Library Marketplace -- Where Books Come From: An Interview with Toni Brandmill of the National Writers Union

John Riley
Eastern Book Company, jdriley@comcast.net

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4496

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
BLUNDER, BLUSTER AND BUREAUCRATS  
by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

Media coverage of the looting and destruction of Iraq's museums and libraries may have obliterated the good news: three weeks before the U.S. attack began, Iraq's Ministry of Culture employees secretly removed over 8,000 precious objects to a secret location, revealed only after the 6th of July to U.S. investigators. The fascinating tale of "misunderstandings, mistakes, surprises and bureaucratic infighting" is revealed in this excellent recounting that chronicles the unfolding of events from January through July.

See — "Mayhem in Mesopotamia" by Andrew Lawler in Science, August 1, 2003, pp.582-589.
Library Marketplace

from page 97

format, as nothing more than a twenty-first century version of “vanity presses.” Others think that the current publishing climate makes it more difficult than in the past to get published. With magazines, journals and publishers going out of business or being merged, book prices rising and mega-bookstores stocking primarily best-sellers and turning over inventory weekly, many writers are looking to self-publishing as a way to get their material into the mix. Self-publishing is sometimes an option, but it’s just as dicey in terms of commercial success as it was before.

ATG: Would you care to give some examples of changing compensation problems with publishers (i.e., fewer advances, difficult getting good accounting)? Can the average author make a living anymore? Has the Internet opened up new possibilities for compensation (i.e., lecturing, consulting, teaching, etc.)?

TB: Publishers are giving fewer and smaller advances. Getting a good accounting and getting royalties paid on time have long been a problem for authors. Now, however, getting compensated when the publisher has sold the work to an online Web site or database is a bigger problem. Publishers think they have the right to sell the works, sometimes even offer money to the author, but they don’t unless that’s set forth in a written agreement. Getting them to realize it and do something about it is difficult. Most authors just want to be paid. The first threat the publishers make, however, is always, “well, okay, if we can’t have all the rights to your work we’ll take it off the site”.

Writers also rarely get either their rights back or money from a bankruptcy, since the bankruptcy courts that have control really don’t understand copyright law for the most part.

ATG: Could you discuss any issues regarding librarians pro or con (i.e., shared issues on censorship and reading promotion, but differences on copyright infringement and “fair use?” Should writers be compensated for books that circulate in libraries?

TB: I personally don’t know any writers who believe that royalties should be paid for books circulated in libraries, or re-sold in used book stores. I have heard over and over that authors are happy to have their work being read and believe every person who reads and finds value in a particular work will recommend it to friends and colleagues and look for the author’s future work.

In fact, since writers are not the best compensated working people, they access libraries for their entertainment reading as well as using libraries extensively for research.

Libraries are a national resource, in fact, here in Western Massachusetts every little town has an exquisite library building where the librarians offer after school programs, summer reading programs and literacy projects.

Fair use by libraries, which is reasonably lenient under the copyright law, is not disputed by the NWU. Most libraries now have self-serve copying machines which make it possible for individual users to violate the law by copying entire works. However, with most libraries under the gun financially, it would be unreasonable to expect librarians to remove those machines or police their use. At some point you have to believe in the goodness of people and learn to accept that those who wish to violate the law are going to find a way to do so.

It is important to note that current copyright law is being written to protect corporate holders of copyright. Corporations have introduced, promoted and pressed Congress to pass laws favorable to them, but not especially for the individual author.

ATG: What’s going on with Contentville, Copyright Clearance Center, etc?

TB: Contentville went out of business, mainly because of copyright problems with writers. The Union is proceeding with its own royalty program — Publishers Rights Clearinghouse. A writer can register works and those wishing to post them to sites can get permission and pay a royalty through PRC. It works like ASCAP and BMI really.

ATG: What does the Union think about Amazon selling used books? Do publishers share your opinion?

TB: The NWU has no position, to the best of my knowledge, on Amazon.com. I personally wish that readers would shop at their independent new or used book stores. Access to small press books, books with small printing runs or with non-mainstream content will cease to be available (and possibly to even be published) without small, local independent store making them available to the consumers. I also believe, personally, that an integral part of the culture of literature, reading and enjoying the company of other lovers of books, is kept alive by the owners of used book stores who spend their lives recycling books and other reading material which would otherwise be forgotten, lost or sent to the landfill. (Disclaimer: my husband owns and operates a used book store here in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts, as does the interviewer).

ATG: What are some of the future plans, issues, projects for the Union?

TB: The NWU is currently pursuing two major national campaigns. One is to get AOL/Time-Warner to offer fair contracts. The second is a legislative campaign. In the last Congress, Representative John Conyers of Michigan introduced a bill which would protect freelancers, including artists as well as authors, by allowing them to collectively bargain. This is a right we writers, editors and other creative independent contractors do not now have, because we are not traditional employees and do not create in a traditional “workplace” for the same employer. The struggle with AOL/Time-Warner, an entity which encompasses many publishers and other entertainment and intellectual companies (and growing all the time), underlines the need for the Conyers Bill, which will be reintroduced in the current legislative session. Currently, every writer negotiates separately with every publisher and editor. The power of writers as a collective bargaining unit would enhance their ability to protect their rights, including their right to make a living.

Toni Brandimill is an activist for the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981/AFL-CIO and serves as chairperson of her local unit, as a grievance officer and contract advisor, and as a national Trustee. In a former life she was a criminal defense attorney and she also practiced in the areas of family law and mediation. She lives in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts where she runs a used bookstore along with her husband, Bob. Toni is the mother of an eighteen year old daughter, Ayla. <tonibrandmill@attbi.com>.

And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — ACRL National Conference and NEDCC Workshop

Column Editor: Sever Bordeianu (University of New Mexico) <sbordeia@unm.edu>

Learning to Make a Difference

ACRL 11th National Conference, April 2003, Charlotte, North Carolina

Report by Cassandra Osterloh (University of New Mexico)

With record-breaking attendance, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) held its 11th National Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina this past April. “Learning to Make a Difference” was this year’s theme. With over 250 programs, workshops and pre-conferences from which to choose the conference was both educational and invigorating. The conference theme was broad enough that every program seemed a good fit and the sessions I attended were informative and interesting. There were a few troublesome points — too many good programs running concurrently and virtually no sessions in fields such as cataloging, acquisitions, special collections, or preservation. Reference, instruction, collection development, and technology, however, were areas well represented.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>