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## Bet You Missed It: Press Clippings -- In the News -- Carefully Selected by Your Crack Team of News Sleuths

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# Bet You Missed It

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

Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

*Editor's Note:* Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

## LIBERAL ARTS BOOT CAMP by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

There is no camp for **Thackeray** or **Trollope**, but you can go to **Dickens** summer camp at UC Santa Cruz. It's been running for over 30 years, gathering scholars and avid readers to revel in part academic conference, part book club, part vacation. In the earliest years, the amateurs revolted at the academic jargon and demanded ordinary talk. But the scholars hung tough, and eventually everyone got into using words like "optative."

This is one of those classic *New Yorker* style articles that's so lengthy you can't do it justice in a summary. It's a great run-through of **Dickens'** life and lit crit. **Dickens** wrote on a rampage, penning two books at once and editing a weekly magazine throughout his career. To the critics, the novels "before *Copperfield* were meringue and treacle; those which followed were burned pot roast." But readers loved him, and rival authors were awed by his power.

See — **Jill Lepore**, "Dickens in Eden," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 29, 2011, p.52.

## BIG SCALE TRYSTS & NOVELS by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**George Simenon** was a Belgian poor boy who quit school at fifteen, learned to write at a newspaper, then turned to pulp fiction. He churned out 150 novels before he created police superintendent **Jules Maigret** in 1931. Each morning he wrote 80 pages and then vomited from the tension. Afternoons and evenings were devoted to womanizing on a grand scale (1,200 partners). But he limited the contact to two minutes, merely unzipping.

He wrote in longhand without a plot outline and would complete a novel in ten to twelve days. When he'd feel a new book coming on, he'd get a doctor's going-over to make sure he could stand the stress.

The **Maigret** novels eventually totaled 76, but he also produced 134 *romans durs*, which seems to be their term for hard-boiled fiction. The non-**Maigrets** *Dirty Snow*, *The Man Who Watched Trains Go By*, and *Pedigree*, are not merely his best novels, but among the best novels of the 20th century.

The **Maigret** series brought in the money, particularly the 53 films made from them. **Simenon** was picked up by **Gallimard**, France's most prestigious publisher for money reasons as well. *Gide*, *Proust*, and *Valéry* were pretty much lucre losers. **Simenon** was always resentful he never won the Nobel prize. **Gallimard** says his typical book only sold 5,000 copies. But his sales were big because he wrote so many.

See — **Joan Acocella**, "Crime Pays," *The New Yorker*, Oct. 10, 2011, p.120.

## Future Dates for Charleston Conferences

	Preconferences and Vendor Showcase	Main Conference
2012 Conference	7 November	8-10 November
2013 Conference	6 November	7-9 November
2014 Conference	5 November	6-8 November
2015 Conference	4 November	5-7 November

## WHY THINK SMALL? by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**Peter Thiel** developed **PayPal** with **Elon Musk**, sold it to **eBay** for half a billion with **Peter** getting a mere fifty-five mil. Then he tossed **Mark Zuckerberg** a half-mil to birth **Facebook** with **Peter's** stock being worth easily one-and-a-half billion. With thirty mil of his own money he created **Palantir Technologies** to track terrorists and fraudsters. It's worth two-and-a-half billion.



But he's bugged by having come up with mere gadgetry that brings dizzying change to society, but no real progress. So he's into biotech startups with big goals. Like conquering all viral diseases. And ending the aging process.

See — **George Packer**, "No Death, No Taxes," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 28, 2011, p.44.

## NO HARD EDGES, PLEASE. WE'RE BRITISH by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**P.D. James'** big American following is an exception to the rule that top British mystery writers don't usually sell here. Meanwhile **James Patterson** and **Michael Connelly** sell great in the UK. **Peter James** (not **P.D.**) says the Brits write plodding procedurals, while Americans want hard-edged page-turners.

**Peter James** does great in Russia and China but is unknown here. His *Looking Good Dead* with **Carroll & Graf** sold less than 500 copies before they dumped him. **Minotaur Books** has an international staple of authors and is trying to make **Peter** big with *Dead Man's Grip*. A dead biker in England turns out to be the grandson of a NY mafioso, and a revenge plot is spun out on two continents.

See — **Alexandra Alter**, "Solving the Mystery of U.S. Readers," *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 11, 2011, p.D5.

## NOT HAVING IT ALL by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

**Dorothy Thompson** (1893-1961), once America's most famous woman journalist, was best of pals with **Rebecca West** (1892-1983), celebrated British author. **Thompson's** 1932 best-seller *I Saw Hitler!* got her six honorary degrees and some talk of running her for president. **West's** 1947 *The Meaning of Treason* delved the spiritual malaise that led people to abandon democratic values for murderous utopian creeds.

Both were ardent progressives who made wretched matches with great writers: **Thompson** with **Sinclair Lewis** and **West** with **H.G. Wells**. Each had a child that was a mess: **Thompson's** a manic-depressive, and **West's** an alcoholic.

See — **Arthur Herman** reviewing **Susan Hertog's** *Dangerous Ambition*, "Parallel Lives," *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 10, 2011, p.A19.