

# American publishers turn tide on illiteracy

You would think the devastating problem of illiteracy in the U.S. would be of major concern to book publishers. After all their success depends upon people who can read.

However, many publishers have attempted to ignore the problem or, at least, leave the solution to others. Happily, a new awareness and willingness to confront the situation seems to be growing.

Only two years ago, the Association of American Publishers tried to form a group to attack the problem. But the association managed to raise pledges of only \$100,000 and the plan fell by the wayside. Death from lack of interest, you might say.

In a country with more than 25-million functional illiterates one could call this publisher apathy shortsighted, to say the least. Luckily, a number of publishers agree and the tide is turning.

In February this year, Harold McGraw, Jr., chairman of McGraw-Hill, donated \$1-million of his own money to found the Business Council for Effective Literacy. The foundation of business executives will raise funds for various programs aimed at curbing illiteracy.

One of the first projects was to donate \$350,000 towards the American Library Association Coalition for Literacy's national awareness advertising campaign.

McGraw feels that the ammunition needed to



**Trevor Meldal-Johnsen  
about books**

combat illiteracy is money, and he has done something effective to provide it. Private sector resources will be used to help professionals in the literacy field.

Last week, the publisher, NAL entered the battlefield with an extraordinary program involving its paperback line Signet Classics and the national, non-profit organization Reading Is Fundamental (RIF).

RIF is associated with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington and endorsed by major educational organizations. NAL said, "RIF has helped raise reading test scores, increase library circulation, and heighten community awareness of the importance of reading — incalculably important goals in combating the problems of functional illiteracy and aliteracy in our nation."

Last month, the publisher presented RIF with an initial donation of \$25,000. But now NAL will donate a cent for every copy of its Signet Classics sold this

year. Additionally, if booksellers donate a cent to RIF for every copy they sell, NAL will match that. RIF could thus receive three cents for every copy sold.

NAL's program includes a strong new marketing push for its line of classics. There are more than 250 titles in the line and the books have been totally redesigned with striking contemporary covers. The company is also offering promotional and discount incentives to bookstores.

The classics include books by authors such as Mark Twain, Chekhov, George Eliot, Herman Melville, Shakespeare, Jack London, Edith Wharton and Henry David Thoreau. The program is a step in the right direction and deserves bookseller and public support. I hope it get it.

Three books involving South Africa are out this week. The first is "Mouroir: Mirrornotes of a Novel" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) by the Afrikaans poet Breiten Breytenbach.

Written during his seven years in prison for activities opposing apartheid, the book is a collection of stories and reflections of an extremely personal nature.

Madge Swindells' "Summer Harvest" (Doubleday) is a family saga beginning in 1938 and has all the usual elements of romance, success and scandal plus the problems unique to that troubled country.

The third book comes from the prolific Nadine Gordimer with her ninth collection of short stories, "Something Out There" (Viking). Gordimer is a fine writer of international stature and one of apartheid's severest critics.

A number of hardcover bestsellers are coming out in paperback this week. Robin Cook's medical thriller "Godplayer" (Signet), Malcolm Bosse's novel of 1927 China "The Warlord" (Bantam) and Anthony Burgess' "The End of the World News" (Penguin) head the fiction list.

Non-fiction paperbacks include "The Japanese Mind" (Fawcett) by Robert C. Christopher, a look at modern Japanese, "Elsa Lanchester, Herself," (St. Martin's) the actress' autobiography, and comedian David Brenner's autobiography, "Soft Pretzels with Mustard" (Berkley).

## Students' imagination fuels rumors

(Continued from page 5)

program," said Merritt. "Some even think we're being a little too conservative."

The computer science majors explained that they took up broadcasting as a release from the stress and strain of computer work. They agree that the project has been a lot of work, but a lot of fun.

"I was here (in the studio) one day last week from 7 p.m. until about 6 the next morning," Purlia said. "It can take three hours to put one song together, but it's the kind of work you can really get involved in."

"It has turned out to have some bizarre overtones,"

Merritt added, "but I'd do it again in a minute. We wanted to do a totally fake show that gets people involved in the characters and makes them think how great it would be if it really did happen here."

The "Fantasy Festival" will be aired on KCPR today at 10 a.m. when the pre-concert vignettes begin. With the excitement and clamor of a real concert, interspersed with interviews with band members, concert-goers and others, the big event will begin at noon.

"It's going to be as much fun hearing it as it is to be there ... if you can be there," Merritt said.

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