in order. Wielding its mighty sword of decency, the Board is now insisting that the cover photo on a business textbook must be changed. The photo shows the façade of the **New York Stock Exchange**, including the building's nude statues. No wonder the market is down this year. Those **Wall Street** money guys are too distracted to take care of business.

"His Eye Dwelt with Insatiable Avidity Upon the Beauteous Orb"

Compelling prose, as quoted above, and an introduction by **Stephen King**, grace the **Oxford University Press** reprint of *The Monk* by **Mathew Lewis**, first published in 1796. This early Gothic shocker features lurid descriptions of rape and murder by a Catholic priest. According to **King**, it is also a satire on organized religion. Although the book was a best seller when originally published, and over the centuries has been adapted into plays and movies, few people outside academe have read it in the last 200 years.

Lewis was influenced by the excesses of the **French Revolution** when he wrote the novel, and his instant success propelled him into the glamorous world of the European literati. He hobnobbed with the **Shelleys** and **Goethe**, but **Lord Byron** found him a bore. Like **Margaret Mitchell** and **Harper Lee**, he authored only one book in his lifetime, but it was enough to impress the Marquis de Sade, who loved the book and celebrated it as an example of the excesses that rattled the comfortable world of Europe's entrenched aristocracy, both civil and religious. Eventually, however, **Lewis** was ordered by a

court to recall all copies of his book and issue a new expurgated version, with all words such as "lust," "incontinence," and "enjoyment" removed. A Dublin library did its part for decency as well, underlining all the dirty words so the reader could enjoy the book while avoiding the highlighted bad stuff.

Only a cynic would theorize that **Oxford** is riding the current Church scandals by reprinting a book that the contemporary book buyers will find largely unreadable, except of course for **Stephen King's** introduction, wherein he appoints **Mathew Lewis** the "Johnny Rotten" of the Gothic novel genre. Twenty bucks gets you over 400 pages of very dense, very flowery, very 18th century prose. Or you can try to find the Dublin library edition on the OP market.

It's a Jungle Out There

With five marriages under her belt, **Valerie Gibson** is an expert on failed relationships. She is also a self-described "Cougar," her term for older women who date younger men. ("Pumas" are younger women dating older men—really, I'm not making this up). "It's all about being confident, sexy, and absolutely uninterested in commitment or children," says the *New York Post*, describing **Gibson's** new book: *Cougar: A Guide for Older Women Dating Younger Men*. The book contains such invaluable advice as carry condoms in your purse, try not to have more than three martinis on a first date, think short term, and dress sexy. For older women who have managed to date for years without this information, *Cougar* is a must-read.

Lighten Up: She Still Has To Pay For The Booze From The Mini-bar

It appears that British author **Fay Weldon** is at it again. Last year the publication of her novel *The Bulgari Connection* elicited a storm of criticism. **Bulgari** paid **Weldon** an undisclosed sum to feature its brand in the title of her book. Outraged, a group of twenty authors mailed a letter to eighty five book reviewers, urging them to treat the novel as a promotional event instead of a literary work: "*The Bulgari Connection* is like a **Kodak Moment** or a **Budweiser Wassup**. It is advertisement..." "That her (advertising) copy promotes a high class jewelry store does not, somehow, lift it into the realm of literary art." Undeterred by this harsh criticism, **Weldon** has now moved into London's posh **Savoy Hotel** for three months as a "writer in residence" to finish her current novel. Her room, ordinarily priced at 350 pounds per night, is free, and she even gets a breakfast as part of the deal. "I don't think (the **Savoy**) are expecting me to mention them in my book," she said coyly on the BBC, "but it wouldn't be too wicked to change **Claridges** to the **Savoy** just this once." We'll see about that.

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Texas Trails — Bulls and Buckram: A Visit to Archer City, TX

by **Raymond Walser** (Captain, U.S. Army) <james.walser@sheppard.af.mil>

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Archer City, Texas sits in the flat, windswept brush land of North Texas between Dallas and Wichita Falls. Located almost 700 miles from the calming influence of the Gulf of Mexico, the town is subjected to both extremes of midwestern weather. In the summer it lies baking in the 100 degree plus temperatures while in winter it is blasted by icy Canadian winds sweeping unimpeded across the plains.

The town itself has no industry to speak of. It is most likely a product of the oil boom that became obsolete once the oil wells dried up. Think of the stereotypical Texas town and you will see Archer City. One four-way intersection with a flashing stoplight, a large city hall building facing onto a central square, and a row of squat vacant storefronts opening out onto the main street. It takes less than a minute to drive through the town and return to the flat open brushland of cows and oil rigs.

The question, which naturally springs to mind, is why would anyone want to go to Archer City, much less write an article about it? And in truth there would be no reason to visit the town unless you like books. If you do then you could spend a whole day in the town and not be bored. For Archer City, TX is the home of **Booked Up Inc.**, a rare and used bookstore owned and operated by **Larry McMurtry**. **McMurtry** is the popular author of such modern classics as the **Pulitzer Prize**-winning western *Lonesome Dove* and *Terms of Endearment*.

I recently moved to Burkburnett, TX, and having read about the bookstore in a number of articles, I was eager to pay a visit to the town and see it first hand. After looking at the map, I discovered that it was about a half an hour drive from my home. At the next available opportunity, I drove to the town and quickly located the store. The store is composed of four separate buildings, each containing books on various subjects. The first building contains the cashier's cage as well as a sort of showcase area with various rare and first edition books. I had visions of meeting **Mr. McMurtry** but I was immediately disappointed since he was nowhere to be seen. The only indication I had that he was even involved with the store were the Xeroxed pages stuck up on the wall that indicated he no longer signed books so don't ask.

The cashier was helpful, however, and she gave me a sheet indicating what type of books were located in each building and I set out to browse the area. The first building consisted of various biographies, political memoirs and literary criticism. It also had a section devoted to Texas history. In another room were stacks of yellowed pulp western magazines as well as books on the civil war and religion.

A walk across the street to building number two brought me into the history and literature section. There was also a large room devoted to oversized art manuscripts. If you are looking for lower priced books, this building is prob-

ably your best bet. There is an oversized paperback section that consists primarily of modern classics, which are the most reasonably priced of all the books in the store.

While I was browsing through the titles, a lady and her husband entered the building and began yelling "Yoo-hoo!" in a loud Texas twang. Being the son of a librarian, I was somewhat disturbed by this lack of book etiquette. Anyone who has any couth at all knows that you are quiet whenever you are around books. In their defense, this is what the signs posted around the buildings said you should do to get a salesperson's attention. On the other hand, I'm not sure they were meant to be taken serious and it was fairly obvious that there was no one in the store besides me. They continued to walk around and yell without any results. Then they carried on a loud conversation that seemed to echo throughout the store about how they couldn't find anything. "I can't believe it, all these books and no **Harry Potter**!" They left in disgust.

While walking through the store I saw several titles that interested me, however, I felt most of them were overpriced. I would estimate that the average price for a book was \$25-\$30 dollars although some of the paperback books were as low as \$3. As for the most expensive book, I did not ask.

Building 3 contained many different foreign language books as well as a large variety of turn of the century popular works long since gone out of print. It also proved to be the location of the bathroom. This was quite convenient since after two hours of browsing I was in need of a facility. While browsing through building 3, I found a hardbound copy of *Under Two Flags* by **Ouida** that seemed reasonably priced at \$3.

Building 4 was arguably the largest and least organized of the stores. It contained many modern works as well as an art, travel and science section. There were stacks of books, many of them duplicates of books from other areas of the store. There were also quite a few signed copies in here. There were at least five, each, signed copies by authors such as **Lawrence Durrell** and **Allen Drury**. In another section devoted to boats, I found a novel that was autographed by the author to **William L. Shirer**, the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. There was no way to tell if a book was autographed unless you opened it. It was up to the browser to take the book off the shelf and discover what lay inside.

I had spent the better part of the day between the four stores and had picked out a few books. I quickly stopped into **3 Dog Books**, another bookstore in the town, but did not find much of interest. After spending five hours browsing

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More Writier in Residence News: British Author Negotiates Macmillan Contract from His Free Room

Jeffrey Archer, long time best selling author and knight of the realm, was allowed to meet with representatives from **MacMillan Publishing Company** in his prison cell. **Archer** ran afoul of the law last year, some lack of judgment issue involving bribery, prostitutes, and perjury, resulting in his free room courtesy of the Home Office. Since "deprivation of liberty has traditionally meant that one is deprived of the right to continue one's normal business", *The Independent* wondered how **Archer** and **MacMillan** were allowed to conduct their normal business. The Home Office responded to the newspaper's inquiry, at first saying the questions were too general, and then complaining the questions were too specific. Finally, a spokesperson said that Visiting Orders ask the reasons for the requested visit, and that "business is not supposed to be on the agenda." It was unclear whether **MacMillan** or **Archer**

fibbed on the visit request. Or perhaps the publishing folks just wanted to drop by and chat about the prison's rendition of bologna sandwiches, whether they use ketchup alone or mix in a little mustard to crank them up a notch.

Don't Read This If You Are Hungry (or Dieting)

At a recent nine eleven charity event sponsored by *The New Yorker* magazine, your correspondent enjoyed food prepared by some of my town's best chefs. All recipes were inspired by descriptions of meals featured in the chefs' favorite books. Among them, from the restaurant **Quest**, omelets with truffles and shitake mushrooms from **Escoffier's Memoirs of My Life**; from **Aquavit**, herring sushi with green tea mustard from *Memoirs of a Geisha*; from **Fiamma**, panzanella with gulf shrimp from *Under the Tuscan Sun*; and **Grammercy Tavern's** chocolate caramel tarts inspired by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Proceeds of the dinner were donated to the families of restaurant workers killed in the **Windows on the World**, located at the top of the twin towers. Like the chocolate, the event was bittersweet.